

**Reinventing the Wheel or Fixing It ?  
A Case Study of Radical Feminism  
In Contemporary Montreal.**

By

Geneviève Pagé, B.A. (Hons)

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**Canada**

*There is no alternative.*

Margaret Thatcher

*Le fait d'être radicale, moi dans ma vie, ce que ça me permet c'est de pouvoir dire  
Non! Pas un Non, mais un gros Non!*

A member of Némésis

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines radical feminism in Montreal in the last five years and explores its potential for resisting neo-liberalism. I compare the ideas that animated 1970s radical feminism in the United States, France and Quebec then offer a case study of four contemporary radical feminist groups. This thesis identifies a similarity in fundamental concepts across time, but posits that there is an intersectional analysis present in contemporary radical feminism. After establishing the neo-liberal context of Quebec and its impact on social actors, this thesis argues that radical feminists' collective struggle grounded in the personal as political can inform resistance to neo-liberalism in innovative and transformative ways. This thesis also hypothesises that contemporary radical feminism can support the construction of global solidarity and transnational alliances.

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## Introduction

The April 2001 demonstrations held in Quebec City against the Summit of the Americas reminded Quebec's population and government that massive social dissent was still possible and that a new generation of activists had been born, one with its own beliefs, its own means of organising, and its own dreams. In light of these events, it is appropriate to ask ourselves where the feminist struggles stand. Were any of these activist women feminists? If so, what ideologies shaped their understanding of the relationship between men and women? How are their ideologies integrated in their global desire to change the world? How can the feminist struggles feed other struggles such as the anti-globalisation fight? How are they waged separately from other struggles? The scope of this thesis does not allow me to answer all these questions, yet it is a step in that direction. My personal involvement in feminist circles leads me to believe that young feminists are "Alive and Still Kicking" as Steenbergen (2001) argues. More precisely, in the past five years, Montreal has seen a resurgence of underground radical feminist groups with complex ideologies, different means of actions and diverse goals. Using individual interviews, this thesis explores the theoretical foundations and the praxis of four radical feminist groups active in Montreal at the turn of the millennium. At a time when academic literature on women's movements is scarce (Forster, 2002), the need to explore innovations and adaptations of older radical feminist concepts by young feminists to the contemporary political and economic situation is crucial in re-engaging feminist scholarship with feminist movements.

A review of the scholarly literature demonstrates a void in research concerning contemporary radical feminist groups' theories and practices in Quebec. In order to

partially fill this void, I have set myself to the task of identifying how contemporary radical feminist groups in Quebec respond to the neo-liberal predicament. Covering both the theoretical foundations of the groups and the praxis they use, this thesis hypothesises that a resuscitation of radical feminism as a theoretical framework, and the practices associated with it, could lead to a strategically rich and much needed form of resistance to neo-liberalism and could help in the developing transnational solidarities against capitalist globalisation<sup>1</sup>. This introduction examines why I have chosen to use a classical typology of feminist currents of thought as my central framework instead of using the popular ‘wave’ framework or the disengagement-mainstreaming framework. In addition, I discuss the positive and negative impacts on this thesis of my personal involvement in one of the groups. Finally, I outline the structure of the thesis.

### **Research Question**

This research investigates the prospect and promises of radical feminism in contemporary Quebec society. I hypothesise that with the current neo-liberal hegemony in Quebec, and given the historical tradition of radical feminism in this province, radical feminism can be useful to resist neo-liberalism and better women’s conditions in general. In order to support this argument, I first establish that there is indeed a revival of radical feminism in Quebec. Through a case study of four radical feminist groups from Montreal, I examine the differences and similarities between contemporary radical feminism and radical feminism as theorised and practised in the early 1970s. I hypothesise that the ideology remains grounded in the same foundational concepts but now allows for a more

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<sup>1</sup> The expression ‘capitalist globalisation’ is used in this text to qualify the type of globalisation processes at work. At this time, it is a globalisation based on the rules of the market which takes roots in the freeflow of capital, the liberalisation of trade while restricting the movement of people. It is therefore a globalisation based on the economic, the pursuit of profit, hence the use of the term capitalist globalisation.

integrative understanding of multiple oppressions. Secondly, I investigate how the resurgence of radical theoretical concepts can be turned into active forms of resistance to neo-liberalism and how radical feminist concepts can be useful for creating and solidifying a transnational anti-globalisation movement. More specifically, I maintain that radical feminists' contention that the personal is political serves as a strategic response to the neo-liberal reduction of all social life to privatised and individualised relationships. Moreover, the development of an autonomous women's movement is posited as central in ensuring a continuity in the movement in the face of the downsizing of the state. Finally, I argue that the revival of universal patriarchy as an overarching concept that allows for differences and diversity arguably can aid in the construction of a network of resistance to capitalist globalisation.

This research is not about making a comparison between English Canadian feminists and francophone feminists. However, the difference in theoretical lineage between radical feminism in Quebec and the rest of Canada which I outline might explain in part why it is possible (and desirable) for women to re-mobilise around this concept. Furthermore, this research is not an exhaustive historical review of radical feminism in Quebec; rather, historical components are used to explore continuities and differences between two generations of radical feminists in Quebec.

### **Literature Review**

As one could expect, only a handful of articles and books have been written on the topic at hand. Most of the scholarship relating to feminist movements in Quebec stops at the beginning of the 1990s. As a matter of fact, even the number of writings on the movements of the 1970s is very limited. I here briefly review the major works and indicate how they are useful for my present purpose.

The reprinting of the *Manifeste des Femmes Québécoises* (1971 [1970]) allows us re-visit one of the first articulation of revolutionary feminism in Quebec. As well, some first-hand accounts have been provided of the Front de Libération des Femmes (FLF)(which later became the Centre des Femmes (CDF)) through the eyes of O’Leary and Toupin (1982)<sup>2</sup> and through the re-publishing of their journal *Québécoises Deboutte!* (Collectif, 1983). While the former recounts the many actions undertaken by the FLF, the latter is a complete re-edition of the more or less monthly journal published by the CDF. *Québécoises Debouttes!* features an array of political analysis, informative text and invitations to partake in actions. As well, a reprint of the journal *Têtes de pioche* (Collectif [Les Têtes de pioche], 1980), a radical feminist monthly publication which shaped the landscape of feminism in Quebec between 1976 and 1979, traces the evolution of radical feminism in the second half of the decade. These first hand texts give us excellent insights on radical feminists of the second wave. Although more descriptive than analytical, these texts are original sources and are used in this thesis as sources of comparisons with the contemporary material. Furthermore, a recently published account of the Regroupement des Femmes Québécoises (RFQ) (Yanacopoulo, 2003) recounts the rise and fall of this group and its interaction with nationalism, particularly at the time of the first Quebec referendum (1980) and the conflictual positions women occupied on this issue. Because it focuses so much on the nationalist debate, this text is less useful for my present purpose.

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<sup>2</sup> In this section, the years refer to the year of publishing. The groups existed during the following years : Front de Libération des Femmes : 1969-1971; Centre des Femmes : 1972-1974; Collectif du Manifeste des Femmes Québécoises : 1971; Têtes de Pioches : 1976-1979; Regroupement des Femmes Québécoises : 1976-1980.

Lamoureux's (1986) account of feminism in the 1970s is the only overall analysis of feminist ideologies of the second wave in Quebec. Innovative and thoughtful, Lamoureux offers interesting elements of analysis on feminism and politics. After distinguishing between feminism of equality and feminism of difference, the author widens the debate to include the space created in the political sphere for women's voices through second wave activism. The typology of women's currents of thought proposed by Descarries-Belanger and Roy (1991) maps out the different ideological tendencies of the groups and the main foundational texts that influenced feminism. This extensive work will be used in Chapters One and Two as my reference point for identifying schools of thought and allegiance to them amongst feminist groups.

Another collection of books tries to delineate the women's movements through history. Books like *De travail et D'espoir* (Collectif, 1990), *Mouvement des Femmes au Quebec* (Brodeur et al., 1982), Stanton's article on the history and struggles of the Conseil du Statut de la Femme (CSF) (1993), and the latest version of *L'Histoire des Femmes au Quebec* (Collectif Clio, 1992) account for the movement's development from a historical perspective. These books are very useful in following the accomplishment of women's groups through time, but because of their historical nature, they leave very little space for discussion on ideological components and tactical choices. In addition, their descriptive account of feminist movements stops at the beginning of the 1990s, just before the period of interest for this thesis. Even the very recently published *La Pensée Féministe au Québec* (Dumont & Toupin, 2003) does not go beyond the mid-eighties. This collection of original texts dating between 1900 and 1985 exposes stimulating glimpses of feminism in Quebec, but offers very little analysis. The only book that

engages somewhat with the 1990s is a report on the Forum pour un Québec Féminin Pluriel (Beauchamps, 1994). This account of a unique women's group gathering tries to identify the problems faced by women in Québec. Although interesting for the diversity of the groups who participated, it still falls short of addressing this thesis' main concern, that is, the revival of radical feminism at the end of the 1990s.

A more recent in-depth account of women's political involvement can be found in *Apolitiques ces jeunes femmes?* (Quienart, 2002). As promising as the title may sound, this book only covers the involvement of women in formal political parties, student federations and institutionalised women's groups, once again failing to give voice to the plethora of marginalised women involved in political activism. In 2003, *La Gazette des Femmes* published a Dossier under the theme "Rebelles et Engagées." Interestingly, this "dossier spécial" (Stanton, 2003) resembles somewhat the work of English third wavers, especially in the diversity of women interviewed and in their discourse. From *Les Fermières Engagées*, to women from the *Studio XX*, *Les Sorcières* as well as a few individual women, these voices reflect a new generation of active and changing feminists but also presents them in the context of collective struggles. Following the same line, *À Babord!* opens its pages to *Les Sorcières* and *Némésis*, through an interview on a radical feminist gathering (Coté, 2003). But these glimpses into activist women's lives are insufficient to understand how and why radical feminism now functions, what grounds their ideology and how they attempt to create social change in today's context.

Anna Forster, in her review of English-Canadian writings on women's movements, identifies a gap in the literature on women's movement starting in the 1990s that she attributes to a decline in women's movements and to change in the political arena

combined with a lack of adequate theoretical framework in the literature to analyse women's movements (2002: 4). She further demonstrates that this break in the literature coincides with a rise of writings on 'the (declining) nature of the status of *women*' (2). Although Forster only looked at English-Canadian texts, this short literature review reveals a similar pattern in the production of academic work on Quebec women's movements.

Yet, a number of texts dealing with 'third wave feminism' have appeared in English and, more recently, French literature. As demonstrated in my later discussion on third wave feminism, however, this framework mainly treats feminism as a conglomeration of individual actions, falling short of inscribing itself in women's movements literature. The third wave notwithstanding, the strength and endurance of the anti-globalisation movement seem to have reversed the tide and produced a cluster of literature on this new social movement, and, by extension, individual women's and women's movements interaction with it. In 2004, an issue of the Quebec feminist publication *Recherches Féministes* dedicated to the topic of women and globalisation printed two texts relevant to this research: Diane Lamoureux's "Le Féminisme et l'altermondialisation" and Anna Kruzynski's "De l'Opération SalAMI à Némésis: le cheminement d'un groupe de femmes du mouvement altermondialiste québécois". These texts discuss the relationship between feminist groups and the anti-/alter-globalisation<sup>3</sup> movements, the former conceptually, the latter more empirically, by focussing on one of the groups studied in this research: *Némésis*. They both suggest that feminists have a lot

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<sup>3</sup> Some anti-globalisation activists prefer the term *alter*-globalisation because it suggests that globalisation could be done differently and that, in fact, what they oppose is the way globalisation is done, not the globalising process itself. For simplicity purposes, however, only anti-globalisation will be used from now on in this thesis.

to contribute to the alter-globalisation movement and that, despite the good intentions and the lipservice of the anti-globalisation groups, the integration of feminism in this struggle is still an exhausting battle yet to be won. Both these authors, although not restricting their analysis to radical feminism, emphasise the importance of the feminist contribution to the movement both on the theoretical and organisational levels.

More recently, in a book edited by Francis Dupuis-Deri (in press), an article by Melissa Blais discusses her experience as a member of *Les Sorcières* and the challenges of radical feminist groups working in coalition with men. This author reviews some of the basic tenets of contemporary radical feminism and discusses its relationship with the “third wave”. In the same book, Pascal Dufour examines the mobilisations around the International Women’s March in 2000. Dufour concludes that although interesting on the level of the creation of international solidarity, the energy and time invested in the International Women’s March led to very few concrete changes. This latter text is helpful in reviewing feminist mobilisations in which the groups studied only participated instrumentally.

This thesis therefore contributes to the recent but embryonic return to the study of women’s movements. Drawing on both empirical research and academic theoretical perspectives, it intends to stimulate discussions on and about women’s movements in and of themselves – not just in relation to the anti-globalisation movement – and of radical feminists within them.

### **A Few Theoretical and Methodological Notes**

Prior to engaging in the core of this analysis, a number of issues need to be addressed as they influence the framework of this thesis. First, I address the limited use in

this thesis of two analytical frameworks – the disengaging/mainstreaming and the ‘third wave’ frameworks – and the reasons behind my decision to work with a more conventional classification of feminisms. Second, I want to tackle my personal involvement in one of the group since it can have impacts not only on the resulting analysis of data, but also on the theoretical and conceptual framework.

### *The Mainstreaming/Disengagement Framework*

In 1988, Adamson, Briskin and McPhail published a very influential and comprehensive review of English Canadian feminism. The authors developed a framework for analysing women’s movements and actions in relation to established structures that remains widely used in English Canada. Although now almost 20 years old, this work is still widely discussed and used by women’s studies scholars. Since very few other frameworks have been elaborated in the last ten years (Forster, 2002: 2), the Adamson et al. book might appear as a natural choice for this research. However, as I demonstrate, its focus on groups’ actions and their engagement – or lack of – with established structures rather than ideological foundations led me to reject it as a central tool for analysis.

The framework suggested by the authors exposes how feminist practices can be understood through a continuum that ranges from ‘a politic of disengagement’ to ‘a politic of mainstreaming’ in which the first instance:

operates out of a desire to replace social institutions and practices with alternative modes of functioning. [...] disengagement is the part of feminist practice that speaks our critique of the existing society, whatever the nature of that critique may be. As a politic, disengagement takes feminists outside the structures and views accepted by the majority of people. (177)

In contrast, mainstreaming refers to:

The part of feminism that attempts to engage with women around concrete issues arising directly out of their personal experience rather than out of an overall feminist agenda for social change. [...] mainstream focuses on dealing with what is, rather than on what should be. [...]

Mainstreaming is the part of feminist practices for change that wants to be concrete and immediately relevant to women's lives. (177)

This axis of analysis can be very useful for analysing alliances and coalition between different feminist groups. As the authors state, ideological categories do not always correspond to a determined set of practices, just like a specific form of resistance is not the brand-name of any type of feminism. Yet, ideological beliefs do restrict the use of certain tactics. For example, a group coming from a pacifist feminist perspective will not organise actions that might involve the destruction of private property while radical feminists who consider the state as inherently patriarchal are less likely to lobby the government for changes in the legislative system.

For this reason, I consider this framework inappropriate for the purpose of this thesis. Without denying its use in numerous other contexts, I find that it does not put enough emphasis on the relationship between praxis and theory. Although this differs across time, location and political contexts, the groups under scrutiny here seem to maintain a coherence between their theoretical position and the type of action they used that is far more rigid than suggested in the framework established by Adamson, Briskin and McPhail.

In addition, the authors seem to equate in their definition of mainstreaming the attempt to influence directly women's condition of living with having large numbers of women involved in the movement: "the importance of mainstreaming arises out of the need both to alleviate the specific conditions of oppression faced by most women and *to actually have large numbers of those women involved in the process of making change*" (Adamson et al, 1988: 178; emphasis mine). This statement implies that in order to involve large numbers of women in a struggle, one *needs* to address the specific living

conditions of these women and refrain from formulating important critiques of existing structures. However, as demonstrated by the case of anti-globalisation campaigns, a disengagement framework can also draw and involve large numbers of women in a struggle. The demands of the anti-globalisation movement had little immediate consequence in the lives of these women, required a critical analysis of the global system, and was based on long-term goals. Therefore, the contention that in order to appeal to a wide number of women, the demands should address tangible elements of women lives oversimplifies the problem. Furthermore, the focus of this framework is on the praxis, rather than on theory or on a balance between theory and praxis. Because this thesis intends to be more focussed on the ideological framework of the groups than the actions, the mainstreaming-disengagement continuum has not been retained as a central tool for analysis; instead, a more traditional typology of feminist currents is used.

#### *A Third Wave?*

The emergence of a third wave of feminism, both in the U.S. and in Canada, has been claimed by a number of publications. The texts and writings on third wave feminism are relevant to my thesis in that they represent an attempt to tell the story of contemporary feminists. The term, coined in 1992 by Rebecca Walker, was crystallised with the anthologies of Findlen (1995) and Heywood & Drake (1997), which were followed by a plethora of semi-academic works on “young feminists” (Baumgardner & Richard, 2000; Dickers & Piepmeir, 2003; Sidler, 1997; *Hypatia* (Various), 1997), and similar texts in the Canadian context (Crosbie, 1997; Mitchell, Rundle and Karaian, 2001; Mitchell & Karaian, 2004; see also the special edition of *Canadian Woman Studies*, 2001). These works present controversial assumptions about contemporary feminists in that they state their contentious but heterogeneous positions on porn and sex-

work, changing identity politics, queer theories including trans issues, and postmodernism and by posing questions about the existence of a third wave.

The excitement exhibited in this literature has one major goal: to assert the existence of a new generation of feminists, up and ready to take part in the struggle, expressing their own concerns, priorities and feelings. As Findlen (1995: xiv) explains, young feminists have been told by both older feminists and the media that they don't exist. In her book, as in others, young feminists are presented as diverse, rampant, everywhere, and in all sectors of life. However, these same feminists have been criticised for their "lack of theoretical, historical, or organizational resources" (Orr, 1997: 33). Surprisingly, most authors seem to express individual voices and do not ground their voices in collective experiences of groups, collectivised identities or affinity relationships. Even when discussing activism, the focus remains on isolated individual daily actions rather than in the construction of a collectivised movement for social change. Without denying the importance of such actions and work and the need to deconstruct stereotypical understandings of activism and feminism, I do not see these writings as filling the gap identified by Forster in women's movements literature, particularly in the context of Quebec.

In 2005, the launch of *Dialogues sur la troisième vague féministe* reflected the emergence not only of a local voice for contemporary Quebec feminists, but also a form of collective voice in the midst of this third wave phenomenon. Whereas most of the work on third wave speaks from the first person, one can see in this anthology the affirmation of collective existence not only as actors (Pagé, 2005; Beaulieu et Legault, 2005; Lanoix, 2005), but also as authors (Les Panthères Roses, 2005). This difference

might be rooted in two phenomena: either the political culture of Quebec is more conducive to the creation of political groups, or, the 10-year delay between the first publication on third wave feminism and this later one has allowed for a stronger, more organised and active presentation of the third wave.

Even with this last book on third wave in Quebec, the lack of material on contemporary groups and their ideologies and praxis in the third wave literature casts doubts on the usefulness of this concept as a central tool for group analysis. Despite its promising description of ‘young’ feminists, the concept of third wave is not a central part of the frame of reference for this research, even as my present research does not completely dismiss the wave terminology as irrelevant. First, the objective of this thesis lies in exploring the theoretical assumptions that current young<sup>4</sup> feminists are using to construct their struggle and analyse the world in which they live. Most participants are not familiar with and do not use this framework in their self definition, hence the extent to which this concept is used in my analysis is very limited.

Second, I believe the concept of third wave creates confusion and oversimplifies complex social movements. For instance, the terminology, unless otherwise stated, does not clearly identify what it qualifies as a wave. Scholars have used it indiscriminately to define a group of feminists characterised by their cohort, their age group, the praxis they favour, the topics they address, their frame of analysis and the feminist label to which they subscribe. As much as I see the usefulness of identifying a resurgence of political

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<sup>4</sup> The use of “young” to describe a cohort of feminism has been used to describe women between the age of 18 and 35 in Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, eds., *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997) Rose L. Glickman, *Daughters of Feminists* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) offer a similar definition. However, Mitchell and Karain have problematised the use of this term (Allison Mitchell and Lara Karain, "Third-Wave Feminisms," in *Feminist Issues: Race, Class, and Sexuality* (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2004)). For the purpose of this thesis, it is used with parsimony as most – but not all – women involved with the groups studied fit this criteria.

activism, I find it highly problematic to fuse together these activities. According to Blais (in press), the concept of third wave reduces all nuances, diversity and internal debates to a homogenous movement at best (for example, to posit second wave feminism as only white middle-class). Furthermore, the situation in Montreal demonstrates the need to find an adequate women's movements framework for analysing contemporary mobilisations. In comparison with the two well recognised frameworks I have discussed, I now explain the choice of the Descarries-Bélanger and Roy (1991) typology as more adequate for my purposes.

#### *A typology of currents of thought*

In choosing an appropriate framework, many concerns were taken into account. First, the framework had to reflect meaningfully the groups' self-understanding. Second, it had to allow us to see how they differed and resembled women of previous generations without confining them to such a comparison. Meanwhile, it was important that such an historical analysis did not obscure the groups' innovations and originality. Third, it had to allow for the complexity and diversity of nuances to find their way in order to give an accurate picture. Finally, it had to tackle as much the theoretical aspect of the groups as their praxis. Developed by two Quebec scholars, the typology of Francine Descarries-Bélanger and Shirley Roy (1991) offered just that.

In a small book on the different feminists currents of thought, the two authors review the theoretical foundation of Marxist feminism, feminism of "femininity" (also known as feminism of difference), equality feminism, radical feminism, the lesbian separatist movement and neo-conservative feminism on two main axis of analysis: the social division of the sexes problem – the theoretical analysis of the relationship between the sexes – and the action-oriented problem – the perspectives of the struggle derived

from the theoretical framework. Because radical feminism is so central to both the research and the group's self-definition, I thought it was important that the framework chosen would address the nuances in radical feminism and allows us to navigate its complexities. Perhaps because it was developed by two Quebec scholars, this framework seems to be consistent with the groups' self-definition but also with their understanding of other kinds of feminism, with the exception of post-modern feminism and queer theory, which are absent from the typology<sup>5</sup>.

With the same objective of highlighting the contrasts and nuances present in radical feminism, I will use the concept of *generations* to distinguish between the different cohorts of feminists instead of the concept of *waves*. Although not neutral, 'generations' are less contradictory and obscure, and the concept is accessible to grassroots women as well as academics. Although when referring to a specific generation it is possible to infuse the term with meanings and stereotypes that homogenises it (Steenbergen, 2001), the term 'generations' when used to compare two cohorts of women, is not as laden with meaning and allows for similarities and differences to emerge. In this sense, women in a generation can put forward a diversity of ideologies that might contains similarities with previous generations and might inspire future generations. In fact, in this thesis, one can notice that the comparison is mostly between two generations of *radical* feminists. Furthermore, in contrast with the wave analogy that implies an ebb in theoretical development as much as in the presence of groups and actions, the generation terminology does not suggest such a lapse.

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<sup>5</sup> This omission can be explained by the publication date of the book. In 1991, post-modernism and Queer theory were not developed to the extent that they are today.

Because Descarries-Bélanger and Roy (1991) further subdivide radical feminism into three categories, it covers both the American/English-Canadian understanding of radical feminism usually associated with women-centred characteristics, although under a different terminology, and the French/Quebec understanding usually associated with materialist radical feminism. This distinction, discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, further confirmed the appropriateness of this framework for this research.

Finally, because of its dual focus on theory and action, it clearly responds to my desire to treat praxis as a continuation of theory. Although sometimes confusing, the term radical can be used to describe a type of action – very ‘disengaged’ – as much as a specific feminist ideology. Yet, this duality seems to be part of the group’s definition and follows a logical continuum. Therefore, the two meanings cannot be analysed separately. In that sense, the Descarries-Bélanger and Roy typology is well suited to both theory and practices of contemporary radical feminist groups and is preferable to the disengagement-mainstreaming framework.

#### *My Personal Involvement in the Groups*

This research is inscribed in the larger project of feminist empirical research, a undertaking that differs in its methodology and its objective from ‘positivist’ empirical research (Reinharz, 1992: 3). Accordingly, feminist epistemology does not posit the participants as static, homogenous and passive objects of research; rather, it considers participants to be complex, dynamic and ‘equally knowing subjects’ (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:100) with whom the researcher can establish a intersubjectivity that allows for a more accurate transmission of knowledge. Furthermore, feminist research differs from positivist research in that it deliberately aims at changing the status quo and producing social change. More precisely, it intends to take part in the project of an appropriation of

women's history by women. As such, this research is a step in the collectivisation of women's experiences and another step in the process of forming a collective consciousness and creating social change (Mies, 1983: 127). Furthermore, this thesis is a deliberate attempt to uncover marginalised or 'subjugated' knowledge.

I have been an active member of one of the groups studied, *Les Sorcières*, since this group was created sometime between November 1999 and March 2000. My involvement in this radical feminist group has informed my political involvement, my ideological framework as well as my academic work. My interest and passion for this topic thus stems from a strong desire to understand and explain the environment in which I have evolved. Following feminist epistemologies, I recognise that my involvement does more than motivate my research work, it actually intersects with my epistemology (Alcoff and Potter, 1993:13). Therefore, I identify my 'positionality' and relationship with the groups, along with an honest attempt to acknowledge any bias that may arise from this situated knowledge position (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000; England, 1994; Haraway, 1988). As such, I depart from the 'contemplative, uninvolved spectator' researcher (Mies, 1983:124) since I stand in a dynamic relationship with the topic and the groups studied. This awareness of my "positionality" allows me to engage in a critical reflexivity that addresses the biases as they arise. The implications of this standpoint for this thesis are significant. For each aspect, there seems to be an advantage and a challenge that did not always exactly balance out, but in general, I think, puts me in a privileged position of knowing.

In order to maintain some distance from the groups, I stopped my involvement when I moved to Ottawa at the beginning of my MA degree in 2004. Although I have

kept in contact with some members of *Les Sorcières*, my relationship with the group was limited to participating in three public events in the last two years, thus removing myself from the internal politics of the group. I hope I have achieved what Mies (1983) calls ‘conscious partiality’ whereby I have established a critical and dialectical distance from the participants in order to “enab[le] the correction of distortions of perception on both sides and [to] wid[en] the consciousness of both, the researcher and the ‘researched’.” (123)

Although my knowledge of this group allowed me to have privileged access to information about the groups – who they are, what they believe in, how they organise – I tried to ensure that I would not only interview the groups I knew. Before finalising the choice of groups, I made sure I had canvassed the entirety of the Montreal activist community for groups fitting the criteria I define in chapter Four (non-institutionalised and francophone self-identified radical feminist groups, based in Montreal between 1999 and 2005), speaking with as many feminists as possible, asking if they knew of any groups or of anyone who knew about radical feminist groups. Furthermore, in an effort to avoid any bias, as explained in Chapter Four, I did not handpick individual participants, but tried to rely on existing structures and networks so as to be as little involved as I could in the selection of individuals.

On the positive side, my knowledge of this community allowed me not only to be aware of its existence, but also to have easy access to it and to establish easily the first contact with the groups. I believe that my prior knowledge of participants – although to varying degrees – was helpful in creating an environment of trust between the researcher and participants for the duration of the interviews. Both groups and participants did not

question my ulterior motive and did not suspect I would distort – voluntarily or not – the content of the interviews, a fear common in marginalised communities.

On the negative side, however, because of my personal knowledge of the groups, the participants would sometimes refer to events, groups or even ideas on which they did not feel the need to elaborate. When I noticed it, I would ask the participant to explain further. However, in a number of cases, I did not take notice and I had to fill in the blanks with my personal knowledge. Nonetheless, I have tried to rely as much as possible on the information given in the interviews, as the length and extend of the quotations in Chapter Four testify. As well, I have tried to give a voice to the diversity of opinions and interpretations existing in the radical feminist community amongst and across groups.

In general, my prior experience with the groups seems to have been an asset for this research rather than a downfall. Although my methodology had to account for the potential biases that may have arisen such as favouritism, the relationship of trust I was able to establish with participants ensured a level of honesty from the participants and may have allowed for more relevant information to be shared.

### **Outline**

The thesis is structured in the following manner. The first chapter explores different definitions of radical feminism. It includes a historical review of radical feminism as developed in France and in the United States as well as a review of a few nuances in radical feminism. The second chapter explores the specificity of radical feminism in Quebec and its relationship with nationalism and differences from English Canada. The second chapter examines the context in which the groups studied have emerged. Namely, it explores the the transformation of the Quebec state due to the rise of neo-liberalism, the changing relationship between the main institutionalised feminist

group and the state, and the development of radical social movements in Montreal between 1995 and 2005. Once the context is well established, my focus turns to the core of this research: the groups. The fourth chapter outlines the methodological approach and reviews the ideological framework and the practices of these four radical feminist groups from Montreal based on the interviews. This chapter allows me to affirm the existence of radical feminist groups in continuity with the concepts defined in Chapter One. In the following chapter, drawing more generally on the data collected through the interviews, I analyse the impact and place of radical feminism in the context of neo-liberalism and capitalist globalisation. I also highlight what relevant elements of this resurging feminist ideology are useful for social change. Finally, the conclusion reviews the findings of the research, its limitations and the questions that still demand more research.

## Chapter One – Radical Feminism

This chapter examines radical feminism as it was first developed at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s in the United States and in France – two poles of influences – in order to understand how radical feminism was constructed specifically in Quebec. After reviewing its fundamental principles and its organisational innovations, the influences of other movements such as nationalism also will be integrated into my overview of the radical feminist traditions as well as the relationship of radical feminists in Quebec with English-Canadian feminists. This chapter outlines the theoretical foundations on which Quebec second wave radical feminism developed and contemporary radical feminists now organise.

### **Radical Feminism**

The first part of this chapter establishes the main elements of what constituted radical feminism as expressed in France and in the United States, since feminists from these countries influenced the theoretical framework of Quebec radical feminists. The definition of whom and what is encompassed in radical feminism varies widely amongst authors, and must be understood as essentially contested. It is therefore a dangerous task to try to freeze in space and time ideas and practices associated with a dynamic movement.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, I posit that some basic tenets can be extracted and used as defining elements, and that these elements are common to radical feminists across differences associated with context and tradition. To further complicate the matter, one must keep in mind that radical feminism can be divided in sub-categories highlighting

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<sup>6</sup> Radical feminism in this text is treated as one of the feminists movements. It can be considered as a movement in itself since it is constituted by a plurality of entities that act towards a common goal and, through their interaction, recognise each other as part of collective identity.

ideological differences, which poses the additional challenge of avoiding generalisation of some of these specificities to radical feminism as a whole.

In fact, in recounting the history of feminism, a number of authors have simplified and agglomerated the diversity and nuances of radical feminism and used that category to describe almost all non-institutional feminists of the 1960s-1970s. As such, they present radical feminism as a non-coherent ideology full of contradictions.<sup>7</sup> In that process, such authors also attribute to radical feminism ideas that usually identified with other streams of feminism, even as these streams were not identifiable at the time the texts were written.<sup>8</sup> Specifically, some authors have used the terms radical feminism and cultural feminism interchangeably (Digg, 1972, as cited in Brooke, 1978) and later Jaggar, 1983; Adamson, Briskin & McPhail, 1988), a “mistake” that angered many self-identified radical feminists (Brooke, 1978: 79; Willis, 1984). This phenomenon in part can be explained by the development of socialist feminism, which in the process of distinguishing itself from radical feminism contributed to the stereotypes of what radical feminism stands for, a phenomenon I will address in more detail in the section on socialist feminism towards the end of the next chapter. I believe that it is unwise to broaden the concept of radical feminism to include all and any ideas produced by women’s groups in the 1970s, just as it is unfair to reduce the diversity amongst radical feminists to a monolithic homogenous conception of women’s oppression. Although one must recognise that the ideas generated by radical feminists were developing in many

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<sup>7</sup> For example Jaggar claims that “radical feminists are not identified by adherence to an explicit and systematic political theory. [...] but the grass-roots radical feminist movement is also influenced by many other traditions, from astrology to zen.” Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Sussex: Romand and Allanheld, 1983) : 84.

<sup>8</sup> This is the case namely for the work of Mary Daly. Jaggar’s continuously refers to her work and cites it as a radical feminist text. However, Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* has been associated with other forms of feminism like “feminism of femininity” in Descarries-Bélanger and Roy.

directions – which is easily explained by the novelty of the ideas – general principles can still be identified to serve as a basis for classification of groups and texts.

I use the typology as defined by Francine Descarries-Bélanger and Shirley Roy (1991) as a central tool to delimit the boundaries of the concept in this thesis. According to these authors, radical feminists in Canada support the following tenets:

the identification of patriarchy as a socio-economic-political system of appropriation of women and the recognition of the existence of a class of women. The radical tendencies converge in their denunciation of the patriarchal system, of their refusal of idealist explanation of women's oppression and its components, naturalism and biologism and the priority they give to women's struggle. The prevailing argument is that women are exploited collectively and individually on the basis of their sexual identity (12).

Beyond these general notions, Descarrie-Bélanger and Roy further delineate radical feminism into three main categories: radical materialist feminism; radical women-centred feminism; and radical lesbian feminism. Yet, one must understand that the range and diversity of radical feminism extends beyond this nomenclature and varies greatly in time and space. As such, some trends common to French feminists differ slightly from those promoted by American feminists. As we sort through the different tendencies from both sides of the Atlantic, one must keep in mind that the movements were part of a constant dialectical network of influences on many levels. Yet, through this transplantation of information and the translations, some ideas were distorted and reinterpreted. For instance, American literature tends to stress a profound difference between the two theoretical traditions. However, a more detailed review reveals as many similarities as differences between the two (Moses, 1996: 6). The analysis of “French feminism” as published in the United States differs in its essence from the feminisms lived and theorised in France (Delphy, 1996).

It is in the midst of this dialogue that feminists in Quebec picked up bits and pieces from both, trying to form a coherent theory. Because of their access to the whole spectrum of French feminist literature – they were not constrained by translation tyranny – they do not appear to suffer from the same colonial distortion as American feminism (Delphy, 1996). Furthermore, the selection of French authors idealised by American feminists seem to favour a rather essentialist understanding of women, which is in direct opposition to the early precepts of radical feminism.

While I examine the two poles of influences, this chapter should not, however, be understood as an exhaustive review of American and French feminisms, but rather as a quick overview of the major tendencies that had an impact on Quebec feminism and as a treatment of how in each setting, feminists were influenced by the context in which they evolved and the different struggles happening around them. As such, since they reflect the specificity of Quebec's influences, some currents like materialist radical feminism in France and Black women's lib. in the United States will be covered in greater lengths than, for example, radical lesbian theory or psychoanalytical tendencies.

Some concepts are common to most radical feminist theorists, at least in the early years of theorising the oppression of women. As more and more authors wrote on the issue, nuances were added, clusters of ideas started to emerge and more differences and contradictions appeared. In agreement with the Descarries-Bélanger and Roy's (1991) definition however, I identify: patriarchy as a universal system of oppression; the departure from a naturalistic explanation of the category of women; the concept of women as a class; and the notion that the personal is political as the central tenets of radical feminism, irrespective of the further subcategories that one might also find.

Furthermore, radical feminists also distinguished themselves in their praxis through four main activist characteristics: the use of consciousness-raising groups; an attempt to avoid reproducing hierarchical structures inside the groups; the use of direct guerrilla-type actions; and the construction of an autonomous women's movement.

### *Universal Patriarchy*

The first element of radical feminism lies in identifying patriarchy as a transcending socio-economic-political system of appropriation of women and the source of women's oppression (Descarries-Bélanger and Roy, 1991: 11). Making the connection with the anthropologic definition of patriarchy – rule of the patriarch, the father – Kate Millet first extended the definition to a system of domination and subordination where domination is used as defined by Weber: “domination in the quite general sense of power, i.e. the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviors of other persons, can emerge in the most diverse forms” (translation from Rheinstein & Shil, 1967: 323 cited in Millet, 1970). Her groundbreaking book further explained how “every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands” (Ibid.: 123). She defined the domination processes at work in patriarchy as encompassing two main axes: “male shall dominate female; elder male shall dominate younger” (Millet, 1970: 123). She then went on to explain how it permeates every aspect of society (social, political, economic, etc.) and in all institutions (state, religion, etc.) yet manages to vary greatly in shape and form, depending on the time and location. One of the symptomatic expressions of patriarchy is the identification of the category of women, a group that takes different meanings and valorisations across history, but is always presented as a ‘natural’ category – the second concept questioned by radical feminists.

### *Women as a 'natural' category*

Following on the footsteps of Simone De Beauvoir, a number of radical feminists questioned the 'natural' category of women (Wittig, 1984: 148). This deconstruction of the natural category of women was a constant in the work of most pioneers of radical feminism, from Kate Millet to Shulamith Firestone, from Christine Delphy to Colette Guillaumin. According to socio-biological theories, women's oppression stems from their biology (or nature) and therefore is unchangeable. This belief is often accompanied by a set of psychologising theory ascribing a set of personality traits (gentle, gullible, peaceful, etc.) (Broverman et al., 1970; 1972) as inherent to women's nature. Although most feminists strongly opposed the "naturalisation" of the category of women and, by extension, their oppression, some feminists of the 1970s adopted the opposite view and posited that women's values and characteristics should not be 'denied' but rather should be embraced, celebrated and re-valorised. This trend most often known as cultural feminism or women-centred feminism (Descarries-Belanger & Roy, 1991) has been the topic of debates as to whether it is a part of radical feminism or not.<sup>9</sup>

In this quotation from Wittig, radical feminists further parted with essentialism by deconstructing the 'woman is wonderful' myth often associated with these movements:

Thirty years ago, Simone de Beauvoir underlined particularly the false consciousness which consists of selecting among the features of the myth (that women are different than men) those which look good and using them as a definition for women. What the concept of 'woman is wonderful' accomplishes is that it retains for defining women the best features which oppression has granted us and it does not radically question the categories of 'man' and 'woman' (1984: 150).

Even as radical feminists challenged the construction of the category of women as natural and the understanding of the social division of labour as a by-product of this

difference, they nonetheless recognised that patriarchy is grounded in an appropriation of women's bodies, either through their reproductive or productive functions. According to radical feminists, it is not a coincidence that biological functions are not only characteristics used to confine women in a narrow category, but are also one of the central sites of power, control and therefore oppression. In this sense, patriarchy needs to prevent women from having full control of their reproductive function, to keep them misinformed about their sexuality and their body and to subjugate them as sex-objects accessible at any time regardless of consent (Brownmiller, 1975; Eisenstein, 1983; Griffin, 1979).

Addressing this understanding of patriarchy as grounded in women's bodies, therefore, motivated radical feminists to pick struggles that aimed at 're-appropriating' their body. Abortion and contraception struggles were the most obvious examples of the re-appropriation of women's reproductive functions. As well, the propagation of knowledge on women's bodies with a focus on sexuality, either through a reclaiming of women's rights to sexual pleasure or the choice of orientation, the struggle against rape, and the struggle to preserve the physical integrity of their bodies (violence against women) were central concerns for radical feminists.

#### *Women as a class*

In replacing the biological explanation of women's oppression which is part of the hegemonic discourse of society, radical feminists turned to Marx and Engels to borrow

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this debate, see the work of Ellen Willis, "Radical Feminism and Feminist Radicalism," in *The Sixties without Apologies*, ed. Sohnya Sayres (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) As well, this topic is discussed in more details in the section on socialist feminism later in this chapter.

familiar tools of analyses that helped them construct an alternative interpretation of women as a group.<sup>10</sup> Firestone reflected this quest for analytical tools when she said:

For feminist revolution we shall need an analysis as comprehensive as the Marx-Engels analysis of class antagonism was for the economic structures. [...] In creating such analysis we can learn from Marx and Engels: Not their literal opinions about women – about the condition of women as an oppressed class they know next to nothing, recognizing it only where it overlaps with economics – but rather their analytical *method* (Firestone, 1970: 91; emphasis in original).

This borrowing of the ‘analytical method’, led early radical feminists to borrow Marxist terminology as well.

Indeed, as early as 1969, Ti-Grace Atkinson developed the idea of women as a class and transposed the class struggle terminology to women’s condition. While dwelling on the reason why women relinquished defining men as the enemy and the cause of women’s oppression, she stated that:

radical women, on the other hand, grasp that women as a group somewhat fit into a political analysis of society, but err in refusing to explore the significance of the fact that women form a class, the uniqueness of this class, and the implications of this description to the system of political classes (Atkinson, 2000[1969]: 83) .

This statement was echoed by Christine Delphy at about the same time in France (Delphy, 1970).

The implications of the development of women as a class were manifold. For one, it allowed women to form a collectivity, and create solidarity without making these connections inevitable and natural. It provided them with the political tools to develop a collective identity on the basis of which a political struggle could be fought.

Yet, Ti-Grace Atkinson seemed to detect early on the dangers inherent in the development of a collective identity based on an already existing or imposed

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<sup>10</sup> One can wonder if the integration of Marxist terminology by radical feminists might not only be explained by a use of readily available language for complex analysis, but might also reflect their desire to be understood by their peers in the New Left.

categorisation of people. As such, she tried to deconstruct what is implied in the notion of women as a class to prevent the universalising and naturalising trap:

We have established that women are a political class characterized by a sexual function. It is clear that women at the present time at any rate, have the capacity to bear children. [...] "Political" classes are usually defined as classes treated by other classes in some special manner distinct from the way other classes are treated. What is frequently omitted is that "political" classes are *artificial*; they define persons *with* certain capacities *by* that capacity, changing the contingent to the necessary, thereby appropriating the *capacity* of an individual as a *function* of society (Atkinson, 2000 [1969]: 85).

Although she recognised that historically, the women category has been based on a biological commonality, she clearly identified the danger of such notion and proposed that this category is not natural, but rather, political.

The identification of women as a class was critical to the attempt by feminists to collectivise women's experience of oppression. At the same time, Delphy also attempted to define women as a class. In doing so, she clearly articulated how if women are posited as a class in the context of a class struggle, their interests are by definition different than those of the opposing class, in this case "men". In a way analogous to Ti-Grace Atkinson's text, she came to the conclusion that 'men as a class' were the political enemy against which feminists must fight (Delphy, 1970).

Following the Marxist analogy of class struggle one step further, the goal of the radical feminist revolution became the establishment of a classless society, a society without sexual division. In this sense, Wittig stated that: "Our aims [is] to suppress men as a class, not through a genocidal, but a political struggle." (1984:151) Thus, one of the major objectives pursued by radical feminists in the 1970s lies in the "eradication of sexual division on which our society is based" (Kreps, 1973: 239). The struggle was aimed at abolishing gender differentiation or the "sex class system" (Koedt, 1969; see also Quelques Militantes, 1970). The ultimate goal was therefore far from a simple full

integration of women in the men's world, but rather, a revisiting of all the structures and divisions of society, including the one based on sex. Because women's class-consciousness opposed hegemonic discourses of identity, it required some work from women themselves to recognise the source of their oppression as external, as non-individual, and as essentially political.

*The personal is political*

The notion of women as a class was central to the analysis of the personal as political. The Redstockings Manifesto highlighted this relationship:

“Women are an oppressed class. [...] Because we have lived so intimately with our oppressors, in isolation from each other, we have been kept from seeing our personal suffering as a political condition. [...] In reality every [women's relationship with her man] is a class relationship, and the conflicts between individual men and women are political conflicts that can only be solved collectively” (Redstockings, 2000 [1969]: 223).

Thus, this connection of the personal is political with “women as a class” was the missing link that later distinguishes feminist groups that continued on a materialist-radical theoretical framework and maintained this connection from those that concentrated their work on the personal is political without maintaining the link – also referred to as “women-centred radical feminists” by Descarries-Bélanger and Roy (1991: 16).

Whether in France or in the United States, in environments in which men developed all theories of oppression and society and delineated the difference between public and private life, the questioning inherent in the concept that ‘the personal is political’ was revolutionary. Thus, women's attempt to create an understanding of the world that helped them make sense of their personal experiences set them on the path of a new epistemology. Both Consciousness-raising (CR) groups and political groups not defined as CR served this function of living the personal as political not only theoretically but also in their praxis.

## **Radical Feminism in Action**

The collectivisation of the struggle and the realisation that personal problems related to a system of oppression, and were therefore political, was discovered by women as they shared their experiences through CR groups. These unique means of discussing one's oppression, especially in the United States where CR groups sprouted in most major cities, brought an interesting epistemology that posited that knowledge comes from shared experiences rather than the modernist understanding of truth as a disembodied idea.

Developing these ideas in the context of the New Left, radical feminists organised consciousness-raising groups to collectivise their personal experiences and emphasised the importance of theorising it and extracting commonalities into a systemic analysis. This concern for grounding their theory in women's experiences was central to the emerging ideology on both sides of the ocean. Indeed, a French collective identified as their first "advice" for a strategic start in the struggle: "Commençons toute analyse, toute action, à partir de nous, car nous subissons une même oppression"<sup>11</sup> (Quelques Militantes, 1970: 88). Furthermore, another article by a French feminist warned against the development of an overarching theory and reminded feminists to ground their analysis in their lived oppression: "Nous ne nous battons pas pour la libération de la femme (sic) parce que nous avons compris l'oppression de la femme « en général », mais d'abord parce que nous-même nous étouffons"<sup>12</sup> (J.K., 1970: 91). American radical feminists discussed similar ideas when, for example, another group explains: "We believe that theory and

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<sup>11</sup> (All French quotes are translated by the author in order to ensure clarity, but are kept in the text for precision purposes) Let's start every analysis, every action from us, because we live the same oppression.

<sup>12</sup> We are not fighting for woman's (sic) liberation because we understood woman's oppression "in general", but foremost because we are ourselves choking.

analysis which are not rooted in concrete experience (practice) are useless, but we also maintain that for the concrete everyday experiences to be understood, they must be subjected to the processes of analysis and abstraction” (Allen, 1970:23).

As one might expect, many problems arose from this epistemological method. First, it was easy to overgeneralise a particular situation to an entire group, a critique often directed at radical feminism (Jaggar, 1983). Yet, women seemed to be aware of this danger, as many articles testify (Collective, 1973 [1971]), but they understood this approach as essential to the development of a theory that would speak to them and to their experiences.

The second element characteristic of radical feminist groups was an attempt to eradicate all organisational hierarchies within the groups. Radical feminists explicitly tried to avoid reproducing power structures found in society and tried to create a space free of oppression and subordination of all kinds: “We are committed to achieving internal democracy. We will do whatever is necessary to ensure that every women in our movement has an equal chance to participate, assume responsibility, and develop her political potential” (Redstockings, 2000 [1969] :224). French radical feminists, both at the individual and collective level, shared this desire:

Veillons à ce que les structures hiérarchiques ne se reproduisent pas dans notre mouvement. Organisons-nous en petit groupe où toutes s’expriment, où toutes développent leur potentiel.  
Restons solidaires avec les autres groupes par un comité de coordination où chaque groupe soit représenté, où il y ait un roulement des fonctions <sup>13</sup> (Quelques Militantes, 1970: 89).

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<sup>13</sup> Let’s make sure that hierarchical structures are not reproduced in our movement. Let’s organise in small groups where everyone expresses themselves, where everyone develops her potential. Let’s stay in solidarity with other groups through a co-ordination committee where every group is represented, where there is a rotation of task.

Unfortunately, their attempt to eradicate all forms of hierarchy within their groups was not always successful. As reported by Jo Freeman (aka Joreen; 1972) in her famous article “The Tyranny of The Structurelessness”, a group without structures leaves women (and men) defenceless in front of informal power as no mechanism is available to identify this power and confront it. Furthermore, Cassell argues that in American CR groups, power was never discussed in meetings and consensual decisions were in fact “decisions by exhaustion” (Cassell, 1979: 149). Nonetheless, this was the beginning of a tradition that would be perpetuated and refined in later years.

Once they identified manifestations of their oppression, radical feminists promptly acted on it and denounced it openly. Although aware of the limits of attacking symptoms of the oppression, they still wanted to denounce the manifestation of their oppression, not only to help establish that such oppression is real, but also to create a complex discourse that questions the roots of the oppression. The means of denunciation favoured by radical feminists was the use of direct action where small collectives or masses of women vocally and physically demanded an end to patriarchy and the exploitation of women. One can cite the protest at the Miss America Contest in New York in 1968, which put radical feminism on the map (Sarachild, 1978: 147). Similarly, the most notorious French demonstration, the one that symbolised for mass media the beginning of the M.L.F. (Mouvement de Libération des Femmes), was a demonstration on the grave of the Unknown Soldier (Soldat Inconnu) to remember his wife, at which all protesters were arrested (Rabaut, 1978: 338). Countless actions on abortion, mother’s day counter-celebrations, and in 1972, the *Mutualités* (days to denounce freely and publicly violence against women) kept women in the streets. In the United States, one can name WITCH

(Women's International Conspiracy from Hell) as organisers of countless guerrilla-type actions, even towards other feminist events (Rhodes, 2005 :36-37).

On both side of the ocean, the idea of an autonomous movement<sup>14</sup> was the result of the repeated failures to get their voice and concerns heard in co-ed “integrated” left movements. In the United States, the first instance of “separatism” is often attributed to women of the SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) when in 1964, they confronted male supremacy and questioned how to work with men on a equal basis (Freeman, 1975: 57). Facing much resistance and empty promises of change, women soon realised that the only way to “truly” fight patriarchy was to meet alone, without men. Although this tactical decision was common to many groups, it was understood as a mean and not an end, or as Leon says “They were in effect calling for an all-women’s group to end all-women’s groups” (1978: 152). The move to form women-only groups was aimed at building a power base, at defining who they were and what they wanted on their own terms, setting priorities for the struggle, avoiding unequal power relations in the organising structures, and countering the individuality of the problem by collectivising their oppression, a task they could only do amongst women (Leon, 1978: 152-154).

Yet, the end purpose eventually was to integrate with the movement as a whole, but on an equal basis. In France, the case of the FMA is a good example of the evolution of such position. Originally, FMA was a co-ed group and stood for Féminin, Masculin et Avenir (Feminine, Masculine and Future). Two years later, after numerous frustrations on

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<sup>14</sup> The notion of women’s autonomous movements should be understood as an essentially contested concept since it has been attributed different meanings in different contexts. In this research, I use the notion of an autonomous women’s movement to mean both autonomous from the state (as used by, for example,

women's part, they changed the meaning of the acronym for Féminin, Marxisme et Avenir (Feminine, Marxism and Future) (Delphy, 2002: 6), excluding the male membership and illustrating a departure from an "integrated" struggle. At the first meeting of the first women-only group, women had to physically remove the men who showed up, assuming the legitimacy of their presence (Delphy, 2002 [1977]: 174). Delphy (2002 [1977]), in an article entitled "Nos amis et nous" (Our friends and us), related with sarcasm the paternalist way men tried to take control of the direction of the women's movement both intellectually – by giving advice and warning against the pitfall of this or that analysis – and physically – by staying at the front of demonstrations intended by and for women, for example. Perhaps because women's political organisation was threatening, the resistance to it was so ferocious and women constantly had to justify their choice of forming women-only groups.

Although one does not find many references in original radical feminist texts of the importance of autonomy from the state, the 'revolutionary' aspects of many groups suggests that it was implied. Furthermore, the ease with which radical feminists condemned attempts by liberal feminists to engage with the state hints to their clear position in regard to the potential role of the state as an actor for change. At an organisational level, the similarities between groups on both sides of the Atlantic are striking, although some differences remained.

### **Materialist Radical Feminists**

As I have examined so far, radical feminism defines a general theory of oppression that has been further explored and specified. Elements from other social

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McFadden, 2000) and autonomous from other progressive organisations (as used, for example, by Freeman, 1975), which also implies in this research women-only structures.

movements also influenced how radical feminists further articulated women's oppression. The early development of materialism amongst French feminists, for example, might be attributed to the historical predominance of Marxism in the progressive milieu in France and incited feminists to construct an analysis that engaged – either by supporting, integrating or refuting – Marxist premises.<sup>15</sup> It is therefore not surprising to find a materialist understanding of feminism developing as the main radical feminist trend in France.

The materialist analysis of women's oppression reiterated all the same *a priori* as radical feminism but departed unequivocally from essentialism. More precisely, it understood women's oppression as a consequence of specific historical-material conditions. As such, it also suggested 'class' as a key concept for acting against such oppression through the valorisation of collective struggles (defined in terms of class war). French materialist feminism was clearly a subcategory of radical feminism, as confirmed by the interchangeable nature of the two terms in France.

Again in the case of the foundational concept 'materialist', radical feminism borrowed from Marxist terminology, specifically Engles (1972 [1848]), to construct its conceptual framework. In terms of its application to women's oppression, a main concern was "the determinate character of the sexual division of labour and the implications of

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<sup>15</sup> Materialist feminism should be distinguished from the simple application of the Marxist framework to women's oppression as supported by Marxist feminists. For Marxist feminists, household labour is not categorised as a production since it does not have a surplus value (Descarries-Bélanger and Roy, 1991:23; see also Delphy, 1970; 1975; 1982), which led to a central battle over the place of housework in production and the ensuing discussion of housewife wages (see among others, the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of the Community* (Bristol, England: Falling Wall Press, 1972); Sylvia Federeci, *Wages against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975); Suzie Fleming and Wendy Edmond, *All Work but No Pay: Women, Housework, and the Wages Due* (Bristol: Power of Women Collective/Falling Wall Press, 1975); Selma James, *Women, the Unions and Work* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1972) Furthermore, Marxist feminists often posit women's oppression as a by-product of the economic relations of production. Therefore, the fight against patriarchy is often subsumed and subordinated to the fight against capitalism.

this for power relations between men and women at different conjunctures”(Kuhn & Wolpe, 1978: 7). For radical materialist feminists, the role of women as reproducers of the species and producers in the domestic sphere took a central place in the analysis of women’s oppression.

One of the most important figures of materialist feminism in France was (and is) Christine Delphy. The additional claim of materialist feminists that distinguished them from their radical feminists sisters was the emphasis on the historical domination of one group over another, which then creates material conditions – economic, psychological, social, political, structural, ideological – to perpetuate this domination (Delphy, 1970;1975; 1982). For instance, she stated in the publication of *L’Arc* that a material feminist understanding of history has: “des prémisses [qui] conduisent à considérer les productions intellectuelles comme le produit de rapports sociaux, et à considérer ceux-ci comme des rapports de domination”<sup>16</sup> (Delphy, 1975: 63). Materialist feminism therefore developed independently in France as a dominant influence in the feminist movement. As I explore at the end of the next chapter, the development of socialist feminism, even though not defined as a sub-current of radical feminism, was in many ways similar to the materialist radical feminist theory, at least in its basic assumptions.

### **Radical Feminism and the Treatment of Difference**

In a process akin to the influence of Marxism on French feminists, the Civil Rights Movement made a strong impression on all feminists in the United States. Although the temporal proximity of the two movements did not lead to a quilting of

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<sup>16</sup> premises that lead us to consider intellectual production as the product of social relationships, and to consider them as relationships of domination.

theories as was the case between French feminism and Marxism, it nonetheless shaped the engagement of American white feminists with Black women, whether feminist or not.

Although American feminists (radical or otherwise) readily used the discourse of the Civil Rights Movement to make their point about the oppression of women, this seemed to be a one-way street. The relationship of Black women to radical feminists was rather complex and far from homogeneous, although the historiography of Radical Feminism is often written as if it was a monolithic block, formed only by American white middle-class college educated women (Jaggar, 1983: 83; see also Eisentein, 1983 and for a rebuttal, Rowland and Klein, 1996). The positive interactions and alliances between and across women of different classes, racialised groups and education levels were often underplayed and therefore silenced (Crow, 2000: 4-5; hooks, 1984: 6). In fact, many Black women were also radical feminists and many radical feminists were equally committed to the Civil Rights Movement (Bell and Klein, 1996). However, even as some (Black or white) women were able to engage in a constructive dialogue, a significant portion of the movements could never find peace and work in stable coalitions.

A number of reasons were given by Black women to explain the difficulties they faced in the white Women's lib groups. Amongst the most important, the fear that white women would co-opt their participation and derive benefits from it was one:

What do Black women feel about Women's lib? Distrust. It is white, therefore suspect. In spite of the fact that liberating movements in the black world have been catalysts for white feminism, too many movements and organizations have made deliberate overtures to enrol blacks and have ended up rolling them. They don't want to be used again to help someone gain power – a power carefully kept away from their hands (Morrison, 2000 [1971]: 454).

This potential co-optation was not, however, the only problem Black women were facing. In fact, concerns addressed in Women lib groups were not relevant to Black women's lives:

I don't know that our priorities are the same, that our concerns and methods are same, or even similar enough so that we can afford to depend on this new field [feminist literature] of experts (white, female). It is rather obvious that we do not (Cade, 1970:10).

Furthermore, the hesitation of white women to fully support groups such as the Black Panthers created suspicion amongst some Black Women as to the veracity of commitment to the Black liberation struggle professed publicly by Women's lib groups (YAWF Women's Caucus, 2000 [1970]).

These interactions, however, were not exclusive to radical feminism. One issue that was at the core of the debate with radical feminists more specifically was the debate on the prioritisation of the struggle. Some Black women saw racial oppression as more central to their lives and were vocal about the importance of first liberating Blacks before women: "If the Negro woman has a major underlying concern, it is the status of the Negro man and his position in the community and his need for feeling himself an important person, free and able to make his contribution in the whole society in order that he may strengthen his home" (Height, 1965; cited in Ware, 2000 [1970]: 101). While all Black women did not share this position, it was an important theme. Other Black women, however, were critical of the simplicity of this equation. Ware, identified by Crow as a radical feminist (2000), commented that "[black women] have been made to feel guilty at the thought of acting in their own interests" and cites an American woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Angelina Grimke, who already developed a response to the claim that Black liberation would precede women's: "The slave may be freed and women be where she is, but women can not be freed and the slave remains where he is" (Sinclair, 1965; cited in Ware, 2000 [1970]: 101). As these examples show, Black women differed in their conception of the relationship between the two systems of oppression.

Similarly, radical feminists disagreed on their conception of patriarchy. Some radical feminists' insisted that patriarchy was the original source of oppression. Two interpretations can be distinguished here. The first one asserted that historically, patriarchy was the first organised system of oppression. Basing this analysis amongst others on Engels' writings (1972 [1848]), this position was supported by most radical feminists (Atkinson, 2000 [1969]: 85; Firestone, 1970). However, a second take on this issue added that because patriarchy was the first system of oppression, it was also the one that oppressed the most and was the basis on which other systems were created and therefore should be fought first. Although some radical feminists avoided creating a hierarchy of oppressive systems, others such as the Redstockings clearly stated the primacy of patriarchy as the source of all other oppressions:

We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. [...] *All men* receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. *All men* have oppressed women (emphasis in original; Redstockings, 2000 [1970]: 223).

This passage made explicit the notion that other systems of oppression are by-products of patriarchy. Not surprisingly, some black women resented these radical feminist trends.

In contrast, however, some radical women seemed to understand the two systems of oppression on equal basis, without one being more important than the other:

For justice to come to black people, there must be black economic and political self-determination. For an end to militarism there must be an end to control of society by business which profits only with the suppression of national wars of independence. For the true freedom of all women, there must be restructuring of the institutions which perpetuate the myths and the subservience of their social situation. (Booth, Goldfield and Munaker, 2000 [1968]: 63).

Likewise, the following excerpt adopted at the Congress to Unite Women and reprinted in Koedt et al.'s influential book *Radical Feminism* (1973) represents a negotiation of

common basis of oppression and differences amongst women generally supported by radical feminists:

All women are oppressed as women and can unite on that basis; however, we acknowledge that there are differences among women, male-created – of economic and social privilege, race, education, etc. – and that these differences are real, not in our heads (1973 [1969]:309).

With pressure to prioritise the struggle from both sides, the decision was not always easy for Black women. For some, the solution lay in a Black women liberation movement. Confirming that some Black women saw some validity in radical feminist analysis of women's oppression, a number of them created Black Women's lib groups thereby answering the need to regroup amongst themselves to address Black women's concerns more specifically while presenting a gendered analysis:

Women's liberation should be considered as a strategy for an eventual tie-up with the entire revolutionary movement consisting of women, men, and children. [...] All women suffer oppression, even white women, particularly poor white women, and especially Indian, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Oriental and black American women whose oppression is tripled by any of the above mentioned. This means that we can begin to talk to other women with this common factor and start building links and with them and thereby strengthen and transform the revolutionary force we are now beginning to amass (Weathers, 2000 [1970]: 450, 452).<sup>17</sup>

Even as the majority of American radical feminists were, in fact, white and lacked coherent and clear theory on multiple oppression, one can see how they engaged and discussed the intersection of many systems of oppression, be it class, sex or race. Interestingly, however, these dialogues paralleled in a strange way the internal conflicts between the nationalist and the feminist struggles in Quebec, as seen in the next chapter.

## **Conclusion**

As I have shown, radical feminists, regardless of the later diverging tendencies can usually be said to agree on some basic principles. The identification of patriarchy as a

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<sup>17</sup> Here, the reference to a commitment to a revolutionary change of society is taken as a sign of radicalism. A more complete analysis would be needed to determine if these texts are in fact grounded in the same foundations of radical feminism.

system of oppression, which then becomes the target of the struggle along with other systems, was evident on both sides of the Atlantic. Furthermore, there is a clear departure and questioning of the natural category of women and biology as an explanation for the sexual division of society. Finally, the collectivisation of the struggle through the theorisation of women as a class and the questioning of the dichotomy between the private and the public through the affirmation that the “personal is political” are clearly foundational elements of radical feminism, yet they all have their own specificities according to the context in which they were practised.

In short, radical feminism developed in rather similar ways in the United States and in France. Contrary to Jaggar’s (1983) assertion, radical feminism can be understood in relation to a set of defined tenets and characteristics within which a diversity of groups and reality were expressed. Ground breaking in many ways, radical feminists’ consciousness-raising groups allowed for the development of theory based on their own experience, an attempt to eradicate hierarchies within the groups and the construction of an autonomous women’s movement. Yet difference emerged in regards to its interactions with other movements such as Marxism and the Civil Right Movement.

## **Chapter Two - Quebec Radical Feminism in the 1970s**

### **Introduction**

The development of radical feminism in Quebec followed its own path. As this chapter demonstrates, Quebec feminists drew on both American and French ideas to create their own trend and were influenced also by nationalism, a social movement highly engaged in by radical feminists in Quebec.

In this chapter, I first review the extent to which radical feminism in Quebec concurred with the concepts previously explored. Theoretically, Quebec radical feminists seemed to have favoured the work of French feminists, which might be due to the availability of the texts; however, they adopted means of organising that was greatly inspired by American feminists.

As demonstrated in the examples of France and the United States, the influence of other social movements and the political environment in which radical feminism emerged plays a substantial role in its development. Similarly, specificities of Quebec's reality impacted significantly on the development of radical feminism in Quebec. Furthermore, the integration of materialist feminism into the canons of Quebec feminist literature might explain why what can be called the split between radical and socialist feminism did not emerge in Quebec, which might also explain the ease with which contemporary feminists re-engaged with radical positions.

### **The Wind of Change: Quebec in the 1960s**

The modernisation wind that swept through Quebec during the 1960s Quiet Revolution<sup>18</sup> also reshaped the face of feminism. Within a few years, La Belle Province

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<sup>18</sup> This analysis of the Quiet Revolution as the turning point of modernisation of Quebec is now contested by a number of authors. For example, see Paul-André Linteau, "Un Débat Historiographique : L'entrée Du

moved from the home of an archaic, conservative, religious women's movement to a hotbed of revolutionary radical feminism. Now graduating from the same schools as their male counterparts, women seemed more than ever willing to engage actively in the political struggles of the time. Their critical feminist analysis of the different social movements led to the creation of a plethora of women's groups, all following different ideological positions and focussing on different struggles.

The first feminist group created in 1966 in the midst of the Quiet Revolution was the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (FFQ), a secular organisation which included at first both francophone and anglophone women, self-identified as 'feminists' (LeClerc & West, 1997: 229). The FFQ acted as the major interlocutor with both the government (especially before the creation of the Conseil du Statut de la Femme) and their Canadian counterpart, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) after its creation in 1972. The FFQ played a significant role in institutionalising Quebec women's demands both at the federal and provincial levels and articulating their demands in terms of rights and therefore can be classified as the liberal branch of the movement. Thus, the FFQ had been active for more than three years before radical groups started to bloom.

The idea of a women's liberation movement entered Montreal with the coming of Marlene Dixon, an American feminist who taught sociology at McGill (Adamson, et al., 1988: 43). Her experience with the American feminist movement fuelled the development of women's lib groups in the anglophone community and motivated the

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Québec Dans La Modernité Et La Signification De La Révolution Tranquille" (paper presented at the Conference : La Révolution Tranquille 40 Ans Plus Tard : Un Bilan, Montreal, 2000) and Robert Comeau, "La Révolution Tranquille: Une Invention?" (paper presented at the Conference: La Révolution Tranquille 40 Ans Plus Tard : Un Bilan, Montreal, 2000)

start of women's informal meetings and CR groups.<sup>19</sup> As anglophone women organised, they tried to reach out to their francophone counterparts in an effort to develop the movement as widely as possible. The first contact between women was created when women from McGill called a meeting with French women to discuss women's liberation movements. While women were reticent at first, the more they discussed it, the more they saw the need to organise on the basis of their gender:

[La plupart des femmes présentes] ne voyaient pas pourquoi elles diviseraient en mouvements distincts les hommes et les femmes, alors qu'il était déjà tellement difficile de s'unir pour mener la lutte de libération du peuple québécois. Après de nombreuses discussions, plusieurs devinrent conscientes que même dans ces mouvements – qui se définissaient comme des mouvements de gauche – elles étaient aussi exploitées, puisque encore une fois, elles ne participaient pas aux décisions importantes<sup>20</sup> (Collectif [FLF], 1982 [1970b]: 65).

After these discussions, some women agreed to the usefulness of creating women-only groups; however, a stronger trigger was needed to transform these ideas into groups organised on that basis alone.

To understand how women regrouped to form political alliances, one must first understand the general climate of the late 1960s in Quebec. In November of 1969, there

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<sup>19</sup> For more on the influence of Marlene Dixon on Anglophone feminisms, see Jill Vickers, Pauline Rankin, and Christine Apelle, *Politics as If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993) As well, in a letter to American feminists, members of the FLF try to go around Marlene Dixon as the mediator between the two and clearly distance themselves from Marlene Dixon, although they justified this distance only on the basis of language difficulties: "Nous voulons aussi préciser notre position face à Marlene Dixon et ses amies. Marlene est professeur à l'université McGill (anglophone); elle n'appartient ni au Women's Lib de Montréal, ni au Front de Libération des femmes du Québec. Elle vit ici depuis un an et demi et ne parle toujours pas français. Elle ne peut donc en aucune façon parler en notre nom ni en celui d'aucune Québécoise." (We also want to specify our position towards Marlene Dixon and her friends. Marlene is a professor at McGill University (anglophone); she is not a member of the Women's Lib of Montreal nor of the FLF. She has been living here for a year and a half and was never able to communicate with us directly because she still does not speak French. Therefore, she cannot in any way speak in our name nor in the name of any *Québécoise*.) For the complete letter and the context see [Front de Libération des Femmes] Collectif, "Lettre À Des Féministes Américaines," in *Québécoises Deboutte! : Une anthologie de textes du Front de Libération des Femmes (1969-1971) et du Centre des Femmes (1972-1975)*. ed. Véronique O'Leary and Louise Toupin (Montreal: Ed. du Remue-ménage, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> [The majority of the women present] did not see why they would divide in distinct movements of men and women when it was already so hard to be united under the struggle for the liberation of the Quebec people. After many discussions, many realised that even in those movements – who defined themselves as leftist movements – they were as exploited, and once again, they did not participate in important decisions.

were 141 general strikes involving more than 103 000 workers. This mass labour movement spilled into other sectors of political activity, leading to many demonstrations in Montreal and Quebec City. On November 12<sup>th</sup>, after a particularly violent protest, then Montreal mayor Jean Drapeau enacted a legislation that prevented all protests, marches and public assemblies – a bylaw that served as the final trigger for the creation of women’s autonomous groups. On the heels of this confrontation, a group of women – known as the Front Commun des Québécoises – openly defied the law. More than 200 women chained themselves in the streets to prove the administration wrong in their claims that women and children had to be protected from the growing social revolts. The protest resulted in 165 women arrested, but it allowed every other political and labour groups to go back in the streets (Brodeur et al., 1982: 27). The situation further degenerated when in 1970 the Front de Liberation du Quebec (FLQ) kidnapped Pierre Laporte and Richard Cross, thereby creating a state of panic at the federal level as well. The Trudeau government responded by enacting the War Measures Act and sending the Canadian Forces to Montreal. Abiding by one of their ransom demands, Radio-Canada (French CBC) read the FLQ manifesto live on television, shaking the whole country. Even if the army quickly controlled the event after more than 300 arrests (of mostly innocent people) and the death of Pierre Laporte, the October crisis offered an exceptionally important public forum for the FLQ, a radical and revolutionary group, and to political radicalism in general.

Out of the *ad hoc* Front Commun des Québécoises, bonds of solidarity between women were formed, which led to the creation of a number of collectives. The most documented one is the Front de Libération des Femmes (FLF) that was created in 1969,

and replaced two years later by the Centre Des Femmes (CDF). As well, a group of women from Montreal published the *Manifeste des Femmes Québécoises* (Collectif, 1971). At the same time, a number of other CR groups started to emerge. For the purpose of this thesis, these three main groups will be used as the main sources of early radical feminism in the 1970s, along with Les Têtes de Pioches who published a journal between 1976 and 1979 that represented radical feminists of the second half of the decade.<sup>21</sup>

### **Radical Feminist Theory in Quebec**

When looking at the early writings of radical feminists in Quebec, one should keep in mind that women were restricted in their access to theoretical sources by the language barrier. As such, they only accessed some of the classic American feminist texts a few years after their publication, when they were translated. Yet, the anglophone feminist circles active at McGill brought awareness of the importance of certain American writings and made them accessible before the translated versions were available to the few women who could read English.

The main sources available to Quebec women included Simone De Beauvoir's writings, Betty Friedman's *The Feminine Mystique* (which was translated as early as 1969), *The Communist Manifesto* from Marx and Engels (1955) as well as *The Origin of the Family* by Engels (1972 [1848]) which were available in French. As well, a special publication of *Partisans* named *Libération des femmes, année zéro* (1972 [1970]) was accessible, in which, along with a few French writings, a number of texts were translated from English and Spanish. In terms of English literature, O'Leary and Toupin (1982: 40-41) name *Off our back*, a number of pamphlets coming from Washington (DC), Boston

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<sup>21</sup> The choice of these groups is made solely on the basis of the availability of the documents.

and New York, *The Female Eunuch* by Germaine Greer (translated in 1971), *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millet (translated in 1971), Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* (translated in 1971) and Maria Della Costa (both in her writings and through conferences), as the main sources of English literature. Furthermore, the Kinsey Report on sexuality served as a source for discussions around sexual and body issues. In 1970, the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women was published, which provided Canadian data on women's position in society. This unique blending of original writings from New York and Boston all the way to Paris gave Quebec feminism a flavour of its own. Furthermore, a look at the theoretical sources clearly explains the materialist and radical basis on which women's groups honed their arguments.

The influence of a Marxist ideology was particularly strong in Quebec in the 1960s and 1970s and, combined with the availability early on of some crucial radical and materialist writings, it seemed to have favoured a strong radical materialist stance. Just like their French counterparts, however, at no point do the early writings – the *Manifeste des Femmes Québécoises* and the published *Québécoises Deboutte!* – self-identify as radical feminist *per se*, although they did call for a radical transformation of society (O'Leary & Toupin, 1983 [1970]:). The identification with the term radical feminist appeared around 1975 (Dumont, 2003 :462) and developed mainly in the publication *Les Têtes de Pioche*, whose authors identified with radical feminism and defined it as “cette analyse qui lie l'oppression des femmes à sa racine fondamentale, l'existence du système patriarcal. Ce processus est révolutionnaire et il consiste à éclairer les tabous, à tirer

chacune des ficelles pour dénouer l'écheveau séculaire de l'oppression"<sup>22</sup> (St-Jean, 1980: 7).<sup>23</sup>

The *Manifeste des Femmes Québécoises*, first written in 1970 but only formally published in 1971<sup>24</sup>, clearly identified the theoretical positions radical feminists followed for the next few years. From individual stories and calls to consciousness-raising all the way to theorising women's oppression, the authors covered the basics. Similarly to French feminist groups, they identified as materialist feminist, clearly rejecting both Marxist and biologist interpretations of women's situation, and framed patriarchy and capitalism as two oppressive systems that needed to be abolished (Collectif [Manifeste], 1971[1970]: 22).

On the subject of the economic exploitation of women, the collective of authors referred to Engels' *On The Origin of the Family* (1972 [1848]) as did their American counterparts. Yet, the authors of the manifesto clearly placed an emphasis on the economic dependence of women to their husband in post-industrial capitalism as a major source of women's exploitation. The FLF positioned itself in the materialist camp when it stated:

l'exploitation spécifique des femmes est basée sur des conditions matérielles qui sont liées à la division du travail, à la structure de la famille et de la société de classes et que la libération des femmes québécoises nécessite la transformation de la famille et la destruction du système politique et économique actuel<sup>25</sup> (Collectif [FLF], 1982 [1971a]:107).

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<sup>22</sup> This analysis that links women's oppression to its fundamental roots, the existence of the patriarchal system. This process is revolutionary and consists in shedding light on taboos, pulling on all the strings to untangle the secular web of oppression.

<sup>23</sup> They also dedicate a whole article in a later publication to the definition of radical feminism (Collectif [Les Têtes de Pioches], 1980 [1978]: 62).

<sup>24</sup> According to the foreword in the published version, photocopied versions of the *Manifeste* were circulated in 1970 in Montreal before the official publication in 1971.

<sup>25</sup> women's specific exploitation is based on material conditions that are linked to the sexual division of labour, to the familial structure and to the class- society and that Quebec women's liberation necessitates a transformation of the family and of the present political and economic systems.

Just as in the works of Shulamith Firestone, Ti-Grace Atkinson and Christine Delphy, the authors crafted an analysis of the economic role of women in society that went beyond traditional conceptions of production, which very early on allowed them to depart from a Marxist feminist analysis of women's economic oppression.

*Patriarchy as a system of oppression*

The word patriarchy is everywhere in these early writings and usually cited in conjunction with capitalism: “Nous avons découvert également que la double oppression dont on nous parlait constamment venait du fait que nous étions les victimes de 2 systèmes: le système capitaliste et le système patriarcal”<sup>26</sup> (Collectif [Manifeste], 1971 [1970]: 23). In an article that described radical feminism, *Les Têtes de Pioche* defined patriarchy as follow:

Le féminisme radical fait reposer l'oppression de la femme (sic) non sur le système social ou économique, mais sur le système patriarcal qui a signifié pour la femme “sujétion et protection”. Le système patriarcal a donné le pouvoir aux hommes à tous les niveaux et c'est contre quoi le féminisme radical s'insurge <sup>27</sup> (Collectif [Les Têtes de Pioches], 1980 [1978]: 185).

Other feminists identified patriarchy as a system that: “en établissant la division du travail sur la base du sexe, vient renforcer le système capitaliste”<sup>28</sup> (Collectif [CDF] 1983 [1973c]: 84). All these groups identified patriarchy as a primary target of their activism, although they differed slightly in their choice of how to go about it. In many instances, and often using Engels as their source, Quebec radical feminists stated that patriarchy was the first form of oppression (Collectif [FLF], 1982 [1971a]:108; Collectif [CDF], 1983 [1972b]: 49-50; Collectif [Manifeste], 1971[1970]: 26) but always linked it to

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<sup>26</sup> We have also discovered that the double oppression that we heard so much about comes from the fact that we are the victims of two systems : the capitalist system and the patriarchal system

<sup>27</sup> Radical feminism makes woman's (sic) oppression lie not on the social or economic system, but on the patriarchal system that meant for women “subjection and protection”. The patriarchal system gave men the power on all levels and this is what radical feminism rises up against.

<sup>28</sup> by establishing the labour division on the basis of sex, reinforces the capitalist system.

capitalism. Although they posited patriarchy as the first historical oppressive system, nowhere did they express a desire to destroy only that system. As a matter of fact, these feminists went to great lengths to establish links between patriarchy, capitalism and nationalism, especially in the earlier groups.

#### *Women's nature*

Like both their French and American counterparts, radical feminists in Quebec rejected the use of women's nature as an explanation/justification for the oppression of women. One can cite a few instances where they clearly stated that: "L'exploitation de la femme ne repose pas sur des différences biologiques"<sup>29</sup> (Collectif [Manifeste], 1971 [1970]: 26). Again, in the Bulletin de Liaison of the FLF, they justified the existence of such a movement by stating, among other reasons: "parce que le statut inférieur de la femme dans notre société n'est pas fondé sur une différence biologique ou psychologique et que notre libération ne peut être ramenée à une lutte entre les sexes"<sup>30</sup> (Collectif [FLF], 1982 [1971a]:107). Yet, they spent a surprisingly small amount of energy denying 'women's natural condition'. Rather, they seemed more preoccupied by the development of an alternative.

Beyond the theoretical explanation of the normalisation of women's behaviour and status, some groups posited a new culture of women, but unlike American cultural feminists, this new culture was seen as contingent on the materially-grounded struggle to abolish exploitation of all persons.<sup>31</sup> Women's culture was therefore to be developed *through* the struggle:

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<sup>29</sup> Women's exploitation does not rest on biological differences.

<sup>30</sup> Because woman's inferior status in our society is not grounded on a biological or psychological difference and that our liberation can be achieved through the struggle between the sexes.

<sup>31</sup> Cultural feminists groups will appear later in Quebec but will be mainly organised around the lesbian separatist movement. This phenomenon does not reach the same proportion as in the United States. The

Et aussi en créant une nouvelle culture de femmes, une culture où les femmes seront solidaires dans la lutte de libération. Car c'est dans la lutte que se créera la femme nouvelle (sic) et sa culture, une culture révolutionnaire d'où seront exclues toutes les dépendances<sup>32</sup> (Collectif [Manifeste], 1971 [1970]: 39).

Thus, they avoided the 'women is wonderful' myth and a re-valorisation of the positive aspects of women without questioning the category in which it is grounded. Solidarity amongst women was posited as contingent on the development of collective and political objectives that would lead to the destruction of sexual differences. The later collective who authored *Québécoises Deboutte!* further emphasised the distance with American cultural feminists when they define them as:

Le féminisme culturaliste s'attaque aux aspects culturels de l'oppression des femmes (ex.: femme-objets, etc.), aspects qui ne sont que l'expression idéologique de l'oppression fondamentale. En d'autres mots, le féminisme culturaliste s'attaque aux symptômes et pas à la cause<sup>33</sup> (Collectif [CDF], 1983 [1973b]: 95)

### *Women as a class*

It is interesting to note that the vocabulary used by Quebec women differed from what can be found at the same time in the United States or in France. For one, radical feminists of the 1970s in Quebec preferred to identify women's condition as similar to serfs and slaves, instead of using the generic term 'class'. In contrast to the United States, the use of the slave rhetoric was not as taboo in Quebec. Two reasons can explain this phenomenon. First, because the dominant class did not have to (publicly) acknowledge a historical interaction with slaves<sup>34</sup>, the concept for both white working class women and

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relationship of these groups with radical feminism does not last long as they slowly move away from feminism.

<sup>32</sup> And also by creating a new women's culture, a culture where women will be in solidarity in the struggle for liberation. Because it is through the struggle that the new woman (sic) and her culture will be created, a revolutionary culture from which all dependencies will be excluded.

<sup>33</sup> Cultural feminism attacks cultural aspects of women's oppression (e.g. women as objects, etc.), aspects that are only the ideological expression of fundamental oppression. In other words, cultural feminism attacks the symptoms and not the cause.

<sup>34</sup> Historical data shows that there were a substantial number of slaves in Canada, yet the authorities and elite seem to deny or downplay this reality. Because the abolishment of slavery in Canada is not the result

rich white men appeared somewhat theoretical and less controversial. Second, the national liberation movement in Quebec – here referring to the FLQ but also to the popular claims of the supporters of independence – had already co-opted the term “slave” to describe the colonial situation of francophones in Canada, namely in the book *Nègres blancs d’Amérique* (Vallière, 1968), and in the nationalist discourse in general. Thus, when the predominantly white nationalist working and middle class referred to slavery, they did not think of their ancestors’ responsibility; rather, they pointed to the exploitation French Canadians experienced over two centuries.

In addition to the ‘women as a class’ found in France and in the United States, therefore women’s groups posited ‘women as serfs’ or ‘women as slaves’, citing Engels: “La fourniture gratuite de travail dans le cadre d’une relation globale et personnelle constitue précisément un rapport d’esclavage”<sup>35</sup> to which they added “Brutalement et sans fioriture, un individu qui travaille pour un autre en échange de son entretien et qui est tenu par un pacte à vie est un serf”<sup>36</sup> (Collectif [Manifeste], 1971 [1970]: 29-30; see also p.25).

### *The Personal is political*

Another one of the defining principles of radical feminism, whether materialist or not, lies in the axiom ‘the personal is political’. This was well represented by the emphasis that the different Quebec feminist groups put on issues such as contraception,

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of an armed revolution, it seems easier for authorities and the dominant class to forget this part of history and instead portrays Canada as “the slave refuge” through the mythology of the underground railroads. For more details see Afua P. Cooper, “Black Women and Work in Nineteenth-Century Canada West: Black Woman Teacher Mary Bibb,” in *Back to the Drawing Board*, ed. Njoki Nathani Wane, Katherina Deliovsky, and Erica Lawson (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2002).

<sup>35</sup> The providing of free work in the context of a global and personal relationship constitutes precisely a slave relationship.

<sup>36</sup> Abruptly and without embellishment, an individual that works for another in exchange for their maintenance and is held by a life-time pact, is a serf.

sexuality and the conditions of housewives. Seen from the perspective of radical feminists, issues such as rape and marriage were unequivocally political. Feminists of the 1970s spent a lot of energy exposing the political ideology behind such societal structures as the family and its impacts on women as seen in the following quotation: “Cette possibilité pour les femmes de choisir leurs occupations, ne constitue point pour nous quelques réformettes ici et là. Elle veut dire une révolution fondamentale dans les rapports de domination homme-femme (...)”<sup>37</sup> (Collectif [CDF], 1983 [1973d]: 113; emphasis in original). They problematised the naturalistic discourse on the family as a political construct and questioned the lack of alternatives for women from which to choose. In this sense, they both reaffirmed the importance of personal choices and, at the same time, highlighted how these choices could be controlled through the framing of the different options available.

Indeed, radical feminists of the 1970s clearly identified how relations of power influence individuals in their personal choices. Power relations were not only linked to a traditional structural hierarchy between classes but also infiltrated every part of one’s life, down to one’s sexuality. As such, it departed from a Marxist understanding of relationships between individuals, which were only conceived in terms of social relations of production.

### **Quebec Feminists in Action**

Interestingly, radical feminists in Quebec seemed to borrow their strategic repertoire from a mixture of consciousness-raising groups as found in the United States and autonomous cells such as those found in ‘revolutionary’ struggles like the FLQ. In

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<sup>37</sup> This possibility for women to choose their occupation, does not constitute for us some petty reforms here and there. It means a fundamental revolution in the men-women relations of domination

order to support my argument, I examine more closely the structure of the FLF since they documented their structure and actions.<sup>38</sup>

Although the FLF called themselves cells and not specifically CR groups, they operated on the same principles as those laid out by their Southern neighbours. They worked in small groups of women who got to know each other well, and most importantly, they shared their personal experiences together and used self-reflexive processes to inform their theory. They valued the experience of women and challenged traditional ways of knowing. Indeed, the first part of *Manifeste des Femmes Québécoises* contains the personal testimonies of ordinary women, depicting their lives. The diversity of women's testimonies speaks to the desire to show a common oppression of women across class and marital situation (Collectif [Manifeste], 1971[1970]: 14-20).

The structures of the FLF reflected those used by revolutionaries. They worked in separate cells that came together in general assemblies. Each cell was working on one issue. In January 1971, the FLF had three cells, the daycare cell, the abortion cell, and the "cellule X" – in charge of organising direct actions. In July 1971, one can add the C.A.F. cell (Cinema-animation-formation), Cell 1 and Cell 2 (whose objectives are somewhat obscure), the journal cell, and the "cellule O comme dans vulve" (Cell O as in vulva), which will focus on learning about women's bodies. The apparent confusion in relationships within and between the cells reveals the downfall of their attempt to avoid hierarchical structures. The comments of many members in the different reports from the cells confirm the difficulty they were facing as well as their tenacity in trying to solve the problem. Furthermore, their commitment to non-hierarchical relationships is revealed

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<sup>38</sup> Other groups have not documented any actions; the Collectif author of the *Manifeste* being exactly that, a one time collective of authors and the *Tête de pioche* being an editorial board.

when the abortion cell defines the goal of the structure as: “s’assurer que chaque femme ait une chance égale de participer aux décisions, de prendre des responsabilités, de développer son potentiel”<sup>39</sup> (Collectif [FLF], 1982 [1971b]: 95).

Taping into more traditional definitions of radicalism, radical feminists were also motivated by direct and visible actions. The first public display of radical feminism in Quebec can probably be traced to the women’s protest in response to the ban on demonstrations discussed above. This was followed by a series of action like the Jury Action (a physical take over of the jury bench to protest the impossibility for women to be tried by their peers, women’s jurors); the Salon de la Mariée Action (where they stormed the Weeding exhibition and distributed flyers); numerous actions on abortion; the annual March 8<sup>th</sup> celebration; a series of actions to support a women’s strike at the Squibb Pharmaceutical company; a Mother’s Day action; and the occupation of a “taverne”<sup>40</sup> (O’Leary & Toupin, 1982).

Quebec women’s organisations clearly identified the reasons behind the need for an autonomous women’s movement: the relegation of women to subordinate positions and the lack of voice, political legitimacy and power in other co-ed movements – even when a woman achieved a certain position, her valorisation depended on her male colleagues – and the failure of other movements to concretely address women’s liberation (Collectif [FLF], 1982 [1971a]: 119-120). Even more “reformist” organisations such as the FFQ were unconditional about being women-only groups. Just like their French and American counterparts, radical women constantly had to justify, explain and defend their

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<sup>39</sup> ensure that each women has the same chance to participate in decisions, to take responsibility and to develop her potential.

<sup>40</sup> A “taverne” is a typical neighbourhood bar that until then was forbidden to women explicitly.

choice to organise on their own terms; their comrades in the anti-capitalist struggle and in the national liberation struggle were deaf to their plight for self-organisation.

Furthermore, radical feminists rejected all interactions with the State. Even as the institutions of the state at the time were bending backwards to try to accommodate the new generation of activists, it was not enough. As a matter of principle, radical feminists would not rely on the state to change the structures of power since the state was theorised as vested with patriarchal interests. Therefore, demanding more funding from the state was not seen as a legitimate objective, a position which at the time led to many contradictions. A good example was the childcare debate. To gain their independence, women had to work and therefore find affordable day-care. Yet, women from the FLF did not advocate for government funding. Faced with funding difficulties due to cut backs from the federal government, they took the following position:

Nous ne pouvons certainement pas réclamer [des gouvernements] qu'ils prennent en main la garde des jeunes enfants. (...) Mais nous n'avons qu'à penser au système d'éducation au Québec (cf. polyvalentes-casernes) pour vite nous rendre compte que l'organisation des garderies contrôlées par l'État (capitaliste et exploiteur) enrégimenterait les enfants en une sorte de "parking" où ils apprendraient très jeunes les comportements nécessaires à ce pourquoi ils sont destinés: Cheap labor du capital<sup>41</sup> (Collectif [CDF], 1983 [1973a]: 63).

By refusing to demand more funding from the government, they still confronted the harsh reality of women in need of childcare. They answered that the only way to respond is by "soulever dans toutes nos batailles partielles (créations de garderies dans les quartiers, inclusions des garderies parmi les revendications syndicales, etc.) l'objectif à long terme, ceci afin de dénoncer les contradictions actuelles du système et ainsi éviter

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<sup>41</sup> We certainly cannot demand [of the governments] that they take charge of our young children. Which is something we could ask a popular government. But we just have to think about the education system in Quebec to quickly realise that a childcare organisation controlled by the (capitalist and exploiter) State would enrol children in a sort of "parking" where they would learn very early the behaviours necessary to become what is expected of them: cheap labour of capital.

toute forme de récupération”<sup>42</sup> (64). The tradition of radical feminism in Quebec, therefore, suggested an understanding of the autonomous women’s movement as independent from men but also from the state or any institution.

### **Feminism and Nationalism**

As I have shown, ‘revolutionary’ Quebec nationalism was at its peak when the first few radical feminist groups emerged. As such, the women constituting these groups proposed ideas in tune with the *air du temps*. Quebec nationalism acted as a strong social force with which feminists had to engage. Indeed, early radical feminist groups took a very clear stance on the Quebec national debate. For example, the FLF made their position more explicit in their name, which is inspired by the FLQ, and secondly through the title of their first journal: “Pas de libération des femmes sans libération du Québec, pas de libération du Québec sans libération des femmes”<sup>43</sup> (Collectif, 1983: 17). As well, in the *Manifeste des Femmes Québécoises*, national liberation was paralleled with women’s liberation. As the authors explained:

Or, pour les femmes, ce qui importe d’abord c’est la libération des femmes. [...] Mais nous sommes très conscientes que notre libération est liée à la libération nationale et c’est pourquoi nous joindrons le mouvement<sup>44</sup> (Collectif [Manifeste], 1971[1970]:12).

Although some radical feminists posited patriarchy as preceding capitalism historically, they did not prioritise which one should be abolished first; rather, they avoided the debate by questioning its relevance. Furthermore, because they posited themselves as an oppressed “people”, they did not develop a sound analysis of the racist system similar to what is found in the United States. In part, this was due to the battle

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<sup>42</sup> bring up in all our partial struggles (creation of daycare in neighbourhoods, inclusion of childcare in union demands, etc.) the long term goal, in order to expose the current contradictions of the system and thereby prevent any form of co-optation.

<sup>43</sup> No women’s liberation without Quebec liberation; no Quebec liberation without women’s liberation.

they were fighting to get rid of the ‘English oppressor’ through the liberation struggle. In this sense, early radical feminists departed from both American and French feminists in that they did articulate an anti-racist theory of oppression but posited themselves as oppressed, denying their white privileges. Although the position of ‘oppressed French-Canadians’ seems highly problematic from a contemporary point of view, it is still interesting to note that contrary to common perception, radical feminists engaged in theorising a multiplicity of oppressions including the oppression based on “race” at an early stage in the struggle.

Just like any combination of different struggles, nationalist radical feminists ran into a number of paradoxes and problems. After 1971, when most of the nationalist “revolutionary” activities were replaced by more official and institutionalised groups like the Parti Québécois (PQ), radical feminist groups started to articulate their ambivalence towards the way nationalism was being promoted. As much as feminists supported the national liberation struggle, they were not willing to subsume women’s liberation to it. Therefore, contradictions started to arise as the political institutions co-opted the nationalist struggle and incorporated it into existing power structures where women’s access to power was even more limited. For example, even if they supported the separatist cause, the FLF (and the later Centre des Femmes) historically had been very critical of the Parti Québécois and were suspicious of the official political arena. Even as the PQ presented an array of social reforms (before their election), *Québécoises Deboutte!*, saw their double discourse. In their article “Le P.Q., Espoir ou illusion”, they highlighted the contradictions of the party program and explained how “l’État capitaliste

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<sup>44</sup> However, for women, what is important first is women’s liberation. [...] But we are conscious that our liberation is linked to national liberation and this is why we join the movement.

peut se permettre certaines variantes de son organisation interne (ex.: Congés de maternité payés, garderies, etc.) sans se remettre en cause lui-même”<sup>45</sup> (Collectif [CDF], 1983 [1972a]: 129). They saw how the government would not try to destroy the capitalist state because it would mean destroying its own interests. The article also showed how the PQ was fooling workers through the incorporation of certain demands while serving, in the end, the French elite. Even though their platform differed from that of the PQ, the Centre des Femmes saw the creation of an independent state as a mean to end all forms of oppression, including women’s and workers, which motivated their commitment to the struggle.

The nationalist cause was problematic for radical feminists in other ways. As well summarised by Yanacopoulos, radical feminists realised:

*l’histoire est éloquent: aucune lutte de libération nationale ne s’est faite sans la participation active des femmes; aucune lutte de libération nationale ne s’est faite sans promettre aux femmes satisfactions futures à leurs demandes. Et une fois l’indépendance réalisée, les femmes se retrouvent renvoyées à leurs rôles d’antan*<sup>46</sup> (Yanacopoulos, 2003: 89).

Examples from Cuba, China and Russia were usually presented to support these warnings about the ‘real’ desire to change the structures of society and the professed plan to liberate women once Quebec’s independence was achieved.

Another contradiction that resurfaced from time to time laid in the radical feminist attempt to create solidarity with all women, despite their ambivalence towards the creation of alliances with English-speaking women. Somewhat analogous to the relationship between Black (feminist) women and white feminists in the United States,

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<sup>45</sup> The capitalist state can allow for certain variations of its internal organisations (e.g. : paid maternity leave, daycare, etc.) without questioning its own existence.

<sup>46</sup> History is eloquent: no national liberation struggle happened without the active participation of women; no national liberation struggle happened without promising women that their demands would be met. And once the liberation was achieved, women were relegated to their traditional roles.

French-speaking women were wary of uniting with English-Canadian feminists, whom they consider both oppressors and sisters in the struggle. Clearly, they were reticent to join in wider coalitions or nation-wide attempts to change the Canadian State. They outright rejected any attempt to engage with the Canadian federal state, thereby negating the possibility of coalition with feminists of other provinces – revolutionary or not.

Nous refusons d'aller manifester devant un parlement dont nous ne reconnaissons pas les pouvoirs qu'il s'arroge sur le Québec. Cependant, nous sommes solidaires des femmes du Canada, puisque étant femmes, nous subissons la même oppression <sup>47</sup> (Collectif [FLF], 1982 [1970a]: 71).

Even within Montreal, the alliances were scarce and rarely successful. The revolutionary feminists of the FLF tried to navigate the line between their desire to establish solidarity with women regardless of their origin and position in society and their 'anti-anglo' sentiments but sometimes had to back down. The following quotation is from a letter from the FLF written to terminate their involvement in the organisation of an anti-imperialist conference in Montreal where Vietnamese women planned to discuss the impact of the Vietnam war on women:

Nous devons maintenant revoir et réorienter notre politique. Les événements nous ont montré à quel point il est urgent de travailler d'abord et avant tout avec les Québécoises. Nous sommes opprimées non seulement en tant que femmes mais aussi en tant que Québécoises francophones, colonisées par les capitalistes anglo-américains. Notre priorité ne peut être que de travailler avec la masse des femmes québécoises <sup>48</sup> (Collectif [FLF], 1982 [1970c]: 79).

Although this citation needs to be contextualised – it was written not even two months after the October Crisis – one can see how their focus changed from a women- to a Quebec-oriented focus in a short lapse of time. The importance of this contradiction resurfaced around the 1980 referendum when women decided on whether to annul their

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<sup>47</sup> We refuse to demonstrate in front of a parliament whose power it assumes on Quebec we do not recognise. However, we stand in solidarity with women of Canada, because as women, we are all subjected to the same oppression.

<sup>48</sup> We now need to review and reorient our politics. The [recent] events showed us how urgent it is to work first and foremost with *Québécoises*. We are not only oppressed as women, but also as francophone

vote by writing WOMEN on their ballot or actually vote for an independent Quebec (Yanacopoulos, 2003).

### **Socialist or Materialist Feminism? The English-Canadian Difference.**

The distance between feminists in Quebec and those in the Rest-Of-Canada (ROC), however, cannot solely be attributed to the Quebec radical feminists' refusal to work with English-speaking women. When reviewing the literature on the women's movements, the vocabulary used to describe the different shades of radical feminism also differs based on its location.

While radical feminist theory in France evolves towards a materialist radical feminism, 'radical feminism' in English Canada seems to move in the opposite direction. The materialist tendencies of radical feminism reorganised under the socialist feminist label thereby reducing radical feminism to what Willis (1984) and other American feminists have termed 'cultural feminism' or what Descarries-Belanger and Roy call women-centred analysis. Socialist feminists, in their attempt to distance themselves from radical feminists (Adamson et al., 1988: 72-74) homogenise and simplify the theoretical framework of radical feminism to one associated with an essentialist understanding of the category of women.<sup>49</sup> For example, because socialist feminists emphasise the intersection of patriarchy and capitalism, they presume radical feminists to homogeneously understand patriarchy as the source of capitalism, which as I have shown is not always the case. Furthermore, because socialist feminists focus on public and collective actions,

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*Québécoises*, colonised by Anglo-American capitalists. Our priority can only be to work with the masses of Quebec women.

<sup>49</sup> The same phenomenon can be seen in some American writings like Hester Eisenstein, *Contemporary Feminist Thought* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1983) although it is also resisted by others like Brooke, "The Retreat to Cultural Feminism," in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women's Liberation Movement (New York: Random House, 1978) and later Robin Rowland and Renate Klein, "Radical

radical feminists are portrayed as acting mainly in their personal lives and individually (Ibid.: 174).

A closer look at the main tenets of socialist feminism reveals a striking similarity with materialist radical feminism. Adamson, Briskin and McPhail (1988) define socialist feminism in the following manner:

Socialist feminism is simultaneously about a transformation in the relations of domination between men and women and about a redistribution of political and economic power between classes and races [...] neither class, gender nor race is privileged as the primary source of oppression. Rather the interconnectedness between the political and economic power – in our society capitalism – and the organization of male power – what we might refer to as ‘patriarchal relations’ – is emphasized” (98-99).

This statement echoes radical feminists’ positions on the relationship between capitalism, patriarchy and racism. As I have shown, although some radical feminists do posit that patriarchy is at the root of all other systems of oppression, this assumption is not shared across the board. The authors continue their definition of socialist feminism by explaining how:

The strategic and analytic interconnectedness of these issues points to the necessity for a dramatic social reorganization. Situating these demands in the political-economic context of patriarchal capitalism highlights the class nature of women’s oppression, the impact of racism and heterosexism, and the role of the state in reinforcing women’s oppression (99).

This quotation highlights the importance for socialist feminists of the concept of women as a class, again an element traditionally associated with radical feminists, especially materialist radical feminists. Furthermore, the authors point to the socialist commitment for a ‘dramatic’ (radical?) social reorganisation. In addition, the authors distinguish socialist feminism from other feminist currents of thought using the following assumption:

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Feminism: History, Politics, Actions," in *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed*, ed. Diane Bell and Renate Klein (North Melbourne: Spinifex, 1996).

The second assumption of socialist feminism rests on the belief that non-exploitative relations between men and women are possible; that is, that the domination of men over women is not biologically based (99).

As I have demonstrated, this assumption is widely shared by radical feminists. Finally, another fact that supports the correspondence with English Canadian socialist feminism is found in the proposed methodology. Indeed, the authors ascribe a specific method to socialist feminism:

This section will describe the historical-materialist method of socialist feminism. [...] Our 'historical-materialist' method, derived from Marxism, is both historically specific and focused on the material conditions of living of women's lives (118).

As I have documented, socialist feminists did not hold the monopoly on the historical-materialist method since radical feminists in Quebec and France also used it to make sense of their condition.

Far from implying that there is therefore no distinction to be made between radical feminists and socialist feminists, I wish to highlight the difference between the ideological development of feminism in Quebec and the ROC. Although not the main purpose of this thesis, one can offer an number of tentative explanation for these differences.

Although one notices the presence of Marxist feminists in Quebec at the beginning of the second wave, they do not seem to develop into a steady stream of feminism (such as socialist feminism) or in organised groups. Furthermore, not all radical feminist groups of the end of the 1970s in Quebec mirror the 'cultural feminists' described by Ellen Willis (1984) that seem to have motivated the "bad name" of radical feminism. Therefore, materialist radical feminists might not have felt the need to distance themselves so much from women-centred radical feminists. Instead, their analysis of women's oppression is in continuity with early radical feminism while integrating some

Marxist elements. In contrast, socialist feminism marked a break with radical feminism. Through this process, the use of radical feminism in American and English Canadian texts becomes the referent specifically for cultural feminism or what Descarries-Belanger and Roy identified as women-centred radical feminism (1991: 11). Finally, an alternative explanation lies in the fact that the Quebec feminist movement was to be the theatre of another divisive conflict at the end of the 1970s. The tension amongst feminists might have been mitigated by the nationalist debate in light of the 1980 referendum (Yanacopoulos, 2003).

Therefore, this brief review of socialist feminists highlights the two different paths that radical feminism assumed in the Canadian context. It is important to underscore the constant relationship in Quebec between radical feminism and a materialist analysis since it is still present in contemporary radical feminism. Indeed, the resurgence of radical feminism in Quebec might be due to the fact that the type of radical feminism that took root is in fact very similar to the socialist feminism that became a predominant ideological orientation of both academics and activist contemporary feminists in English Canada.

### **Interlude: The Latent Period of Radical Feminism**

Le féminisme des années 70 n'est plus. Mais il faut chercher derrière cette banalité ce qui a contribué à sa disparition. Trois facteurs me semblent devoir être pris en considération: d'abord, le changement politique et la disparition des projets sociaux d'ensemble, ensuite, la récupération institutionnelle, enfin, la disparition du radicalisme du fait de son intersection dans le lesbianisme qui se dissocie de plus en plus du féminisme<sup>50</sup> (Lamoureux, 1986: 145).

In her analysis of the feminist of the 1970s, Lamoureux identifies three main factors that explain the disappearance or transformation of – amongst other social

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<sup>50</sup> The feminism of the 70s is dead. But one needs to look beyond this mundane fact and look for what contributed to its disappearance. Three factors seem to have to be considered: first, the political change and

movements – radical feminism. The first element she highlights is a change in the general political climate. The result of the 1980 referendum affected the political landscape. With the loss of the referendum, the momentum for radical nationalism appears obsolete.

Furthermore, the willingness of the federal and provincial governments to consider the demands made by liberal and even some radical feminists took away the edge of radical feminism. As a matter of fact, the 1980s represent the apogee of the welfare state.

The second factor identified by Lamoureux is the ‘institutional co-optation’ of the movement. Radical feminists, like other activists, seem to stop organising in politically-oriented and marginalised groups and instead, find refuge in the establishment of service-oriented groups. For example, many women’s centres find radical feminists on their board or amongst their workers. Some have attributed the development of women’s shelters and the Centre d’Aide et de Lutte contre les Agressions à Caractère Sexuel (CALACS) network to the relentless work of radical feminists (Masson, 1999/2000). Some radical feminists also found their way into the academy while others set up bookshops (La Librairie des Femmes), coops (coop-femmes), or even publishing companies (Les Éditions du Remue-ménage). In terms of publication, *La Vie en Rose*, a glossy magazine has replaced the amateur *Québécoises Deboutte!* and *Les Têtes de Pioches* as the main feminist magazine. It does not specifically identify as radical or with any feminist school of thought but rather takes on the task of asking questions more than answering them (Guénette, 2005). Finally, the separatist lesbian tendencies of radical feminism move away from feminism in general, slowly turning their political statement into a lifestyle.

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the disappearance of global social projects, second, institutional co-optation, and finally, the disappearance of radicalism due to its intersection with lesbianism, which more and more dissociate itself from feminism.

Although radical feminist groups as constituted in the early 1970s seem to disappear from the political map after the 1980 referendum, radical feminism survives as an ideology. Radical feminism is kept alive in community groups such as women's centres and in academic circles through the documentation of radical feminist writings and actions, the continuation of an academic dialogue on radical feminism namely in *Questions Féministes* and *Nouvelles Questions Féministes*, and the commitment of professors to keeping this ideology alive. But nothing of the importance of radical feminism in the 1970s continues in the 1980s, although many gains are achieved at the legal and societal level. It is not until the turn of the millennium that radical feminism as a movement re-emerges.

### **Conclusion**

As I have exposed, radical feminists in Quebec, regardless of the later diverging tendencies, subscribe to the same basic principles as early French and American radical feminists. Following the theoretical influences coming mostly from France, a materialist radical feminist tendency can be delineated amongst Quebec feminists. Yet, Quebec's radical feminism is highly tainted by the revolutionary nationalist struggle which prompts them to engage in complex yet underdeveloped intersections of multiple oppressions. Feminists, whether based in Quebec or not, constantly have to negotiate the tension arising from the solidarity they try to establish amongst all women regardless of their class or language while also engaging with other movements that foster divisions amongst women and create solidarities between other constituencies. The focus of this research now turns towards contemporary Quebec. The foundations of radical feminism established in this chapter will be revisited in my examination of contemporary radical feminists.

## **Chapter Three – The Context of Quebec at the Turn of the Millennium**

To understand the reasons behind the emergence of new radical feminist groups and the factors shaping their ideology, one first needs to look at the context in which this new radical feminism appeared. The chapter is divided in three sections. The first section reviews the logic and principles underlying neo-liberal ideology and its application in Canada and the specificities of its expression in Quebec. I posit that the economic and political context of neo-liberalism influences the way radical feminists articulate their ideas and interact with (and refrain from) the state.

I then tackle the complex relationship between the Quebec state and the institutionalised women's movement. The FFQ, as well as community groups, have a long history of "conflictual cooperation"<sup>51</sup> with the Quebec state that started to fall apart in 1996, a decade after their Canadian counterparts (Dufour, in press). As such, the FFQ has maintained a love-hate dynamic with its government and with the nationalist debate, two elements rejected by radical feminists as a whole.

Moving from a macro to a micro analysis, the third part of this chapter turns its lens to consider the extreme left and reviews the revival of social movements in Quebec in the second half of the 1990s. The rupture in the partnership between social actors and the provincial government fostered the rise of more radical factions. Starting with the student strike in 1996, an escalation of mobilisation fed the activist movement until it reached its culminating point at the Summit of the Americas in April 2001. This section

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<sup>51</sup> For more on this concept see Deena White, "Quebec State and Society," in *Quebec Society: Critical Issues*, ed. Michel Fournier, M Rosemberg, and Deena White (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1997).

gives the reader an idea of the immediate environment in which women decided to form radical feminist groups.

### **Neo-liberalism and its application in Quebec**

Neo-liberalism is a political and economic rationality that has been spreading for the past 25 years. Basically, it promotes the following program: the recognition of the superiority of the market in all dimensions; cuts in social expenditure for social services and reducing the safety-net for the poor; deregulation of every sector to maximise profits; privatisation of state-owned services, goods and enterprises; and the replacement of the concepts “public good” and “community” with the notion of “individual responsibility” (Martinez & Garcia, 1996). Likewise, Friedman (1991, 35) defines neo-liberalism as demands made on governments to maximise exports, reduce social spending, curtail state economic regulations and enable market forces to restructure national economies as parts of transnational or regional trading blocs. These two definitions highlight the diminishing role of the state and the expansion of the market economy to sectors previously understood as public and state-regulated.

One of the key strengths of neo-liberalism is the ease with which it is interpreted as apolitical, scientific, common sensical, inevitable and as a simple reflection of “the reality”. It has been argued that neo-liberalism succeeds because it is able to start and maintain a cycle creating a reality that suits its ideology and proves its theories while its supporters proclaim that this reality could not have been different (Bourdieu, 1998). In the same article, Bourdieu further argues that one of the main ways the neo-liberal utopia is able to achieve such success is through the destruction of all collective structures, whether in the workplace or by restricting the domain of the state.

The spread of the neo-liberal utopia seems to have reached all parts of the world over the past 25 years. Yet, some important differences persist, due in part to the existence of prior structures and local circumstances. In the case of Canada, the government decided in the first half of the century to assume the responsibility for fostering the well being of its constituents. In doing so, the Canadian state followed a generalised trend of advanced capitalist countries. The adoption of this active role by the state forces a particular form of governance – what Rose calls ‘government from the social point of view’ – which posits “a single matrix of solidarity, a relation between an organically interconnected society and all the individuals contain therein, given a politico-ethical form in the notion of social citizenship” (1996: 333). In Canada, ‘government from the social’ followed a Keynesian model where social responsibility of the state is mediated by the creation of different safety nets. Therefore, the creation of social measures such as Medicare, employment insurance and welfare was linked intrinsically with the rhetoric of social responsibility of the state and its institutions.

It should be understood, however, that as long as these social measures created a prosperous and profitable climate for economic interests (namely by ensuring high rates of consumption, accessible qualified labour, etc.), governments could juggle both economic and social imperatives successfully. Yet, with the acceleration of economic globalisation, the mutually beneficial relationship between social and economic interests has turned into a dynamic of competition (Rose, 1996). As a matter of fact, in the last 10 to 20 years, neo-liberal rhetoric has worked actively to deconstruct the social responsibility of the state, namely through the destruction of the social as an imaginary collectivity and meaningful object of governance. In Canada, this takes the shape of

social policy reforms and a shift in discursive practices, both at the federal and provincial levels.

Three main elements of this neo-liberal transformation are of interest for the purpose of this thesis: the deconstruction of a collective responsibility and its replacement by individual responsibility; the discursive transformation of political choices as inevitabilities or non-choices; and a reduction of state funded women's support structures. The example of welfare policy demonstrates the neo-liberal processes at work to transform state structures and public discourse. The same pattern occurred in other policy sectors such as education and women's support networks.<sup>52</sup>

Paralleling an American trend, the federal government, along with provincial governments, introduced a number of changes to the welfare system in the last decade that posited welfare as a privilege, conditional upon certain requirements, and challenged the notion of economic survival as a fundamental social right. Among these measures, one can count : the reduction of federal transfers to the provinces through the transformation of the funding agreement (from Canadian Assistant Plan (CAP) to Canadian Health and Social Transfer (CHST)), forcing them to find alternative revenues or reduce the total amount dedicated to social assistance; the implementation of stricter rules; "snitch lines" for fraud and the introductions of diverse obstacles before having access to public money; and a massive reduction of the amounts allocated to the recipients (Finnie, Irvine, Scerviour, 2004: 19-0). Furthermore, the disappearance of CAP

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<sup>52</sup> The welfare case being well documented, it is much easier to demonstrate both processes. An example grounded in the education system would use the massive cuts in post-secondary education combined with the imposition of a "failing tax" on students who fail their Cegep courses so as to distinguish between the 'deserving students' and the 'non-deserving students' and adapt the funding accordingly, as was the case with the Bouchard-lead PQ in 1997. For more on the rationalisation for this "incitation a la reussite" see the report from the Ministère de l'Éducation du Québec (MEQ). "Prendre Le Virage Du Succès: Plan D'action

also removed the incentives for provinces to abide by federally defined criteria such as entitlement on the basis of need, the right of appeal and the prohibition to workfare (Mayson, 1999: 95).

Moreover, these changes in social policies paralleled a change of discourse on government responsibility towards the economic welfare of its citizens. This change in discursive practices confirms Bourdieu's alarm call about the deconstruction of collective structures. The alleviation of poverty, for example, shifts from a collective responsibility shared by the government with other institutions such as philanthropic organisation to a private matter and an individual responsibility.

Propelled by writings such as Lindbeck's (1995), the idea that welfare recipients become accustomed to it and therefore that generous welfare programs institutes a long-term dependence of recipients that can even be passed down from generation to generation becomes part of the dominant discourse on welfare (see among others Sarlo, 1992; Sabatini, 1996; Finnie et al., 2004). With this psychologising definition of poverty, individual deficiencies (re-)entered the discourse as an underlying cause of poverty and dependency. While these stereotypes affect both women and men, it has been argued that these changes have more adverse effects on women, especially single mothers (Breitkreuz, 2005; Little, 2001; Mayson, 1999).

On the integration of neo-liberal reforms to the state, at the time of writing this thesis, Quebec stands in a unique position. Compared to other provinces, neo-liberal discourse has not yet been accepted as the governmental norm. Consequently, the present state of affairs might not resemble the post-Harris Ontario, but especially since the

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Ministériel Pour La Réforme De L'éducation." Quebec: Gouvernement du Québec, 1997, [retrieve on May 21st 2001 from <http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/reforme/reforme.htm>]

accession to power of the Liberal government in 2003, Quebec has headed full force into a neo-liberal regime. My goal here is not to target the Quebec Liberal Party specifically since many parties pursue the same neo-liberal agenda and have done so for a number of years.<sup>53</sup>

Another important element that makes Quebec “distinct” is the tradition of concerted negotiation between the provincial government, particularly under the Parti Québécois (PQ), with the different actors of society – hereafter referred to as “social actors” – including the major unions, the institutionalised women’s groups under the leadership of the FFQ, the student federations (FECQ, FEUQ), and community groups through their national or regional council representatives. According to White (1997), this phenomenon can be attributed to the desire of the PQ to develop long term partnerships with and between these influential actors of society because it sees them as partners in the nation-to-be-built in the independence project. The PQ must balance carefully the “carrots” and “sticks” with these sometimes otherwise marginalised interlocutors to ensure that by the next referendum, they will take a public position in favour of Quebec separation, as was the case in previous referenda.<sup>54</sup> As a result, community groups, the FFQ, unions and student federations have developed what White (1997) calls a “conflictual co-operation” with the state where even as their interests are different, social actors of society are an integrated part of the governance project the PQ had chosen.

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<sup>53</sup> See, for example, the accomplishment and discursive practices of the Parti Québécois during the Bouchard administration.

<sup>54</sup> For example, in the 1995 referendum, the FFQ, both student federation and most Unions took a stand for the separation, regardless of the internal (Pascal Dufour, "Des Femmes En Marche: Vers Un Féminisme Transnational?," in *Québec En Mouvements*, ed. Francis Dupuis-Déri (Montreal: Lux, in press)).

Nonetheless, this relationship was profoundly challenged after the loss of the 1995 referendum. First, the partnership designed to facilitate the independence project became obsolete; there was no more incentive for the PQ government to work in co-operation with social actors. Furthermore, after Parizeau's demise, the ideological tendencies of the party changes under the new leader – a former progressive-conservative MP – Lucien Bouchard. Through his leadership, the government in need of a new image focused on economic stability and adopted a neo-liberal agenda that was “forced down the throat” of community organisations and unions during the Sommet Socio-Economique<sup>55</sup> of 1996 in the name of the zero deficit (Dufour, in press). The concerted negotiation turned into a “consensus at gun point”. This summit was the beginning of what would later be called the “restructuring” processes where neo-liberal transformations were implemented in all sectors of the government through privatisation and massive cuts to social expenditures, only to be continued by the Liberal Party once they reached power in 2003 (Pichette, 1997).

In contrast to the PQ's “concerted” model, the Liberals were quite blunt in their application of the neo-liberal agenda, as clearly expressed in the Opening Address to the 37<sup>th</sup> legislature (2003) of the National Assembly. In many instances, Premier Charest suggests openly that the management of the government should be based on a managerial model of efficiency. The Prime minister clearly establishes that “interventionism” has a negative impact on Quebec competitive potential:

Or, dans l'état actuel des choses, l'État québécois, par le poids qu'il exerce sur notre économie, nuit à la position concurrentielle du Québec. L'interventionnisme à tous crins est non seulement une stratégie de développement économique ruineuse et inefficace, mais c'est une stratégie qui est de plus en plus contraire aux règles du jeu. L'avenir

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<sup>55</sup> In order to convince unions, students, women and other social groups to agree with the downsizing of social spending, the Parti Québécois called for a Socio-economic summit where all sectors of society were to agree on a general plan.

économique du Québec, ce n'est pas l'interventionnisme, c'est l'entrepreneurship (Charest, 2003:19).<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, Mr. Charest mentions more than once the importance of individual responsibility as one of the four distinctive “values” of Quebec. As well, the predominance of economic rhetoric and the lack of reference to political choice is in line with the conception that a government should be run like a company, without a specific political agenda and with efficiency as the main objective. He even directly addresses the “neutrality” of the changes to the state apparatus when he mentions that “il ne s’agit nullement d’être les tenants d’un courant de gauche ou de droite. Notre formation politique, vous le savez, a toujours visé le pragmatisme”<sup>57</sup> (21). In his words, politics are an antonym of pragmatism. The Prime Minister repeats the inevitability of the changes, the lateness of these changes compared to Ontario and the rest of the country, the urgency of such changes, the obsolescence of the present system and the numerous advantages such changes would bring. With the recurrence of notions like efficiency and competitiveness, the neo-liberal narrative is perfectly laid out.

Another element that makes this address akin to a textbook treatment of neo-liberalism is the acknowledgement of the resistance that such change will create. Because neo-liberalism is posited as common sense, resisting it seems counterintuitive and somewhat hysterical and hard-headed. It then becomes easy to portray the tenets of the welfare state as outdated and its defenders as resistant to the “normal progression” of society, as exemplified by the questionable parallel drawn between the Quiet Revolution

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<sup>56</sup> “However, in the current state of affairs, the Quebec State, through the weight it puts on our economy, is an obstacle to the competitive position of Quebec. The all-purpose interventionism is not only a ruining and inefficient economic development strategy, but it is also a strategy that is more and more contrary to the rules of the game. The economic future of Quebec does not lie with interventionism, but rather with entrepreneurship”.

and today's neo-liberal turn in the following example: "Il y aura, et c'est normal, il faut s'y attendre, une résistance, toute naturelle, au changement, comme, soit dit en passant, comme il y a 40 ans, lorsque les Québécois (sic) se sont levés pour faire la Révolution tranquille et nous faire accéder à la modernité"<sup>58</sup> (Charest, 2003:21). Therefore, the appropriate answer to this anticipated resistance is to ignore it since it has no legitimacy. In light of such a stance, to argue solely for the return to a Keynesian welfare state is to fall into the trap of equating "change" with those presented by neo-liberalism.

All this wouldn't be so alarming if these were just words, but unfortunately, in only two years, the Liberal government has introduced private-public partnerships (Bill 61), tried to reform the loans and bursary system with an additional cut of \$103 million to post-secondary education,<sup>59</sup> changed labour laws to allow sub-contracting in the public sector (implying the removal of protections guaranteed under the union agreements, and rendering jobs more "flexible", read: less pay with less benefits) and made the welfare system even less accessible and restrictive, squeezing out an additional approximately \$150 million to an already under-funded welfare system<sup>60</sup>, all of which are presented as logical and inevitable.

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<sup>57</sup> it is not at all about being the tenants of a right or left wing current. Our political formation, you very well know, has always aimed for pragmatism.

<sup>58</sup> There will be, and it is normal, we should expect it, resistance, naturally, to change, like, for the record, like 40 years ago, when the Quebecers rose for the Quiet Revolution and to give us access to modernity.

<sup>59</sup> The loans and bursary system was already cut by 35% between 1996/97 and 2000/2001, falling from \$825 millions to \$532 millions. For a discussion on its impact, see Canadian Federation of Students - Quebec (CFS-Q). "Submission to the National Assembly Commission on University Funding." Montreal: Canadian Federation of Students, 2005, [retrieved on May 21st 2006 from <http://pdfdl.oceighty.net/pdf2html.php?url=http://www.education-action.net/eng/com.pdf>]. In 2004, the Charest government tried to transform an additional \$103 millions of need-based bursary into loans, which was answered by general student strike. This province wide mobilisation succeeded in making the government return the money, but only over a 4 year period ([www.feuq.qc.ca](http://www.feuq.qc.ca)).

<sup>60</sup> For more on the restrictions on social services including access to welfare and the corresponding money figures, see Projet Genèse. "La Réingénierie: Quels Sont Les Impacts Pour Nos Programmes Sociaux?" Centre des Organismes Communautaires, 2004, May, [retrieved on June 2nd 2006 from <http://pdfdl.oceighty.net/pdf2html.php?url=http://cpcp-net.org/docs/reenginimpacts.pdf>].

But more crucial than the amount of money involved in each service is the shrinking of what is considered state or social responsibility, paralleled by an increase in personal responsibility. Public services to the population are being “systematically” (CSN, 2004:1) transformed into private-public partnerships (Bill 61, 2004)<sup>61</sup> and opened to market regulation, a change presented as apolitical. As many researchers suggest, these changes increase the marginalisation of women, immigrants and racialised minorities, and increase poverty (see among others Griffin Cohen *et al.*, 2002; Gabriel & McDonald, 1996; Gabriel, 1999; Stinson, 2004).

Neo-liberal ideas are not confined, though, to governmental institutions. The release of the *Manifeste pour un Québec Lucide* (2005)<sup>62</sup> came at a time when the unpopularity of the Liberal government reached highs of approximately 80% of the population (SRC, 2005). For more than two years, the Charest government implemented the neo-liberal reforms it promised, dropping in popularity with each, and did not seem to recover. Because resistance to this neo-liberal agenda seems to be channelled towards a single political party, it appeared advantageous for proponents of neo-liberal doctrines to take the debates out of partisan politics to ensure that if the Liberal party falls, it does not take down the underlying neo-liberal ideology with it. Therefore, the release of this *Manifeste* can be understood as an attempt to place the neo-liberal discourse outside of partisan politics in order to ensure the influence of the ideology in all spheres of society. The publication of this manifesto once more has stirred debate around neo-liberalism and

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<sup>61</sup> Typically, public-private partnerships are introduced when the government contracts out to private corporations in long-term agreements parts of or a whole sector of public service. Designed to reduce the size of the state and are part of a neoliberal restructuring where the monopoly of the state on certain sectors (education, electricity, water, healthcare, etc.) is sold out to private companies.

<sup>62</sup> Literally : “Manifesto for a lucid Quebec”. The authors of this Manifesto are public figures such as Lucien Bouchard (Ex Quebec Prime minister), Joseph Facal (ex minister for the PQ and now professor at

its place in Quebec society.<sup>63</sup> Although this text is a clear manifestation of neo-liberal ideology, it also seems to rely on icons and expressions not usually associated with neo-liberal primacy of economic concerns. From the tone of the writing to the format chosen, the *Manifeste* deviates from the pretension of neo-liberalism as apolitical. These signs are an example of how this economic doctrine has to be adapted to Quebec's heritage and culture in order to gain traction.

It is significant that the *Manifeste* claims to have no political allegiance.<sup>64</sup> The pretension to a universality of ideas is clearly seen by the appeal to both separatists and federalists transcending the traditional line of political division in Quebec. Like the Liberal government, the *Manifeste* calls for a substitution of state interventionism with individual responsibility:

La responsabilité exige que nous mettions tous l'épaule à la roue. Chaque individu, chaque groupe, chaque leader doit abandonner le premier réflexe qui est celui de tous, en particulier dans le Québec d'aujourd'hui: protéger ses intérêts et faire appel à l'intervention du gouvernement. Au contraire, chacun doit se demander ce qu'il peut faire, dans son domaine et comme citoyen (...)<sup>65</sup> (2005, 7).

This call for individual responsibility is quickly followed by the identification of the central problem of the state: public debt. Interestingly, the sense of danger and urgency associated with the problem of public debt resonates with the discourse around the deficit of the 1990s that justified the first wave of cuts in public funding.

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ENAP) and André Pratt (editorialist at *La Presse*). The spectrum of authors include federalists as well as independentists, conservatives as well as "socio-democrats".

<sup>63</sup> The *Manifeste* in fact was received by much controversy. A number of response manifestos were written such as the *Manifeste pour un Québec Solidaire* (2005), which included in its authors Micheline Asselin (FFQ president), Françoise David (ex-FFQ president and co-founded of the new leftist party *Québec Solidaire*), Amir Khadir (also co-founder of *Québec Solidaire*) and many other social actors, the *Manifeste pour un Québec Morbide* (2005) along with editorials, lignes ouvertes and the likes.

<sup>64</sup> It regroups authors from a somewhat diverse background, including the long time separatist Joseph Facal and the ex-prime minister Lucien Bouchard, who, although prime minister under the Parti Québécois, was originally a federal deputy for Progressive-Conservative Party of Canada.

<sup>65</sup> Responsibility demands that we all participate. Each individual, each group, each leader must abandon the first reflex that everybody has, especially in today's Quebec: to protect one's interest and ask the state

The *Manifeste* also tries to delegitimise and pre-empt any resistance to the changes they are proposing. Analogous to Thatcher's "There is no alternative", its authors are quite direct in blaspheming anyone who dare consider alternative ideas: "Penser autrement, c'est rêver en couleur ou ne pas savoir compter"<sup>66</sup> (3). Similarly, they associate any criticism to the proposed changes as a symptom of conservatism and backwardness. They do not allow for alternative forms of changes, as if resistance to neo-liberal change equates with resistance to change: "Cet espèce de refus global du changement fait mal au Québec parce qu'il risque de le transformer en république du statut quo, en fossile du 20<sup>e</sup> siècle"<sup>67</sup> (5). Furthermore, they present the average Québécois as part of the problem: "Les Québécois travaillent moins que les autres nord-américains; ils prennent leur retraite plus tôt; ils se paient des programmes sociaux plus généreux; dans leur vie privée comme collective, ils s'endettent jusqu'à la limite de leur carte de crédit"<sup>68</sup> (6).

In the face of the enduring social-democratic legacy of Quebec, neo-liberals turned to other tactics to get their message across. Through this manifesto, they appeal to the symbolic realm (the use of a manifesto – an essentially political tool), reinterpret icons from the past, (parallels with the Quiet Revolution) and situate themselves on a continuum with ideas diametrically opposed to what they suggest ("Le model Québécois").

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to intervene. On the contrary, everyone must ask themselves what they can do, in their domain or as a citizen.

<sup>66</sup> To think otherwise is to be dreaming in colours or to be unable to count

<sup>67</sup> This kind of global refusal of change hurts Quebec because it risks transforming it into a *status quo* republic, a 20<sup>th</sup> century fossil.

<sup>68</sup> The Québécois work less than the other North-Americans; there retire earlier, they treat themselves to more generous social programs; in their private and collective life, they contract debts to the limit of their credit card.

The “social” as a tool of analysis is disappearing from the government’s vocabulary and massive cuts have been inflicted on social services in the past 10 years. The provincial state has started to disengage with the social, initially using the zero deficit rhetoric and now simply relying on neo-liberal discourse. These changes have had an impact on the relationships with social actors in general, including the women’s sector, who used to rely on the state for implementing positive support system for women in need. In order to better understand the change in these dynamics – and to understand how radical feminists fit in the picture – the next section focuses on the relationships between institutionalised women’s groups and the Quebec state.

### **Institutionalised Women’s Groups and the State**

Quebec’s contemporary context therefore includes a full frontal attack by neo-liberals on social services, an individualisation of problems and a de-politicisation of solutions. As well, the relationship of the state with different social actors has changed. Since its creation in 1966, the Fédération des Femmes du Québec (FFQ) positioned itself as the main representative of women’s interests. With an overwhelming predominance that structures and influences most women’s groups in Quebec (Dufour, in press: 3), the FFQ adopted a collaborative and lobbying approach with the Quebec state<sup>69</sup> as a mean to ensure the betterment of women’s conditions.

As discussed, a number of factors come in to play in the middle of the 1990s which changed the relationship of the FFQ to the state. After a promising start in 1995 with *La Marche du Pain et des Roses* in Quebec where the government conceded some

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<sup>69</sup> The FFQ inclination to lobby mainly Quebec government was furthered by a nationalist belief that the Quebec government could adequately respond to its citizens’ demands, at least better than its Canadian counterpart (Barbara Ann Roberts. "Smooth Sailing or Storm Warning? Canadian and Quebec Women's Groups on the Meech Lake Accord/ Beau Fixe Ou Nuages À L'horizon; L'accord Du Lac Meech Jugé Par

points, the loss of the referendum marked the end of the stronghold that the FFQ enjoyed in the years leading up to it, years where the PQ were especially generous to ensure women would side with nationalism on the day of the referendum.

Furthermore, another neo-liberal practice considerably diminished the negotiation power of women's groups: the construction of women's groups as special interest groups. Women's groups are no longer considered as a valid interlocutor with the state representing half the population but are relegated to one amongst other lobby groups that need to defend their legitimacy. In the face of this minimising gesture from government, feminist institutions seem to be losing grounds. Torn between the multiplicity of fronts to fight on, from the local to the global, from masculinism to post-feminism, from sex-trade to child-care, the FFQ does not (cannot?) provide a strong vocal opposition to all contemporary reforms.

With the success of the *Bread and Roses March*, some women decided to take these struggles to the global level and start implementing a democratic structure that would lead to the *International Women's March* in 2000. Although not officially under the FFQ's leadership, the mobilisation around this unprecedented event consumed their energy and affected their ability to prioritise. Although a success in terms of participation, the concrete results left the organisers wondering if the time and energy was well invested.<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, the FFQ devoted considerable time to adapting its structures and priorities to contemporary reality, leaving less time for struggle and official opposition

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Les Groupes Féministes Du Québec Et Du Canada." Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, 1988, .

<sup>70</sup> The March involved women from more than 5000 organisations from more than 159 countries around the globe. For a discussion on the result of the IWM, see Dufour, "Des Femmes En Marche: Vers Un

(FFQ, 2003). Although they still defend the principles adopted at the 2000 March, their voice in opposition to different events has been either controversial or absent. For example, the FFQ condemned the 'diversity of tactics' principles used at the Summit of the Americas in Quebec City (2001), failing to make a qualitative distinction between state perpetrated violence and police brutality, and self-defence and civil disobedience.<sup>71</sup> A number of women's centres felt betrayed by this public and misinformed condemnation of demonstrators. To everyone's surprise and for unknown reasons, the FFQ did not publicly respond to the *Manifeste pour un Québec Lucide*. More recently, the FFQ refused to officially support a coalition *Avortons leur Congrès* against the nation-wide anti-choice congress held in Montreal in 2005.

In addition, women centres and women's service centres such as women's shelters and sexual assault centres, are so strangled with financial concerns, understaffed and overwhelmed with increasing poverty and condition deterioration that they seem to have little time left for fighting on a political level. In that sense, the neo-liberal state has been successful in forcing women's centres into a corner where little time and energy can be spent on political issues. In addition, reforms in the allocation of funding for community groups (including women's shelter and CALACS network) make it harder and harder for

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Féminisme Transnational?," and Françoise David, *Bien Commun Recherché. Une Option Citoyenne* (Montreal: Ecosociété, 2004)

<sup>71</sup> After the People's March at the Summit of the Americas, Françoise David (FFQ president), condemned in a Press Conference the actions of « violence used by some marginals part of isolated and extremist small groups » (author's translation). This was felt as treason from the more radical groups, especially the fact that this statement was not coupled with a critique of the violence used by the state on demonstrators and the violence of the system In the following issue of the *Les Sorcières*, they replied : « On vous savait 'molle' et réformiste, Mme David, mais votre trahison dépasse les bornes. [...] Vous avez faites le choix politique de dénoncer ceux et celles qui font la guerre au capitalisme et au patriarcat de façon honnête et intègre, de la seule façon qui soit! Vous auriez pu, Mme David, ne rien dire ou encore dénoncer la violence du système et de son appareil repressif[...] » (We knew you were 'soft' and reformist, Ms David, but your treason goes beyond the limits. [...] you made the political choice to denounce acts of those who honestly fight capitalism and patriarchy with integrity, the only way possible. You could have, Ms David, not said

community groups dispensing services to keep an advocacy contingent (Messf, 2001). As Masson (1999/2000) suggests, funding was a constant re-negotiation with a state that became more unyielding as to the role it wanted to play in supporting services. This is paralleled by a more and more intrusive state apparatus that wants to ensure the real merit of the organisation and demands more statistical accountability. These changes in the federal and provincial governments' positions cast doubt as to whether governments can really be considered a stable and reliable provider which can help defend women's position and better it, especially in the long run.

But more importantly, what might be seen as a major cause for the creation of parallel organisations is the FFQ's determination to rely on the state as the forum for solutions. Just like the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), the FFQ has a long history of using lobbying as a central tactic, even if from time to time, it is accompanied by demonstrations of popular support. However, with proponents of the neo-liberal doctrine now in power, their role as the watch dogs over government policies is harder to maintain. While the FFQ needs to rethink its strategies, it seems to be trapped in the welfare state model and incapable of developing strategic alternatives.

Janine Brodie terms this tendency 'nostalgic welfarism'. It refers to an analysis that "glorifies the postwar welfare state and reads any deviation from past experience as undesirable" (1996: 9). Without taking it to its extreme, the FFQ seems trapped in this paradigm where they are turned towards the past rather than the future and consequently keep thinking of the state as a key player. This nostalgia can easily be explained by the traditional responsiveness of the Quebec government to women's demands.

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anything or denounced the violence of the system and its repressive apparatus [...] (Les Sorcières, 2001 :8).

Considering the end of the liberal partnerships and the neo-liberal devolution of power to private structures, radical feminist groups' analysis of the state allows them to pursue alternative avenues to think about and engage in the struggle. Even as the state might provide temporary relief for marginalised women, doubts remain that ultimately the state's structures are capable of promoting an anti-patriarchal agenda. Following this line of thought, radical feminism has the potential of providing activists with alternatives. Their emphasis on an autonomous movement – autonomous from the state – and an extended understanding of what falls under the political realm – as opposed to both the private and the economic realm – seems promising. Although some of these ideas might be original to radical feminism, others are inspired by the broader activist community in which the groups are evolving.

### **The new mobilisations: a revival of social movements**

In the same way the changes in the PQ affected the relationship between the FFQ and the state, the same was true for all social actors in society. Students, unions and community groups saw their previous “partnership” with the state reduced to a mere facade during the Socio-Economic Summit of 1996. In this context, growing radical movements on the margin of all “official partners” developed as a constellation of the disenchanted and radicals. From the creation of the *Mouvement pour le droit à l'éducation* (MDE) (at the margin of the student federations) to the radicalisation of certain community groups and some union factions, as neo-liberalism took a stronger hold in politics, the margins expanded when the hope of negotiating a truce grew dim. But the PQ is not solely responsible for this radicalisation of civil society. A few specific events can be identified as key moments in the construction of a dynamic activist community out of which radical feminist groups emerged: the student strike of 1996; the

Montreal Conference on Economic Globalisation (M.A.I.); the WTO Seattle summit in 1999; the 2000 International Women's March; and the 2001 Quebec Summit of the Americas. Although none of these events is a direct instigator of feminist groups, all of them contributed in different degrees to the growing activist community which provided a conducive environment within which such groups emerged.

The 1996 student strike was instrumental in creating a critical mass of activists that would then bring their experience and ideas to other issues. Following the example of the Coalition X against Axworthy reforms<sup>72</sup>, the MDE was created in 1995 to promote in the province a free and democratic education system. Up until that time, Cegeps<sup>73</sup> were almost free since there was no tuition fees per se, although a number of ancillary fees were charged to students (registration fees, computer service fees, etc.). Over the years, this alternative structure allowed a number of people to get a post-secondary education without having to pay prohibitive tuition fees.

In the summer of 1996, the provincial government under Bouchard's leadership started discussing the possibility of increasing tuition fees for both universities and Cegeps. This plan was part of their general cuts to the public sector aimed at balancing

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<sup>72</sup> The Federal Liberal government elected in 1993 calls for a zero deficit policy and Lloyd Axworthy transformed this goal into welfare reforms which take the form of province transfer cuts. Afraid that these transfer cuts will be transformed at the provincial level in an education reform and a raise in tuition fees, students unite under Coalition X to oppose the Axworthy reform. For more on the chronology of student activism, see Benoit Lacoursière, "Le Mouvement Étudiant Au Québec De 1983 À 2000" (M.A., Université du Québec à Montréal, 2005); Association Pour Une Solidarité Étudiante (ASSÉ). "Recueil De Textes Sur L'Histoire Du Sur L'Histoire Du Mouvement Étudiant Québécois." Montreal, 2004, 110, [retrieved on May 21st 2005 from [http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/documents/fr/materiel\\_dinfo/brochures/Histoire%20du%20mouvement%20E9tudiant%20hiver%202005.pdf](http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/documents/fr/materiel_dinfo/brochures/Histoire%20du%20mouvement%20E9tudiant%20hiver%202005.pdf)] and Association Pour Une Solidarité Étudiante (ASSÉ). "Aperçu Historique Du Syndicalisme Étudiant Au Québec." Montreal, 2005, 12, [retrieved on May 21st 2005 from [http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/documents/fr/materiel\\_dinfo/brochures/Aper%20historique%20du%20syndicalisme%20E9tudiant.pdf](http://www.asse-solidarite.qc.ca/documents/fr/materiel_dinfo/brochures/Aper%20historique%20du%20syndicalisme%20E9tudiant.pdf)].

the provincial government budget on which they hoped to get approval at the socio-economic summit. The official decision to increase tuition fees was supposed to be delivered on December 15<sup>th</sup>, in the middle of the exam period and just before the Christmas break, a strategy used in the past to prevent students' mobilisation (Lacoursière, 2005). However, to counter this tactic, students regrouped in a coalition under the leadership of the MDE, took to the streets and launched a general strike in mid-October. The general strike at its peak involved 20 Cegeps spread out all over the province, and a few university departments including the Université de Montréal and the whole of Université du Québec à Montréal. Some Cegep strikes lasted for more than a month, before dying slowly at the end of November, after the announcement by the education minister, Pauline Marois, that she would not increase tuition fees until the end of the PQ's mandate, two years later.<sup>74</sup>

It is worth noting that the strike was not led by the major student federations (which differ in their structure, mandate and ideology from the MDE). As a matter of fact, the federations' leadership was originally opposed to the strike but later had to join in when faced with its province-wide success. The federations were bypassed on their left by grassroots and local organising. This phenomenon contributed to a lack of faith on the part of some activists towards traditional *modus operandi* and the promotion of direct actions as efficient tactics.

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<sup>73</sup> CEGEPs stands for Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel. This alternative education institution is equivalent to grade 12<sup>th</sup> and the university freshman year, for the pre-university programs, or to grade 12<sup>th</sup> and two years of professional trade training for the « technical » programs.

<sup>74</sup> An interesting parallel can be made between the student Federations and the FFQ. Using the same structures and being both privileged interlocutors of the government to represent their respective constituency, they are both left aside by the government once the referendum is lost. However, a radical fringe of the student movement develops almost instantly in reaction to the new politics of the neo-liberal PQ where as it takes a few years for a radical fringe of the feminist to develop on the margins of the FFQ.

During these weeks of intense mobilising, direct actions, and direct democratic participation, numerous workshops and debating spaces served as awareness-raising tools. Moreover, the strength of the mobilisation combined with the gains it managed to secure created the perfect conditions for a number of these new activists to remain involved in social struggles. One of the consequences of the strike lies in the radicalisation of many activists. This radicalisation, as activists moved on to other issues, spread to other aspects of their struggle including feminism. As a matter of fact, Benoit Lacoursière (2005) describes how some organisations that were central to the strike movement (MDE) fostered the (re-)birth a few years later of women's caucuses that seemed to propose a certain trend of radical feminism, combining an anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalist stand. They also promoted women-only space, in contrast to the recent trend in women's committees to include men in feminist student groups.

Adding more fuel to the fire of contestations, the anti-globalisation movements quickly started to emerge after these events. In 1997, the Plan G occupation encouraged the mobilisation followed by a number of direct civil disobedience actions.<sup>75</sup> In the spring of 1998, as numerous students recovered from the strike, the first mobilisation on 'globalisation' emerged in Quebec. In contrast to the mobilising around NAFTA, it was not so much the content of this agreement that was of concern, especially since it remained secret until the last minute, but it was the process as a whole that was attacked. The realisation that there are no more limits to the power of corporations and international organisations was instrumental in the birth of the anti/alter-globalisation

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As a matter of fact, radical feminists have a lot more in common with radical student movements or radical anti-globalisation activists than with the FFQ.

movement. In student and non-student activist communities, the word started to spread about these new international agreements (MAI, and later FTAA) and the institutions in which they are grounded (WTO, IMF, World Bank). Operation SalAMI, a group opposed to the MAI (Multilateral Agreement on Investments), opened the floor with a non-violent blockade of the Montreal Conference on Economic Globalisation that took place in May 1998. This non-violent civil disobedience action successfully delayed for five hours the opening of the conference. Beyond the discussion of whether these mobilisations played a role in the shelving of the Agreement (Duhamel, 1999), it is clear that they served to raise awareness about international economic agreements and set a precedent for the denouncing of international institutions.

The following year, the spotlight turned to Seattle. As some activists went to the west coast to participate, 400 others staged a local demonstration in Montreal in support of the Seattle actions (Edmonds, 1999). Those coming back from Seattle with a renewed energy met with the ever growing mass of anti-globalisation activists and started to organise what was to become the biggest confrontation in Quebec since the War Measures Act, "Quebec 2001".

The mobilisation and organisation process started almost two years ahead and assumed unprecedented proportions. All social, community, political, youth, awareness-raising groups from all sectors, from women to Greens, Blacks and people of colour, humanists, students, unemployed and unions regrouped to form coalitions. Some united under the CLAC (Convergence des Luttes Anti-Capitalistes), others through the

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<sup>75</sup> For a more detailed chronological escalation of radical actions see Anna Kruzynski, "De L'opération Salami À Némésis: Le Cheminement D'un Groupe De Femmes Du Mouvement Altermondialiste Québécois," *Recherches Féministes* 17, no. 2 (2004).

alternative summit, and even more in the gigantic union march, all converged on Quebec City in April for three days of resistance and celebration. Some organised through official channel such as the Union march which is estimated to have gathered more than 60 000 people (CSQ, 2001; Fréchette, 2001), and others through affinity groups. The diversity of the 70 000 or so people (MacKay, 2002) who converged on Quebec City was astonishing and a unique melange of festive energy and violent repression undeniably changed the perception of anyone present.

The influence of the anti-globalisation movement is two fold. First, it helped the politicisation of many young people. Because of the range of people the mobilisation was able to reach and because of the media coverage, a whole generation of youth could reflect on the possibility of being active politically. Second, one could no longer deny the influence of global forces on local communities. Furthermore, through information campaigns around globalisation processes and its impact, more women are now aware of the living conditions of women all over the world. This forced them to integrate their struggle to a larger movement and global realities.

The mobilisations around the summit of the Americas and capitalist globalisation in general also highlighted the shortcomings of government-oriented demands. As the power (real and perceived) of the Canadian and Quebec governments is reduced through the signature of international treaties that limit state intervention on a number of issues, concerns around poverty, work, life conditions, access to education and basic needs have to be answered by new solutions. In addition, the alternative structures developed in the struggle against capitalist globalisation, although far from perfect, were so successful in organising a diversity of activities and creating a sense of community across ideological

differences that it further reinforced the belief that, contrary to Margaret Thatcher's mantra, there is an alternative (Lamoureux, 2004: 171-172).

Lastly, it should be noted that the radical feminist groups studied in this research were the result of an original attempt to bring a feminist analysis to other radical groups, more so than an attempt to bring a radical analysis to the feminist movement, although with time this distinction tends to dwindle. The distance between radical feminist groups and institutionalised feminist groups like the FFQ was confirmed after the Summit of the Americas when the FFQ condemned the violence used by demonstrators without criticising police violence.

### **Conclusion**

Radical feminism re-emerged in a context characterised by a neo-liberal transformation of the state that forced institutional groups to change their attitudes towards government. To different degrees, the severity of the disillusion regarding the belief that the state can be a positive agent of change led to the polarisation of positions and fostered the development of marginal and more confrontational groups.

As I now turn to a description of contemporary radical feminist groups, one should keep in mind the theoretical and concrete changes neo-liberalism has created in Quebec society. This chapter also reviewed the processes at work in the adoption of a neo-liberal agenda by states in general, and how it translated into reforms in Quebec. These processes will re-surface in the final chapter when I explore how radical feminism is interacting with and resisting them. Therefore, this chapter served a dual function: to identify the conditions that fostered a return to radical feminism and to review how neo-liberalism is articulated in Quebec specifically. This chapter highlighted the polarisation of Quebec in two opposite directions. Although the challenges contemporary feminists

face are numerous, the recent change of Quebec transformed not only the policies and structures of the state, but it also affected the fundamental conceptions of the role of a state in society. It also challenged the place of the political and economic spheres and of the private/collective dimensions of society.

In this sense, contemporary radical feminism is one possible response to these changes. Without being the most well-known, I suggest that the theoretical foundations and organisational strategies they propose can help progressive sectors of society stand up to the imposed changes and offer valid resistance to them. With this in mind, Chapter Four presents the theoretical orientations and organisational strategies of radical feminists in contemporary Quebec.

## **Chapter Four – Contemporary Radical Feminism**

This chapter presents the core of my empirical research. In short, it reviews the data collected and analyses them in contrast with the information gathered in previous chapters. The first part reviews the general parameters of the research – how the groups were chosen – followed by a detailed review of the methodology used in the research. A brief section addresses ethical concerns that arose during the research and how they were resolved. The data analysis is then divided into three sections. The first section situates contemporary radical feminism using the theoretical concepts of its predecessors. Starting with the self-definition of the participants, I then use the elements of Descarries-Bélanger & Roy's definition of radical feminism (1991) as presented in the first chapter. Universal patriarchy, the deconstruction of women as a natural category, the use of the concept of women as class and the inherent link between the personal and the political are the four theoretical axes I have retained.

Secondly, the praxis of the groups studied is analysed in light of elements identified in Chapter One as typical of radical feminism: the development of consciousness-raising groups; an attempt to deconstruct hierarchical relationships within the groups; the use of direct actions and the construction of an autonomous movement. The final part of this chapter analyses the immediate impact of these groups on their environment. Finally, I discuss the ways these groups incorporate multiple oppressions in their analyses and the place of the nationalist struggle.

### **General Parameters of the Case Study**

This research should not be understood as an extensive review of all women sharing radical feminist ideas in today's Montreal, but a rather as a case study of women

involved in radical feminist groups. As Yin (2002) explains, case studies are best suited for research focussing on contemporary phenomena within a real-life contexts. This detailed analysis of group members' thought of provides a window of knowledge on contemporary radical feminism. Although the use of a case study as a research design does not allow for statistical generalisation, it can provide evidence for 'analytical generalisation' (Yin, 2002). More specifically, a case study with multiple cases can reveal support for a theoretical framework, highlighting common elements at the same times as leaving space for nuances and contrasts. Therefore, t a case study was the design of choice for the purpose of this research.

In order to answer my research question, I relied on a case study of contemporary Montreal radical feminist groups. As explained in more detail in the methodology section that follows, I interviewed members of these groups in order to gather empirical data to test my hypothesis. The first criterion for the selection of the groups was a self-identification as "radical feminist". Although their definition might differ from that expounded in Chapter One, I did not investigate the matter previously. My sole concern was with the fact that they claimed to have radical feminist tendencies.

These groups also had to be characterised as non-institutionalised. By this term, I mean that the groups could not be a women's caucus/committee of another organisation, institution or group (like the women's committee of a student union, a political party or an anarchist federation).<sup>76</sup> The groups could not have any guaranteed funding from institutions such as the government or a school. When funded, it had to be upon request

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<sup>76</sup> I have decided to include Némésis even if at the beginning they were the Comité-Femmes de SalAMI. After the Summit of the Americas in 2001, they cut all ties to SalAMI, changed their name and acted as an autonomous women's group. Because this period covers about half of thier existence, it was significant enough to include them in the research.

and for specific projects only. In short, they would not have enough stable funding to rent a space or have an employee all year long (although they could hire employees or rent space for specific projects). The membership therefore was geographically dispersed (i.e. not attached to one room/address/mail box). Also implied in the terminology is the autonomous aspect of the groups, which means that whatever funding they would get could not have any strings attached and that the group was only accountable to its own members. A preliminary and informal discussion about this element was used to exclude groups. All information was later officially confirmed through a question during the interview on the sources of funding.

The term “group” had to refer to more than 2 people gathering on a more or less regular but voluntary basis with common goals and interests for the purpose of organising/sharing/theorising. For my research, the groups I identified mainly took the forms of collectives or affinity groups. Also, I excluded groups with an artistic/cultural orientation. Without diminishing the importance of their work and contribution to the movement,<sup>77</sup> the differences in goals and organisational structures would have extended the scope of this research too much.

The location of the research was confined to Montreal. Studying many groups in the same urban area has some advantages. First of all, all groups work in the same physical environment, with more or less the same environmental factors (e.g.: the level of police brutality, of unemployment, of poverty, etc.). Furthermore, the size of a city like Montreal with a high population density helps the creation of a subculture where many groups can co-exist and influence each other. In fact, the activist community is big enough to foster a diversity of groups, yet small enough to perpetuate a sense of

collectivity. This context allows the different groups to interact with each other and to transfer knowledge from one to the other, between and within sectors of activism (women's groups, anti-capitalist groups, affordable housing groups, etc.) and sometimes even between generations. Finally, as seen in similar research of marginal communities in an urban area (Chauncey, 1994), this type of spatial limitation also allows for elements of the subculture to surface. However, one can understand that because the research is restricted to this one city, the results and conclusions of the research cannot be assumed to be generalisable to the province as a whole. Additionally, I have decided to exclude groups located in the anglophone community. Although the francophone and anglophone communities come together at times for certain events and/or goals, they virtually evolve in two parallel worlds with surprisingly few interactions.<sup>78</sup>

As for the period studied, only groups which formed between November 1999 to February 2005, will be examined. This period of a little more than five years is marked by two important events for the activist community. November 1999 corresponds to the first massive "anti-globalisation" protest in Seattle.<sup>79</sup> Although not organised overnight, these protests set the stage for new dynamics in the Montreal activist subculture. February 2005, on the other hand, marks the beginning of a new student general strike in Quebec Universities and Cegeps. A new generation of activists was then created and its

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<sup>77</sup> One can name amongst others *Genr'Radical* and *Les Lilitantes*.

<sup>78</sup> For a discussion on the distance between the francophone and anglophone feminist movements in Montreal, see amongst other Candis Steenbergen and Isabelle Perreault, "Entre Deux Solitudes," in *Dialogues Sur La Troisième Vague Féministe*, ed. Maria Nengeh Mensah (Montreal: Les Éditions du Remue-ménage, 2005) For a historical review of this phenomenon, see Vickers, Rankin, and Apelle, *Politics as If Women Mattered: A Political Analysis of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women* And on a specific topic, see also Roberts. "Smooth Sailing or Storm Warning? Canadian and Quebec Women's Groups on the Meech Lake Accord/ Beau Fixe Ou Nuages À L'horizon; L'accord Du Lac Meech Jugé Par Les Groupes Féministes Du Québec Et Du Canada."

<sup>79</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, November 1999 is when thousands and thousands of activists gathered in Seattle outside the FTAA meeting, inciting police brutality and mass arrests, but also collectivised

impact on the movements, both feminist and not, is not clear at the time of writing this thesis. Together, these criteria led me to identify the following groups for my case study: *Les Sorcières*, *Némésis*, *Cyprine*, and *Les Insoumises*.

### **Methodological approach**

This research was based on an analysis of qualitative interviews. At times, cultural productions (zines, pamphlet, workshop material, and websites) were consulted.

Following the interactionist tradition, I believe interviews are a way to reach out to people's reality and that the research participants can communicate efficiently their perception of the world. As Miller and Glassner assert: "[Qualitative interviewing] provide[s] us with a mean for exploring the points of view of our research subjects, while granting these points of view the culturally honoured status of reality" (1997: 100). Thus, it is assumed that participants have the capacity to share their meaningful reality. While this methodology favours an access to people's honest and spontaneous thought, it does not allow them much time to formulate their ideas into well-developed sentences. As a consequence, when compared to the published work of some authors, it does not appear to have the same depth and profoundness. Therefore, one should not be fooled by the perceived lack of clarity or use of colloquial language.

Individual interviews were conducted with participants from each group. The choice of individual interviews (as opposed to collective) can be explained by my desire to get a personalised account of the person's involvement as well as their particular political ideologies, which may differ in some respects between participants of the same groups. In this respect, group interviews would allow less space for such differences to be

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resistance and massive alliances. The movement later converged in Quebec City in 2001, at G8 and G20 meetings namely in Genoa.

revealed. Furthermore, positive elements that have been associated with group interviews – collectivisation of women’s experience, overcoming of structural isolation, coming to an understanding of the social causes leading to personal suffering (Mies, 1983: 128) – have probably already been achieved by the formation and continuous membership of the groups themselves.

All the interviews were taped with permission of the participants. Identification of participants within the groups was done following different processes depending on the status of the groups. Groups that were still active were asked to choose amongst themselves who would participate, although the participants did not have a representational status. This was the case of *Les Sorcières* and of *Cyprine* since both groups are still active. In the case of *Les Sorcières*, however, because there was such a high turn over and because the existence of the group extends over such a long period of time (2000-current), it was seen as important to include women from previous “generations” of *Sorcières*. In that case, after having excluded members who either had moved to another country or were untraceable, the names were put in a hat out of which two additional names were drawn. Similarly, because the group does not meet anymore but members are still in contact with each other, the selection of *Némésis* members was done through a circulated email request. Three people volunteered their names and were therefore interviewed. *Les Insoumises* is the group that was harder to get a “representative” sample. Ex-members of the groups did not systematically stay in contact with each other. Through the already established network, however, I was able to get in contact with a few ex-members who agreed to participate. It should also be noted that a number of members of *Les Insoumises* later joined *Les Sorcières*. These women were

excluded from the *Les Insoumises* sample on the basis that their more recent experiences might have changed their understanding of their experiences in the former group.

A total of 11 interviews were conducted with an average time of an hour and a half per interview. Although these participants in no way “represent” the entirety of their groups or of contemporary radical feminism, I posit that these interviews present a significant window of knowledge into this sub-culture. From the preliminary exploration of Montreal francophone activist scene, I estimate that the total number of clearly self-identified radical feminists in and outside of groups totals around 60 people, and can rise up to around 130 if one understands the definition of radical feminism more loosely to include women who, depending on the context, will side with radical feminism. This research, however, focuses on radical feminists organised in collectives and affinity groups – collective structures of political organising.

I did not include in my interviews questions on the background of each individual participant. I contend that their specific location – in terms of race, class, education level, age, and political activism history – although important for the formation of their own ideas, was not central to the analysis of the ideas produced. As such, I decided to focus on the ideas as produced and not on the production process.

The interviews were mainly held in the person’s apartment, although for everyone I had originally suggested alternatives such as a university facility – a space considered neutral and which could offer accessibility to all. Most people preferred the comfort of their home and I tried to adapt myself to their requests. The question topics pertained to the formation of the groups, the personal beliefs of the participants, the groups’ ideologies, their definition of radical feminism, the position of the group as part of a

wider movement, the major problems women in Quebec are facing, their goals and their potential means for achieving such goals, and the type of action they privilege (see Appendix A for the complete list of questions). The researcher then transcribed the interviews.

### **Ethical Concerns**

Since the research involves the participation of human subjects, the Carleton University Research Ethics Committee approved the project before any step was taken. The project was approved on December 14<sup>th</sup> 2005 and the interviews were conducted between February and April 2006. Some ethical concerns arose from the involvement of human participants, namely regarding consent, confidentiality and the dynamics of a small community.

The group of participants targeted is not considered a vulnerable group. It consists of adult women who have the capacity to consent or decline the participatory process. They were not interviewed in any institutional context nor under the recommendation of any authority figure. Their adherence to the group, to the best of my knowledge, was, or is, voluntary and without coercion. In this sense, the identification as group member should not be an issue.

Consent to participate in the research was obtained on paper through the signature of a consent form as exemplified in Appendix B. I explained the consent form in order to ensure a good understanding. Participants were also informed that the data gathered would be used for publication purposes, that could included but is not limited to the publication of a thesis, conference papers and other material. Questions were answered as they arose. Participants who consented were asked to sign and were given a copy of the form to keep.

Confidentiality of research participants has been ensured by the researcher to the maximum of her capacity. Consent forms were not associated with recorded interviews. At no time were the participants asked to disclose their identity on tape. However, participants were asked to identify the group to which they belong. Great care was taken and will be not to release any information that could lead to the identification of individuals by members of the community.

### **Data Analysis**

In the spirit of feminism, I begin by allowing the groups to self-identify. All four collectives studied self-proclaimed as radical feminists. Yet, the self-association of a group to an ideology does not guarantee its level of correspondence. In this section, I explore the elements of continuity and difference with “second-wave” radical feminism according to the elements presented in Chapter One and Two. This chapter intends to explore how the concept of radical feminism evolved over time. I suggest that the concept remains substantially the same, although some modifications can be observed.

Before getting into the core of the interviews, I first review the groups, so as to situate the different participants in context. The first group, *Némésis*, is a radical non-violent anarchy-feminist group that was originally the women’s committee of *Opération SalAMI*. Up until the summit of the Americas in April 2001, the women organised around creating a body of knowledge on the impact of globalisation on women and disseminating that information prior to the Summit. They also organised an event for the enormous demonstration in Quebec City, where they built a two-story high puppet depicting *Némésis*, the “goddess of legitimate rage” (la déesse de la juste colère). After the event, and frustrated with their relationship with SalAMI, they separated and became autonomous. The group remained centred around the idea of popular education, but the

focus of their workshops became affinity group building and alternative organisations. Three women were interviewed from the group (N1, N2, and N3).

*Les Sorcières* organised in reaction to a specific event where one woman was insulted with sexist and sexual insults during a political meeting. This event, far from being isolated, was the breaking point and women decided to regroup amongst themselves to deal with sexism in the activist community. After a few kitchen meetings and a larger gathering where women disagreed on whether actions or discussions were to be the focus of the group, *Les Sorcières* were created during the winter of 1999-2000 by the “action” women of the group, who then decided to identify as radical feminists against patriarchy, capitalism and the state.<sup>80</sup> This collective centred their attention on sexism within the activist community, while bringing in a global analysis of patriarchy and women’s oppression more generally. Engaging in direct actions and producing a journal, *Les Sorcières* still exist and are active at the time of writing this thesis. However, over the years, there was a high turnover of members and women now involved in the group were not part of the first cohort, with the exception of one. Because of the high number of activist members, and in an attempt to try to represent the diversity of women involved in *Les Sorcières*, four women were interviewed from the collective (S1, S2, S3, S4).

The third group interviewed is called *Cyprine*.<sup>81</sup> The collective, originally composed of 5 women, has recently allowed a 6<sup>th</sup> member to join the group. This tightly knit and closed group was created after the Radical Feminist Get-together organised in 2003. Old friends and fellow activists, these women felt it was appropriate to create their

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<sup>80</sup> They did not all agree on being anarchist, but they were all against the state which for them was one of the institution which furthered patriarchy.

own affinity group instead of joining the existing groups. They identify as radical feminists, who are “obviously” against patriarchy, but also against capitalism and against the state. They concentrate on direct actions and creating spaces of resistance, which are designed as much to let off steam as to further a political agenda. Two women were interviewed from *Cyprine* (C1, C2).

The final collective, *Les Insoumises*, was formed mainly by UQAM students between 2001-2004. This group, created in a student environment, was involved in student politics but remained completely autonomous. Although there was a high turnover in this group as well, only two women were interviewed (I1, I2) mainly because a substantial number of *Insoumises* later became *Sorcières*. As well, because their main ties between each other were through the university, once their degree was completed, some were hard to track down.

### **Radical Feminism: a Definition**

This section opens with a quick overview of the participants’ answer to the question “Your group identifies as Radical Feminists. What does it mean for you or for the group?” to get a general sense of their own definition. The elements used in Chapter One will then be brought back to contrast and compare how much or to what extent these contemporary radical feminist groups are in continuity with their predecessors, both in terms of ideology and praxis.

Two of the groups, *Les Sorcières* and *Némésis*, previously had reached a consensus on a definition that would be used for the radical feminist get-together in February 2003:

#### **Le féminisme radical: une définition**

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<sup>81</sup> In French, cyprine refers to vaginal fluid and is the physical sign of sexual pleasure.

Radical: adj. Latin *radicalis*, de *radix*, racine. Le terme radical se dit d'une organisation ou d'une analyse féministe qui va à la racine du patriarcat et qui le combat dans sa nature profonde pour éliminer les fondements de l'oppression spécifique des femmes. Le féminisme radical postule que celles-ci sont individuellement et collectivement appropriées aux fins de reproduction biologique et de la production économique. Cette exploitation est conjuguée au capitalisme, au racisme, à la hiérarchie et à toute autre forme de domination.<sup>82</sup>

It is probable that with time this definition has been integrated into the participants' understanding of feminism, hence the similarities with the interview answers. However, because it was created by the groups, it remains a valid element for the purpose of this thesis. Furthermore, one can already notice a resemblance with the tenets identified by Descarries-Bélanger and Roy, which, I cite again:

the identification of patriarchy as a socio-economic-political stem of appropriation of women and the recognition of the existence of a class of women. The radical tendencies converge in their denunciation of the patriarchal system, of their refusal of idealist explanation of women's oppression and its components, naturalism and biologism and the priority they give to women's struggle. The prevailing argument is that women are exploited collectively and individually on the basis of their sexual identity (1991: 12).

Out of the 11 answers to the question on their self-definition as radical feminists, 9 mentioned the notion that radical feminism means to go to the root of women's oppression in opposition to merely addressing its manifestation or consequences. In this sense, it reflects and perhaps reinforces a dichotomy between what they call reformist feminism and radical feminism where the former tries to make changes to the legal or political system – a focus that is understood as addressing only the manifestation of oppression – and the latter aims at the structure of the system – or its roots.

S1 : Pour moi, c'est clair, le féministe radical devrait être une analyse systémique. Euh, de dire qu'un système patriarcal qui, historiquement, socialement, politiquement, a été un fardeau pour les femmes, qui les a opprimées, parce qu'elles sont des femmes, pis de dire qu'il faut avoir une analyse radicale : aller à la source des problèmes, à la source de ce système là plutôt que de

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<sup>82</sup> Appendix C: Invitation à la Rencontre Féministe Radicale. Radical from Latin *radicalis*, from *radix*, root. The term radical refers to an organisation or a feminist analysis that goes to the root of patriarchy and that fights it in its deepest nature to eradicate the basis of women specific oppression. Radical feminism postulates that women are individually and collectively appropriated for biological reproduction and economic production purposes. This exploitation is in conjunction with capitalism, racism, hierarchy and with any other form of domination.

s'arrêter uniquement à ses manifestations. [...] On dit souvent féministe radical par opposition à féministe réformiste, euh, c'est ça, de dire qu'il faut pas juste comme s'arrêter aux manifestations, de demander des changements juridiques par rapports aux femmes mais il faut également changer en profondeur les comportements de la socialisation.<sup>83</sup>

C1 Alors pour moi ce qui diffère c'est justement d'aller à la racine des questions, et de ne pas chercher des solutions, disons faciles, de ne pas chercher justement à seulement effleurer une question, de seulement mettre un *plaster* sur un bobo, mais bien de soulever tous les problèmes, même si c'est lourd, même si c'est dur à porter, mais c'est de ne pas faire l'autruche.<sup>84</sup>

In these quotations, radical feminism refers to a depth of analysis and a way to approach a problem. Once again, this differs from alternative understandings of radical feminism that might specify the praxis or the topics of importance, as seen respectively in the following quotes:

N1 : Ben, je vais y aller un peu pour moi, mais c'est aussi un peu pour le groupe, c'est vraiment aller à la racine pour nous, t'sais le radicalisme. C'est vraiment, ben t'sais, mois je ne suis pas tellement idéologue, ça fait que je ne parlerai pas en terme politique. Ça fait que concrètement comment ça se vivait c'était une primauté à la non-mixité.<sup>85</sup>

S2 : radical c'est aller à la racine du patriarcat, c'est sûr que pour moi la racine du patriarcat, tu peux pas passer à côté du travail de reproduction que les femmes font, puis du contrôle du corps des femmes<sup>86</sup>

Women seem to be aware of the multiple meanings of the term and, in fact, were prone to play with it fluently, using one definition or the other when best suited or more appropriate – a process sometimes accompanied by a critical comment on its usage:

S1 : Pour moi il y a une différence entre être radicale au niveau de la pensée théorique, de la pensée politique puis en terme de moyen d'action. [...] je voudrais que mon radicalisme se situe surtout au niveau de la pensée politique mais comme théorie et action vont de pair et doivent aller

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<sup>83</sup> For me, it is clear, radical feminism should be a systemic analysis. Hum, to say that a patriarchal system that, historically, socially and politically, has been a burden for women, that has oppressed them, because they are women, and to say that we need a radical analysis: to go to the source of the problem, to the source of this system instead of stopping at its manifestations. [...] We often say that radical feminism in opposition with reformist feminism, hum, that's it, to say that we shouldn't stop at its manifestation, to ask judicial changes for women, but we also demand deep changes to behaviours and socialisation.

<sup>84</sup> So for me what is different, it is precisely to go to the root of the questions, and not to look for, let's say, easy solutions, not to only try to skim over a question, to only put a plaster on a scratch, but really to tackle all the problems, even if it is heavy, even if it is hard to carry, but not to bury your head in the sand like an ostrich.

<sup>85</sup> Well, I will speak for myself, but it is also a little bit for the group, it is to really go to the root for us, you know, radicalism. It is really, well you know, I am not an ideologue, therefore I won't talk in political terms. Therefore, concretely, how we were living it was a primacy to women-only space.

<sup>86</sup> Radical means to go to the roots of patriarchy, and clearly for me, the root of patriarchy, you cannot avoid the reproductive work women's do, and the control over women's bodies.

de pair c'est clair que ça influence les méthodes d'action que je vais choisir. Mais pour moi, le féminisme radical est surtout au niveau de la pensée politique pis des rapports au quotidien.<sup>87</sup>

Even more intriguing is the fact that regardless of the number of meanings associated with radical feminism, none of the participant mentioned a tension associated with these multiple meanings. They all seem to agree on a common basis, and be able to deal with the differences.

Even within the theoretical framework of radical feminism, a number of them (C2, S3, I1) acknowledged that many tenets could be found in radical feminism, and that even among group members, some divergences were present. More specifically, some self-identified as *materialist* radical feminists, a fact that will be explored in more detailed in the section that develops the notion of women as a class.

### *Universal Patriarchy*

Although the feminists interviewed used the term patriarchy, when asked to define it, they seem to struggle a little. Following Descarries-Bélanger and Roy's (1991) definition, they clearly identify patriarchy as the source of women's oppression. Most of them identify the etymological roots of the word as the power of the father, a concept that is then generalised to mean power of men over women.

S2 : Ben patriarcat, si on va selon la définition, c'est le pouvoir du père. C'est vraiment ça, c'est le patriarcat, ça été beaucoup centré sur le père, [...] C'est pas seulement le père, le père comme le père de sang là, mais c'est le père en tant qu'État aussi. Ça fait que... eh... C'est ça, c'est le pouvoir des mâles, des hommes en tant que groupe sur les femmes en tant que groupe et le pouvoir individuel [...] Mais dans un système global aussi là.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> For me there is a difference between being radical on the level of theoretical thought, political thought and in terms of means of action [...] I would like my radicalism to be situated mainly at the level of political thought but since theory and action go together and must go together it is clear that it influences the means of action I choose. But for me, radical feminism is mainly on the level of political thought and daily interactions.

<sup>88</sup> Well, patriarchy, if we go with the definition, it is the power of the father. It is really that, the patriarch, it was really centred around the father [...] It is not only the father, the father as in the blood father, but it is the father as the State as well. So...hum that's it, it's the power of males, the power of men as a group over women as a groups and the individual power.[...] is but it is also a global system.

C1: Oui, à part le fait que c'est l'autorité du père, et des pères, pour moi le patriarcat c'est plus un système qui est à la fois politique, économique et social qui considère que les hommes sont plus, euh, sont « supérieurs » aux femmes. Oui j'ai fait des guillemets parce que je n'y crois pas. Euh alors c'est ça, c'est un système qui est autant dans nos valeurs que dans nos pratiques courantes, et que c'est insidieux, et donc qui est à détruire. Ha ha.<sup>89</sup>

As well, many women added that this concept referred to a universal condition that took different shape or form across history and cultures.

I1: C'est quelque chose qui est universel selon moi. Bon d'autres femmes de d'autres pays pourraient dire que non, mais c'est quand même quelque chose qui est quand même observable, même si on tombe dans le relativisme, parce que c'est tellement partout.<sup>90</sup>

S1: Pour moi, le patriarcat c'est un système d'appropriation pis d'exploitation des femmes qui s'est manifesté, euh selon moi, à toutes les époques euh, de manières différentes, selon moi, selon les époques. [...] c'est quelque chose de systémique pour décrire la hiérarchie des sexes pis les oppressions qu'on ressent au quotidien, euh *at large*, historiquement, au niveau civilisationnel dans nos rapports avec les hommes.<sup>91</sup>

N1 : C'est tout ce qui fait que on vit de la socialisation pluri-millenaire, que les femmes sont moins considérées comme des êtres humains, que le travail est gratuit, domestique, sexuel, économique, cet enfermement dans les rôles trad....cette non valorisation des compétences femmes [...] Mais moi je pense que ce qu'il y a de commun à toutes les cultures c'est le patriarcat. T'sais je veux dire je ne connais aucune culture qui n'est pas patriarcale. Même que toute les différences culturelles qu'on peu donner et tout ça.

**Ça fait que c'est universel?**

C'est ça.<sup>92</sup>

Just like Kate Millet's definition (1970), patriarchy is understood as being present in all spheres of society and as being reproduced through most institutions.

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<sup>89</sup> Yes, apart from the fact that it is the authority of the father, and fathers, for me patriarchy is more a system that is at the same time political, economic and social that considers that men are more, hum, are "superiors" to women. Yes I added quotes because I don't believe it. Hum, so that's it, it is a system that is as much part of our values as part of our daily practices, and it is insidious, and therefore to be destroyed. Laugh.

<sup>90</sup> It is something that's universal for me. Well, other women from other countries could say no, but it is still something that is still observable, even if we fall into relativism, because it is so everywhere.

<sup>91</sup> For me, patriarchy is a system of appropriation and exploitation of women that has manifested itself, hum, according to me, in all eras, hum, in different ways, for me, according to the epoch [...] it is something that is systemic to describe sex hierarchy and the oppression that we feel daily, hum *at large*, historically, at a civilisation level in our relationships with men.

<sup>92</sup> It is everything that makes us live a pluri-millennium socialisation, that women are less considered as human beings, that [their] work is free – domestic, sexual, economic – this entrenchment in traditional roles...this lack of valorisation of women's competence [...] But me, I think that what is common to all culture is patriarchy. You know, I mean I know of no culture that is not patriarchal. Even with all the cultural difference that we can give and all.

**So it is universal?**

That's it.

N3: Un système composé d'institutions, de valeurs, de culture, de traits culturels, de de, de tout ça, mais qui est basé sur l'oppression des femmes. [...] en fait c'est basé sur le fait que les femmes sont inférieures aux hommes.<sup>93</sup>

I2: le patriarcat pour moi c'est la domination d'un système qui est faite par et pour les gars finalement pis [...] un système de domination des gars sur les filles qui dure depuis des générations et générations. [...] [l'oppression] vient de toutes les institutions qui renforcent ce système là eh... autant l'église l'état, la famille, le couple... euh... qu'est-ce qu'il y a d'autres? L'armée euh... l'école... n'importe quoi que tu trouves dans la religion... [...] c'est comme ça que je définirais [le patriarcat] autant dans le quotidien, oui, que les institutions finalement, ça passe par les comportements individuels mais générés... ou en tout cas générés ou influencés par toutes les institutions [...] t'sais dans le fond le patriarcat je l'vois oui comme un système, mais qui s'incarne dans les individus là...hum... pis transmis par les institutions patriarcales.<sup>94</sup>

It also implies an understanding of women's oppression that is systemic, part of a global system that cannot be reduced to individual differences or relationships.

S4 : l'oppression des femmes c'est une oppression systémique, aussi, c'est pas juste un individu, c'est lié à un système qui se construit pis qui se maintient. Ça fait que pour moi féministe radicale, c'est beaucoup une question d'analyse un peu plus loin que peut-être juste revendiquer au niveau de l'institutionnel.<sup>95</sup>

S3 : le patriarcat, c'est un système d'oppression; c'est pas une discrimination sur un aspect x, de dire exemple les femmes ont des salaires plus bas que les hommes on va lutter contre ça. [...] Mais le patriarcat est un système en soi qui fonctionne depuis des lunes et qui dans le fonds maintient ces structures de hiérarchie là, les privilèges masculins à travers différentes formes, soit comme je le disais institutionnelles, structurelles, comme le couple, euh, pis personnel, [...] c'est un ensemble de système qui va aussi produire une idéologie pour se maintenir, donc là on a toute la science qui y contribue, tout le savoir qui y contribue avec des théories, soit psychologiques, biologisantes, qui nous maintiennent dans un espèce de rôle de reproductrice, ou à travers justement une absence dans l'histoire, ça fait que toutes les sciences, toutes les disciplines vont participer à ce travail idéologique là.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> A system composed of institutions, of values, of culture, of cultural traits, of of, of all that, but based on the oppression of women. [...] in fact, it is based on the fact that women are inferiors to men.

<sup>94</sup> Patriarchy for me is the domination of a system that is made by and for men in the end and [...] a system of domination of boys over girls that has lasted for generations and generations [...] [oppression] is coming from all institutions that reinforce this system hum...the church as much as the state, the family, the couple...hum...what else is there? The Army...hum...school...hum anything you find in religion...that's how I would define [patriarchy] as much on a everyday basis, yes, that in institutions in the end, it is expressed in individual behaviours but is generated...or at least generated or influenced, but that is incarnated through individuals,...hum...and transmitted through patriarchal institutions.

<sup>95</sup> women's oppression is a systemic oppression as well, it is not just an individual, it is linked to a system that is constructed and that is maintained. So for me, radical feminism, it is a matter of an analysis that goes further than maybe just a demand on an institutional level.

<sup>96</sup> Patriarchy, it's an oppression system, it's not a discrimination on x aspect, to say for example that women have lower wages than men, we will fight that. [...] But patriarchy is a system in itself that has been working for moons and that in the end maintains these hierarchy structures, the male privileges through different forms, either as I was saying institutional. Structural, like the couple, and hum, personal [...] it is a conglomerate of system that will also produce an ideology in order to maintain itself, so then you have all of science that contributes, all the knowledge that contributes to it with its theories, either psychologising, biologising, that maintain us in sort of a role of reproducers, or through precisely an absence of history, so all science and all disciplines will participate in this ideological work.

This system therefore uses many tactics to maintain itself, one of which has been to define women as a “natural” category.

### *Women as a Natural Category*

The classification of women in a category, although usually not addressed directly, seems to be grounded in women’s capacity for reproduction. In the question “Selon toi, d’où vient l’oppression des femmes?” (For you, where does women’s oppression come from?), a number of them cited women’s reproductive capacity as the source of women’s oppression and as the central difference between men and women. This categorisation of women, although originally grounded in biological function, gains significant meaning by being invested by societal organisation and relations. As a matter of fact, most women identified the origin of the category in a social relation of hierarchy between men and women and the desire of the former to control reproduction.

S2 : Ça fait que le contrôle du corps des femmes, j’pense que le patriarcat a été fait en fonction de contrôler la reproduction des femmes, de s’appropriier le travail du corps des femmes [...] Moi personnellement, je vais beaucoup lier [l’oppression des femmes] à la reproduction, parce que je pense que ce qui différencie fondamentalement une femme des hommes, c’est la capacité de reproduction des femmes. C’est une ressource que les hommes ne peuvent pas eux-mêmes produire. Donc, ils sont obligés de contrôler qui produit cette ressource-là, puis c’est les femmes.<sup>97</sup>

S1 : la source d’oppression des femmes, selon moi, moi je pense qu’elle est dans leur corps. Moi je pense qu’à ce moment là, c’est ça je suis triste de l’envoyer ce que je vais dire mais moi je pense que historiquement, les femmes ont été opprimées parce qu’elles sont détentrices des moyens de reproduction de l’espèce. Pis pour moi c’est clair, clair, clair, clair, clair, pis euh, pis c’est pour ça que je pense qu’il faut être particulièrement vigilante sur ces dossiers-là. Euh, ouais, c’est ça, sur la base du corps, euh, que les femmes ont été opprimées. Bon c’est ça, d’une part à cause, eh bon, elles ont les outils de reproduction pis toute l’imaginaire-social qu’on a construit autour du corps des femmes.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> So the control of women’s bodies, I think that patriarchy has been shaped in order to control women’s reproduction, to appropriate the work of women’s bodies [...] Personally, I will strongly link [women’s oppression] with reproduction, because I think that what fundamentally differentiates a woman from a man, is the reproductive capacity of women. It is a resource that men can produce for themselves. Therefore, they are compelled to control who has this resource, and it is women.

<sup>98</sup> the source of women’s oppression, I think it is located in their bodies. I think that from there, I am sad to say, but I think that historically, women have been oppressed because they possess the means of reproducing the species. And for me it is clear, clear, clear, clear, and hum, that why I think we need to be particularly careful on these issues. Hum, yes, that’s about it, it’s on the basis of the body, hum, that women were oppressed. Well, that’s it, on one side because, well, they have the reproductive tools and all the imaginative-social that was built around women’s body.

Thus, the generic term ‘women’ is understood critically as a constructed category used to justify and further an exploitative relationship, which can and should be abolished.

In addition, the participants promptly denounced the use of “naturalistic” discourse rationalising women’s oppression:

S4 : Euh, je pense que c’est un construit sociale. Je pense pas que comme à la base, euh, les gars naissent gars pis les filles naissent filles mais on apprend d’être des filles pis on apprend d’être des gars, pis à avoir des comportements et des attitudes ça fait que, je sais pas. [...] Je ne sais vraiment pas. D’où ça vient [l’oppression des femmes], en tout cas c’est construit, en tout cas c’est pas quelque chose de naturel tant qu’à moi. [rires]<sup>99</sup>

I1 : Bon je pense que c’est historique. Premièrement, c’est culturel, c’est ancré dans notre socialisation, c’est ancré dans notre corps aussi, euh, même si ça fait un peu Foucault, j’y crois sincèrement! Par exemple si on y va au niveau des thèses biologiques : «Ah! les femmes sont faites moins fortes », ben moi je crois sincèrement que les femmes ont eu moins accès à la nourriture. C’est peut-être pour ça que notre corps ne s’est pas autant développé que celui des hommes, c’est peut-être pour ça qu’on est petite, c’est peut-être pour ça que à cet’heure notre population grandie plus que les hommes, parce qu’on a accès à de la nourriture, on a accès à des conditions de vie.<sup>100</sup>

This last quotation goes as far as positing some biological characteristics such as body size as being the result of material conditions of life and socialisation. Following this same line of thought, one woman directly contrasted radical feminists with ‘essentialist feminists’, underlining the fact that radical feminists do not believe that women have ‘natural characteristics’ - innate gendered characteristics:

S1 : les féministes essentialistes, certaines vont dire qu’elles font parties du féminisme radical, pour moi c’est un non-sens. Hum, de dire c’est ça que les femmes ont une essence féminine, une espèce de nature féminine, que les femmes sont plus douces etc, plus pacifiques... t’sais, à la limite je peux être d’accord, sauf qu’il faut que ça soit clair que c’est un construit social qui peut être défait, euh, par une autre forme de socialisation très très différente, euh, par une révolution des mœurs pis par euh des changements au quotidien dans notre manière de voir les choses. Je ne suis pas en train de dire qu’il faut devenir agressives ou quelque chose de même, quoi que c’est

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<sup>99</sup> Hum, I think that it is a social construction. I don’t think that like from the start, hum, boys are born boys and girls are born girls but we learn to be girls and we learn to be boys, and to behave and have attitudes, so, I don’t know. [...] I really don’t know. Where does [women’s oppression] come from, in all cases, it is constructed, it is not something that is natural, for me. [laugh]

<sup>100</sup> Well, I think it is historical, first, its cultural, it is grounded in our socialisation, it is grounded in our body as well, hum, even if it sounds a little bit like Foucault, I believe it sincerely! For example if we go the level of biological thesis : « Ah! women are weaker », well for me, I sincerely believe that women had less access to food. This might be why our body did not develop as much as men’s, this might be why we are smaller, this might be why nowadays [women’s] population grows faster than men’s, because we have access to food, we have access to living conditions.

vraiment le fun dans certains cas là. Euh, mais c'est ça, les essentialistes vont avoir tendance à essentialiser euh, les femmes pis à dire que les femmes sont meilleures que les hommes ou quelque chose de même. [...] personnellement, je crois pas nécessairement à la différence des sexes ou du moins je ne pense pas, je pense qu'elle existe dans notre société parce qu'on a été socialisé à percevoir les différences entre les gars pis les filles mais pour moi, il y a surtout une différence biologique qui pour moi, elle peut être surmontée. Il y a ben des études qui disent que les gars qui s'occupent plus des enfants développent plus de l'œstrogène etc, fait que moi je pense que les différences entre les hommes pis les femmes sont vraiment sociales pis à ce moment là, euh, cette idée là d'une nature féminine ne m'intéresse pas du tout.<sup>101</sup>

In this quotation, the participant clearly states that although gender categories can be associated with certain traits in our contemporary society, one should not imply that these traits are innate. Rather, under different material conditions of life, women might develop different personality traits. She explains how essentialist contentions that stipulate characteristics inherent to a gender are pure nonsense and she promotes an understanding of gender differences as social. This social conception of gender differences is echoed by many participants. In fact, the only exception lies in one member of *Némésis* who posited a spiritual connection between women as women.

#### *The Concept of Women as a Class*

Only two women interviewed introduced the notion of women as a class *per se*. This might be due to the highly theoretical argument that is involved in this notion. Furthermore, although some of them claim to be materialist, one must recognise that the influence of Marxism has greatly diminished in Quebec and has given way to anarchist tendencies. The concept of women as a class as used by these women draws directly from

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<sup>101</sup> Essentialist feminists, some will say that they are part of radical feminism, for me it is a nonsense. Hum, to say that women have a feminine essence, a sort of feminine nature, that women are more gentle, etc., more peaceful...you know, if you push it, I can agree, but it has to be clear that it is a social construction that can be undone, hum, through another very different type of socialisation, hum through a revolution of habits and through daily changes in our way of looking at things. I don't mean to say that we should become aggressive of anything like that, although it is sometimes really fun in certain cases. Hum, but yes, essentialist feminists will have the tendency to essentialise, hum, women and to say that women are better than men or something like that. [...] personally, I don't necessarily believe in a sex difference, or at least I don't think that, I don't think it exists in our society because we have been socialised to perceive differences between boys and girls but for me, there is mainly a biological difference that I think can be overcome. Many studies suggest that men who take care more of their children develop more estrogen, etc.

the theoretical materialist feminism as explained by Delphy. Because the citations are quite long, I will only cite one of the participant's attempt to explain materialism.

S3 : le féminisme radical matérialiste, c'est euh, c'est comprendre que la matérialité des faits sociaux, euh, dans le fonds que, non, je recommence. Le Patriarcat s'inscrit dans une réalité matérielle. Pour permettre la hiérarchie au pouvoir, il faut que collectivement les hommes appartiennent à une même classe sociale pour pouvoir nous approprier. Il le font individuellement et collectivement. Ça ça se manifeste dans différentes, euh, à partir de différents aspects. Ça fait qu' il va y avoir des manifestations collectives de l'appropriation, [...] à partir de là il va y avoir aussi des formes d'appropriation individuelle. [...] puis la à partir de là il peut tirer profit de la force de travail, des produits du corps – par les enfants – puis du corps au complet comme machine qui produit une force de travail. Donc c'est le corps complet qui est approprié. Donc comment je le comprends c'est que c'est deux formes d'appropriation – individuelle et collective – et ça ça se matérialise dans des manifestations directes, donc, au niveau des structures, au niveau des institutions, au niveau des rapports directs entre êtres humains hommes-femmes. C'est ma compréhension de l'oppression des femmes.<sup>102</sup>

Here she defines men as a class and implies that it is the same for women. One can also notice the predominance of economic terms such as “force de travail” (workforce), “produits du corps” (products of the body), “machine”(machine) and “appropriation” (appropriation). She defines women-men relationships in terms of property relationships, both individual and collective, where women become the property of men, a resource to be exploited, and hence the analogy between women's bodies and machines. The relationship between men and women is conceptualised as grounded in work, energy, profit and privilege. Again, in a way reminiscent of Christine Delphy, she implies in this statement that “men as class” are the target of the fight.

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so I think that differences between men and women are really social and from that moment, hum, this idea of a feminine nature does not interest me at all.

<sup>102</sup> Materialist radical feminist, is hum, it is to understand that the materiality of social facts, hum in the end, no, let's start again. Patriarchy is inscribed in a material reality. To allow for power hierarchy, men need to belong to a collective shared social class in order to appropriate women. They do it individually and collectively. It is expressed in different, hum, in different aspects. So you will have manifestations of collective appropriations [...] from there, there will also be individual appropriation [...] and from there, he can profit from her labour, from the products of her body – children – and of the body as a whole as a machine that produces labour. Therefore, the whole body is appropriated. Therefore, how I understand it is that it is two forms of appropriation – individual and collective – and it will be materialised in direct manifestations, so on the level of structures, on the level of institutions, on the level of direct relationships between human men-women. This is my understanding of women's oppression.

The conception of women as a class *per se* does not seem to be shared across the board amongst radical feminists, hence the low rate of appearance in the answers. Alternatively, the low rate of spontaneous use of this highly theoretical concept might be caused by the orientation of these groups towards action. As such, when interpreted more liberally, one can draw from their answers the idea that women form a collectivity, a category to which they are confined and through which their social relationships are defined. “S2: C’est le pouvoir des mâles, des hommes en tant que groupe sur les femmes en tant que groupes.” Remembering Ti-Grace Atkinson’s understanding of class, “‘Political’ classes are usually defined as classes treated by other classes in some special manner distinct from the way other classes are treated,” (2000 [1969]: 85) one can see a similarity in conceptual thought transcending the discursive complexity.

Furthermore, just like Koedt (1969), Kreps (1973) and Wittig (1984) argued, the end goal of the radical feminist struggle lies in the abolishment of the sexual division that permeates every aspect of society, and the elimination of social constructions of gender:

C2 : Pour moi dans une société idéale, qui n’aurait plus de patriarcat, qui n’aurait plus aucun de système d’oppression, vraiment au bout, au bout, au bout de où est-ce qu’on peut se rendre, y’aurait pas de construction sociale de sexe.<sup>103</sup>

This desire for a genderless society, however, does not translate into an immediate negation of the gender categories, but rather, is mediated by the struggle against the roots of the creation of this differentiation. This resistance starts in their personal life and extends to social structures.

### *The Personal is Political*

All women interviewed agreed with the statement that the personal is political. In fact, women thought the statement was so obvious that they did not understand the

question. When prompted to explain what this slogan meant for them, this is the type of answers they gave:

C1 : Ça signifie que dans tous rapports, y'a du politique, tout espace, y'a toujours quelque chose de politique, dans la discussion qu'on a là, le rapport qu'on a [avec les autres] c'est politique, c'est ce lien là, c'est des rapports de pouvoir qui a là dedans aussi. Alors pour moi c'est de toujours prendre ça, de ne jamais prendre pour acquis qu'il y a des espaces libres et informels tout simplement mais que toute discussion que ce soit amoureuse ou amicale ou quoi que ce soit implique quelque chose, implique des rapports de domination et qu'on se doit, pas nécessairement de les déconstruire, c'est pas nécessairement ce qu'on doit faire à tout moment, mais au moins de ne pas faire l'autruche et de s'en rendre compte et d'essayer de les *dealer*. Alors pour moi, c'est comme ça que j'essaie de l'appliquer dans ma vie et de politiser justement les conflits que j'ai avec les gens au moins d'en prendre, de le considérer.<sup>104</sup>

Clearly, this activist emphasises the politicisation of personal and individual relationships. S2 on the other hand focuses on how central this distinction between the public and private sphere was for patriarchy.

S2 : La sphère privée étant celle autour de la cellule familiale, la sphère publique étant celle supposément la plus élidée (sic), donc la politique, le travail, tout ce qui est à l'extérieur de la maison, mais ça c'est une différenciation entre le privé et le public, qui est vraiment faite pour garder le patriarcat en place. [...]Ça veut dire que t'as pas un droit de regard sur ce qui se passe dans les maisons, fait que le *Privé est politique* c'est une façon de dire ben...comment le travail gratuit que je fais, le travail de reproduction, ce qui se passe dans la chambre à coucher... Si tu me violé dans la chambre à coucher... Même si nos rapports sexuels se font d'une certaine façon, c'est politique, c'est un conditionnement social, c'est quelque chose qui regarde la société aussi, c'est pas juste ce qui se passe entre moi pis toi, mais c'est quelque chose qui reflète ce qui se passe dans deux groupes sociaux aussi. [...] j'pense que ça été amené pour dire que... pour déconstruire le fait qu'y'avait deux endroits, un endroit qui était politique, un endroit qui l'était pas.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> For me in an ideal society, there would be no patriarchy, there would be no system of oppression, really in the end, the end, the end of where we want to go, there would be no social constructions of gender.

<sup>104</sup> It means that in every relationship, there is politics, every space, there's always something political, in this discussion that we are having, the relation we have [with others] is political, it is this link, they are power relationships as well. So for me it is to always take this, simply never to assume that there are free and informal spaces but that every discussion whether it is amongst friends or lovers or whatever implies something, implies relations of domination and we have to, not necessarily deconstruct them, it is not necessarily what we always have to do, but at least not to hide our heads in the sand and to realise it and try to deal with it. So for me it is how I try to apply it in my life and to politicise conflicts that I have with people at least to take it, to consider it.

<sup>105</sup> The private sphere being the family cell, the public sphere being the one supposedly the more [sic], so politics, work, everything that is outside of the house, well it is a differentiation between private and public that is really made to keep patriarchy in place '...' It means that you don't have the right to judge what is happening in households, so the personal is political is a way to say well...how the free work I perform, the reproduction work, what is happening in the bedroom...if you rape me in the bedroom...Even our sexual relations are done a certain way, it's political, it's a social conditioning, it is something that concerns society as well, it is not only what happens between you and me, but it is something that reflects what is happening between social groups as well [...] I think it was brought up to say...to deconstruct the fact that there was two locations, a location that was political, a location that was not.

Others emphasise the importance of this notion for the feminist struggle. In fact, two women mentioned that to break this dichotomy was one of the most challenging task radical feminists still need to accomplish:

N3: Ben parce que je pense que c'est le plus gros du combat, on va l'appeler comme ça, je pense que ça se fait dans le privé. Pis euh, mais qu'en même temps, c'est difficile à sortir du privé [...] mais c'est souvent plus, c'est encore plus difficile de militer dans notre vie privée que de militer, euh, d'aller dans une manif.<sup>106</sup>

S3 : une forme d'appropriation c'est un homme individuellement qui va s'approprier une femme pour la maintenir sous son contrôle mais individuellement, ce qui est d'autant plus difficile pour elle de résister parce que là, elle se retrouve toute seule face à un oppresseur, et là t'as toute la propagande du romantisme qui fait en sorte que c'est d'autant plus difficile que c'est intériorisé, donc la résistance devient plus difficile, parce qu'on les aime les gars, et là, mais ça s'inscrit vraiment, une des formes de l'oppression, en fait une des manifestations de l'oppression les plus quotidiennes et les plus directes c'est dans le couple hétérosexuel, dans la famille. [...] Ça va être là où on va être le plus appropriée, c'est de torcher son chum, d'être la psychologue, de l'écouter, c'est de passer du temps à dire 'ah ben non, dans le fonds il est fatigué', c'est de se convaincre, donc c'est une forme de résistance encore plus difficile.<sup>107</sup>

Interestingly, one woman explained how central it was in her life to be able to theorise what was happening and to relate it to a wider context. Furthermore, the solidarity with other women achieved through her activism was a central tool in the resistance to daily manifestations of oppression :

C2: c'est quelque chose qui pour moi prend tout son sens quand je rentre chez moi le soir après une journée de militantisme, euhm, je ne suis pas toute seule, je ne me sens pas toute seule. Ça fait en sorte que j'ai, en générale, je prends conscience que je suis pas toute seule à la vivre cette oppression là, que je peux la collectiviser, qu'il y a des gens autour de moi avec qui je peux collectiviser ça. Pis je sais qu'il y a des militantes pis des amies qui vont intervenir si jamais moi je vie des situations x ou y qui sont totalement inacceptables.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Well, because I think it is the biggest part of the struggle, let's call it like that, I think that it happens in the private. And, hum, at the same time, it is hard to get it out of the private [...] but it is often more, it is even harder to be active in our private life than to be active, hum, to go in a demo.

<sup>107</sup> A form of appropriation, it is a man individually who will appropriate a woman to maintain her under his control but individually, which makes it even more difficult for her to resist because then she is alone in front of an oppressor, and then you have all the romantic propaganda which makes it even harder since it is internalised, so resistance is even harder because we love them the men, and then, but it is really a part of, one of forms of oppression, in fact, one of the most daily and most direct manifestation of the oppression is in the heterosexual couple, in the family [...] It will be there that we will be the most appropriated, it is to clean up after our boyfriend, to be its psychologist, to listen, it is to spend our time saying "well, not really, it's just 'cause he is tired", it is to convince ourselves, so resistance is even harder.

<sup>108</sup> It is something that for me takes all its meaning when I come back home at night after a day of activism, hum, I am not alone, I don't feel alone. As a result, in general, I realise that I am not alone living this oppression, that I can collectivise it, that there are people around me with him I can collectivise this. And I know that there are activists and friends who will intervene if I ever live x or y situations that is unacceptable.

Therefore, the personal is political is not only a concept that needs to be debated and theorised. It is actually a central element of the praxis of breaking down social isolation and creating a solidarity that strengthens one's potential resistance to fatalist acceptance of certain behaviours and situations. This was also echoed in many feminist answers to the question "qu'est-ce que ton implication t'a apporté individuellement?" and it was also reflected in their practices.

### **Radical Feminist in Action: The Praxis of Women's Groups**

The praxis of contemporary radical feminists resembles on many points that of their predecessors, although with some nuances. For example, they do not refer to their groups as consciousness-raising groups per se, but rather, following the terminology of their times, as "collectifs"(collectives) or "groupes d'affinité" (affinity groups). Still, most of the characteristics of consciousness-raising groups can be found in affinity groups. Another fundamental organising principle that remained was the attempt to abolish hierarchy within and between the groups. Furthermore, the types of actions used suggest a clear disengagement with the established structures. Finally, the construction of an autonomous women's movement remains a central objective of the groups.

#### *Consciousness-raising or Affinity Groups: One And the Same?*

Just like their predecessors, women regrouped on the basis of affinity. Consequently, the groups were more or less closed to newcomers. As a case in point, *Cyprine*, which was composed of the same five people for 2 years, finally invited a 6<sup>th</sup> person to join the group in 2005. In the case of *Némésis*, the groups stayed more or less with the same members in both phase of its existence. Nonetheless, in order to facilitate the integration of new members, they set up a pairing system. Similarly, although at first

people in *Les Sorcières* would come and go, they later tried to implement a system ensuring a match between women and the group. It should be noted that these systems were designed to make sure that the group corresponded to the woman's expectations as much as to ensure that the woman corresponded to the group. However, in both cases, the integration systems did not prove very successful.<sup>109</sup>

Consequently, because the members of these groups work closely together and because it is part of their feminist ideology, the line between personal (dis-)affinities ran the risk of blurring with political (dis-)agreement. Yet, most groups seem to negotiate this thin line quite well, as exemplified by this comment from a member of *Cyprine*:

C1 : Euhm, ça fait que on s'est perdues de vue en tant qu'amies, ben non, je ne dirais pas qu'on s'est perdues de vue en tant qu'amies, y'a certaines filles qui se sont plus éloignées en tant qu'amies, pis ça a fait en sorte que les liens ne sont peut-être pas aussi forts émotionnellement, mais ils sont tout le temps aussi forts politiquement et notre oppression on la sent encore.[...] t'sais, nos vies étaient assez parallèles pis on était assez proches à ce moment là; c'est plus nécessairement le cas maintenant, mais on travaille encore bien ensemble à mon avis.<sup>110</sup>

In this example, the members of the group, although originally close friends, continued their political work together in the affinity group even as their friendships dwindle.

The urge to meet in a women-only environment was motivated by the experience of discrimination in their activist environment, and their desire not only to analyse and

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<sup>109</sup> "Ah! On n'était pas super bonne je pense [dans] l'intégration des nouvelles personnes. [...] C'est ça, on a manqué notre coup un peu parce qu'on aurait pu euh, même si quelqu'un était pas sûr d'être d'accord [avec les trois principes de base], peut-être avoir une petite formation ou quelque chose pour faciliter l'intégration." (S4)(Oh! We were not very good I think for the integration of new people. [...] That's it, we missed our chance because we could have, hum, even if someone was not sure whether they were agreeing or not [with the three basic principles], maybe have a little workshop or something to facilitate the integration). "Pour l'intégration on y allait par parrainage. Ça c'était très important pour nous autres, [...] mais je te dirais que ça a pas super bien fonctionner l'intégration; on était quand même un groupe assez fermé, euh, pas tellement replier sur soi-même, mais le fait qu'il y ait le blabla et tout ça, ça faisait quand même, sans le vouloir je pense, qu'on était assez tricoté serré." (N3) (For integration, we worked through sponsorship system. It was very important for us. [...] but I would say that it did not work very well; we were a pretty closed group, well not really isolated, but with all the "blah blah", it still made us, without wanting to I think, a pretty tight group.)

<sup>110</sup> Hum, so we lost sight of each other as friends, well, no, I wouldn't say that we lost sight of each other as friends, some girls distanced themselves as friends, and as a result the bonds might not be as strong emotionally, but they are still as strong politically and our oppression is still there [...] you know, our lives

make sense of sexism, but also to actively resist it and try to eradicate it. On that point, contemporary radical feminists do not relate personal experiences and theory as their mothers did. For one, they are not starting from scratch. Because the theory developed by their predecessors was grounded in everyday experiences, and because the material life conditions have on many aspects stayed frighteningly similar, the new radical feminists are often amazed at how much these theories speak to them and to their lives. There is therefore less of a need to develop theory from their personal experiences.

That being said, all the groups studied mentioned that the topics they were addressing were chosen on the basis of what was happening in their life at the moment. Moreover, in *Némésis*, according to one participant, a lot of time was spent discussing the daily issues women were facing:

N3 : mais la façon dont on fonctionnait c'est qu'il y avait aussi beaucoup de place pour le personnel, euh donc on essayait beaucoup de... parce que justement quand on milite c'est facile justement d'être sur la scène publique disons où est-ce qu'il y a les gros sujet et ça ça peu être loin de nous, pis là donc on essaie de ramener ça à bon qu'est-ce qui se passe dans nos vies. Pis des fois on a eu le commentaire aussi qu'on était peut-être un groupe de blabla. On laissait de l'espace justement à ce qu'on vivait, que ce soit comme mère, future mère, blonde, euh, maîtresse, étudiante, whatever, donc pis c'était pas nécessairement des fois on essayait de créer des formations en fonction de qu'est-ce qui ressortait, d'aller se documenter pis de se nourrir, comment dire, d'aller chercher des ressources, mais souvent aussi c'était juste entre nous évaluer comment on peut militer dans nos vies privées, dans nos vies personnelles, ce qui est selon moi le plus gros combat.<sup>111</sup>

Similarly, C2 claims that the topics of their action and of their discussion varies with the events in their personal lives:

C2 : Euh, on a abordé à certains moments des événements qui se posaient dans la vie des filles, on a essayé de gérer des situations x, dans la vie des hommes autours de nous aussi ... pas

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were so parallel and we were so close at that moment; now it is not necessarily the case anymore, but we still work together very well in my opinion.

<sup>111</sup> But the way we worked was that there was always a lot of space for the personal, hum, so we tried a lot to...precisely because when one is active, it is easy to be on the public stage, let's say where big topics are, and it can be far from us, and then we try to bring it to what is happening in our lives. And sometimes we got the comment that we were maybe a "blah blah" group. We left space precisely for what we lived, whether it is as mothers, as future mothers, as girlfriend, hum, lover, student, whatever, and so it was not necessarily, sometimes we tried to create workshops on the basis of what was coming out, to document and to feed ourselves, how can I say, to get resources, but often it was also only between us, evaluate how to act in our private lives, in our personal lives, which I think is the biggest challenge.

nécessairement de façon positive, la mais...Au départ on voulait vraiment intervenir dans notre milieu, pis on avait un milieu commun, avec le temps évidemment, y'en a qui commence à travailler, on va plus toute à l'école, on a plus pan toute le même parcours, ça fait qu'on s'axe plus sur des actions, sur des trucs qui viennent nous chercher personnellement la euh, des campagnes précises sur des évènements précis...<sup>112</sup>

This Sorcière explains through examples how each issue discussed is tied to the oppression members of the groups are living:

S3 : Ben, c'est sur qu'on va d'abord partir aussi de ce qu'on ressent et ce qu'on vit pour aborder des thèmes, ça fait que, euh qu'on a touché...euhm, on peut parler justement femmes et pauvreté, parce qu'il y a beaucoup de femmes qui vont travailler. Ça rejoint aussi dans nos milieux de travail et de vie, ça fait que femmes et pauvreté ça va être des sujets qui vont être abordés, on a déjà eu à faire des réflexions là-dessus; racisme parce que ça a été des préoccupations que certaines ont partagées; euh, on a abordé euh des problèmes d'abus et d'agressions sexuelles. On a monté des ateliers là-dessus, aussi on a su faire un rapport de force contre ....euh, dans une situation où il y avait eu une agression sexuelle.<sup>113</sup>

Therefore, although starting with pre-existing theories, women still made sense of them through their personal experience. This suggests strong similarities between affinity groups and consciousness-raising groups, although the official objective was different. Contemporary feminist collectives have as much an action-oriented mandate as a self-reflexive and collectivisation of oppression purpose.

#### *Non-hierarchical relationships*

The second distinctive radical feminist practice lies in the attempt to build non-hierarchical relationships in the groups. All groups work on a consensual basis and were affinity groups. Far from the imposing top-down structures of institutional groups, contemporary radical feminist collectives work on a more or less informal basis. All the

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<sup>112</sup> Hum, we touched on, at certain times events that were happening in the women's lives; we tried to manage x situations, in the life of men around us as well...not necessarily in a positive way, but...At the beginning we really wanted to act in our own environment, and we had a common environment. With time obviously, some start to work, we don't all go to school anymore, we don't have the same paths at all anymore, so we focus more on actions, on things that come and touch us personally hum, specific campaigns on specific events...

<sup>113</sup> Well, it is clear that we first start also from what we feel and what we live to bring up issues, so we touched on... hum, we can talk, precisely, about women and poverty, because there are a lot of women who work. It meets our work environment and our lives, so women and poverty will be topics that will be brought up, we had already reflections on this; racism, because it has been a preoccupation that some have

groups named the importance of trying to create alternative and non-hierarchical structures, yet all groups had different means to go about it. Two groups, *Némésis* and *Cyprine* seem to use rules to ensure equality and the sharing of power amongst their members while the two other groups, *Les Sorcières* and *Les Insoumises* relied on individual and collective awareness of power dynamics to prevent hierarchical relations. *Némésis* actually tried out different structures to create an egalitarian environment:

N3 : On animait à tour de rôle, on prenait des notes à tour de rôle. Ça fonctionnait plus ou moins, dépendamment, parce que y'en a qui ont plus d'habileté la dedans. Au début on essayait d'être très stricte, on a vue que ça ne marchait pas, on essayait de, c'est ben beau que tout le monde le fasse, mais quand il y en a qui n'aime vraiment pas ça, ça peut devenir contre-productif pis c'est pas ça le but. Donc toujours un peu de jouer entre essayer de donner des outils à celles qui se sentaient pas bien la-dedans, pis respecter leur besoin de ne pas le faire, ça leur tentait pas. Donc l'idée c'était de partager le pouvoir dans le fond.<sup>114</sup>

*Cyprine* also modified their 'rules' as they went along. It is hard to determine which method was most successful, but it is clear that some problems remained in all cases. Despite everyone's best efforts, difference of status based on seniority, access to information, and individual privileges remained.

Not only did the groups try to deconstruct power relations inside the groups, they also attempted to work co-operatively amongst them. The radical get-together is the perfect example of an attempt from the different groups to work together without having a restraining structure that imposes a hierarchy.

S2 : Suite à ça, on a noté sur des tableaux toutes les suggestions qui étaient venues, toutes les idées qui émergeaient, mais pas dans le but d'en adopter une ou deux, mais dans le but de dire ben... Si y'a une idée qui t'allume, ben on fait un papier, mets ton nom, puis ce groupe là t'sais vas partir pis va pouvoir faire son affaire. C'est vraiment l'idée de ne pas concentrer entre les mêmes mains

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shared , hum, we talked about abuse and sexual aggressions. We put out workshops on it, also, we were able to build a power relationship against ... hum, in a situation where there was a sexual assault.

<sup>114</sup> We facilitated in turn order, we took notes in turn order. It worked more or less, depending, because some have more abilities in this. At the beginning, we were trying to be very strict, we saw it did not work, we tried to, it sounds great that everyone does it, but when some really don't like it, it can become counter productive and that's not the goal. So, always try to find the balance between giving the tools to those who don't feel comfortable, and respecting their needs to not do it, when they didn't want to. So, the idea is to share power in the end.

ou de... coordonner tout ça là... c'est très très diffus, c'est très éclaté... pis c'est de favoriser des initiatives diverses. Pis suite à ça, ben... j'pense que y a un groupe féministe radical qui s'était formé, j'pense [...] D'ailleurs, ça s'est prouvé : *Cyprine* ont fait des actions t'sais totalement différentes de celles des *Sorcières*, pis c'était vraiment cool parce qu'on était plus les seules à toujours faire des actions féministes. T'sais y a eu d'autres groupes qui ont pu en faire pis ça a multiplié les actions qui pouvaient être faites.<sup>115</sup>

This statement is reinforced by *Cyprine*'s own desire to multiply the number of active collectives instead of integrating existing ones. Therefore, much like the previous generation, contemporary feminist groups try to establish non-hierarchical relationships both within and between groups.

### *Types of actions*

Unlike some consciousness-raising groups in the United States, and much like most groups in De Gaulle's France, contemporary radical feminists consider actions to be as important as discussion. Although the weight given to each component varies with time and momentum, it is easy to see that all four groups have been involved in guerrilla-type direct actions and public demonstrations. As their first direct action, *Les Sorcières*<sup>116</sup> forcefully entered the church diocese of Montreal where they spray-painted slogans and hung hangers and condoms to denounce the Church's stance on contraception (2000). From graffiti commando to the organisation of demonstrations, from sticker campaigns to the staging of a public denunciation in the courthouse regarding sexual assault verdicts (2002, 2003), all the way to the desecration of a Church, this group cannot be considered only a theory-oriented group. They organised an annual rebuttal to the anti-choice protest

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<sup>115</sup> Following this, we noted on blackboards all the suggestions that came up, all emerging ideas, but not with the goal in mind to adopt one or two of them, but with the goal to say well, if there is an idea that enlightens you, well, we make a signup sheet, write your name, and this group, you know will be able to go and do their thing. It is really the idea to not concentrate in the same hands, or...co-ordinate all of it...it is really diffuse, it is really eclectic, and it is to favour diverse initiatives. And following this, well, I think that a radical feminist group was created, I think [...] Which by the way, it was proved; *Cyprines* did completely different actions, you know, then the ones from *Les Sorcières*, and it was really cool because we were not the only one to always do feminists actions. You know, other groups might have done more and that multiplied the actions that could be done.

(2000, 2001, 2002, 2003 - with *Cyprine*). They organised, in alliance with another group, a ‘*Évinçons les proprios!*’ (Evict the landlords, 2001) action where they tried to take over the Montreal Landlords Association office. Add to that countless contingents at demos (May 2000, May 2001, September 2001, February 2003, Mai 2003) and a number of graffiti campaigns, and one gets a picture of how active they were.

By the same token, *Cyprine* clearly is a group focused on actions. The Salon de la Mariée action (2003), where they yelled and gave out flyers in the Salon until they were not-so politely shown the door, is their most notorious. As well, they revived the annual *La nuit, la rue, les femmes sans peur* protest (Take back the night) in Montreal (2005). They participated actively in the Anti-masculinistes Coalition against *Parole d’Homme* congress (April 2005) and were key in the *Avortons leurs congrès* (November 2005) actions. They joined *Les Sorcières* in the organisation of a few actions against anti-choice groups (2004, 2005) and organised an alternative International Women’s Day March<sup>117</sup> (2004). Once again, countless sticker campaigns and direct intervention in public spaces were also performed on a regular basis.

*Les Insoumises*<sup>118</sup> were most active inside the walls of their university. One of their major event was an art exhibition for International Women’s Day in 2002. The group was also at the core of two sexual assault denunciations (both in 2002), one of which involved a male comrad, hence the chaos and ruptures that ensued. Grounded in

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<sup>116</sup> The dates are based on the publication of a historical review of *Les Sorcières*’ action that was published in the May 2003 issue (vol.3, issue 5) of the zine *Les Sorcières*. Therefore, the dates stop in 2003.

<sup>117</sup> *Cyprines* organised this march on the same day as a more “official” « International Women’s Day March (organised by a number of women’s groups including the FFQ) and offered an alternative discourse where they denounced amongst other phenomena sexist advertisement. The scheduling was consciously done to allow women to participate both in the “alternative” as well as the “official” march.

<sup>118</sup> Because the two members interviewed were only active during the year 2001-2002, the actions reviewed only cover these years.

their environment, this group was involved in responding to the different situations they encountered, and also ensured a feminist presence in student politics.

*Némésis*, although created in the context of direct action, turned their attention to popular education as their main means of interacting with and influencing their environment. Their original participation in the Summit of the Americas (2001) was marked by a creative public display of their opposition. After their separation from Opération SalAMI, however, they turned to less media oriented actions. In the words of N1, “c’est plate à dire, mais on a plus formé à l’action qu’on en a faite”.<sup>119</sup>

The types of collective and public actions proposed by radical feminists are therefore also ‘radical’ in the sense that they are disengaged with the existing structures of the state and other institutions of the establishment. They attack patriarchy in its structures, its symbols and in its manifestations, but always with an analysis that brings it back to the roots of oppression.

In addition to these types of actions, contemporary radical feminists are also active in their personal lives. Therefore, in response to daily patriarchal oppression, they offered daily resistance.

I2 : mais aussi, vraiment ça se joue plus à un niveau quotidien, moi j’dirais... comme de... t’sais d’être vigilante, mais de plus eh... de voir les rapports qui s’exercent eh... des fois subtilement, ou pas subtilement mais que, ... souvent c’est plus facile de taire pis de passer par-dessus parce que t’sais c’est difficile de vivre tout le temps dans le... t’sais d’être au aguets tout le temps... mais que j’pense que de le dénoncer plus systématiquement que de... que de ramener tout aux lois ou eh... genre... C’est ça à un niveau plus institutionnel. Moi c’est ça que je vois là comme définition [du féminisme radical].<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> I am sorry to say, but we gave workshops on actions more than we did them.

<sup>120</sup> But also, really it happens more on a daily level, I would say...like...you know to be vigilant, but more...to see the relationships that happen hum,...sometimes subtly, or not subtly but that...often it is easier to stay quiet and to let it go because you know, it is difficult to always live in the... you know, to always be watchful...but I think that to denounce it more systemically than... than to bring back everything to laws or ...like.. It is more at an institutional level. This is what I see as a definition [of radical feminism].

C1: C'est dans ce sens la qu'on est radicales et on va expérimenter le radicalisme aussi de montrer que c'est pas nécessairement de faire la révolution demain matin, mais que ça peut se faire quotidiennement au jour le jour ici et maintenant par différente façon.<sup>121</sup>

The combination of private and daily with public and collective action covers a large spectrum of tactics. This diversity of tactics, in fact, is helpful in attacking patriarchy in its multiple manifestations, but also in reaching out to a diversity of women in order to build an autonomous women's movement.

#### *The Construction of an Autonomous Women's Movement*

Although they were all familiar with the concept, very few participants spontaneously suggested the concept of an autonomous women's movement as a defining and central element of radical feminism. Even as they were clearly aiming at the construction of a women's movement, it is through their position on the importance of women-only groups and their reluctance to engage with the state that one can infer the "autonomous" in autonomous women's movement.

First, it is interesting to note how the creation of autonomous women's groups emerged in similar contexts in the 1970's and in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The experience of sexism from their male fellow activists along with a relegation of women's issues to theoretical details or the bottom of the agenda motivated women to organise separately in their own affinity groups where they could have real control over the issues discussed and set the priorities of the struggle. This *Némésis* member exposes how women-only space is crucial to the definition of radical feminism:

N1 : Pour nous c'est un peu l'aspect principal de comment se vit le féminisme radical, c'est un espace femme. L'autonomie des femmes.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> It is in this sense that we are radical and we will live radicalism also to show that it is not necessary to have a revolution tomorrow morning but that it can be done on a daily basis here and now through different means.

<sup>122</sup> For us, it is kind of the main aspect of how we live radical feminism, it's a women space. Women's autonomy.

Therefore, this concern for women's space has endured the test of time.

In this case, the participant was contrasting the different types of feminism. When asked to give an example of "liberal feminists" in her environment, here is what she described:

C2 : Ben ok, on a une table, dans le milieu où est-ce que je travaille, on a une table de groupes qui s'organise, qui se rassemble pour organiser la journée du 8 mars, pis ben euh il n'y a jamais été question de non-mixité, ça n'a jamais été mis de l'avant que cet événement là pouvait un jour être non-mixte, que les femmes pouvaient sentir le besoin de s'organiser... on s'organise, on est juste des femmes autour de la table mais l'évènement en soi est, à chaque année depuis 25 ans, est mixte. Il n'a jamais été question que les femmes pouvaient avoir le besoin de juste être entre elles pour collectiviser leur oppression, pour moi c'est quelque chose qui est un peu aberrant de ne pas soulever ces réflexions-là.<sup>123</sup>

In this quotation, C2 underlines the extent to which she believes in the virtues of women-only groups when expressing her 'aberration' towards this lacuna in her workplace.

Furthermore, since this example is used to illustrate a theoretical distance between radical and liberal feminists, she reaffirms the creation of women-only space where women can share, collectivise and politicise their oppression as a defining trait of radical feminism.

As all members agreed on the necessity to organise separately from men, the negotiation of when and on what basis groups should form alliances with co-ed groups has been the topic of heated debates. Namely, with the creation of male pro-feminist collectives, women were forced to take a position, deliberately or not, on the extent to which they collaborated with men's groups such as *Hommes contre le Patriarcat*.<sup>124</sup>

Radical feminists were sometimes successful in negotiating the boundaries of what part men should directly play in the struggle or support it. For example, the organisation of

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<sup>123</sup> Well ok, we have a table, in my workplace, we have a table of groups who organise, who gather to organise March 8<sup>th</sup> [International Women's Day] and well, women-only space was never an issue, it was never suggested that this event could one day be non-mixed [for women only], that women could feel the need to organise...we organise, we are all women around the table but the event in itself is every year and for the last 25 years, is mixed. No one ever questioned that women might need to be just amongst themselves to collectivise their oppression, for me, it is something that is aberrant that the reflection are not brought up.

the French Take Back the Night (la marche *La Rue, la nuit, les femmes sans peur*, 2005) by *Cyprine* was entirely women-run, both in its organisation and in the march itself. Instead of the traditional male contingent at the end of the march, *Cyprine* and pro-feminists men agreed that the men would be on surrounding streets, though not directly in the march, giving out flyers on ways men can take small steps to make women feel more secure at night. This collaboration respected women's autonomous structures both in the organisation and power position, but also in their desire to create a women-only space where women could empower themselves and feel safe in all neighbourhoods. At the same time, men were not 'excluded' since they were pro-actively involved in a 'support' action.

However, not all attempts to work with pro-feminist men are as successful. In fact, the line between supporting and co-opting is a very fine line, especially on topics such as abortion where men's involvement is not de facto motivated by their belief in a women's right to control her body.<sup>125</sup> As such, the usual difficulties encountered in any coalition such as time constraints and the division of tasks can easily turn into power struggles where the advantages of such alliances get lost.<sup>126</sup> In such cases, it remains crucial that women have the possibility of organising on their own without having to justify themselves if the need be.

The groups studied can be seen as autonomous from the state. In fact, their struggle is not even mainly directed at the state. For radical feminists, the state is one institution that perpetuates oppression amongst others. Even on topics such as abortion,

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<sup>124</sup> For more information on *Hommes Contre le Patriarcat*, see their web site: [www.antipatriarcat.org/hpc/](http://www.antipatriarcat.org/hpc/)

<sup>125</sup> accessible abortion also reinforces male privileges such as access to sexuality without responsibility ("if she wants to keep it, then it is her responsibility!")

they try to bring a more global perspective and refrain from ‘demanding’ changes from the state. For example, during a speech<sup>127</sup> given at an pro-choice demonstration, *Les Sorcières* made it clear that they did not ask anything from the government; rather, they protested the fact that states not only in Quebec but all over the world were constantly discussing women’s bodies in local parliaments and global institutions through discussions on population control and birth-rates studies focussing on considerations such as economic productivity and immigration issues without considering in any ways women’s voices and desires. Radical feminists’ empowering message promoted direct access to the tools to gain and maintain control of one’s body. This example illustrates how even on issues that have traditionally involved a dialogue between women’s groups and the state, radical feminists refused to engage and negotiate with a fundamentally patriarchal institution. Therefore, although radical feminism abstains from engaging with the state, it nonetheless stays very involved in the political realm.

As will be discussed in the next chapter, this notion becomes more and more important in the face of the neo-liberal state. As the provincial government changes the terms of public services offered, radical feminists reiterate that it is first and foremost through collective empowerment that patriarchy can be fought. Free from all ties, and responding only to themselves, these groups highlight that the construction of an autonomous movement remains so crucial. At times when masculinist pressures are, with mitigated success, questioning the women-only basis of association in instances such as

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<sup>126</sup> For a detailed discussion on the difficult alliances between radical feminists and pro-feminist men, see Melissa Blais, "Féministes Radicales Et Hommes Pro-Féministes : L'alliance Piégée," in *Québec En Mouvements*, ed. Francis Dupuis-Déri (Montreal: Lux, in press)

<sup>127</sup> Personal communication with S2.

the Conseil du Statut de la Femme (CSF, 2004),<sup>128</sup> the need to reaffirm the usefulness and necessity of this organisational principles is critical.

### **Intersectionality of Struggles**

I had originally included a question to address the intersectionality of oppressions specifically, but faced with the challenge of formulating a question that would not lead the participants, I later decided to remove it and see when and how my respondents would raise this issue. To my surprise, most women address the intersectionality of oppression in their definition of radical feminism. An element that arose in a few interviews was their belief that radical feminism implied an analysis of other systems of oppression, namely capitalism and racism.

S1 : Fait que c'est une manière aussi de comprendre le féminisme radical. C'est de dire que si c'est une analyse systémique des choses pour le patriarcat, il faut que tu l'aïlles aussi pour le capitalisme, par rapport au racisme, à l'homophobie, l'hétérosexisme plutôt.<sup>129</sup>

I2 : Ben... dans le fond, comme je disais un peu, pour moi [être radicale] c'est d'être contre le capitalisme, contre le patriarcat.<sup>130</sup>

S4 : pour moi le féminisme radical [...] c'est d'embarquer de pas se limiter aux questions femmes détachées de tout le reste de ce qui se passe dans la société aussi. [...]c'est ça au niveau de reconnaître que l'oppression des femmes est systémique, que y'a pas juste non plus le patriarcat, pis que y'a aussi le capitalisme qui est une forme d'oppression<sup>131</sup>

The way these women integrate other systems of oppression into their understanding of radical feminism differs slightly from earlier writings. The last quotation (S4) indicates that an intersectionality of analysis was almost a criterion to be a radical feminist. This

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<sup>128</sup> For a detailed CFS position, see Conseil du Statut de la Femme (CSF). "Vers Un Nouveau Contrat Social Pour L'égalité Entre Les Hommes Et Les Femmes." Quebec: Gouvernement du Québec, 2004, 174, [retrieved on May 21st 2005 from <http://www.csf.gouv.qc.ca/telechargement/publications/AvisNouveauContratSocialEgalite.pdf>]. For an answer from women's groups, see amongst others Micheline Carrier, "L'Avis Du Csf Pour Un "Nouveau Contrat Social" : Candide Et Racoleur," *Sisyphé* (2004).

<sup>129</sup> So it is a means to understand radical feminism. It is also to say that if it is a systemic analysis of things for patriarchy, you also need it for capitalism, in regards to racism, to homophobia, heterosexism rather.

<sup>130</sup> Well...in reality, as I was saying, for me it means to be against capitalism, against patriarchy.

<sup>131</sup> For me radical feminism is to engage in, not to restrain ourselves to questions detached from everything else that happens in society as well [...] it is at the level of recognising that women's oppression is

position is confirmed by the presence in the founding principle of two of the groups, *Les Sorcières* and *Cyprine*, of an anti-capitalist stance and in *Némésis*, by an anarchist stance. This makes sense in the context that these radical feminists groups represented more the feminist factions of radical groups than the radical factions of feminist groups. Therefore, it is only logical that the members consider other forms of oppression such as classism and racism to be a critical element of their analysis.

It should also be noted that in all groups, most women were involved in other activist groups, be it anti-globalisation, anti-poverty groups, the student movement or groups for affordable housing to name only a few.<sup>132</sup> Therefore, their feminist engagement was, for most of them, only one part of their involvement to change society and eradicate many forms of oppression. Yet, some participants in the research, as exemplified by this *Némésis* woman, did see the struggle against patriarchy as the central focus of their group:

N3 : Donc radical en terme de s'attaquer à la racine du problème et donc dans ce cas la, c'était pour nous le patriarcat, qui ne mettait pas de coté toutes les autres formes d'oppression, vraiment pas, parce que je pense que c'est intimement lié soit le racisme, le capitalisme, tout le reste. Mais pour nous c'était vraiment à la base de tout.<sup>133</sup>

This quotation suggests that although they recognise the multiplicity of oppression, the struggle against patriarchy is at the core of everything they did, which was not the case necessarily for other systems of oppression. This is confirmed by an other member of the same group:

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systemic, and that there is more than just patriarchy, and that there is also capitalism that is another form of oppression.

<sup>132</sup> To my knowledge, none were involved in Quebec nationalist or communist groups, which is a striking difference with the previous generation.

<sup>133</sup> So, radical in terms of attacking the root of the problem and therefore in that case, that case, for us it was patriarchy, which did not put aside all other forms of oppression, absolutely not, because I think it is intimately linked, racism, capitalism and all the rest. But for us it was really the basis of everything.

N1 : Pour la majorité des femmes, ou au moins pour moi, le patriarcat est à la racine du capitalisme, donc on est féministes radicales dans ce sens là. Pour nous c'est notre priorité.<sup>134</sup>

This prioritisation of struggle was not explicitly mentioned by any other group. Yet, the absence of anti-racism from the fundamental principles of unification suggests that anti-racist struggles were not the main focus of the groups. *Les Sorcières*, in an article that exposes the debate they had on feminism and racism, explains that:

Ce débat était vu comme un retour sur une réflexion déjà entreprise, une remise en question des principes déjà établis implicitement; ou encore comme un besoin de partage quant à des inquiétudes et des incertitudes reliées à nos expériences tant dans le milieu militant qu'ailleurs. Mais pour tout le monde, ce débat fut constructif même s'il a permis de mettre à jour certaines contradictions ou désaccords (*Les Sorcières*, 2002: 2).<sup>135</sup>

This passage indicates that members of the collective probably had different levels of critical reflection on the integration of anti-racism in the feminist struggle. In short, their analysis of racism differs substantially from that of *Québécoises Deboutte!* in that it is not grounded in the understanding of Quebec women as victims of a (post-)colonial system where they are oppressed on the basis of their language.

### **Radical Feminism and Nationalism**

Because no one raised nationalism in the interviews, this section is based almost in its entirety on analysis drawn from their general positions. Yet, this silence in itself is revealing: the nationalist struggle is clearly not considered a priority. As one might expect from groups who define themselves as anti-state but in sharp contrast with feminists of the previous generation, contemporary radical feminists do not support Quebec's separatist project. Radical feminists' contention that the state is a

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<sup>134</sup> For the majority of women, or at least for me, patriarchy is the root of capitalism, so we are radical feminists in that sense, For us, it is our priority.

<sup>135</sup> This debate was seen as a return to a reflection already started, a questioning of principles already established implicitly; or as a need to share our concerns or uncertainties linked to our personal experiences as much in the activist milieu as elsewhere. But for all, this debate has been constructive even as it allowed for some contradictions or disagreements to surface.

fundamentally patriarchal structure makes them sceptical of the promises predicated on a future independent state.

In addition, the idea that Quebec is governed by a political and financial English colonial élite that assimilates and oppresses poor French-Canadians – the idea that motivated nationalist radical feminists to defend the independence project – has receded. Quebec now seems to be governed, at least politically, by a Québécois élite that fully upholds the capitalist system. In its extreme, nationalism has become, for some remaining extremist militant separatist groups, a backward and fundamentally racist conception of “the Quebec nation”.<sup>136</sup> Moreover, the preservation of Quebec culture does not seem a pressing need in comparison to women’s growing poverty, the perpetuation of violence against women and the rise of a new feminist backlash in the form of masculinism – the three problems cited as most important in today’s society by the participants.

Furthermore, in an era in which neo-liberalism tends to reduce the roles and responsibilities of the state to replace it by market-regulated structures, the fight for an autonomous state might be seen as obsolete. As well, the globalising processes and structures implemented through the signature of binding agreements such as NAFTA,

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<sup>136</sup> For examples of the racist ideology in some militant separatist groups such as the Mouvement pour la Libération Nationale du Québec, see an interview of its leader, Jacques Villeneuve in *Cantilevers*, answering a question regarding the treatment of the ‘peuples autochtones’ by the Quebec government: “Vous voulez dire les Amérindiens, puisqu’on est autochtones – c’est notre terre, notre pays. Les Amérindiens sont relativement bien traités. Ils sont dans des réserves [...] subventionnées par les Canadiens et le Québec, ils jouent donc un peu des deux.” (You must be referring to Native Americans since we are indigenous – it is our land and our country. Native Americans are relatively well-treated. They live in reservations [...] subsidised by the Canadians and Quebec, benefiting from both sides.) He also explained to the interviewer that: “les communautés culturelles s’unifient contre le peuple Québécois en permanence. S’il n’y avait pas un vote raciste anti-Québécois à 98%, y aurait pas de problème.” (The cultural communities have consistently organised against the Quebecois People [...] there would be no problem if there [wasn’t] a racist anti-Quebecois vote supported by 98% of [cultural communities’] population.) in Eric Abitol, “Entrevue Avec Raymond Villeneuve, Président Du Mouvement Pour La Libération Nationale Du Québec (M.N.L.Q.)/an Interview with Raymond Villeneuve, President of the M.L.N.Q.,” *Cantilevers: Building Bridges for Peace*, spring 1999: 38-39).

FTAA and MAI suggest that the impact of changing the nation-state structures might be, in fact, diminished.

Finally, the rupture between the PQ – the primary instigator of the independence project – and its social partners and the implementation of neo-liberal reforms confirms for the participants that the independence project is not intrinsically progressive. As a matter of fact, an independent Quebec might not foster social change, but rather, run the risk of being an independent neo-liberal Quebec. An analysis of these elements suggests that unlike second-wave radical feminists in Quebec, the independence project is not part of the struggle of radical feminists. That being said, I do not know for certain how these women would vote in the case of a new referendum.

### **Conclusion**

As I demonstrated in this chapter, a first reading of the data shows that contemporary radical feminist groups have many similarities in their praxis and ideology with radical feminists of the previous generation. They subscribe to similar ideas on universal patriarchy, although they show a more complex and core integration of other systems of oppression. Their refusal to accept the categorisation of women as a group on essentialist ‘natural’ characteristics is coupled, in some cases, with an analysis of women as a class. Finally, they reaffirm that the personal is political and propose both individual and collective strategies to address it.

Furthermore, their organisational structures have similarities with consciousness-raising groups, although the main objective of affinity groups differs. They continue the task started 30 years prior of trying to establish egalitarian relationships within and between groups, sometimes using structures, sometimes not. As well, contemporary

radical feminists use guerrilla-type actions that remind us of the media-driven *coup d'éclat* of the 1970s. Finally, their commitment to the development of an autonomous women's movement offers interesting elements for resisting the neo-liberal world in which they live, as will be demonstrated in the following chapter. However, contemporary radical feminists' take on nationalism and anti-racism is clearly informed by the context in which they live and constitutes a rupture with Quebec second-wave radical feminists.

I can also assert with certainty that the existence of these groups, their relationships with each other and with other movements support the thesis of a resurgence of a radical feminism in Montreal. Now that I have established a clear understanding of radical feminism, understood the context in which the groups emerged, and demonstrated the presence of this type of feminism, the last chapter examines how their existence influences their environment and what radical feminism offers in terms of understanding and resisting today's injustices.

## **Chapter 5 – Contemporary Radical Feminism in Interaction:**

### **Impacts on their community**

This chapter addresses the implications of the revival of radical feminism at the micro and the macro level: in the immediate community of Montreal and in the globalised, neo-liberal world. Although embraced mainly to address issues faced in their immediate community, the potential impact of the radical feminist resurgence is significant.

According to the participants, their involvement in radical feminist groups: questioned male privileges in the activist community; ensured that women's issues were addressed in non-feminist activist groups; developed and disseminated an alternative gendered analytical framework; radicalised community groups; and helped women break out of their isolation. All these elements contributed to the re-emergence and expansion of an autonomous feminist movement.

At the macro level, the resurgence of radical feminism challenges two important dimensions of the contemporary predicament of Quebec society which is in the process of implementing neo-liberal reforms. First, looking at its interactions with neo-liberalism. The focus on the 'private is political' and on an autonomous women's movement is more important than ever in a world where power and responsibilities are devolved from the state to communities and individuals. While neo-liberalism emphasises private relationships but de-politicises them, radical feminism engages these so-called private spaces critically by questioning the relations of power that underlie them. In so doing, radical feminism is better equipped to confront neo-liberalism than liberal/reformist

feminism. The discourse and practices of liberal feminism remain directed at the welfare state and are left largely empty handed in front of neo-liberal privatisation.

However, radical feminism's critical engagement with the private sphere does not prevent it from analysing and challenging global issues. On the contrary, by understanding women as a class, radical feminism does not hesitate to highlight the universality of women's oppression. In the context of globalisation where women are collectively subjugated to economic precariousness and enduring poverty, radical feminism reaches back to one of feminism's first goal: the development of a collective consciousness. If the critique directed at radical feminism of the 1970s was partially right in highlighting the homogenising and colonising aspect of universal patriarchy and its implication for non-white and non-occidental women, contemporary radical feminism in Quebec is attempting to resuscitate the concept of patriarchy but with a revised meaning, one that tries to integrate anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist theories into their discourse as an important aspect of what it is to be radical.

### **Impacts on their community**

At the micro level, these radical feminist groups have had a number of immediate impacts on the community in which they are involved. Women regrouped in women-only groups to address issues that concerned them and fight sexism within the activist community. For *Les Sorcières*, fighting sexist behaviours in their immediate environment was clearly one of the main goals of the group:

S4 : *Les Sorcières* se sont formées en réaction à un événement dans le milieu militant, euh, y'avait une fille qui s'était faite éccœurer dans une réunion, en tout cas je ne m'en souviens plus, ha ha, pis en tous les cas, en en parlant avec d'autres filles, y'a ben d'autres filles qui vivaient des choses dans le milieu militant [...] Euh, en même temps, c'était de se regrouper pour, pour avoir une

certain force ensemble, pour agir sur des trucs comme ça mais aussi pour ramener les questions femmes à l'intérieur du mouvement.<sup>137</sup>

Similarly, *Les Insoumises*' major actions were geared towards people belonging to their own student community. As mentioned earlier, they were directly involved with other women in the denunciation of two sexual aggressions. To confront the activist movement about its own patriarchal tendencies is never an easy task, and women from the collective felt the repercussions of this which eventually led to their demise.

*Les Sorcières* (S1, S2) and *Les Insoumises* (N1) also talk about the pressure of being "Les Chiennes de garde" (the Watchdog) of the activist community, and the high costs, both personally and politically, of confronting their fellow activists on their behaviours. With the resistance to change and the barrage of empty promises they experienced, these women wanted to build a solidarity and 'rapport de force' that allowed them to affect change in their community. According to them, they were at least partially successful in creating a power dynamic where men would be forced to question their behaviours and could not always rely on their privileges:

S2 : On a mis beaucoup de pression, c'est devenu plus difficile pour les gars d'exercer une hégémonie, d'exercer des rapports de force. Euh... de faire abstraction des enjeux féministes, des enjeux qui touchent les femmes. Parce que je pense qu'on a construit vraiment un rapport de force, même si *Les Sorcières* c'est juste un petit groupe au sein d'une plus grande communauté, au sein d'une plus grande... t'sais... mais ça l'a eu un impact, pis même les filles qui ne font pas partie des *Sorcières*, ça leur a donné l'assurance que si il se passait des choses qui étaient pas correctes qu'elles pouvaient venir en parler à certaines filles. [...] Je pense qu'on a eu beaucoup beaucoup d'impact dans le milieu militant en tant que groupe.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> *Les Sorcières* was formed in reaction to an event in the activist milieu, hum, there was a girl that was nagged in a meeting, anyway, I don't remember, ha ha, and anyway, when she talked to other women, a lot of them were living it in the activist movement, [...] hum, at the same time, it was to regroup to, to have a certain strength together, to act on things like that but also to bring back women's issues inside the movement

<sup>138</sup> We put a lot of pressure; it became more difficult for the men to exercise hegemony, to exercise power dynamics. Hum... to make abstraction of feminist issues, of issues that concern women. Because I think that we really built a 'rapport de force', even if *Les Sorcières* is just a small group in the middle of a wider community, in the middle of... you know... but it created an impact, and even women that were not part of *Les Sorcières*, it gave them insurance that if things that were not ok were happening, they could go and talk to some women [...] I think that as a group, we had a big big impact in the activist community.

The impact went beyond the small intimate circles of these groups; it affected women in unexpected ways. It gave them the insurance that if something happened, a support network was there to respond, as was the case with the two women that chose to work in coalition with the radical feminist community to publicly address their experience of sexual assault. Therefore, this disruption of male privileges happened both at the symbolic and the material level.

Furthermore, the establishment of this power dynamic where women's groups successfully capture the attention of a larger movement is meaningful. Not only does such an action contribute to the breakdown of taboos around sexual violence and abuse, it also asserts the importance of exposing individual relations of domination in the public sphere and make it part of a public debate. As well, it reminds men of the existence of such gendered power dynamics even in 'leftist' environments and reasserts that individual appropriation of women's bodies is part of a larger system of collective appropriation, in which every man plays a part.

The second major goal of these radical women's groups is to address their issues with a radical perspective and try to keep them integrated in the analysis of social issues more generally. For instance, *Némésis*' original mission was to develop a gendered analysis of globalisation:

N1 : y'avais eu un comité femme informel de SalAMI qui avait présenté une formation sur les femmes et la mondialisation, ça c'était avant que la FFQ en fasse, avant que tout le monde en fasse, avant la marche mondiale des femmes en 2000, on commençait à parler de mondialisation, mais il n'y avait pas d'analyse féministe à l'époque, ça fait que je pense qu'à ce niveau là, les femmes avaient été un peu préceuseures, y'avait eu 100 personnes dans la salle, pis y'avait pus de place, pis c'était vraiment super, pis à la fin y'avait fait circuler une feuille si il y avait des femmes qui étaient intéressées à continuer la formation pis on avaient été quelques-unes qui ont écrit leur nom.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> There was an informal women committee of SalAMI that presented a workshop on women and globalisation, that was before the FFQ would have one, before any one, before the international women's

In contrast to the androcentric bias present in both the globalisation processes and the resistance to it, these women reaffirm the need for a gender specific analysis of global and local issues.

By the same token, one of *Cyprine's* goals is to act on issues that matter to them, issues that would not otherwise be brought up by other groups but should not go unnoticed. Here, the importance of an autonomous women's movement resurfaces. In light of the indifference of co-ed groups, it is important for women to have the means to organise on their own on issues that matters to them.

C1 : on s'est organisé entre autres comme ça parce que on sentait qu'on avait besoin de se défouler à quelque part. Ça fait que, je pense qu'on utilise pas mal toutes les méthodes à notre portée pour nous défouler pis, évidemment vouloir changer les choses ou en voulant faire prendre conscience les gens.<sup>140</sup>

Their philosophy probes actions that not only focus on raising awareness, but also act to relieve tension. This secondary purpose serves as an essential component of activism often forgotten in the face of the dramatic issues: to enjoy what they are doing.

Another important dimension of these groups is the development and propagation of an alternative feminist analysis. In concert with other emerging trends of feminism such as queer/post-modern tendencies or the discourse promoted by sex-workers, radical feminists have contributed to a diversification of the discourse on women. As such, rupturing the homogenous discourse – some even say hegemonic hold (Dufour, in press: 3) – of liberal feminism is a step towards constructing a broader movement that can reach a greater diversity of women and can multiply its impacts. This alternative discourse also

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March in 2000, we were starting to talk about globalisation, but there was no feminist analysis of it at that time, so I think that on that level, women were little precursors, there was a 100 people in the room, and there was no more space in the room, and it was really great, and at the end there was a sheet if women were interested to continue the workshop and there was a few of us who wrote their names down.

responds to a pressing need to fill the void left by mainstream liberal feminism and to create and multiply spaces of resistance.

C1: Donc on s'installe, on prend un espace, euhm, et on, et ben justement, on rend des trucs accessibles, on rend une analyse différente, on la fait connaître. Alors je pense que pour ça, ben on participe au moins à faire des espaces de résistance, de transgression du beau système et de l'ordre établi. Alors dans ce sens là, oui, en plus d'être légitime, ben c'est pertinent qu'est-ce qu'on fait.<sup>141</sup>

As such, radical feminists propose an alternative to viewing the state as the main agent of change in society while also fostering the creation of a collective movement.

Furthermore, radical feminists try to make accessible alternative tools for resistance, either through workshops on how to organise affinity groups (*Némésis*) or through stimulating debate that allows women to critically reflect on their condition (*Les Sorcières*, *Cyprine*, *Les Insoumises*). Therefore, radical feminists strive to empower women to become their own agents of change and multiply sites of resistance.

The resurgence and maintenance of radical feminism in the Montreal activist community also had the side effect of creating a critical mass of women that are now finding jobs in community groups/institutionalised women's organisations. These women carry their experience with them and have re-energised the long-deradicalised community groups.

S2 : Quand y a eu, j'sais pas comment dire, parce que les filles féministes radicales ont commencé aussi à avoir des emplois dans le milieu communautaire qui est un milieu beaucoup plus réformiste (rises) [...] pis aussi y'a eu des féministes radicales qui ont eu des postes comme même à la Fédération des femmes du Québec, qui ont amené comme un autre son de cloche comme un peu, sans que ça soit les Sorcières nécessairement. [...] y'a eu une diversité qui s'est installée, pis y a eu toute une génération, comme plus militante qui a commencé à s'impliquer dans les groupes communautaires, dans les groupes plus réformistes, pis qui ont amené un discours aussi. Pis j'pense que les groupes réformistes ont voulu aussi se faire imprégner de ce discours là, parce que,

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<sup>140</sup> We organised amongst other things just like that because we felt that we needed to let out the pressure somewhere. So, I think we use almost all-available methods to let out the pressure, and of course to change things or to raise awareness.

<sup>141</sup> So, we get comfortable, we take space, hum and we, and well precisely, we make things available, we present a different analysis, we make it known so I think that for that, well we participate at least in creating spaces of resistance, spaces of transgression of the pretty system and of established order. So, in this sense, yes, in addition to being legitimate, well what we do is pertinent.

avec la mondialisation, avec qu'est-ce qui c'est passé à Québec, justement la manif à Québec 2001, y a eu comme un genre de bouillonnement qui se passait pis y voulait pas passer à côté.<sup>142</sup>

C2 : [la génération] de 40 ans et plus, c'est celle qui a fondé le mouvement communautaire. Ça fait que oui, y'étaient radicales il y a 20 ans, mais maintenant ils s'assoient pis y font rien. Ça fait que de nous voir arriver, nous les jeunes féministes radicales qui poussons, défonçons des portes comme mettons des affaires de l'avant, ça les fait se remettre en question pis ça fait que le mouvement se radicalise de façon générale.<sup>143</sup>

As discussed at the end of Chapter Two, radical feminists in the 1980s were disillusioned about the possibility of a revolution, resigning themselves to the possibility of working with the state to alleviate women's conditions of living. Today, with the shrinking of the Quebec welfare state and massive cuts in social programs, community workers face a similar disillusionment about the long-term commitment of the state to provide for the marginalised. As such, community workers who were once radicals themselves may see the resurgence and appropriation of radical ideas by young women as a breath of fresh air, and according to the earlier testimony, are open to exploring the avenues presented by young radical feminists. Therefore, the arrival of radical feminists in community groups and women centres potentially changes the dynamic of the relationship between the state and (some) community groups to supplant the already severed conflictual co-operation with the Quebec state and replace it with a dynamic of confrontation. On a collective level, it gives them the tools to offer a gendered analysis of the world in which they live and the possibility of changing it.

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<sup>142</sup> When, I don't know how to say, because radical feminist women also started to find jobs in the community sector, which is much more reformist environment (laugh) [...] and also there are radical feminists that had job at the FFQ, that brought a different 'bell ring' (son de cloche) like, and it was not necessarily *Les Sorcières* [...] there is a diversity that settled, and there was a whole generation, like a more militant generation, that started to get involved in community groups, in more reformist groups, and that brought with them a discourse as well. And I think that the reformist groups also wanted to absorb this discourse because, with globalisation and what happened in Quebec City, precisely the 2001 Quebec City demonstrations, there was sort of a buzz that was happening and they did not want to let it pass them by.

<sup>143</sup> the 40 years old [generation] is more the one that founded the community movement. So, yes, they were radical 20 years ago, but now they sit down and don't do anything. So to watch us coming, us the young radical feminists that push, break down doors and, like, promote things, it makes them question themselves and it generally radicalises the movement.

### **Resisting Neo-liberalism**

Radical feminism, as articulated by contemporary groups, proposes an illuminating take on the context faced by today's activists. As discussed in Chapter Three, neo-liberalism promotes a society where the state washes itself of responsibility for the well being of its citizens. Following this doctrine, all sectors of life and relationships should follow the market-based model – allegedly situated outside of the political sphere.

This phenomenon is doubled with a process of de-socialisation and individuation (Rose, 1996), where the state disengages its relationship with citizens as a collectivity and rather targets individuals and communities by dividing them into deserving and undeserving agents. This process effectively prevents them from creating solidarity between each other. This phenomenon, of course, is also sustained by the change in discourse that blames individuals for their situation in society, as seen in the case of welfare.

I suggest here that the motto the 'personal is political' originally presented by 1970s radical feminists and revived by contemporary radical feminists addresses these issues from a heuristic perspective by showing that relationships between individuals or between an individual and an institution is not devoid of power and therefore is fundamentally political. The notion that the personal is political allows radical feminists to address critically the relationship between individuals and the market as embedded in a political system, not as neutral.

As the importance of the private/personal sphere is increased by the augmented responsibility of individuals for their situation, radical feminist theory can be used to

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reclaim the personal as political. Using examples such as the feminist discourse around rape, violence against women, reproduction and sexuality, radical feminists have succeeded in the past in bringing to light the political aspects of individual issues. For example, rape used to be considered a private and individual problems that the victim would blame on her personal choices (to be there at that time, alone, to wear this dress, etc.) or could nowadays even be considered the result of market-based relationships (the cost of raping and the chance of getting caught versus the “benefit” of the rape). Radical feminism changed the meaning of rape by making it part of a general oppressive dynamics between the sexes and a mean of control that, although expressed through an individual relationship, is rooted in political and collective relationships.

In order to illustrate how radical feminists might tackle the individuation process, I offer this example. As a result of the funding cuts imposed on health care’s infrastructures in the last 10 years, hospitals now keep their patients for shorter periods of time, sending patients home on the same day as a major surgery in some cases. Although for hospitals this can translate into cost-reduction, it does not translate as a reduction of cost for society in general and, in many cases, women end up compensating by taking care of their relatives (Armstrong, 2003; Stinson, 2004). While shifting the responsibility of care from a social one to an individual one, it also increases the workload of the woman. By saying “ *Le Privé est politique c’est une façon de dire ben...comment le travail gratuit que je fais ou le travail de reproduction [...] c’est politique, c’est un conditionnement social, c’est quelque chose qui regarde la société aussi,*”<sup>144</sup> this Sorcière member highlights how the new relationship of woman to the healthcare system and to

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<sup>144</sup> The personal is political is a way of saying, well...how the work that I do for free or the reproduction work [...] it is political, it is a social conditioning, it is a society matter as well,

sick relatives changes and is not one of free choice or a neutral relationship mediated by the market. In fact, it uses unequal relationships of power to displace the responsibility of the well being of the patient from the state onto women (and, less often, men).

Consequently, radical feminists suggest that individual problems can be a topic for political activism. It is not because something is personal or private that it should not be the topic of debates and eventually, collective resistance. Concretely, the same way radical feminists championed causes such as sexual aggression, and forced every member of the immediate activist community to take a position on an essentially private act between two people, the notion that the personal is political can be used to fight (women's) burden to attend to the well-being of sick relatives outside of established structures. Instead of focussing the blame on the state, radical feminists might suggest that this relationship between women and their sick relatives be addressed and debated in public to find the best solution. In this quotation, a member of *Cyprine* discusses this process when she explains how personal problems need to be conceptualised politically:

C1 : Ça signifie que dans tous rapports, y'a du politique, tout espace, y'a toujours quelque chose de politique, dans la discussion qu'on a là, le rapport qu'on a [avec les autres] c'est politique, c'est ce lien là, c'est des rapports de pouvoir qui a là dedans aussi. [...] [Ça] implique quelque chose, implique des rapports de domination et qu'on se doit, pas nécessairement de les déconstruire, c'est pas nécessairement ce qu'on doit faire à tout moment, mais au moins de ne pas faire l'autruche et de s'en rendre compte et d'essayer de les *dealer*. Alors pour moi, c'est comme ça que j'essais de l'appliquer dans ma vie et de politiser justement les conflits que j'ai avec les gens au moins d'en prendre, de le considérer.<sup>145</sup>

Therefore, by efficiently transforming personal situations into political debates, radical feminists might be able to destabilise the structure of neo-liberalism in ways other than

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<sup>145</sup> It means that in every relationship, there is politics, every space, there always something political, in this discussion that we are having, the relation we have [with others] is political, it is this link, they are power relationships as well. So for me it is to always take this, simply never to assume that there are free and informal spaces but that every discussion whether it is amongst friends or lovers or whatever implies something, implies relations of domination and we have to, not necessarily deconstruct them, it is not necessarily what we always have to do, but at least to not to hide our heads in the sand and to realise it and

the traditional call to a return to a social state. This tactic is especially interesting in that it attacks neo-liberalism on its own grounds: the private sphere.

This response to the neo-liberal predicament departs significantly from the liberal/reformist response that attempts to reveal the fallacy of the neo-liberal neutrality claim and tries to expose the political aspects of neo-liberalism. As I have shown, proponents of neo-liberalism have erected defences that make those claims appear illegitimate and even retrograde, as demonstrated by the claims of both the Charest governments and the *Manifeste pour un Québec Lucide* that they are beyond the left-right spectrum of political ideologies.

Thus far, women's movements have been unable to propose sound alternatives to the current political and economic situation characterised by the rise of neo-liberalism. There is a strong desire to keep the different services provided by the state and fight cuts in the public sector. Without diminishing the importance of such struggles, radical feminism hints that it is somewhat illusory to invest all energy in trying to return to the previous Keynesian welfare state. As a matter of fact, radical feminists consider the state a major patriarchal institution that maintains and reproduces this hierarchical system. Although the state might concede minor changes to its structure in order to retain its legitimacy, radical feminists do not believe that, ultimately, the state's structures can promote an anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal agenda. As these remarks illustrate, radical feminists have very little faith in the state as an agent of change and, on the contrary, see it as an agent of oppression:

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try to deal with it. So for me it is how I try to apply it in my life and to politicise conflicts that I have with people at least to take it, to consider it.

S1 : mais je pense que c'est important dans le groupe dans la mesure où euhm, l'état a été un agent oppressant historiquement pour les femmes.<sup>146</sup>

S4 : Je crois pas à l'état, je crois pas à son fonctionnement, je ne crois pas aux structures, euh, c'est ça, t'sais, je crois que c'est une blague de A à Z, que ce soit une femme ou que ce soit un homme [qui gouverne] [...] Mais moi, j'ai pas, j'y crois pas à [l'état], pis j'ai vraiment zéro envie de mettre de l'énergie là-dedans.<sup>147</sup>

I2: [L'oppression] vient de toutes les institutions qui renforcent ce système là eh... autant l'église l'état, la famille, le couple.<sup>148</sup>

Although radical feminists are not against the liberal/reformist attempts to maintain the existing patterns of state-provided social services<sup>149</sup> or as one participant puts it: “mais en même temps, je ne sortirais pas dans la rue pour dénoncer qu'il y en a qui se battent pour ça,”<sup>150</sup> their attention and energy is turned to another goal: the development of the women's movement as a parallel network, an autonomous women's movement that focuses most of its energy on the development of alternatives to state funded structures. The construction of solidarity networks, the publication of information (through zines, pamphlets, leaflets, etc.), the organisation of conferences and popular education workshops, and the general presence of a counter discourse in public spaces are amongst the different ways these groups try to break the hegemonic patriarchal discourse outside of state structures. In this sense, revisiting the tenets of radical feminism can provide a conceptual framework challenging neo-liberalism and encouraging autonomy. Radical feminists argue that it is crucial to develop independently of everyone, including the state. In light of the downsizing of the state, the position held by radical feminists

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<sup>146</sup> But I think that it is important in that the state has been an oppressive agent historically for women.

<sup>147</sup> I don't believe in the state, I don't believe in the way it operates, I don't believe in structures, hum, that's it, you know, I believe that it is a joke from A to Z, whether [it is] a woman or a man that governs ... But me, I don't have, I don't believe in [the state], and I have zero desire to invest energy in it.

<sup>148</sup> [oppression] comes from all institutions that reinforce this system, hum...the church as much as the family and the couple.

<sup>149</sup> As a matter of fact, a good number of them are workers in community groups, women centres and organisations and unions. Yet, they distinguish between their work and the interests of their groups/organisation/centres and that of women as a whole on the long term.

<sup>150</sup> Well at the same time I would not take to the street to protest against it

might be more appropriate than ever. Furthermore, most radical feminists do not consider the state as the source of patriarchy, or capitalism and racism for that matter, but rather one of the institutions used to reproduce systems of oppression. Therefore, to focus all energies on reforming the ways patriarchy is reproduced by the state does not address the core of the problem. As one participant puts it:

C2 : le patriarcat ça a pas été voté au parlement ça fait que ça ne s'abolira pas au parlement. [...] C'est pas en votant une loi sur l'élimination de la pauvreté qu'on élimine la pauvreté, ça fait que c'est pas en votant qu'il n'y a plus de patriarcat qu'y en a plus, t'sais. C'est à nous de collectivement s'organiser et de lutter pour que ça avance, pour se prendre en main de façon plus autogestionnaire.<sup>151</sup>

A number of other tactical advantages can be attributed to the organisation of feminist forces in an autonomous women's movement. First, it allows women to organise on a basis that recognises their specific needs. It permits flexibility and a capacity to adapt quickly. It does not depend on a bureaucratic structure that disempowers its members and that can be intrusive and scrutinising. Although radical feminists avoid orienting their struggles towards state reforms, they nonetheless strongly engage the public and political sphere. The goals are usually long-term and can easily be inserted in a wider political platform that can better represent the complexity and wholeness of women's lives. Beyond the influence that the size of a movement can have, the flexibility of an autonomous movement helps in tackling issues with spontaneity, acting more freely and keeping a political focus without interference.

Certainly, a number of problems may arise with feminists forces only organised through completely autonomous movements. Autonomous organising risks putting the burden on the marginalised community both in terms of material and energy resources.

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<sup>151</sup> Patriarchy was not voted in on Parliament Hill so it won't be abolished on Parliament Hill [...] it is by voting a law on the elimination of poverty that poverty will be eliminated, so it is not by voting that there is

Considering the fact that marginalised communities are usually the ones with fewer resources to begin with, gathering resources comparable to what the state can procure through collective redistribution and without relying on more resourceful segments of society such as men is almost impossible. However, as one participant so accurately said: “C1: Être radicale, c’est...c’est accepter que ce n’est pas nécessaire d’être pragmatique pour que ça vaille la peine de se battre pis de lutter contre quelque chose”.<sup>152</sup> Another positive aspect of radical feminist organising is the potential for solidarity building and politicisation through the struggle. As Bourdieu (1998) has shown, neo-liberalism’s success can be attributed in part to its ability to breakdown collectivities and solidarities. By building an autonomous movement that does not rely on the state or on structures run by their oppressors, women can get to know each other, their neighbours, and develop social networks and collectivities while politicising themselves.

This point was echoed in the interviews when women described what they personally gained from their involvement in radical feminist groups. A clear majority of the participants mentioned the fact that their activism freed them from their isolation and provided them with a support network. Individually, it strengthened their self-confidence, their self-esteem and allowed them the legitimacy to identify and denounce their daily oppression. But most importantly, they developed a sense of community and solidarity ties rarely found in other aspects of their lives. As a member of *Cyprine* explained:

C2: c’est quelque chose qui pour moi prend tout son sens quand je rentre chez moi le soir après une journée de militantisme, euhm, je ne suis pas toute seule, je ne me sens pas toute seule. Ça fait en sorte que j’ai, en générale, je prends conscience que je suis pas toute seule à la vivre cette oppression là, que je peux la collectiviser, qu’il y a de gens autour de moi avec qui je peux

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not more patriarchy that it won’t exist anymore. It is for us to organise collectively and to fight it, to organise on a more self-managed basis.

<sup>152</sup> To be radical means...means accepting that it is not necessary to be pragmatic for the struggle and the fight against something to be worth it.

collectiviser ça. Pis je sais qu'il y a des militantes pis des amies qui vont intervenir si jamais moi je vis des situations x ou y qui sont totalement inacceptables.<sup>153</sup>

The development of long-lasting solidarities through political struggles, although not unique to radical feminism, can still be contrasted with other forms of political activism that are on the rise in the increasingly individualised neo-liberal Quebec society. The rise of consumer-activism (Fair-trade campaigns, biological and GMO-free (Genetically Modified Organism) food alternatives, corporate boycotts, 'voluntary simplicity' (Elgin, 1981)) falls short of developing alternatives to neo-liberalism and creating solidarities. In fact, it does not question the premises of neo-liberalism such as relying on the market as the mediator of all social interactions. The collectivisation of the struggle is an important aspect of resistance to neo-liberalism. Through the development of an autonomous radical feminist movement, the construction of a long lasting political solidarity is possible.

### **A Globalised World**

In the context of capitalist globalisation, this new generation of radical feminists raise a number of theoretical avenues for strengthening global solidarity. First, contemporary radical feminists do posit a transnational patriarchal structure, that, although not homogeneous, can provide a common basis on which to create solidarities across national borders. Furthermore, the groups studied are quick to integrate their radical feminist analysis of power with a critical analysis of North-South relations, racialised dynamics both within and between nations, and capitalist and economic

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<sup>153</sup> It is something that for me takes all its meaning when I come back home at night after a day of activism, hum, I am not alone, I don't feel alone. As a result, in general, I realise that I am not alone living this oppression, that I can collectivise it, that there are people around me with whom I can collectivise this. And I know that there are activists and friends who will intervene if I ever live x or y situations that is unacceptable.

relations in order to create a complex but inclusive picture of patriarchy and to advance a comprehensive plan to resist it.

Although at first anachronistic, the concept of universal patriarchy when employed to designate the gendered material impacts of market globalisation (Chan-Thiberghien, 2004; Shiva & Dedi, 2002) and the structures that organises it is geared towards the development of international solidarities rather than the colonial application of one model on others. For that purpose, the concept of women as a class can also provide conceptual space for an understanding of women as unified in their oppression, yet different in their lived experiences. The concept of a class also emphasises that categories of dominance are ascribed externally and arbitrarily on the basis of otherwise meaningless elements (one's place and family of birth, one's skin colour or one's genitalia).<sup>154</sup> As radical feminists have pointed out, it is the ascribing of social meaning and power to these categories, along with the rules regulating them, that creates the classes and the classed relationships. Furthermore, the idea of a class does not imply a homogenous and universal understanding of women, but rather focuses on the universal processes that confine women to certain roles/positions/status. Therefore, women do not create solidarities on the basis of a common "nature" nor even on the basis of a common situation; rather, they create alliances on the basis of the system that restrains them through similar processes from one country to the other. Furthermore, the flexible and diverse nature of affinity groups and its networks provides them with the concrete means to negotiate this individual/collective binary of oppression and resistance.

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<sup>154</sup> Although in the discourse sexual divisions are said to be based on differences in the reproductive capacities of an individual, in fact, gender is ascribed on the basis of the type of genitalia with which a person is born, not her/his actual capacity to procreate.

Contemporary radical feminists groups strive to integrate fully an analysis of other systems of oppression to their political activism. They consider this intersectionality of struggles to be central to the definition of radicalism, as shown in the definition used to invite people to unite under the radical feminist label:

Le féminisme radical postule que celles-ci sont individuellement et collectivement appropriées aux fins de reproduction biologique et de la production économique. Cette exploitation est conjuguée au capitalisme, au racisme, à la hiérarchie et à toute autre forme de domination.<sup>155</sup>

The importance given to this aspect of the analysis indicates that contemporary radical feminists are aware of the difficulties of creating global solidarity, yet this reiterates their commitment to it.

### **Conclusion**

The impact of radical women's groups is significant. First, they have been able to reverse certain power dynamics and establish a 'rapport de force' with men in their environment by addressing women-related issues in other radical groups and exposing individual relations of domination in public and political arenas. Their enthusiasm and perseverance in undertaking radical actions has won them a place on the feminist map of Quebec where they are starting to bring a radical wind of change to community groups and more liberal groups.

On a wider level, the resurgence of radical feminism in contemporary Quebec society suggests that the use of the 'the personal is political' slogan might be helpful in finding a way to confront more broadly the privatisation and individuation processes associated with the neo-liberal attack on 'the social'. These feminists, through the revival

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<sup>155</sup> Radical feminism postulates that women are individually and collectively appropriated for biological reproduction and economic production purposes. This exploitation is in conjunction with capitalism, racism, hierarchy and with any other form of domination. (Appendix C: Invitation à la Rencontre Féministe Radicale.)Dominique Masson, "Constituting "Post-Welfare State" Welfare Arrangements: The Role of

of this ideology and through the daily resistance they create both in their personal and public life, suggest that private and personal relationships are, in fact, political.

Furthermore, instead of only resisting the downsizing of the state by aiming for a full return to a Keynesian-type state, radical feminism also suggests that the building of an autonomous women's movement not reliant on the state would ensure much more stability and would not reinforce an institution that is fundamentally patriarchal. As well, radical feminists advocate constructing collectivities and creating solidarities essential to resist the individualising and isolating processes intrinsic to neo-liberal transformations.

Finally, I argued that in a globalised world, the revival of a universal patriarchy as a conceptual framework combined to an organisational structure that allows for the expression of differences such as the complex network of affinity groups might help address the global feminist struggle that is in our hands. This attempt to negotiate the collective aspects of the struggle without negating differences is promising. Furthermore, a well-integrated intersectional analysis of systems of oppression might restore the credibility to the familiar concept of universal patriarchy, which could prove useful in fighting women's oppression on a global scale.

## Conclusion

This thesis demonstrated that the rise of neo-liberal ideas in Quebec's political arena disrupted the relationship between the state and institutionalised women's groups such as the FFQ. Recent governments, breaking the traditional 'conflictual co-operation' with social actors by imposing a neo-liberal restructuring of the state, have left groups who rely primarily on lobbying empty handed and powerless. As I have shown, these changes not only consisted of downsizing the state through massive cuts in social programs, but shifted responsibility away from the state, which now functions more and more as a facilitator that ensures all relationships are mediated through the market and displaces an increased responsibility onto individuals. Faced with the determination of the government to pursue this agenda, some social actors have turned to more confrontational and radical means of resisting these changes. In the midst of this renewed social movement activity, women have started to organise on their own to ensure a feminist analysis.

In this political climate, some women have returned to radical feminism. In doing so, they draw on older radical feminist concepts developed in the 1970s and re-tool them for use in the contemporary context. As my comparison between the two radical feminist generations shows, the core of the radical feminist ideology remains intact while a few elements have changed. First, other systems of oppression such as racism are now integrated as central elements of their analysis in addition to capitalism. Furthermore, Quebec's contemporary radical feminists have abandoned completely the national liberation struggle that was so important in 1970s. Finally, their organisation in affinity

groups linked through a network, although, in part, inspired by consciousness-raising groups, demonstrates a clear adaptation of earlier organisational tactics.

The renewed popularity of radical feminism in Quebec might be explained in part by the importance of materialist radical feminism in its tradition. Contrary to English Canadian feminism, the influence of a materialist analysis in Quebec radical feminism seems to have prevented the emergence of socialist feminism. This difference in theoretical foundation might also explain the ease with which young feminists have revitalised this movement. It also confirms that, each following their own path, feminist theories and praxis evolve differently in Quebec than in the rest of Canada.

As I suggested in the introduction, revisiting radical feminist concepts aids in developing alternative ways to react to the contemporary political climate. As such, the emphasis on collective means of resistance is central to counteracting the neo-liberal individuation process. Radical feminism's contention that private relationships are imbued with power can be used to counter the neo-liberal contention that every relationship must be reduced to one between individuals or between individuals and the market, a neutral mediating body. Furthermore, radical feminists call for an autonomous movement – autonomous from the state and from other organisations – and maintain that not only should theory be grounded in personal experiences of oppression, but also that feminists should not rely on the state as a long-term actor for social changes, as the recent positions of the Quebec government indicate.

This research also demonstrated that contemporary expressions of universal patriarchy can serve as a tool for the development of world-wide solidarity based on

gender while leaving sufficient theoretical space to account for differences and specificities.

This research is inscribed in a wider project of documenting new social movements. Although this thesis only looks at a small portion of these new movements, radical feminism, I contend that its theoretical contribution is nonetheless significant. Furthermore, I have shown that the commitment and engagement of radical feminists in political organisations dedicated to ending women's oppression through both daily actions and public demonstrations is crucial in ensuring the integration of women's issues in current political movements.

By giving a voice to generally marginalised people, this research (re-)connects scholarship with grassroots feminist organising. Based on the assumptions that academic work on women should stay in touch with their realities, this work allows community-based women to share their experiences and to have their actions analysed from a scholarly perspective. Hopefully, the documentation and analysis of the theories and means of action used by these groups will also be useful for them to reflect critically on their theoretical assumptions and on their role in Quebec and global politics. This research might also contribute to making visible knowledge and practices to audiences that would otherwise be unacquainted with radical voices in Quebec.

Further contribution of this research is to make accessible contemporary francophone feminisms to an anglophone audience. More precisely, this analysis of both historical and contemporary radical feminism challenges the stereotypes about Quebec feminism, such as its relationships with nationalism, and provides empirical evidence to address the diversity of feminisms in Quebec.

It should be noted that the span of this research had to be limited in terms of location, time, language and ideological positions in order to allow an in-depth study the groups. Consequently, many other feminist groups founded themselves outside of the scope of this study but are nonetheless influential. This project is therefore only an initial step in the analysis of the diversity of women's grassroots organisations and their contribution to both theoretical and ideological development of society. Given the emergence of a new generation of activism, much research is needed to map out the diversity of its constituents, their interaction with each other and with institutions of the state. Accordingly, further research could explore in more detail the interaction of radical and non-radical feminists with, for example, the anti-globalisation movement. Furthermore, an investigation of the relationship between grassroots feminist groups and institutionalised groups could help deepen our understanding the development of feminism across Quebec.

Finally, it remains to be seen if similar groups – gathered under the radical feminist label or not – emerged in other locations but similar contexts. For example, one can wonder if under the Harris-led Ontario government of the mid-1990s, (radical) feminist political organisations with similar theoretical orientations and strategic practices also appeared. This thesis therefore confirms that more research is needed to fully understand the relationship between theory and praxis. This research is one step in exploring the continuity, resilience and applicability of feminist theory across time and space.

## **Appendix A**

Questions in French  
Questions in English

## **Introduction et consentement**

### **Partie 1: Informations générales**

1. Peux-tu décrire brièvement le groupe dont tu fais partie? Quel en est le mandat? Quels sont les principes de bases?
2. À ta connaissance, pourquoi le groupe a-t-il décidé d'exister? Depuis combien de temps existe-t-il?
3. Pourquoi as-tu décidé de te joindre au groupe? Est-ce qu'il y a eu un évènement particulier, une raison particulière ou une motivation quelconque derrière ton adhésion?
4. Quels sont les principaux sujets abordés au sein du groupe?
5. Comment financez-vous vos activités/publications/actions?
6. Quelles sont les structures du groupe? (Decision making process, etc.)

### **Partie 2 : Idéologie**

7. Votre groupe s'identifie au féminisme radical. Qu'est-ce que ça veut dire pour toi/le groupe?
8. Selon toi, d'où vient l'oppression des femmes?
9. Que veut dire le mot patriarcat?
10. Comment le féminisme radical diffère-t-il des autres formes de féminisme que tu connais ou as expérimenté?
11. Que penses-tu des stéréotypes associés à cette étiquette?
12. Comment le groupe s'est-il transformé à travers le temps?
13. En quoi le groupe serait-il différent s'il n'était pas à Montréal?

### **Partie 3 Québec Contemporain**

14. Quels sont selon toi les principaux problème vécus par les femmes dans le Québec contemporain?
15. Comment le groupe s'inscrit-il dans cette situation? As-tu l'impression de faire partie d'une transformation sociale?

16. Que penses-tu de la phrase 'le privé est politique' / 'le personnel est politique'?
17. Quel est la place du politique dans le Québec contemporain? Comment s'inscrit votre militantisme dans ce contexte?

#### **Partie 4: Actions**

18. Quels types d'action utilisez-vous? Qu'est-ce qui motivé ce choix? Pourquoi?
19. Est-ce que vous avez déjà fait partie d'une coalition (féministe ou autre)? Si oui, dans quel(s) contexte(s)? Quel est votre relation avec les autres mouvements?
20. Quel est votre relation avec les groupes féministes institutionnalisés?
21. Qu'est-ce que ton implication t'a apporté individuellement? Collectivement?
22. Y a-t-il autre chose que nous n'avons pas couvert durant l'entrevue que tu aimerais partager ou que tu penses que l'on devrait couvrir?

Merci! et retour.

## **Introduction and Consent**

### **Part 1: Background information**

1. Can you describe briefly the group in which you participate? What is its mandate? What are the fundamental (unifying) principles?
2. To your knowledge, why did the group decide to exist? How long has the group existed for?
3. Why did you choose to join the group? Was there any specific event, reason or motivation behind your adherence to the group?
4. What are the major issues and topics that animate your discussions or orient your actions? Why?
5. How do you finance your activities/actions/publications?
6. What are the structures of the group? (What is your decision making process?)

### **Part 2: Radical feminism**

7. Your group identifies as “radical feminist”. What does it mean for you? For the group?
8. What do you consider to be the root cause of oppression?
9. What do you mean by patriarchy?
10. How is radical feminism different from other trends of feminism that you have seen or experienced?
11. What do you think of the stereotypes associated with this label?
12. How has the group/yourself evolved over time?
13. How different would be your actions/group if you were not in Montreal?

### **Part 3 Vision**

14. What are the major problems women are facing in today’s society?
15. How do you see your political activism inscribed in this context? Do you feel part of a social transformation?

16. What do you think of the sentence “The personal is political”
17. What is the place of politics in contemporary Quebec? How does it relate to the political activism that you do?

**Part 4 Actions**

18. What types of actions are you using? What motivates your choice? Why?
19. Do you ever form alliances with other groups (feminist or not)? If so in what contexts? What is your relationship with other movements?
20. What are your/the group’s relationships to institutional feminist groups?
21. How did your involvement benefit you individually? Collectively?
22. Is there anything else that we have not covered that you would like to share with me?

Thank you and debriefing.

## **Appendix B**

Formulaire de Consentement (French)  
Consent Form (English)

## FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT POUR PARTICIPATION À LA RECHERCHE

Ceci est pour affirmer que j'accepte de participer à une recherche conduite par Geneviève Pagé du département d'Études canadiennes de Carleton University dans le cadre de son projet de mémoire de recherche pour l'obtention d'une maîtrise sous la direction de Dr Pauline L. Rankin.

### **Objectifs**

J'ai été informée que les objectifs de cette recherche sont de documenter et d'explorer les idéologies et pratiques des groupes féministes radicaux non-institutionnalisés de Montréal et leur rôle dans la résistance au neo-libéralisme et que cette recherche se fait dans le cadre des exigences à remplir pour l'obtention d'une Maîtrise en arts.

### **Procédures**

J'ai été informée que la recherche suivra les procédures suivantes :

Une période d'interview individuel d'approximativement 60 à 90 minutes. Durant cette période, je serai invitée à répondre à des questions sur mes idéologies, mes opinions et mon analyse du monde. De plus, je serai invitée à répondre à des questions au sujet des pratiques et idéologies de \_\_\_\_\_, un groupe dont je fais partie.

Par la suite, je serai invitée à participer à une rencontre collective qui aura lieu le \_\_\_\_\_ où je serai invitée à commenter les résultats préliminaires de la recherche. Je comprends que ma participation à cette rencontre peut impliquer un dévoilement de mon identité aux autres participantes. Je comprends aussi que d'autres alternatives peuvent être mises en place afin de me permettre de soumettre mes commentaires sans pour autant dévoiler mon identité aux autres participantes. Je comprends également que ma participation ou l'absence de participation à cette deuxième étape n'influencera d'aucune manière l'utilisation des informations fournies dans la première étape.

Il n'y a pas de motifs cachés dans cette recherche et je ne serai pas invitée à faire autre chose que ce qui a été décrit ci-haut. J'ai été informée que mon âge, mon genre et d'autres informations personnelles vont être recueillies mais que mon nom ne sera associé ni à ces informations, ni à mes réponses.

Je comprends que ma participation à cette recherche et les informations fournies vont rester strictement confidentielles. Si les résultats de cette étude sont publiés, je comprends que les citations individuelles et les réponses peuvent être rapportées mais que mon nom n'y sera pas associé. Cependant, je comprends que mon anonymat ne peut être garanti et, par conséquent, que des informations circonstanciées pouvant mener à mon identification par les membres de la communauté peuvent être publiées. Je comprends que la chercheuse fera tout en son pouvoir et selon son jugement pour limiter la publication d'informations inutiles qui pourraient mener à mon identification par les membres de la communauté.

Je comprends que les cassettes audio contenant les interviews vont être gardées par la chercheuse pour une période de cinq ans et seront subséquemment données aux Archives canadiennes du mouvement des femmes (ACMF) à l'université d'Ottawa. Je comprends que

ceci sous-entends que n'importe qui, incluant des représentants de l'autorité, pourront avoir accès au contenu des interviews.

Je comprends que, puisque les objectifs de la recherche ne comprennent pas la documentation d'activités illégales et que, pour ma sécurité et celle de mes camarades militants et militantes, j'ai été avisée de m'abstenir de dévoiler des détails inutiles concernant des activités potentiellement illégales. Je comprends également que, si je décide malgré tout de dévoiler des informations concernant des activités potentiellement illégales, ces informations vont éventuellement être accessibles à n'importe qui en faisant la demande au ACMF. Je comprends que si je dévoile de telles informations sans le savoir, la chercheuse peut effacer ces informations de l'enregistrement sur demande. De même, si la chercheuse juge que de telles informations impliquent une tierce partie, elle peut me demander de reformuler mes réponses afin d'assurer la sécurité des autres membres de la communauté.

Je comprends que je suis libre de refuser de participer à cette recherche sans conséquence négative et que je peux à tout moment me retirer de la recherche.

### **Conditions de participation**

- Je comprends que je suis libre de ne pas participer à cette recherche sans aucune conséquence négative.
- Je comprends que je suis libre de retirer mon consentement et de mettre fin à ma participation à tout moment sans conséquence négative.
- Je comprends que ma participation à cette recherche est confidentielle (i.e. la chercheuse connaît mais ne dévoilera pas mon identité) mais qu'on ne me garantit pas l'anonymat (i.e. certains renseignements menant à mon identification par des membres de la communauté peuvent être publiés.)
- Je comprends que les données recueillies dans le cadre de cette recherche peuvent être publiées dans un mémoire de maîtrise et dans d'autres documents.
- Je comprends que les données recueillies dans le cadre de cette recherche vont éventuellement être données aux Archives canadiennes du mouvement des femmes (ACMF) et seront par conséquent accessibles au public.
- Je comprends les objectifs de la recherche et je sais qu'il n'y a pas de motifs cachés desquels je n'aurais pas été informée.

J'AI ÉTUDIÉ ATTENTIVEMENT LES INFORMATIONS CI-HAUT ET JE  
COMPRENDS CETTE ENTENTE. JE CONSENS LIBREMENT ET J'ACCEPTÉ DE  
PARTICIPER À CETTE RECHERCHE.

NOM (lettres moulées): \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE : \_\_\_\_\_ DATE : \_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE D'UN TÉMOIN : \_\_\_\_\_ DATE : \_\_\_\_\_

Si j'ai des questions ou commentaires, je peux joindre à tout moment :

Geneviève Pagé, chercheuse : (613) 842-3437; courriel:

Pauline L. Rankin, directrice de recherche: (613) 520-2600, ext. 2538

courriel: [prankin@connect.carleton.ca](mailto:prankin@connect.carleton.ca)

Prof. Antonio Gualtieri, président du Research Ethics Committee: (613) 520-2517

courriel: [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

## CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to participate in a research being conducted by Geneviève Pagé of the Canadian Studies Department at Carleton University, in conjunction with her research Master of Arts thesis project, under the supervision of Dr. Pauline L. Rankin.

### Purpose

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to investigate the ideologies and practices of non-institutionalised radical feminist groups in Montreal and their role in resisting neo-liberalism and that this research is being conducted to partially fulfil the requirements for the Master of Arts Degree.

### Procedures

I have been informed that the research involves the following procedures:  
One individual interviewing session of between 60 to 90 minutes. During this session, I will be asked to answer questions regarding my ideologies, my points of view and my understanding of the world. As well, I will be asked questions about the practices and ideology of \_\_\_\_\_, a group to which I belong.

As well, I will be invited to a collective session to be held on \_\_\_\_\_ where I will be asked to comment on the preliminary results of the research. I understand that going to this session might imply informing other participants of my participation in the study. I also understand that I have alternative ways of giving feedback that would not imply disclosing my participation to other members of the community. Furthermore, I understand that the participation or lack of it in this second part of the research will not influence in any way the use of the collected data.

There is no deception in this research and I will not be required to do any task other than those described above. I have been informed that my age, gender and other personal information will be recorded but that my name will not be associated with this information, nor will my name be associated with my answers.

I understand that my participation in this research, and the information that I provide, will be kept strictly confidential. If the results of this study are published, I understand that individual quotations or answers might be reported but that my name will not be associated with it. However, I understand that I am not guaranteed anonymity and therefore, circumstantial information could lead to my identification by members of the community. I understand that the researcher will, to the best of her capacity and judgement, prevent reporting unnecessary information that could lead to my identification by members of the community.

I understand that the tapes from the interview will be kept by the researcher for a period of five years and will subsequently be donated to the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA). This implies that anyone, including members of authorities will have access to the content of the interviews.

I understand that the goal of this research is not to document any illegal activities and that for my own safety and my fellow activists, I have been advised to refrain from giving any unnecessary details about illegal activities. I also understand that, if I decide to disclose information pertaining to such illegal activities, the information will be available to anyone who asks for it through the CWMA. I understand that if I disclosed such information without intent, the researcher can rewind the tape to erase the information. Similarly, the researcher can ask me to reformulate an answer if she reasonably believes that someone else's security might be at risk by the statement.

I understand that I am free to decline to participate in this research without any negative consequences and that I can withdraw my participation at any time in the research process.

### **Conditions of Participation**

- I understand that I am free to decline to participate in the research without negative consequences.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is confidential (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity) but that I am not guaranteed anonymity (i.e. some information leading to my identification by members of the community might be published).
- I understand that the data from this research may be published in the thesis or in other documents.
- I understand that the data from this research will be donated to the Canadian Women's Movement Archives (CWMA) and will therefore be accessible by the public.
- I understand the purpose of this research and know that there is no hidden motive of which I have not been informed.

I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH.

NAME (please print): \_\_\_\_\_  
SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_  
WITNESS SIGNATURE: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

If I have questions or comments, I can contact at anytime after the research:

Geneviève Pagé, researcher: (613) 842-3437; email:  
Pauline Rankin, supervisor of the research: (613) 520-2600, ext. 2538  
Email: [prankin@connect.carleton.ca](mailto:prankin@connect.carleton.ca)  
Prof. Antonio Gualtieri, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee: (613) 520-2517  
Email: [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

## **Appendix C**

Invitation pour une rencontre de féministes radicales (French)

## *Invitation pour une rencontre de féministes radicales.*

*Nous vous invitons à collectiviser votre lutte par le biais d'une rencontre féministe festive, qui aura lieu d'ici peu (probablement à la fin novembre ou en janvier si la salle n'est pas disponible...bref, la date reste à confirmer). Nous communiquerons avec vous bientôt pour vous faire part de la date et de l'adresse où aura lieu la rencontre.*

*La journée débutera à midi avec des ateliers de discussions et d'échanges pour se terminer par des prestations artistiques (ex : musique, poésie, danse, prose, etc.). Le tout sera ponctué d'un souper communautaire, d'expositions et de kiosques tenus par des groupes féministes. Nous vous invitons à apporter un plat à partager pour le souper collectif (un frigo et une cuisinière seront à votre disposition). Pour la santé de la planète, nous vous demandons d'amener votre vaisselle et vos ustensiles. Un service de garde sera offert.*

*IMPORTANT! Nous appelons également toutes les femmes intéressées à faire partie du spectacle, de communiquer leur désir à l'adresse suivante : [sorcières@nomade.fr](mailto:sorcières@nomade.fr).*

*L'information qui suit explique brièvement l'historique de la rencontre ainsi que les bases sur lesquelles nous vous appelons à participer. Au plaisir de vous rencontrer!*

*Les Sorcières  
Némésis*

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Historique de la rencontre**

L'idée d'une rencontre féministe radicale est née de discussion entre des féministes radicales s'impliquant dans divers milieux. Depuis plus de 6 mois, des féministes provenant du collectif Les Sorcières et du groupe d'affinité Némésis préparent une rencontre des féministes radicales prévue pour l'automne 2002. L'objectif est d'avoir l'occasion de se connaître, d'échanger, d'amener un pluralisme radical et révolutionnaire dans le milieu féministe et d'ouvrir la porte à la possibilité d'actions et de luttes communes. Au cours des derniers mois, des femmes de différents groupes d'affinités et collectifs ont été contactées et ont répondu de façon très enthousiaste au projet d'une rencontre féministe radicale.

### **Qu'entendons-nous par féminisme radical ?**

fondamentalement des autres formes de féminismes (ex, féminisme réformiste et féminisme libéral). À la base, les féministes radicales agissent au quotidien pour éliminer toutes les formes du patriarcat et de domination sans se contenter de changements législatifs ou sociaux qui ne remettent pas en question les fondements de l'oppression patriarcale, capitaliste, impérialiste et technocrate. De plus, les radicales mettent de l'avant le droit des femmes de s'organiser sur des bases autonomes et non mixtes. Vous trouverez ci bas une courte définition du féminisme radical. Bien sûr, chaque féminisme radical agit à plusieurs niveaux (ex. vie amoureuse, environnement, lutte au racisme, maternité, lutte à l'hétérocentrisme, etc.) Une définition ne pourra donc par rendre compte de la diversité du mouvement, mais elle peut nous donner des repères sur les bases communes qui nous unissent.

## **Le féminisme radical : une définition**

Qui va à la racine dans le but d'éradiquer le patriarcat, le capitalisme, l'hétérocentrisme, le racisme, et la hiérarchie.

Radical : adj. Latin *radicalis*, *radix*,  
ou d'une analyse féministe qui va à la racine du patriarcat et qui le combat dans sa nature profonde pour éliminer les fondements de l'oppression spécifique des femmes. Le féminisme radical postule que celles-ci sont individuellement et collectivement appropriées aux fins de reproduction biologique et de la production économique. Cette exploitation est conjuguée au capitalisme, au racisme, à la hiérarchie et à toute autre forme de domination.

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