

Let Them Howl: The Operation of Imperial Subjectivity and the Politics of Race in One Feminist Organization

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how the historical imperial legacy in which mainstream white feminism is rooted has had a detrimental impact in grassroots feminist organizations. The analysis is based on struggles around anti-racism that took place inside one feminist organization, Nellie's, in Toronto, Ontario.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article explore comment le legs de l'historique impérial dans le féminisme dominant blanc est enraciné au détriment des organismes féministes populaires. L'analyse est basée sur la lutte axée sur l'anti-racisme qui prit place dans un organisme féministe à Nellie's de Toronto, en Ontario.

INTRODUCTION

In the Canadian city of Toronto, the decade of the 1980s saw the feminist movement seriously grappling with issues of anti-racism which more often than not resulted in bitter divisions leading to fragmented groups. In the 1990s, the right wing relentlessly attacked many feminist services, posing an immediate threat to their survival. This only continues to worsen in the present. In this political context, it has become vital to analyze and begin renegotiating common strategies for political organizing. Yet in order to do this, it is necessary to engage the past to learn from the struggles that have occurred. There have been a significant number of theoretical works which have been involved in this endeavour (Davis 1983; hooks 1981; Hull, Scott and Smith 1982; Lorde 1984; Mohanty, Russo and Torres 1991; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002; Trinh 1989), but little has been written about how these issues have played out "on the ground" - in grassroots feminist organizations.

This study explores how the historical imperial legacy in which mainstream white feminism is rooted has had a detrimental impact in grassroots feminist organizations. The focus is on three aspects of this imperial legacy: imperial subjectivity, the construction of the "other" in the imperial discourse, and the use of philanthropy in the women's movement. We base our analysis on struggles around anti-racism that took place between 1992-1996 inside one feminist organization in Toronto (Nellie's), and how these struggles were taken up and retold by the media in order to reinforce existing notions of imperial subjectivity and hegemonic racism in the public sphere.

CONTEXT

The authors of this article worked at Nellie's from 1992-1996 and experienced the conflict "in the flesh." We know that most of the "Women of Colour" involved in the conflict have paid a price both personally and professionally. As Laura Coramai, one of the Women of Colour on the board of Nellie's during this crisis period has remarked in a personal communication with the authors, "for the Women of Colour there has still not been any closure or justice." This paper is an attempt to give voice to the side of the story that has not been publicly told.

Examining the conflict at Nellie's is apt for several reasons. First, it epitomized the many conflicts that were taking place at the time in the women's movement and have continued to take place. Second, it played out both internally and externally. As a result of the enormous amount of media attention it received, the debate about racism at Nellie's, to a large extent, also became a public debate. Third, in our current climate of right-wing backlash, this paper is an attempt to help strengthen the feminist movement by providing an opportunity to rethink our political strategies.

Nellie's is a social service agency which provides shelter and support to women and children who have experienced violence, poverty and homelessness. Nellie's emerged in the 1970s out of the radical feminist movement. Like most other feminist agencies at that time, Nellie's reflected the philosophy of the radical feminist movement and was centred around a collective structure comprised mainly of White women who provided services that

responded to White women's needs. The organizational culture was based on an essentialized notion of "womanhood" which defined woman as nurturers and non-competitive. Hierarchy was thought to be antithetical to feminism. Power relationships between women were thought not to exist, and oppressive behaviour between women was unthinkable (Barnoff 2001). In the 1980s, Women of Colour challenged the racism inherent in the politics of the feminist movement and its organizations. As a result, agencies like Nellie's were forced to address the issue of racism, and most agencies responded based on a discourse of "inclusion." Efforts were made to "diversify" agencies by hiring a few Women of Colour; however, the overall agency structure and culture remained largely unchanged and systemic racism continued to exist.

At Nellie's it was these newly hired Women of Colour who became critical of the ways power based on race operated within the agency and brought forward challenges. The response from the long-time organizational members (White women) was denial of the existence of racism within Nellie's. This created two antagonistic "camps" within the agency. In order to support and protect themselves from the racial conflict and to strategize responses, Women of Colour formed a "Women of Colour caucus," naming, de facto, "White women" as the alternate "camp." These terms, problematic as they were, were chosen for strategic and political reasons, not because women believed these were homogeneous groups. In fact, women were acutely aware of other social divisions within each group, such as those based on class or sexual orientation. As well, these groupings were complicated by the fact that there was a member of the "Women of Colour caucus" who could be described as "White" (the second author of this paper) and there were members of the "White women" group who could be described as "Women of Colour" (and at various times in the conflict, did assert this identity).

Our analysis is based on our review of all twelve of the print media accounts of "what happened" at Nellie's that were written during the conflict. It is important to examine these media accounts because they played a pivotal role in directly shaping public perception and reaction about this conflict and by extension all other similar conflicts. The media accounts reflected the conflict in a way that served to reinscribe already existing racist notions. As Henry and Tator (2002) argue, this is the primary function of mainstream media.

While the root of the problem at Nellie's was systemic racism in the agency, the media re-framed the issue as being centred around one individual board member, June Callwood. Because we focus on these media accounts, we also tend to focus on June Callwood, and in this regard, could be seen to reinforce this problem. The authors wish to acknowledge that it is our position that the conflict at Nellie's was never about one individual; rather it was about systemic racism in the agency as a whole.

Contrary to the "truth" claims made in the media, we do not claim a position of neutrality in our examination of these media accounts. We view them through a particular perspective, based on our location as "insiders," our positioning in the conflict at Nellie's, and our particular political perspective.

RADICAL FEMINISTS: IMPERIAL SUBJECTIVITY

Feminist theorists have begun to interrogate the complicity of the Western White feminist movement in the Imperial project (Burton 1994). The process of nation building and race were foundational to the arguments for women's emancipation. As Burton argues, White, British, middle class feminists decidedly participated in the Imperial discourse of the times (1994). We argue that these legacies of Imperial discourse and their consequent historical baggage continue to exist in the women's movement in the present day. Modern feminism has inherited two key intertwining aspects of the Imperial discourse: Race and Nation.

The radical feminist philosophy of the Second Wave privileged gender as a conceptual and organizing principle to the exclusion of race, class and other social inequalities. Women were perceived as a homogeneous group that shared sexual oppression in a brutal patriarchal system. In this essentialized notion of "women," race remained hidden and unnamed. In concrete terms, this sense of White superiority based on Imperial concepts is still painfully prevalent in many feminist organizations.

Mainstream feminist organizations like Nellie's which emerged out of the radical feminist organizing of the Second Wave worked on implicit assumptions regarding women's normative experiences. These were reflected in the organization of the White middle class women who founded and operated these organizations. The whiteness of the organizational culture, intentionally or not, manifested in concrete exclusionary practices in which "difference" could not be accommodated. For example, one of the many highly explosive discussions at Nellie's had to do with the fact that June Callwood (a White middle class woman and co-founder of Nellie's who had remained in a leadership position on the board of directors), made a unilateral decision to go ahead and seek funding for a women's resource centre, even though the initial needs assessment for this program had not been done in consultation with Women of Colour on staff or board and had not taken into account the needs of Women of Colour who might potentially use these services. "Women of Colour" were incensed by the lack of consultation in the process because the vision for the women's resource centre was exclusionary. In an excerpt from her article about what happened at Nellie's, Adele Freedman presents Callwood's perspective:

"[Women of Colour] wanted the process to be stopped immediately, so they could be consulted" remembers Callwood...."I was mad - Is having a public health nurse racist? Is having a literacy program racist? I said: We got a window of opportunity here." In her fierceness, she said a lot more. Frightened, some of the women of colour felt they'd been put down by "power and privilege"; Callwood saw bull-headedness and naivete.

(1993, 74)

Callwood does not consider that "business as usual" was based on the presumption of a White organizational culture and the needs of White clients. There was no acknowledgement of the fact that Women of Colour often have different and specific needs and issues in relation to services. "Women of Colour" were effectively silenced by Callwood's lack of willingness to address their concerns. The ownership that long time organizational members (White middle class women) had over the organization, even after they began to allow "Women of Colour" to be "included" among staff and board, perpetuated their sense of "we know best." Their paternalism exploded into indignation when they were questioned by "Women of Colour."

The ingrained belief that Western countries are more "civilized" and advanced than what is presently called "Third World" countries is also very much present in feminist organizations. This sense of superiority, based on technological progress and moral grounds, has allowed White feminists to assume a position of responsibility for the female "other." As Burton states, with regards to the British feminists of the 1865-1915 British Colonial period in India, "Arguments for recognition as imperial citizens were predicated on the imagery of Indian women, whom British feminist writers depicted as helpless victims awaiting the representation of their plight and the redress of their condition at the hands of their sisters in the metropole" (1994, 7).

Imperial subjectivity underlies the belief that as women living in the "First World" we live largely in a democratic and progressive society in comparison to the substandard conditions of women in other parts of the world. The strong belief that Western society has achieved a level of progress reflected in the technology, standard of living, and the ideology of human rights, allows White Western women to lead the advance of humanity. The feminist movement (and other progressive movements) has not been exempt from this view.

The myth of the civilized democratic society is so pervasive in Canada that the mere mention that racism is still alive and well provokes indignant and defensive responses even from the most progressive quarters. This was clearly demonstrated in the media reports about the conflict at Nellie's. Canadian White people, it would seem,

could only relate to racism when in connection to Nazi horrors, KKK hooded members, or other fringe groups (Daniels 1997). When the accusations of racism came to the fore at Nellie's, media reports expressed utter disbelief. Racists were defined as people who believe in the "supremacy of one race over another and are willing to enforce their ideas by any means, including violence" (Dewar 1993, 32-34). Any other expressions of entrenched systematic discrimination were perceived as nothing more than the perverse imagination of a resentful group, the result of racism-in-reverse or a long standing vendetta. (Letters to the Editor, *The Globe & Mail* 1992).

The myth of "Sisterhood is global" and a universal women's experience led many Western feminists to assume that feminism or feminist demands were homogeneous. The myth also assumed that women were powerless "victims," and based on this myth, any claims about the power and privilege of some groups of women were fervently denied. In sum, we argue that it was an implicit Imperial subjectivity that led many Western White feminists to assume that it was they who were the rightful leaders of the women's movement and its organizations and therefore that they had the authority, responsibility, and expertise to define and control these organizations.

CONSTRUCTING THE "OTHER": "ANGRY WOMEN OF COLOUR" vs. "VICTIMIZED WHITE WOMEN"

A second key element of Imperial discourse has been the construction of the female "other." The construction of certain groups of women as "other" provided a central binary relationship in which this "other" was perceived to be submissive, dependent, irrational and primitive; in contrast, White women were politically active, independent, rational and civilized. These representations of the other have acquired what Edward Said calls "a discursive consistency..." (Said 1978, 273). The construction of "Women of Colour" as "other" has always been linked to the perception that these women suffer worse oppression, exploitation and violence. This, in conjunction with the Imperial subjectivity discussed above, has led Western White women to assume the responsibility for the representation of those who supposedly cannot speak for themselves (Burton 1994,7).

Thus, these "sisters" were not seen as capable of articulating a truly feminist position because they belonged to "more primitive" social environments that made them unable or incapable of organizing politically. It has been an incredible shock for White western women to realize that "Third World" women or "Women of Colour" have not appreciated these kinds of patronizing and condescending attitudes and practices which have only served to further institutionalize racist oppression.

In practice, these largely invisible but ingrained beliefs resulted in the negation of the experiences of

"Women of Colour" in feminist organizations. This created an enormous amount of pain, disillusion and confusion for "Women of Colour" inside and outside these organizations. This is in sharp contrast to the espoused rhetoric in feminist organizations which purported that all women were assured their particular experiences of oppression would be not only acknowledged but also validated. In reality however, no effort was made to understand the unique situation and perspective of "Women of Colour." For "Women of Colour" there was bitter disappointment as a result of what George Smith calls "the ruptures of consciousness," that is, "...problems of knowing - being told one thing but in fact knowing otherwise on the basis of personal experience" (1990, 404). This process was riddled with pain. The two Black women who initially decided to confront the issue of racism at Nellie's admitted: "We were going crazy literally and sick physically. We were in a perpetual state of shock, confusion and crisis" (Women of Colour Caucus Letters. Personal Records).

While the collective at Nellie's should have responded to "Women of Colour" and their concerns as part of the collective process, "Women of Colour" instead had their voices silenced, their concerns minimized and were told things like, "How could your opinion be of value?" (Women of Colour Caucus Letters. Personal records). Their response, understandably, was rage.

A fascinating process begins when the female "other" raises her voice. Oftentimes this voice is strained with pain and anger and it is this fury that many White people fail to understand. For example, articles in the media about Nellie's refer to this fury as "hatred" (Freedman 1993, 83) rather than being able to understand it as a justified, legitimate response to individual and institutional racism. It is easier to conclude that the "other" is irrational. This way one is divorced from having to take any responsibility. Fanon (1963) points to this deep-seated fear of the colonizer towards the colonized. He describes how psychologically the colonizer knows that rage and revenge are boiling under the subservient attitudes of the colonized and therefore:

The native is declared insensible to ethics; he represents not only the absence of values, but also the negation of values. He is, let us dare admit, the enemy of values, and in this sense he is absolute evil. He is the corrosive element destroying all that comes near him; he is the deforming element, defiguring all that has to do with beauty or morality; he is the depository of maleficent powers, the unconscious and irretrievable instrument of blind forces. (1963, 34)

The fear of the unleashed anger of the oppressed is still very much present in the White psyche. For example, it is extremely interesting to see how the media portrayed

"Women of Colour" during the social debates that took place in Toronto around the same time as the crisis at Nellie's.

In one account dealing with the debates sparked by the musical "Show Boat" and its depiction of Black people, the reporter cites the example of Nellie's to undermine the argument against the play. He describes Nellie's anti-racist strife in the following manner: "A group of black women have been trying to take over...on the vague pretext that they were victims of a racist - that is, white - staff and board. It is quite simply, a power grab" (Slinger 1993, A2). In another article, espousing a conservative opposition to tax increases, the Nellie's conflict is also dismissed as no more than the greed of the "Women of Colour." The author states, "...the feuding at Nellie's...shows how the city's publicly funded social service organizations have been captured by left-wing activists bent on personal advantage" (Frum 1993, S2).

White women at Nellie's could not deal with the intense feelings engendered by the conflict since such reflection would mean acknowledging the inequalities in the collective and their own personal responsibility in the situation. The media fuelled the fire by portraying the hurt that "Women of Colour" feel in response to evidence of racism as illegitimate. For example, one of the many reporters that came to Callwood's defence argued that since there could not possibly be any racism at Nellie's, these feelings were unrelated to any actual events. Further, since feelings could not be disputed logically, Callwood had been put in a double bind situation. This reporter sarcastically asked, "...who are we to challenge their [Women of Colour's] feelings? Are their feelings not facts in themselves?" (Thorsell 1992, D6). In another article, by Adele Freedman, the reader is told of how "fiercely" Callwood had tried to deal with dissent, how she had uttered profanities to a Black woman, how she had broken confidentiality, and so on. However, Callwood is unable to understand how her actions reflected white power, stating that "...she and other white women involved with Nellie's 'were the most astonished women on earth when several women told them they're racist.'" (Editorial, *The Globe & Mail* 1992, A16).

Further exploration of the media accounts indicates that part of invalidating the struggle against racism has been to define the victims of racism as a resentful, angry, aggressive and malcontent lot. In this very public sphere, we find this process perpetuated through the use of what Dorothy Smith calls "ideological code," and which she defines as "analogous to a genetic code, reproducing its characteristic forms and order in multiple and various discursive settings" (1990, 50). In the media, these codes became organizers of the public discourse about Nellie's, and by association, about anti-racist struggles in general.

The ideological code of "angry women of Colour" in all the text-mediated relations that occurred during this

period had the role of coordinating the discussion but also of offering a symbol that readers could identify with and which needed no further explanation. The code "angry women of Colour" plays to all the unconscious imperial discourses that have still not been uprooted from the White consciousness. It presents "Women of Colour" as uncivilized, as irrational, and as savages. As with the myth of "the black rapist," (Farmangarmaian 1992) this code needs no further explanation; it brings to the surface all kinds of anxieties and defensiveness. The fear evoked by the image of hordes of Black women "out to get you" was repeated in most of the news articles that reported the conflict at Nellie's. Images of "anti-feminist, Black American nationalist language" (Dewar 1993, 34) were brought to the fore. Some argued that "feelings were overpowering rational thought" and "this is tyranny in a new form. The self-defined weak have adopted as a strategy bullying and intimidation" (Marchand 1993, C5). In one account, Callwood is quoted as recalling only "an 'elaborate turban and angry body language'" (Freedman 1993, 76) when she thinks back to a confrontation she had with a Black woman at a Nellie's board meeting. As Farmangarmaian states, "the conflicts are not with a real foe, but with erected opponents who fit within the boundaries of White consciousness" (1992, 126).

Women of Colour were not allowed to be angry. In fact, most of the disparaging comments in the media accounts referred to the fact that these women had dared to be angry. One commentator critical of this anger remarked ironically: "They [Women of Colour] have the 'systematic' right to be angry and even unbalanced in their views"(Marchand 1993, C5). The phenomenon of trying to convince "Women of Colour" that feelings of pain or anger are best suppressed has been commented on by "Women of Colour" themselves, such as Audre Lorde: "When Women of Colour speak out of the anger that laces so many of our contacts with White women, we are often told that we are 'creating a mood of hopelessness,' 'preventing white women from getting past guilt,' or 'standing in the way of trusting communication and action" (Lorde 1984, 131).

However, she is also very clear where this anger is coming from and makes no apologies for it:

Anger is an appropriate reaction to racist attitudes, as is fury when the actions arising from those attitudes do not change. To those women here who fear the anger of women of Color more than their own unscrutinised racist attitudes, I ask: Is the anger of women of Color more threatening than the woman hatred that tinges all aspects of our lives? (1984, 129).

In contrast to this denial of the pain Women of Colour were experiencing, in the public discourse, White women's pain became an open wound for all to see. Good intentions were seen as being misunderstood. Throughout

the media reports there were numerous descriptions of the intense pain of the White women caused by the charges of racism against them (Dewar 1993; Freedman 1993; Kavanagh 1992; Teshler 1995). To illustrate this, one need not look further than the title of one article, which suggests that racism is a "White Women's Burden" in which Callwood is described as a "bird with broken wings" (Freedman 1993). In this article, as in countless others, we learn about the multiple ways in which White women were damaged and hurt by the anti-racist struggles at Nellie's, while no attention at all is focussed on the pain and suffering that Women of Colour, the victims of racism, had to endure as all of these events played out.

PHILANTHROPY: USERS AND WOMEN OF COLOUR

A third element of Imperial subjectivity has been its intrinsic relation to an evangelical discourse. The Western White feminist movement learned many of its political organizing skills by participating in the Abolitionist movement and the Social Reform movement with all its Christian connotations (Burton 1994). Philanthropy, as a frame, continues to permeate the political arena of feminist struggle. The concept of "charity" or philanthropy is now thinly veiled in liberal humanist rhetoric. This element cannot be separated from the construction and representation of the Imperial "Other" which was inferior by definition. It was an "Other" that needed to be silent and was in need of protection.

At Nellie's, the underlying philosophical view of service provision was based in a "charity model" in which the women who used the services were receiving "a favour." Therefore, it was expected that their response to the kindness of the shelter workers would be compliance. If women did not comply, they had to face the consequences of their wilful behaviour. As Hyde comments in her paper which refers to an organizational struggle in a feminist organization that seems remarkably similar to Nellie's, "it was clear that ideological commitment to disenfranchised groups was not infused into daily practice" (Hyde 1995). This position also extended to the hiring of the Women of Colour. Allowing some "fortunate" women to share in the resources and very real benefits that had been available to the White workers was perceived by White women as both a sacrifice and a demonstration of good will.

Thus, two ideas were at play here: (1) the female "other" cannot speak for herself because she is too backward, primitive and oppressed; and (2) the radical feminist essentialized meaning of "woman" - in particular, the notion that women, as victims of a common sexist oppression, could not oppress other women. At Nellie's, the first presumption was illustrated in an excerpt from an organizational review report. The Organizational Review Team concludes:

We are unaware of any formal methods of getting resident input into the operations. This may be the result of an unstated assumption that because staff feel passionately about their work, care deeply and are in close contact with the women they serve, that they are therefore able to *represent the interests* of these women.

([italics mine] burke et al. 1994, 24)

The second presumption relates to what has been termed the "race to innocence" (Razack 1998). At Nellie's there were numerous discussions and debates where White women, who understood themselves as victims of a common sexist oppression, and for some as also victimized by heterosexism, would argue that they could not possibly be oppressors. Comments such as the following were common: "We are all oppressed. How can the women of colour accuse the whites as being the ones with the power?" (burke et al. 1994, 18).

Many White feminists have historically used charity as an organizing principle to position themselves as "innocent" humanitarians without ever questioning their location in relationships of power. In the case of Nellie's this conception came into full force in the media reports that sprang up to defend June Callwood. It was stressed that Callwood could not be labelled a "racist" because she had a long history of taking on "humanitarian causes" (Letters to the Editor, *Globe & Mail* 1992). If good people working for the oppressed can be called "racist," there is a dissonance that becomes too threatening to the perceived sense of White subjectivity - especially of progressive White subjectivity.

Part and parcel of the concept of philanthropy has been the infantilization of the oppressed. This involves blaming them for their fate, thus comfortably disregarding the issue of political rights and injustice. However, when the helpless "other" begins to have a voice, those in power usually chastise them. Their needs and concerns are not taken seriously. If the "other" continues the push to be heard, she is treated patronizingly, as a rebellious child. When the "Women of Colour" at Nellie's questioned some of the usual organizational procedures and expressed concerns that the services were not adequate for particular groups in the community, they were ignored. Their concerns were explained away as simply reflecting a lack of professional training. Thus, women in perceived positions of powerlessness, either as "Women of Colour" staff or users of the service, were framed as vulnerable victims, and were seen as irrational, irresponsible children who really did not know what they were doing. Implication in the domination of the "Other" went unquestioned and any sign of criticism on the part of this "other" was seen as pure ingratitude. This is illustrated clearly by an often quoted statement from June Callwood which was directed to one of the Black women on staff at Nellie's who raised the issue of racism: "Are you the same woman we helped and have

done things for? How can you feel this way?" (Wade Rose 1992, D2). This statement implies, of course, that since "we" had helped "you" in the past, "you" had no right to question "us" now. It is only when the oppressed internalizes and reproduces the "victim role" that they are rewarded (hooks 1995, 64).

The notion that the "other's" pain is a reflection of madness and irrationality is based on the premise that there is no logical, valid or real explanation for this pain. This belief is expressed by June Callwood in the following excerpt from one article: "It was a crazy time where people lost perspective. A wound had been opened and people were crazy with their pain. I got caught in bad timing. I was a conspicuous White woman who looked like the enemy" (Teshler 1995, A2). This quote reflects not only the perceived "irrationality" of the "other" but also emphasizes the forgiving and generous "humanity" of June Callwood herself. The concept of charity then, is a particularly handy one for dominant groups. It allows for the viewing of the "Other" as more vulnerable than their dominant selves, putting them in a position of superior "maternalism" when they decide to take up the "other's" struggle because those "others" surely cannot do it themselves.

The ways in which anti-racist organizational change was envisioned at Nellie's (and in many other feminist organizations) fit less with an "anti-racist" approach and more with a "celebrating (read: tolerating) diversity" approach. The former approach is about shifting organizational power relations whereas the latter leads only to tokenism and perhaps some change at an individual level. At Nellie's, and in many organizations like it, there has been the facile expectation that in order to address racism, what was necessary was simply to "include" Women of Colour in organizations. Some tactics used to accomplish this included the hiring (and then tokenizing) of a few Women of Colour on staff and board and various attempts to "celebrate diversity" through things like increasing the variety of spices provided for cooking. Even after the conflict at Nellie's a White member of the Board candidly remarked, "I'm pretty much a stock Torontonians. You get to a point you don't notice what colour somebody is and now I don't think that's right. You lose the variety and the sense of the wonderful mix. It's not a bad thing to recognize" (Wade Rose 1992, D2). What remains unaddressed in these kinds of efforts at organizational change is a profound analysis of the actual power relations that occur within (and outside of) feminist organizations. Who has the power to "include"? What does this "inclusion" mean? How can we deconstruct the Imperial subjectivity that maintains such strong belief systems of who White women are? And how have White women been implicated in the power relations between themselves and the "other"?

CONCLUSION

Anti-racist praxis demands many kinds of organizational changes. Among the most pivotal of these is the ongoing critical revision of the discursive frameworks that have permeated feminist practice. The idea is to continually understand and reconstruct "what happened" in order to move beyond to the commonalities from/to where we can organize. As Homi Bhabha reminds us, "[P]olitical empowerment and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause, come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective" (1994, 3). It is in this manner that the past becomes crucial. As he states, "the 'past-present' becomes part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living" (1994, 7).

In the present political and economic climate, it is imperative that we reflect on and analyze some of the painful upheavals, fragmentations, and fissures that the feminist movement in Toronto has gone through in the last decade. Such an endeavour can provide insight into the conflicts that are still plaguing feminist organizations today and may help to provide some re/solutions to some of the most painful divisions. Historical analysis, interrogation and reflection on the past must be recurrent and are needed in order to provide alternative strategies for future political organizing, and indeed, survival within the feminist movement and feminist social agencies.

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