

**Identity or Politics?**  
**Multiculturalism and the politics of inclusion in the Québécois women's movement**

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## **Identity or Politics? Multiculturalism and the politics of inclusion in the Québécois women's movement**

**Abstract:** *Feminist movements in Western countries have struggled to recognize intersectional identities and interests while preserving cohesion and solidarity. Despite a now well established theoretical critique of the inability of feminist movements to include in their analysis sources of oppression other than gender, only a few scholars have studied how the tensions between the need to recognize intersectional identities and that of creating and sustaining a collective identity play out on the ground. This paper analyzes the concrete practices of women's community organizations in Quebec with respect to intersectionality. Based on a set of semi-directive interviews with workers from women's community organizations, we analyze the particular understanding of minority women's needs and inclusion beyond these practices. We find that the practices of inclusion within organizations that reflect the multiculturalism ideology often lead to a recognition of differences, but to a depoliticization of the relations of power that create and maintain them. This leads to a fragmentation of the feminist movement through the marginalization of feminists representing minority women which understand inclusion in political terms and want demands specific to them to be put on the movement's political agenda. We conclude by explaining how women organizations are still trying to find a way out of this trade-off between the inclusion of minority women's political claims within organizations, and the risk of fragmentation at the level of the movement.*

In 1992, the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ) organized the *Forum pour un Québec féminin pluriel*. On that day, the organization's president stated that:

“The movement will no longer ignore the issue of cultural pluralism. We must achieve a real articulation between the feminist movement and women from ethnocultural communities.” (Fédération des femmes du Québec 1992)

For most activists, this event represented a turning point in the movement's history. In the following years, many organizations representing women from ethnic and cultural minorities were created. Mainstream organizations also started adopting discourses on multiple oppression and intersectionality. (Barbot 1998) New demands were put on the agenda, but many feminists feared that the recognition of diversity could threaten the movement's unity. In this context, consensus was often hard to reach and minority women contested the tendency of mainstream feminists to downplay differences in order to create a unified “We, Women”. (Lachapelle 1982; for other contexts see: Crenshaw 1989; Driedger 1996; Agnew 1996; Fraser 1996; Stone 1997) As Mukherjee puts it, “plurality and difference (had) split feminism into feminisms.” (1992)

In 2012, the FFQ organized the *États généraux de l'analyse et de l'action féministe*, a year-long program to pursue the reflection around the issues of diversity, inclusion and multiple oppressions. Thus, although the “fight against racism and discrimination specific to the women from cultural communities” has been a priority of the FFQ for many years now, the movement still finds it difficult to speak with one voice. (Fédération des femmes du Québec 2003) As an activist advocating for immigrant women explains:

“I worked for a long time in the Québécois women's movement and I was always there to try to bring together immigrant and Québécois women's demands. In the end, the result was that we could never push for demands specific to immigrant women. It is truly exceptional that you find any such demand. (...) And I consider that the feminist movement doesn't want to make an effort because it forces it to question itself. Now, an effort still needs to be done on that side. And I believe that this effort should come from those who hold the power. And those who have the power in the feminist movement today are not immigrant women.”

Hence, there is a sense that, despite efforts, and despite the creation of organizations dedicated to women from ethno-cultural communities, the Québécois women's movement has not developed practices that truly reflect the principle of inclusion it has been defending for two decades. Is the inclusion of intersectional identities and interests an impossible challenge for feminist movements? The critique of the inability of feminist movements to take into account intersectionality runs deep in the feminist literature. Waves of critique, from Black feminist theory (hooks 1981; Collins 1990; Carby 1998), from post-colonial theory (Mohanty 1988) and from intersectionality theory (Crenshaw 1989; Yuval-Davis 2006; Bannerji 1996; 2000; Razack 1998;

Townsend-Bell 2011; Weldon 2006a; 2006b) have offered hard questions rather than easy solutions for movements' politics and strategy. Indeed, the challenge of including intersectional identities is, for activist, a collective action problem: How to combine potentially conflicting interests in a common social movement? How can activists recognize a variety of identities and still ensure identification, solidarity and collective participation in a single movement? Divisive issues of prioritization may arise, and the prominence of gender identity which used to form the basis of political solidarity might be shattered (Fraser 1996). Thus, the question of inclusion and intersectionality is far from new for the feminist movement. However, only a few scholars have studied how these tensions play out on the ground, i.e. how feminist organizations with diverse memberships work to resolve them in order to create a strong collective identity, or, conversely, how intersectional identities and interests might get marginalized in organizations, even despite formal commitments in favour of inclusion (Townsend-Bell 2011, Bassel 2010, Strolovitch 2007, Lépinard 2007; Ward 2008).

In this paper, we turn our attention to feminist organizations' practices with respect to intersectionality. We study the strategies, practices and identity-narratives developed by women's community organizations in Quebec to respond to the demands of minority women for inclusion while maintaining cohesion and common identity within organizations and, more broadly within the movement. First, we review how social movement and feminist movement scholars have conceptualized the question of the inclusion of differences in new social movements. Then, we sketch the composition and transformation of the Québécois women's movement over the past two decades in response to the demand for representation and inclusion of minority women's needs and identities. Next we describe more specifically how workers in women community organizations adapt their day-to-day practices in order to respond to these needs. We ask how they make sense of the particular conditions of women situated at the intersection of different axes of oppression and take into account their needs in their political platforms, and how they resolve potential tensions between minority women's specific interests and the priority given to the defense of gender equality.

This question is particularly interesting in Canada where members of cultural communities have the right to be recognized as such and to preserve their culture and identity. (Taylor 1992; Bannerji 1996; 2000) In fact, the official policy of multiculturalism has legitimized and fostered ethnocultural mobilization by providing a symbolic recognition of diversity. (Breton 1986; Bloemraad 2006a; 2006b; Kobayashi 2008) It has also legitimized the discourse of minority women criticizing the mainstream women's movement for picturing women in a way that describe best its largely white, middle-class and straight leadership. (Lachappelle 1982; Driedger 1996; Agnew 1996; Stone 1997) Thus, we could believe that the multiculturalism ideology has provided feminists with the necessary symbolic, political and legal tools to fight against discrimination based on categories other than gender. However, even though section 27 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Liberties which specifies that: "the Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians" is considered by many to be one of the most advanced liberal response for the protection of minority rights (Bloemraad 2006a; 2006b), its individualistic approach might not provide feminists with a language favorable to the inclusion of minority groups. In fact, we argue that the multiculturalist

framework encourages an approach to diversity that recognizes differences while depoliticizing the power relations which produce these differences and preventing minority groups from challenging them.

### **1. Inclusion or Division? Recognizing difference in identity-based social movements**

Social movement scholars have long acknowledged the difficulty of building solidarity among a diverse group. (Einwohner, Reger and Myers 2008). In fact, the very work of new social movements often consists in creating a common collective identity and common frames for action (Gamson 1992; Taylor and Whittier 1992; Rupp and Taylor 1999; Benford and Snow 2000). While some have argued that SMOs might successfully sustain a collective identity among a diverse membership (Ferree and Martin 1995; Poster 1995; Reger 2002; Staggenborg 2002; Enns 1993); others cast doubt on this possibility. (Strolovitch 2006; 2007; Ward 2008) Because women have multiple, intersecting and sometimes conflicting identities, this task has proven particularly challenging for feminist groups. (Davis 1996; Dobrowolsky 2000; 2008) However, the issue of inclusivity cannot be avoided. Because their failure to recognize different sources of oppression inevitably fosters crisis of legitimacy, single-identity movements are usually ineffective in the long run. (hooks 1981; Combahee River Collective 1983; King 1988; Robnett 1996; Fraser 1996; Collins 1998; Kurtz 2002; Weldon 2006a; 2006b).

This difficulty at the theoretical level, that intersectional theory has taken as its main task to resolve (Crenshaw 1989, Hancock, 2007a; 2007b; Weldon 2006a; 2006b) translates into practice at the level of organizations. So far the literature has identified a few factors that might make a movement more inclusive of intersectional identities and interests. In her study of Uruguayan feminist organizations, Townsend-Bell has argued that disagreements over the relative importance of different axis of domination could render collaboration impossible (2011). Focussing on transnational coalitions, Weldon finds that three factors make the elaboration of a truly inclusive feminist coalition more likely: descriptive representation, separate organizations for minority women and the institutionalization of dissent (Weldon 2006b). Whereas Weldon and Townsend-Bell mostly focus on failed or successful coalition work as the litmus test for inclusion of intersectional issues and identities in a movement's political platform, Strolovitch focuses on the level of organizations. She identifies four types of strategy vis-à-vis intersectional groups: an organization might advocate for policies that affect all its membership (universal issues) or a majority of it (majority issues) or focus on advantaged or disadvantaged subgroups. She shows that most of the time, organizations frame their priorities claiming to represent the interests of a majority. However, this strategy often ends-up privileging advantaged subgroups. In order for an organization to promote the concerns of disadvantaged subgroups, it must engage in *affirmative advocacy*, which is more likely when minority members are represented in a participatory decision-making structure. (Strolovitch 2006; 2007).

So far, therefore, the literature on the practices of intersectionality measures "inclusion" by evaluating to what extent claims from intersectional organizations or groups get included on the political agenda of a coalition or organization. It has also stressed the importance of factors *internal* to social movements' coalitions and

organizations such as the descriptive representation of minority members<sup>1</sup>. Building on this emerging research, we propose to nuance the understanding of *inclusion* and *intersectional practice*.

Indeed, by stating that including minority women's specific claims on a coalition's platform is the main way of including their interests and practicing intersectionality, studies of intersectional praxis so far assume that there is only one way to include. We want to challenge this assumption and argue that social actors might define inclusion differently and practice different types of (what they think is) inclusion of minority women's claims and identities. There might also be debates and controversies among participants about the best form of inclusion. So, to open-up the definition of inclusion, we rely on Nancy Fraser's concept of a "politics of needs" (1987). We argue that the debates over the best way to concretely take into account the identities and interests of intersectional groups can be understood as debates between different logics of needs definition. Thus, they usually revolve around the questions of on what basis should women's needs be understood (gender, ethnicity, immigration status, etc.) and who can legitimately define them. This means that being attentive to the political needs or identities of women situated at the intersection of various axes of power can take several forms. In some cases, it might lead to the politicization of other relationships than gender and the inclusion of new political priorities on a movement's agenda, while in other cases it might mean responding to needs perceived as culturally specific in the relation of service providing which might lead to a depoliticization of intersectionality.

Second, we argue that practices of intersectionality also depend on factors *exterior* to movements and organizations. Following Fraser's argument, the state "pre-empts the power to define and satisfy people's needs" which can be challenged by social movements. (1987, 115) However, as part of the para-bureaucratic structure through which the state's particular logic of needs definition is maintained, women's community organizations' capacity to propose new needs interpretation is limited. As publicly funded service providers, women's organizations are part of the "shadow state" (Wolch 1990), which means that their encounters with women might be considered as "a kind of policy delivery" (Lipsky 1980; Bhuyan 2012). Thus, they often contribute in reinforcing the state's schemes of interpretation. However, they might also resist policy directives, but at the risk of being unable to attract funding. (Breton 1986). Whether they decide to conform or resist to the state's logic of needs definition has major consequences on their capacity to secure an access to resources for minority women and to challenge the system of power relations that marginalize them. In the context of the Québécois women's movement, which has been enrolled in the federal and provincial state's political project of multiculturalism, the influence of the state in needs definition is particularly visible in the way public policies for the inclusion of ethnic minorities impose frames and practices to women's community organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> Weldon notes however that external factors also matter to some extent: political opportunities or institutional support may facilitate cooperation, but are not sufficient to produce it. (2006b)

## 2. Women's community organizations in Quebec

During the 1980s and 1990s, many community organizations representing women from different ethnic and cultural groups were created. This willingness of women community-based associations to organize along ethnic lines is mainly a reaction to governmental incentives; supporting ethnic organizations is part of the Canadian official policy of multiculturalism as it was announced in 1971 and reaffirmed in the Multiculturalism Act of 1988. (Lanphier and Lukomskyj 1994) Thus, women's and other ethnic organizations have reorganized in response to the financial and symbolic recognition of diversity provided by this policy in a process of structured mobilization. (Bloemraad 2006a; 2006b) The governmental legitimization of ethnic mobilization also pushed the women's movement to include these new organizations while the development of black and post-colonial feminisms provided the language and analysis they needed to do so. (Belleau 1996) These processes were further reinforced by the increase in the size and diversity of the immigrant population (Knowles 1997) and by the new pre-eminence of human rights discourses propagated by the student and civil rights movements and soon adopted by ethnic groups (Kobayashi 2008; Ku 2009).

The 1980s and 1990s were also characterized by major cuts in the federal government's funding to women organizations and in the welfare state (Cossman and Fudge 2002; Dobrowolsky 2004; 2008) and the beginning of a backlash against feminism. (Faludi 1992; Brodie 1995; Bashevkin 1998; 2002). As the feminist movement's relationship with the state became increasingly tensed (Rankin and Vickers 2001), many women organizations started to put aside advocacy activities and to focus more on the provision of services in order to compensate for the negative impacts of the neoliberal policies on women's socio-economic conditions (Dobrowolsky 2008) Today, a majority of community organizations are multi-task, providing services, doing advocacy work and engaging in more traditional types of collective action.

Most women's community organizations receive funding from the provincial government through the *Fonds d'aide à l'action communautaire autonome*. This program funds grassroots organizations devoted to protecting the rights of excluded groups, including women and ethnic minorities. In 2000, it provided them with an average annual subvention of 20 000\$. (White 2001). Many women's community organizations also receive funding from the three levels of government for the provision of integration services. (Beyene et al 1996; Richmond 1996; Richmond and Shields 2005).

Our research relies mainly on a set of semi-directive interviews conducted in 2010 and 2011 with workers from 22 women community organizations situated in Montreal. A third of our sample is composed of general women organizations, another of organizations targeting immigrants or minority women in a general manner and the last third includes organizations representing a specific ethnic, cultural or religious group. Interviews were also conducted with some key players in the feminist movement.

From these 22 organizations, 20 do advocacy work on a regular basis, 18 engage in collective action such as demonstrations and disruptive protest, 20 have popular education programs and all of them provide services, including integration services for 20 of them. The services provided are very diverse and include psycho-social intervention, language courses, legal aid, interpreter services, social activities, computer classes, day

care, employment and accommodation research support, free meals, health information, referrals services, citizenship training and intercultural activities.

The general women organizations tend to be older and more established and to have a bigger membership and more financial resources than the others. Because they are situated in Montreal where almost a fifth of the population is foreign-born (Canada 2005), they all have a diverse membership. Immigrant and ethnic –based organizations tend to have a staff reflecting the ethnic composition of their membership, which is not necessarily the case for mainstream organizations.

Despite broad inclusive coalitions in which most women’s organizations participate and a very active umbrella organization (the FFQ), in the last years, a few issues in which gender equality and minority rights were seemingly in contradiction have revealed the tensions arising about intersectionality. The conflict over bill 94, a proposition of law that would forbid individuals from wearing religious symbols inside public institutions, received intense Media coverage. While some argued that it would limit women’s liberty of religion, others saw the possibility of banning the Muslim veil which they believe is a symbol of gender oppression. (Baines 2010; Conseil du statut de la femme 2010) In 2005, the debate around the potential benefits and dangers of allowing religious tribunals to take a stand on issues of family law in Ontario provoked a vehement reaction among Quebecois feminists. (Macklin 2005; Bakht 2007; Razack 2007; Emon 2008; Lépinard 2010)

Other issues have attracted less public attention. Agnew and Singh for instance have both discussed women’s community organizations’ disagreements over the benefits and consequences of increased police intervention in cases of domestic violence. (Agnew 1996; Singh 2010) While some feminists see police intervention as an efficient tool to fight violence against women, native and women of colour organizations expressed reservations over making more powerful an institution known for its racism. These examples reflect the challenge faced by feminist groups when trying to advocate for gender equality while taking into account the demands of minority women for which issues such as racism might be the priority.

### **3. Framing Women’s needs: the influence of official Multiculturalism**

As we mentioned, most mainstream women’s organizations in Montreal are multicultural. Thus, they have developed in the last thirty years new programs and services targeted specifically at minority women. For the women that we interviewed, this seemed like the logical way to respond to their needs.<sup>2</sup> For example, Isabelle, coordinator of a satellite association working in the domain of domestic violence explains that:

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<sup>2</sup> Although this way of responding to diversity might seem logical in the Canadian context, it might not be the case in all societies with important immigrant populations, and particularly for women’s associations which need to create and preserve a central identity based on gender. For instance, Lépinard has argued that French feminist organizations often reject the approach consisting of offering ethnic-based services, preferring to focus on commonalities between women in order not to challenge the collective identity. Thus, these organizations privilege a “gender-first approach”, i.e. responding to minority women’s demands by translating them into universalistic terms and including in their political agendas only issues relevant to *all* women. (2007; 2011)



“In Montreal, *of course*, we are situated in a multicultural milieu, so one of our first priorities is the question of screening and adapting intervention to the realities of ethno-cultural communities.”

In Quebec, providing “ethnically-adapted services” is a common practice in many domains of public policy. Describing the health care system, McAll, Tremblay and Le Goff have argued that the policy of multiculturalism has fostered a new culture of: “rethinking society according to cultural differences and institutions according to these same differences.” (1997, 22) The ability of society to be inclusive towards ethnic and cultural groups is a major concern for public institutions<sup>3</sup>.

This institutionalization of the multiculturalist ideology is apparent in the way many governmental agencies have reorganized in the last thirty years. Since the 1980s, professionals from different fields such as social services, psychology, law, health and education, have developed diversity management practices based on what they call the “intercultural approach.”(Gagnon 2011; Roy, Legault and Rachédi 2008) The 1990s have seen the proliferation of researches on the accessibility to ethnocultural communities of social and health (Bibeau 1987; Cohen-Émerique 1999; McAll, Tremblay and Le Goff 1997; Battaglini et al 2007), mental health (Boulanger and Baubnan 2007; Cohen-Émerique 1993) and familial mediation services (Blanchard 1999), youth centers (Chiasson-Lavoie et al 1992; Chiasson-Lavoie and Roc 2000) and women shelters (Bhuyan 2012). Colleges and university programs focussing on immigration and interethnic relations and formations on intercultural communication within institutions have also multiplied. (El-Hage 2007)

Another response to diversity, in line with the idea that ethnic communities have specific needs, is the creation of ethnic-based organizations. As previously mentioned, grassroots organizations of women from ethnocultural communities have multiplied in Quebec since the 1980s. When asked why their organization was created, women from these organizations consistently affirmed that the founders had noticed a need “in the community” or that they “mobilized around a need”. Describing the idea beyond the creation of an Italian women’s center, the actual director explains:

“I believe that each women in that group were immigrants...from Italy, of course...that noticed that there was a need within the Italian community, among women... a need for integration...of better integrating the *Québécois* society.”

Similarly, explaining the creation of an organization devoted to women from South-Asia, a social worker states:

“There were many women who came to Canada at the time that were very isolated. (...) So they started a sisterhood. (...) Because of the various languages and cultures, each community will go working for each country and what we see is ... because of the languages and the cultures,

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<sup>3</sup> A good example of this pervasive concern is the appointment, in 2007, of the Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (often called Bouchard-Taylor commission) by Québécois Premier Jean Charest in order to propose guidelines for public services on this issue.

people can come and talk and if there is anything they need to know... so the language and the culture plays a large role in our services.”

Both these examples reflect the politics of understanding society, and women needs, in terms of communities. In some cases, the “need in the community” was associated to an inaccessibility of existing resources. Julie, a social worker in her twenties, explains how the Greek organization for which she works was created:

“At the beginning, the main objective was to provide information to ethno-cultural communities on the issue of domestic violence because the founders had observed that many women, particularly in the Greek community, were not comfortable with the idea of asking for help, especially in Québécois resources.”

Cassandra, the director of a center providing services to women with young children, tells a similar story:

“So when it was originally formed, the reason for that was because... at the beginning it was through the CLSC<sup>4</sup>...the nurses observing that...a lot of young black mothers were having children, but they were not taking advantage of the resources that were there. So they felt that they were in isolation. So how to get them out of isolation? They figured if we start a program, may be the person who talks has the same origin, may be it will be easier for them to relate, to feel more comfortable.”

Many interviewees shared similar stories about existing services which were not “accessible.” Most of them couldn’t explain the precise causes of this inaccessibility, but recalled having heard women telling how they felt unwelcomed in public institutions or other women organizations.

In these ethnic-based associations, providing ethnically-adapted intervention often means that women are referred to workers from the same community. The reason for this is that cultural proximity is believed to facilitate the relation between service-provider and –recipient, fostering a better understanding which makes intervention more efficient. Like these workers explain:

“There is a certain comprehension of how it works...the traditions in the family...how they work. We understand how...We understand the culture. We understand how it happens in our families. When you explain something to someone who has the same culture, who has the same beliefs, who has a family with the same practices...I think you feel like you are not being judged. I think that’s what it is...”

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<sup>4</sup> CLSCs are local centers of communitarian services. They are public institutions that offer free health and social services

“When it comes to new comers, I believe that if the person is from the same culture, it’s gonna be easier. They trust you more easily. They are more open.”

Similarly to these practitioners’ insights, scholars have argued that intervention by an individual who shares an ethnic background with his client might minimize the impact of Eurocentric biases (Reitz 1995; Das Gupta 1999; Weinfeld 1999), counter racism and be more efficient. (Beyene et al 1996) These women who are considered both part of the host society and of a minority ethnic community and as such, better able to bridge the two, are often called “native informants.” (Spivak 1988; Wood 2001) They can foster immigrant integration by acting as mediators between them and the host society (Lemercier 2009) and having the knowledge of both cultures and an experience of oppression, they can communicate their community’s needs to the state. (Narayan 1988)

We could be tempted to think that ethnic-based organizations have very different ways of defining the needs of minority women when compared to mainstream multicultural associations which were not created to serve a specific ethno-cultural community. A closer look at their practices reveals a different story. Workers from mainstream and ethnic-based organizations very often describe their intervention practices as being “ethnically- or culturally-adapted”. In mainstream organizations, that often means that “intercultural intervention” is provided. In these cases, when the intervention worker and her client are from different communities, the intervention must be “culturally sensitive”, taking into account cultural values and understandings. According to Mario Bélanger: “intercultural social work is confined to ethnic differences between the social worker and some of her clients”, differences that are imputed to contrasted value systems. (2002) Here again, practices inside women’s organizations mirror those put in place in public services or other community organizations.

The practices related to the intercultural approach and those relying on cultural proximity reflect a similar way of understanding cultural difference, i.e. a *multiculturalist* frame of analysis and praxis. In a multiculturalist society, it is believed that because cultural differences are fundamental, they are associated with particular needs and therefore have to be addressed by providing ethnically-adapted services. This approach to diversity takes as a given that contacts between people of different origins are characterized by incomprehension and apprehension. Because they think, behave and communicate in different ways, intervention is highly complicated. To be efficient, it has to be performed by someone trained to “understand” cultural differences or by someone from the same cultural background who naturally understands. In both cases, cultural difference is a fundamental given.

Sensitive to cultural identities, these practices which are akin to a form of diversity management can nevertheless be problematic because they tend to collapse “questions of power and structure into questions of cultural understanding and interpersonal civility.” (Ward 2008) Moreover, in this framework, ethno-cultural communities are often perceived as being homogenous and as having specific, almost immutable characteristics. Describing why social workers who are not part of the Jewish community might feel badly equipped to intervene with Jewish women, Joyce explains:

“Well one reason, for sure... These communities are very, very... it is very particular what their beliefs are...their identity...how they are perceived. They are mostly cases who were very, very, very isolated. So it is not in their nature to come share their problems with other people. And also, they are not people who are going to mix with others who are not from their community.”

The hesitance of sharing personal experiences is seen as a cultural trait rather than as a personality one or as the result of a social situation of marginalization. Culture here is described in a very essentialist way; it is not “natural” for people from that community to talk about their personal lives. As Leti Volpp as argued, this reflects a tendency of attributing a cultural cause to problematic behaviors in people of a different origin. (2000; 2001) By picturing individuals’ culture as a defining trait, this perspective denies human agency and obscures the fact that individuals respond in different ways to cultural norms. (Phillips 2007)

Within this multiculturalist approach, “diversity is seen as a condition of human existence rather than as the effect of an enunciation of difference that constitutes hierarchies and asymmetries of power.” (Scott 1995) Hence, being inclusive means taking into account differences by providing services targeted specifically at minority women, within their community or not. This particular logic of needs interpretation has several consequences for minority women.

First, because the inaccessibility of public services is understood as a consequence of differences inherent to ethno-cultural communities rather than as a result of asymmetries of power, women organizations advocate for more resources to develop ethnically-adapted services. Thus, to legitimize their own existence, they have an incentive to avoid addressing the issue of the inclusivity of public services, and more generally to downplay that of the power relations fostering this “non-accessibility” of resources. Similarly, ethnic-based organizations often avoid the issue of inclusivity within mainstream feminist associations and that of power relations within the feminist movement. This tendency of hiding power relations and leaving them unchallenged is a consequence of practices fostered by multiculturalism that has been criticized by many scholars. (Davis 1996; Gordon and Newfield 1996; Lowe 1996; Bannerji 1996; 2000; Dhamoon 2009; Dhamoon and Abu-Laban 2009)

Second, the creation of ethnic-based organizations reinforces the idea that minority women are better able to serve themselves. (Reitz 1995; Beyene et al 1996; Das Gupta 1999; Weinfeld 1999; Ku 2009) Thus, public institutions often direct immigrant women to these organizations that are presumed to be more capable to address their particular needs, which creates tensions. (Bibeau 1987) Community organizations employees often feel that their work is not respected and that they are considered like public institution’s subcontractors. Évelyne, employee in a women’s center, describes a frustration that she shares with many other intervention workers:

“So let me remind you that the Québécois minister of health and social services has declared that we (community organizations) do a pretty good job, and very cheap too! That was all over YouTube... We just thought...What??? Pretty good job and very cheap too! So if tomorrow

morning all community organizations just stop and shut the doors...24h and it's gonna hurt!"

The situation described by Évelyne is not specific to women organizations. Many advocacy groups have condemned this shift from a partnership with the state during the years following the adoption of the Charter to an accountability relationship in the neoliberal era. (Phillips and Graham 2000; Brock 2002; Smith 2005; Kobayashi 2008)

Third, the practices developed by community organizations to respond to diversity also have an impact on women's identity. By targeting services at particular communities, organizations encourage women to think of themselves in ethnic terms. Relaying the official discourse, they remind immigrant women that they are qualitatively different and that they therefore have particular needs. As many scholars have argued, by acknowledging differences and proclaiming the right of individuals to be recognized as members of an ethnic group, multiculturalism reifies these differences which come to be perceived as characteristics that an individual can't escape. This process by which individuals come to be perceived first as members of an ethnic group "strips subjects of their uniqueness and supplants individuation with abstraction" (Haney López 2006, 91)

Despite the consequences of their inclusion practices for immigrant women, community organizations still make it possible for them to get access to much needed resources. Moreover, they are important sources of information, providing immigrant women with the knowledge and support they need to make their rights respected. (Bhuyan 2012; Nankoni 2000) As Basok has argued, the inability of immigrants to access this knowledge is often what perpetrates their social exclusion. (2004) Also, Bhuyan has argued that women working in community organizations might be conscious of the risk they take by claiming to be the voice of their community, choosing to ask for more resources while knowing that doing so, they participate in the essentializing of differences. (Yue 2008; Ku 2009) Finally, scholars often affirm that minority groups need to organize in order to put their demands on the political agenda and ameliorate their condition and that an efficient organization requires the development of a collective identity based on the idea that they share particular needs. (King 1988; Robnett 1996; Collins 1998; Kurtz 2002)

#### **4. The inclusion trade-off: Identity, not politics**

Women's movements in Western countries have been trying to create a unified collective identity while increasingly taking into account, at least rhetorically, minority women's specific needs. This incredibly hard task of building solidarity among members of a heterogeneous group requires a lot of identity work. (Einwohner, Reger & Myers 2008) In order for women community organizations in Quebec to preserve their internal cohesion and to be inclusive, i.e. to make sure that every woman feels welcomed, they need to avoid potential sources of tension. Thus, minority women, which are considered as having the right to be recognized as members of an ethnic group (Taylor 1992), are encouraged to claim their identity in a way that doesn't threaten the cohesion of the

organization and at a global level, that of the feminist movement. Organizations thus often obscure the political aspects of ethnicity, relegating it to the domain of culture. In this context, diversity is often equated with cultural traditions, holidays, food and clothing.

When asked about the consequences of having a diverse membership in their organizations, workers often talk about how women enjoy sharing their cultural traditions. For example, Cassandra explains that:

“I would prefer to say that diversity is better because if it's just all from the same, you don't learn as much. (...) I think that diversity is really great because...like when we prepare our meal...We have somebody from Bangladesh who is gonna prepare a chicken a different way than somebody for the West-Indies would prepare a chicken. And they use a different kind of spice... ‘What kind of spice is that? Where do you get this? How do you know?’ They might buy a vegetable and prepare it this way as opposed to this and it's interesting what you learn.”

Intercultural activities such as sharing a meal, discussing traditions or watching a foreign movie aim at bringing women of different cultures together so that they can learn to appreciate their differences. Because tensions between women from different groups are attributed to cultural incomprehension instead of being understood as reflecting larger group conflicts, these contacts should foster understanding, tolerance and integration.

Focusing on non-political aspects of cultural differences preserves cohesion inside organizations. For this reason, they avoid “political” topics that could foster intergroup tensions, don't take a stand on them in the public sphere, and don't make them part of their political platforms. For example, when asked about their position on bill 94 (a law that would prohibit employees and service receivers to wear religious symbols in public institutions), a much mediatized topic, the coordinator of a women's center explains:

"When you said: Wearing religious symbols...I just thought: Aaaaaaaaaaahhh! Have we heard about it? Yes. Did we take a stand? No. Why not? Because it is very, very complicated. It's the topic...When we start on these topics, everybody becomes a little exasperated. It is not easy...and we have women who come here wearing the veil. (...) We haven't taken up a position. Because it's difficult...Because we have women who come from everywhere... The women's commentaries... the opinions are on both extremes. (...) And every time they come out with something in the newspaper, we bring that here and sometimes we yell. Why the hell are they coming back on that topic? ”

Interestingly, the coordinator of a Muslim women's center makes a very similar comment, thereby undermining the assumption that ethnic-based organizations might have specific claims in this type of political conflict pitting “women's rights” against the recognition of cultural or religious difference:

“No. Because we are known as a Muslim women’s center, often we get calls from the radio and the press... We just don’t find that it is our place to have a political opinion about it. It’s not part of our mandate. (...) The veil is something that is religious. So for the same reason, even between us three who work here, we have so varied opinions about it... We respect everyone's belief, so that's why we are not gonna make a stand on it.”

Although these political issues might be important to some minority women, community organizations prefer not to address them because they are potentially divisive, even within supposedly homogeneous ethnic communities. Hence, in both cases, being inclusive is first understood as avoiding conflicts. This reflects Claire Jean Kim’s argument that multicultural practices: “discourage people from naming and addressing intergroup tensions.” (2004)

This conception of inclusion also influences intervention practices. In the face of cultural differences, the approach employed by workers in women’s organizations very often consists in considering the woman as “the expert” of her situation, letting her define her needs. Intervention workers must therefore avoid telling women what they think she should do and imposing their own cultural norms. These practices associated with the feminist intervention approach aim at empowering women by making them take control of their lives, but also at ensuring inclusion by making sure women will not be encouraged to behave in ways that would contradict their cultural values. (Corbeil and Marchand 2010) As social-worker Julie explains:

“We think of ourselves as feminists because we work on the basis of the woman’s needs. And we won’t impose her anything. The woman, we consider that it is her responsibility to present us her options. We facilitate her decision-making process by asking questions, by highlighting certain realities, but we will never imply that she should do this or that. Never. It is not our place to decide for her.”

In this approach, although a woman’s specific needs might be perceived as associated to her ethnic belonging, the solutions that are proposed to her are individualized. Cultural differences must be accepted, not questioned, and the intervention must adapt to them. This particular way of responding to individual needs leads to a discourse focussing on equality of opportunity that doesn’t encourage women to organize and advocate for minority groups rights. Because inclusivity is addressed at an individual level, the question of group inclusion is avoided. Thus, when we asked about the priorities for immigrant women, the most frequent responses were child care, education accessibility and more social welfare provisions, hence typical feminist claims that are not limited to minority women. Surprisingly, the issue of discrimination based on ethnicity, religion or race was very seldom mentioned. This is very surprising considering the fact that statistics consistently show that certain immigrant groups experience more difficulties to enter the labor market, independently of their level of education and language proficiency. (Ornstein 2000, Li 2003, Shields 2003, Teelucksingh & Galabuzi 2005) When asked if immigrant women might face discrimination in the labor market, two social workers responded:

"No. Not necessarily. That's not the first concern. And the employer, in fact, he is just afraid to deal with a new-comer because... Will he arrive on time? Will he need to pray five times a day inside the firm?"

"Well we are all like that, you know... we have experiences... if you have a Morocco boyfriend and it didn't end well, you're gonna have stereotypes on them, you know. Firms... it's the same thing. So if it goes well, they want more people from this nationality. If it doesn't go well, they don't ever want to hear about it. So we just need to relativize."

This kind of response was pretty common. Here again, tensions between people of different origins are perceived as being the result of incomprehension rather than the consequences of asymmetries of power in society. Since the difficulties faced by minority women on the labor market and in other spheres of their life are seen primarily as being the result of a lack of resources or the consequence of cultural incomprehension, community organizations include in their political platforms mostly general demands, i.e. demands that might be of interest for every women, reflecting the process already described by Strolovitch, that organizations' leaderships tend to privilege issues which impact a majority of the membership. (2007) The idea is that although minority women face more barriers than others, they could overcome them if they were given the necessary resources. This political claim does not imply that the women's movement should be structured as it is, with ethno-specific organizations to defend their interests. Mainstream, immigrant and ethnic-based organizations alike very often share this approach to diversity which leads to a politicization of ethnic identities and a depoliticization of diversity issues that might lead to a fragmentation of the women's movement that the same approach aimed at avoiding.

### **5. The inclusion trade-off: Bringing politics back in at the risk of fragmentation**

The "inclusion" practices consisting of responding to the particular needs of minority women in an individualized manner, avoiding divisive political issues and focussing on cultural dimensions of ethnicity might preserve cohesion within organizations, but foster tensions at the movement's level, i.e. between women organizations. Hence, there seems to be a trade-off between inclusivity at the organizations level and at the movement level or between the inclusion of individuals and that of groups.

Although community organizations are committed to including women of diverse origins, this has only led them in a few rare occasions to reshape their political agendas to include demands aimed at addressing the issue of inequalities between women, a situation that certain feminists advocating for minority women strongly denounce. These feminists understand inclusion in political terms/ frame it as a political issue and feel that they are not included in the women's movement because their specific interests aren't recognized. While telling the story of its foundation, the coordinator of an association of Filipino women explains:



“The idea is to have...to be visible. For our groups to be visible. For example, the issue of domestic workers, the issue of the minimum wage were not supported by the main feminist organizations. (...) The idea was to be out and present what our problems are because nobody else will talk about them except us.”

Similarly, Myriam, an advocate of immigrant women’s rights, argues:

“If you don’t mention gender oppression, nothing’s right. There it is. I think I said everything. But I am interested in colonial or neo-colonial oppression because it is fundamental in the situation in which immigrant and racialized women are today. (...) The big problem here is that inside the feminist movement, we don’t recognize inequalities between women. We don’t want to see them. So as long as it will be like that, we won’t be able to work together. And it won’t be possible to do something in common.”

However, these organizations are far from representing the typical ethnic-based organization; only a few adopt this discourse on the necessity of recognizing the specific political interests of minority groups. In these cases, ethnic/immigrant identity is politicized rather than culturalized, and the politics of needs becomes a more contentious politics of equality and inclusion, which challenges power relations in society as well as inside the women’s movement. These organizations often adopt an anti-capitalist perspective and thus work on issues that might not be perceived as typical “feminist issues” such as supporting the Palestine national liberation movement or taking a stand against the Iraq war. Because they often represent third-world women, they carry demands related to immigration policies and often build international alliances.

These organizations which represent minority women and have alternative political platforms do it at a cost; they tend to be isolated from other women organizations and have difficulties in attracting funding. However, in the context of the Women World’s March (WWM) in 2000, they have gained some success in having their demands carried by the feminist movement through the FFQ. The FFQ’s involvement in the WWM and the need to respond to the critiques of women from the South has pushed the FFQ to widen its demands also at home, and to add to its political platforms, at the demand of ethnic-based organizations which were also very active in the international coalition, new issues related to immigration policies, the conditions of domestic workers and that of women with precarious statuses. (Giraud 2001; Dufour and Giraud 2007; Dufour and Goyer 2009) However, some minority women organizations argue that these demands haven’t been carried with a lot of conviction in the years following the WWM.

Advocates of minority women’s rights also denounce the power relations within the feminist movement, as well as the fact that although women community organizations usually have very diverse memberships, minority women still form only a small proportion of the employees and an even smaller proportion of the leadership and are often concentrated in jobs related to diversity management. (Table des groupes de femmes de Montréal 2010) Myriam explains:

“Just look at representation inside the Québécois women’s movement. Where are immigrant women in the feminist movement? They are very weakly represented. And when they work, they are a minority and even more, very often, we question their competence, their knowledge.”

The question which has arisen in this context is that of political inclusion in the movement, both at the level of descriptive and substantive representation. However, some progress, at least at the rhetorical level, has been made, as an officer from an umbrella organization suggests:

The big challenge that we are facing is to adapt the ways in which we think, understand and analyze the problems posed [by diversity]...hence the intersectional perspective. So the issue is not to say: I am able to welcome someone who needs my services. The issue is to know how, in the strategy, in the ways we take diversity into account, in the political integration of different issues...How do we do this? How do we make sure that when we study an issue, we haven’t forgotten half the women? How to do an analysis that not only highlights common fights, because there are some...It’s the basis of the women’s movement and that hasn’t changed with diversity... To be able to address specificities...because it’s not true that to be a black woman born in Quebec, a woman with a precarious status, to be a temporary worker, is the same.”

In this case, the vocabulary of intersectionality enables a twofold rationale: to talk about differences without depoliticizing them, and at the same time to avoid what is perceived as the risk of fragmentation of the movement. Intersectionality seems to offer some form of way out of the “trade-off” we have identified between recognizing inequalities between women and still preserving some form of unity for the movement.

However, some of the activists we interviewed were not so optimistic. They feared that carrying demands for particular communities might reinforce inequalities among women instead of diminishing them, some communities being more able than others to make their voices heard. Finally, taking positions on issues related to cultural practices such as the veil would necessarily alienate a part of their clientele. In this context, women organizations are still struggling to find a way of reconciling individual and group inclusion.

## **Conclusion**

Scholars have long recognized the challenge that represents the inclusion of intersectional identities and interests in social movements and in feminist movements in particular. Thus, despite a commitment to inclusivity, feminist movements in Western countries have struggled to take into account sources of oppression other than gender in their analysis and political agendas, while ensuring cohesion and solidarity.

In this article, we have observed the concrete practices of intersectionality developed in the last thirty years by women's community organizations in Quebec to conform to a new commitment to the inclusion of minority women. First, we have argued, following Nancy Fraser's concept of a politics of needs, that there are different ways in which women organizations understand and define minority women's needs and thus, inclusion. Then, we explained that mainstream as well as immigrant and ethnic-based women's organizations often respond to minority women's needs by providing ethnically-adapted services and "include" them by encouraging them to claim their ethnicity, understood in cultural terms, in a way that won't foster tensions among women. These understanding and practices that reflect the dominant multiculturalism ideology lead to the recognition of diversity, but to a depoliticization of the power relations that create and maintain differences between groups. Thus, these organizations tend to avoid taking a stand on potentially divisive issues, and to respond to minority women's needs in an individualized manner. Hence, they include in their political agendas mostly demands that are of interest to all women and don't encourage minority women to organize and to make demands aimed at addressing their specific needs. To paraphrase Ward's analysis of inclusion in the gay rights movement: "the rhetorical focus on diversity (...) makes it difficult for excluded groups to identify and challenge inequality at the movement level and remains predicated on the enduring notion that at least some aspect of the gay [in our case woman] experience is universal." (2008)

An exception to this rule is illustrated by organizations that understand ethnicity and inclusion in political and collective terms and believe in the need to challenge the power relations relating to race, ethnicity or migration, in society as well as inside the women's movement. Thus, the movement is divided between the defenders of these different approaches to diversity. Because they seem to be hardly reconcilable, we have argued that there is a trade-off between the inclusion of individuals inside women's organizations and that of minority groups at the level of the movement. However, some organizations have started to use the language of intersectionality as a way to recognize diversity without depoliticizing relations between groups. Thus, it might provide the feminist movement with a form of compass to navigate these troubled waters, by recognizing intersectional identities and interests while still avoiding fragmentation.

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