

Wa(i)ving Solidarity

Feminist Activists Confronting Backlash

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Cet article lance un défi aux privilégiées du post-féminisme et plaide pour un militantisme collectiviste, féministe et critique. Les auteures examinent trois organismes féministes connus pour leur solidarité, le CNA (le Comité national d'action), les syndicats et le projet Miss G. Ce sont des sites qui peuvent affronter le ressac féministe et le sentiment anti-syndical qui prévalent en dépit du programme néolibéral.

Popular media and social and political institutions insist that feminism is in crisis. This crisis fixes feminism as passé, at a standstill, without movement. Rather than act as feminists, women are instructed to watch, to discuss, to critique, and to ignore the need for social change. While (some) women continue to engage in what is staged as the melodrama of the F-word, the unspeakable, four-letter word feminism, many of the goals of feminism are obscured.² The resulting construction of women's movement as troubled, ineffective, and exclusionary holds little meaning for most women and discourages participation. This must be understood as backlash against feminism and feminist movement. Susan Faludi defined backlash as an undeclared war against women which presumes that feminism went too far and hence that women are "enslaved by

their own liberation.... The women's movement, as we are told time and again, has proved women's own worst enemy" (x).³ Backlash both dramatizes and perpetuates a lack of solidarity and inclusion among and between women. If agents of backlash such as the popular media are able to claim that feminist activists are excluding some women without acknowledging where solidarity is occurring, then the questions arise: to whom does feminism belong? Who defines feminism? These questions hijack the debate and the possibility for acting for social change. The question should be, rather: how can we rethink women's movement as a space for acting in solidarity across differences?

In this paper, we argue that the current state of feminist activism in Canada is enmeshed in a neoliberal discursive conundrum. Neoliberalism is an economic and political ideology that dictates free market practices governed by profit. The rule of the free market legitimates such practices as: the reduction of wages; union-busting; the transference of state and government authority to individuals, communities and to external (non-elected) agreements such as NAFTA; and reducing the social safety net, while transferring wealth to the rich through tax cuts, subsidies, deregulation, and privatization. All of these prac-

tices hurt women, communities, the poor, and those who have been historically marginalized. However, neoliberal ideology masks these destructive practices under the guise of a level playing field that is presumed natural and inevitable. Differences are leveled by the benevolence of individuals (charity) or the hand of the market that allows us all to wield consumer power.

We define the neoliberal discursive conundrum as backlash because it falsely assumes women inhabit the proverbial level playing field. It falsely assumes that equality has been substantially achieved and that those women who are left behind do so through their own choices or inabilities to succeed in the equally-accessible free market. Women's consumer and/or labour power under neoliberalism, exercised through individual choices, becomes the only power available to effect change, and hence the only activism that makes common sense. The term conundrum carries the dual connotations of both a complex problem and a riddle. Neoliberal ideology, neither new nor especially liberal (progressive), limits what little feminist activism reaches the popular media under free market conditions. Complicating matters is the frequent classification of post-feminism as Third Wave feminism.⁴ We contend that post-feminism is

neither feminist nor activist. Rather, it is a masquerade, which operates strategically and in tandem with neoliberalism to advance artificial divisions, downplay collective histories, and hinder coalition building among feminist activists. Women's movement is therefore portrayed within a discourse of post-feminism, where collective feminist activism is seen as antiquated and unnecessary.

keeping an institution alive" ("Status of Women minister defends department cuts").

The tension between state-brokered feminism and that of radical and grassroots feminist activism arises from the misinterpretation of a legitimate dialogue between Second and Third Wave feminists. So, for example, although Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards insist in

"waves" of movements, and who defines and controls feminism(s).

By defining and controlling feminism(s), neoliberal ideology frames and fixes feminist goals as market-driven and market-satisfied. An additional complexity of the conundrum is that it is increasingly difficult for activists to challenge the discourse of neoliberalism, which masterfully claims ownership of the language of common sense: efficiency, cost-effectiveness, rationality, accountability, and transparency. The final element of the neoliberal discursive conundrum is the construction of crisis among those who thwart the dominance of neoliberal ideology, especially feminist activists. Manufacturing economic crisis is the strategy by which ideologues such as Ontario's Mike Harris, Alberta's Ralph Klein⁸ and current Prime Minister Stephen Harper⁹ can justify intervention with austere neoliberal policy measures.

The language of crisis is what allows this common sense neoliberal ideology to dictate destructive social policies. John Snobelen, Harris' Minister of Education, notoriously said: "... to fundamentally change the issue in training and ... education.... We need to invent a crisis" (Brennan cited in Hart). In response to Snobelen's assertion, Noam Chomsky commented: "If you want to take some system out of the public domain ... and put it into the hands of private tyrannies which are unaccountable, first you have to create a crisis. And that is standard" (qtd. in Hill).¹⁰ The language used to manufacture crisis and to delegitimize feminist movements evokes a discourse of "practical" solutions asserted by neoliberals. For example, according to Stephen Harper's government, the "rational" and "individualistic" solution to the decades-long struggle for accessible childcare in Canada is simply an (inadequate) cash payment to each "family" rather than the comprehensive, universal daycare program that has been envisioned and demanded by women's movement. The soli-

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Post-feminism finds additional justification in the popular and media emphasis on unproductive tensions between state-brokered feminist activism,⁵ and radical and grassroots feminist activism.

In Canada, post-feminism is unfortunately in the ascendant, embodied by such groups as [sic] REAL Women Canada, which has spearheaded the successful campaign to eviscerate Status of Women, cutting \$5 million over two years of the budget (over 20 percent), and to change its mandate from supporting women's real advocacy to so-called "action-oriented" policy measures that drop the term "equality" from its list of goals. Women's groups were informed in September 2006 "that they would no longer be able to receive funding for projects that involved advocacy work, lobbying of the government, or general research, as part of new terms and conditions for grants" (see "Tories to cut off funding for women's lobby groups"). Echoing the post-feminist conceit that feminism is, if not dead, moribund, the Status of Women minister Bev Oda proclaimed, using the discourse of common sense neoliberalism: "Our government is not a government that just keeps institutions alive in any of its areas ... just for the sake of

Manifesta that this tension resembles more a natural dialogue between mothers and daughters rather than a contradictory, adversarial war among women, popular media focuses on the latter. For examples of the hyped rifts between Second and Third Wave women in the media, one does not have to look very far: from *Time* magazine (Bellafante 1998a, see also 1998b) to the *National Post*,⁶ the melodrama of the "F" word has taken on ugly and accusatory characteristics undermining the productive ability of women's movement to effect change.

As feminist activists pursuing social change, we need to be wary of such rifts that sensationalize and stereotype women's movement as irrelevant to the "real world." This is backlash. It serves the interests of neoliberal ideology in assigning ownership of the F-word to "troublemaking" or "radical" feminists, and privileging definitions of women's movement articulated by popularized post-feminists who have pronounced feminism dead.⁷ The once-powerful women's movements for social justice and equity are thereby denigrated to the status of tokens and special interest groups. Accordingly, feminist activism becomes submerged in debates over

arity that Canadian women have demonstrated in this lengthy and ongoing struggle has never been acknowledged in a popular media where the language of crisis is more profitable. The invisibility of collective feminist activism in the media allows the language of crisis and the consequences of neoliberal solutions to prevail.

Indeed, neoliberal discourse has serious consequences for women, who are forced to shoulder the majority of caring work. The Harper solution to childcare has galvanized Canadian women to (re)action in the shape of the Code Blue coalition. Women's groups have organized nationally to try to stop this destruction of the provincial-federal childcare program proposed by the former Liberal government. No matter how muddied the feminist waters may seem, it is now very clear on which side the state lies. The state is no longer willing to broker feminism or support feminist activism. Since the neoliberal state has abdicated responsibility for regulating and supporting caring, activists are recognizing the importance of reviving the feminist axiom "the personal is political." Also, the power of the neoliberal state to abdicate responsibility demands that activists take a stand in keeping with the union axiom "which side are you on?" Rather than reinforcing the view that feminism is dead as proclaimed by post-feminists, the Code Blue for Childcare Campaign demonstrates a clear solidarity among feminist activists, both Second and Third Wave, who have joined together in condemning the Harper government's assault on women and children. It also demonstrates the clear demarcation between feminist activists and post-feminists, who have banded under the auspices of [sic] REAL Women.

There is therefore potential for a significant renewed solidarity within Canadian women's movement around the assaults on childcare and the Status of Women. However, this solidarity is significantly

lacking coverage in the popular media, which continues to replay the post-feminist emphasis upon elite, professional career women, "Marthaesque"¹¹ homemakers, and motherhood. The debate in the popular media is not about the quality and accessibility of childcare in women's lives, but rather about dispatching dissatisfied career women back to the home and the family, thereby sti-

without the neoliberal emphasis on individual consumerism? How do we reclaim the language of efficiency, cost-effectiveness, transparency, etc., which has been hijacked as the exclusive terrain of neoliberalism? Indeed, what women's group has ever aspired to inefficiency, cost-ineffectiveness, lack of accountability, or lack of transparency? We need to question how such labels come to be

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fling public debate which reinforces the dichotomy between public and private spheres, and women's natural location in the latter. Popular representations in media and culture fail to make the connections between women's ability to be in the boardroom and their need for adequate daycare. Further, the media denies disparities among women—socio-economic class, sexual orientation, and racialization, all of which prohibit particular women's ability to emulate this idealized woman at work and at home. Under neoliberalism, women's power is evinced either through their identity as consumers, whether in the boardroom or as the ideal homemaker, mother, and wife. Should the Code Blue message ever happen to find its way into the popular media, the activists themselves would in all likelihood be unflatteringly compared with the sleek, efficient, coiffed homemaker/mom/high-powered professional woman of the neoliberal fantasy. This would effectively silence the point Code Blue is making about the necessity for universal childcare. Clearly Code Blue has no place in a neoliberal culture that only recognizes code bling.

How can we, as feminist activists, reclaim the recognition of "success"

assigned to discredit women's movement in Canada; how such language hinders our alliances, downplays our history of effective organizing across the waves of feminism, and limits the ways in which we can act together.

The breadth and potential for collaborative feminist activism across the waves is disrupted by the neoliberal/post-feminist inspired rift between Second and Third Wave feminisms. To demonstrate the possible spaces for cooperation, we will examine three organizations as sites for activist solidarity: The National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC); trade unions; and the Miss G. Project. Both NAC and organized labour have historically presented sites for such solidarity and continue to struggle for social change. However, under neoliberalist discourse, emphasis has been publicly placed upon divisiveness within these movements, highlighting racialized and generational rifts. The Miss G. Project, an activist initiative to put women's studies classes into the Ontario Secondary School curriculum, consciously works across generations and diversity, drawing on both Second- and Third-Wave agendas and methodologies. We will examine these or-

ganizations as spaces of historic and future feminist activism to show the possibility of forwarding women's movement despite the post-feminist rhetoric and neoliberal agenda.

Much has been made of the rift between the Second and Third Waves of feminism. In order to expose the fallacy of the crisis of women's movement, it is necessary to briefly examine the differences and simi-

in the home. Slogans such as "the personal is political" were meant to reflect and problematize these issues. However, women's activism was decontextualized even then by the popular media, which resulted in a trivialization of the issues and the sensationalization and demonization of feminist activists.¹²

While no woman ever burned a bra, the term "bra-burner" came to

en were all engaged in activism during the so-called era of the Second Wave. Second Wavers actively challenged sexism in all radical movements, including their own. Such critical self-reflection and interconnectedness among social movements was ignored by popular media representations. It was convenient for the agents of backlash to disregard the diversity of activism in women's

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larities that exist. It is first necessary to question the compartmentalized history of women's movement, given that history is an ongoing and interconnected process. Indeed, one way we can reclaim the language of rationality, inevitability, and common sense is to refuse artificial divisions in our history, instead acknowledging connections and changes.

Second Wave feminist activism in Canada is linked to the emergence in the 1960s of critical social movements for civil rights, the new left, gay and lesbian rights as well as the anti-nuclear, peace, and anti-Vietnam War movements. Women's movement must be understood as at the forefront of activism in the 1960s, never separate from these social movements. As part of this vital social upheaval, Second Wavers challenged the traditional social and historical construction of women's roles, including women's seemingly exclusive responsibility for home, children, and husbands. Second Wave feminists were also dealing with and challenging sexism in all the radical movements of the time (Morgan). A key issue around which women united was challenging the sexual division of labour, constructions of women's work, and especially women's unpaid work

characterize feminists as radicals in the popular media, an image that lingers in mainstream feminist mythology. In the same way, the definition of women's activism in these complex, intersectional movements became constricted, demarcated, and defined by the mainstream as a few outspoken radicals concentrating exclusively upon the separation between the private and public spheres. This must be understood as the public face of feminist movement, a depiction that was (is) neither innocent nor apolitical. A narrow social and political focus was (is) constructed, around which all women could conceivably rally. It offered the possibility for strength in numbers to make change a reality and, at the same time, the political gatekeeping power to marginalize dissent.

The cooption of imagery and language in representations by popular media created a Second Wave that was exclusionary to those who did not fit the white, middle-class, able-bodied, and heterosexual mould. Within Second Wave women's movement, diverse women's groups were working simultaneously on various issues, projects and coalitions. Racialized women, lesbians, (dis)abled women, and poor wom-

movement, concentrating instead upon the angst of the white, middle-class housewife. This focus reinforced the public-private spheres debate and questions around women's place in Canadian society.

A media-imagined, homogenous, mainstream women's movement defined the family, for example, as a site of women's oppression and economic exploitation. In contrast, many racialized women viewed the home as a place for acceptance and empowerment, particularly around issues of race, ethnicity, and community (see, for example, Lorde; Collins). Not coincidentally, popular media depicted the first "feminist family portrait" as universal, rendering the latter feminist definition of the family invisible. The burgeoning (neo)liberal economy was supported by the "official" feminist family portrait which advocated (some) women's shift to paid employment. The programs needed to enable women's full participation in the workforce, however, were not enacted. Moreover, the recognition that women had long been working in paid employment, especially poor and racialized women, was irrelevant to the liberation of the white, middle-class housewife and therefore erased from our history (Brand).

Second Wave feminism therefore cannot be separated from the increasing numbers of women entering the workforce and becoming more active within organized labour. Union women organized as both trade unionists and feminist activists, particularly within the newer public sector unions such as the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE). Working women, in becoming union activists, put “women’s issues” such as pay equity, access to non-traditional jobs, childcare, and sexual harassment on their unions’ collective bargaining agendas. At the same time, they pushed for internal reform of the unions’ patriarchal structures, creating women’s caucuses, committees, and alliances in support of women’s movement.

The rise of the public sector unions has been associated with the rise of feminist activism around broader social justice and equity agendas. Internally, union women created a movement away from traditional “business unionism” which concentrated upon the economic bottom line, isolationism, and the traditional male breadwinner model. They reconceptualized trade unionism, turning a feminist lens on the so-called “bread and butter” issues such as salaries, benefits, job security, and health and safety issues. Wage issues in bargaining began to be expanded to include issues of pay equity; benefits extended to include maternity and family leaves; health and safety conditions included provisions against violence and sexual harassment in the workplace; and seniority included employment equity and access for women to non-traditional jobs. Women trade unionists consciously made links between trying to achieve these gains for union members and the broader sexist society that denied these gains to all women, paving the way for broader alliances, rank-

and-file democracy, and innovative tactics that were inspired by worker occupations, sit-ins, and picket lines. While access to paid work was a key Second Wave issue, women’s union activism has not necessarily been acknowledged as integral to the mainstream movement of the Second Wave. Most unions, to their eventual detriment, continued to be an “old boys’ network.” Exacerbated by the domination of a neoliberal agenda, reactionary union structures have disempowered and excluded feminist and equity activists, constraining the possibilities of broader coalition and reinforcing the always-artificial divide between “women’s” and “social justice” issues, and the “business” bread-and-butter bottom line (Riche). Coalitions are important strategies to effect change among marginalized and disempowered groups. Disrupted by the neoliberal agenda, unions have been forced to rely on state-brokered alliances and legislative reform—labour laws, lobbying, and political party connections. As we will see in the case of NAC, the contradictions of state-brokered coalitions are revealed. Forced rather than natural and spontaneous, these alliances eventually result in rifts, internal divisions, and crisis within the climate of an intensified neoliberal economy that continues to hollow out the state, undermining and eradicating collective actions. In the face of deregulated, privatized, and streamlined government(s), which increasingly tend to recognize the voices of the business “community” as their constituents, the power of lobbying as a tactic for achieving social justice is significantly diminished. Labour legislation is increasingly designed to break strikes, constrain picket lines, limit organizing capacity, and curtail workers’ resistance. Other traditional tools of union activists—mass rallies, petitions, demonstrations, and sit-ins—are also (mis)interpreted and portrayed in popular media as irrational, economically irresponsible

outbursts from “lazy” and “overpaid” workers.

Union isolationism and retrenchment in the face of these challenges have ensured the success of this backlash against the gains that workers have accomplished. For women unionists, this has meant that “women’s issues” are often the first to be conceded at the bargaining table. What the agents of backlash fail to acknowledge in their union-bashing are the links between gains negotiated by unions and the improvement of conditions for non-unionized workers and society. The strategic artificial boundary between unionized workers—characterized as “lazy,” “inefficient,” “unproductive,” etc.—and non-unionized workers ensures that the neoliberal discursive conundrum again divides and conquers working people. This rollback in workers’ rights coincides with the backlash against feminist activism across Canada. In union circles, recent discussions indicate that the labour movement in Canada is beginning to recognize the importance of building coalitions across the waves of feminism and renewing an equity activist agenda.¹³

Many of the gains won by feminist unionists were made in common cause and cooperation with NAC. This was once an example of the kind of coalition-building that feminist activists undertook across social justice movements. Indeed, union women played a crucial role in the formation and maintenance of NAC throughout its history as the face of Canadian Second Wave feminism from joining with other women’s groups to pressure the government into creating and funding women’s programs at the federal level, to participating in NAC as decision-makers.

As with unions, however, NAC illustrates the pitfalls of state-brokered feminist activism. These pitfalls are especially clear in light of the recent budget cuts to Status of Women. NAC has already experienced the neoliberal hatchet. Dur-

ing the Second Wave in Canada, the expansion of funding for women's groups served to both legitimate and contain "Status of Women issues" as they were narrowly conceived by the state. NAC was created with the original purpose of presenting an alternative, independent coalition that was accountable to women's movement rather than subject to changes in government. However, from its inception, NAC's need for resources in order to advance feminist activism in Canada led to an uneasy alliance between the state and women's groups. Like organized labour, NAC eventually came to overly rely on a formal "lobbying and brief" approach that concentrated upon policy expertise and powerful connections within governments. This made NAC vulnerable to political whims and defused its potential for diverse, even radical, tactics. NAC became increasingly unpopular with its state brokers when it began to align itself more overtly with social justice movements and coalitions, and engaged in more confrontational tactics. For example, NAC was at the forefront of the massive anti-free-trade coalition in the 1980s and early 1990s, pointing out to the Mulroney government that the proposed free-trade agreement was far from gender-neutral and indeed detrimental to women. As NAC began to openly criticize neoliberal policies such as free-trade agreements, abandoning polite lobbying in favour of direct action in solidarity with unions, environmentalists and other social justice groups, the state grew increasingly unwilling to listen to or support its work. As a result of NAC's activism, its funding was slashed repeatedly to the point where it could no longer function effectively as a national organization (see Vickers, Rankin and Appelle; Nadeau; Bujaczek).

As long as NAC conformed to its broker's agenda, it was a successful public face of mainstream women's movement, adhering to the fixed definitions of "women's issues" ad-

vanced by the state. When NAC strayed from this agenda, it lost its influential position as an umbrella organization that, at one time, incorporated more than 600 women's groups (Sawer), and was relegated to the status of a "special interest" group. This demotion of NAC was orchestrated in part by the agents of backlash who seized upon the divisiveness of Canadian feminist activism that were undergoing change. Again, this was not allowed to unfold naturally as a necessary dialogue among feminist activists, but was rather dramatized and hyped as a crisis of feminism itself. Once NAC attempted to redefine women's issues more broadly, thereby redefining feminist activism, the heterogeneity of the seemingly homogeneous mainstream women's movement was exposed, alienating many of the white, middle-class women who had been its leaders. The diversity of NAC's members led to internal division between the "old guard" and those feminists who wanted to incorporate anti-racist and intersectional equity work into the agenda, mimicking the Second/Third Wave rupture that was everywhere in the popular media.

Faced with an increasingly anti-feminist and post-feminist climate of hostility, as well as a media-hyped crisis of feminism, NAC, like organized labour, defensively retrenched and closed ranks around established (and establishment) goals, rather than opening itself to the challenges raised by feminist dialogue. Internal rifts did indeed add to the collapse of a financially starved and overstretched organization. In the public discourse surrounding NAC, however, including among its former leaders and members, most of the blame has been laid at the door of these rifts rather than recognizing the destabilizing impact of the agents of neoliberal backlash, as well as the structural limitations of state-brokered feminism.¹⁴ Organized labour's recent formal withdrawal of support for the attempt to revive

NAC demonstrates the ongoing power of the neoliberal discursive conundrum.¹⁵ The demise of NAC is repeatedly cited by the agents of backlash as the quintessential Canadian example of the rift between Second and Third Wave feminist activism. The recent euthanization of the Status of Women is just another step in the ongoing assault on feminist activism. However, women do not necessarily require the state to define, broker, or advocate feminism on their behalf, as women's movement has always demonstrated.

Feminist activism, with or without the state, Second or Third Wave, always demands active critical self-reflective theorizing and ongoing contestation of concepts and goals. The demise of NAC and the retrenchment of organized labour must be seen as struggles, however unsuccessful at the time of this writing, to meet the challenges of social activism. However, agents of backlash depict these struggles as the death of feminist activism rather than an essential process of feminist theorizing and action. These groups argue that feminism is no longer relevant to women's lives. Without a doubt, backlash and post-feminism are spurred by fear, fear of queer theory and activism, feminists of colour, and the new economic power wielded by women as workers and consumers. Those most fearful are not simply white men in positions of power, there are also post-feminists who are the very women who have benefited from the achievements attained by the women's movement—white, middle-class, university-educated, "upwardly mobile" women who want to retain their newly achieved positions of power (Kinahan). On the surface it is difficult to challenge the popular view that "women have made it, so why are they still complaining," particularly when this critique is forwarded by post-feminist women who self-identify as "feminists."¹⁶ When post-feminists and post-feminist groups such as [sic] REAL

Women attempt to speak on behalf of all women, they strategically homogenize and delegitimize women's movement (Jervis).

This misappropriation of feminism by post-feminists allows popular media to shift the focus away from legitimate activism to crisis within women's movements. The crisis, however, fails to recognize Third Wave activism in its diverse

Third Wavers would not deny the need to continue the struggles begun by Second Wave feminists: for example, recognition of women's unpaid work, shared responsibility for the home and children, equal pay for equal work, equal access to all sectors of the labour market, challenging the sexual division of labour, and universal childcare. They continue to agitate for an end to

component of Third Wave activism; consequently irony plays a significant role in campaigns. Contesting issues is welcome in furthering debate and the processes of critical feminist theorizing.

Indeed, Third Wave activism is not less visible, if we know where to look for it. For the most part Third Wavers are not making the front pages of newspapers or the nightly

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forms and venues as integral to women's movement in its ongoing history. While Second Wavers sought to engage and participate in the media as activists, in general Third Wavers have sought alternatives to popular media representation. While Second Wavers emphasized prominent and public figures and displays, Third Wavers have consciously operated away from the media lens. The genius of the Miss G. Project, as we will see, lies in its recognition of the vulnerability to subversion of the popular media, which plays a critical role in disseminating information, images, and ideas that shape our lives and our understandings of what is possible or even desirable.

Third Wave feminist activists have set out to change the face of mainstream feminism by making it more inclusive, emphasizing resistance to imposed and conventional expectations around generations, sexualities, and gender identities. Third Wave activism's commitment to inclusivity embraces a complex and fluid understanding of identity that includes issues of class, race/ethnicity, ability, and age, as well as a nexus for engagement in anti-globalization movements and critical geopolitics, among others. Yet, most

women's poverty, violence against women, and access to reproductive choices. This is where Third Wave feminists differ from post-feminists: Third Wavers do not pronounce feminism dead. At the core of the Third Wave agenda is the empowerment of (young) women and girls to play their part in women's movement. Third Wavers embrace the moniker of young, eclectic, and politically savvy. They mobilize around self- and group-identified feminist issues, often resurrecting Second Wave concerns in new and innovative ways that are clearly demarcated from the brokerage and paternalistic oversight of the state.

An ongoing rethinking of how to "do feminism" lies at the centre of Third Wave activism. To outsiders who adopt the popular media's depiction of feminism, the movement may seem far less cohesive, less visible, and more ad hoc than the Second Wave. Yet, the seemingly indefinable Third Wavers recognize these characteristics as strengths rather than weaknesses. They allow for flexibility around issues and goals, collaboration, and cooperation among diverse Third Wave groups, and access to unlimited and varied activist methods, strategies, and tactics. Humour is a key

news with the rallies, marches, petitions, and protests used by their feminist foremothers. Although we may see them there, economic constraints and technological innovations have made other venues and forums more enticing and arguably more subversive. Accordingly, Third Wavers are highly visible in cyber space, on the internet (blogging, personal narratives, and website), and through zines, e-zines, and other cultural productions. This use of alternative venues to produce feminist goals is fundamental to Third Wave activism (Allyson and Karanian). As part of the commitment to inclusivity, Third Wave publications (virtual and otherwise) are written in accessible language, often using visuals, film, poetry, and plays. The Third Wave feminist adage "do it yourself" (DIY) is a tactic that facilitates diverse participation and removes the onus on NAC, trade unionists, and any umbrella and/or state organizations to speak on behalf of women. To DIY, one does not have to be part of a big group, the mainstream, or any group to be a feminist.¹⁷ To DIY also challenges post-feminism's appropriation of feminist discourse and the neoliberal stranglehold on the language of common sense.

The Miss G. Project embraces the DIY strategy and demonstrates a synergy of women's movement and feminist activism. It bridges much of the conceptual divide between Second and Third Wave feminism through humour and the recognition of women's movement as an ongoing history that needs to be known, disseminated and acknowledged. Miss G. emerged in early 2005 as the creation of four young feminists—Dilani Mohan, Sheetal Rawal, Sarah Ghabrial, and Lara Shkordoff—from the University of Western Ontario who, having completed courses in women's studies, decided that women's studies needed to be part of the Ontario High School curriculum. Feeling robbed of their herstory in high school, these young women initiated a movement that has taken hold in Ontario and is spreading feminist ideas like wildfire. Miss G. contends that the critical skills to recognize the impact of androcentrism, racism, classism, and heterosexism on society need to be disseminated more broadly and at an earlier stage in our education, rather than waiting until university to begin the critical study of gender and sexuality. Women's Studies courses that allow for this type of analysis have the potential to bring about self-knowledge and positive social change.¹⁸ High school is an ideal space for this learning to begin at a time when many young people want to engage in alternative ways of knowing, particularly when university is not accessible to all. Moreover, the neoliberal agenda continues to attack and devalue the humanities, the arts, and social sciences, especially women's studies, as "useless" subjects, promoting instead a narrow, careerist trajectory for university students to produce "useful" eunuchs for the labour market.

Building on the cultural currency of Second Wave feminism, the Miss G. Project advocates for equity in education. Ending sexism through expanding education for girls, and

uncovering the hidden stories and experiences of women remains an important objective of Second Wavers. Miss G. took up this issue by protesting at Queen's Park where activists posed as beauty pageant contestants wearing sashes cheekily inscribed "Miss Education." The moniker is a playful allusion to the lack of feminist—mis(sed)—education available at the same time as it challenges the traditional views of women as non-threatening and therefore marketable objects of male desire and possession. Miss G. activists also organized an old-fashioned game of croquet and served lemonade on the lawn of Queen's Park as part of the same campaign. In so doing, they made a clear link between past feminist movements and current ones, which is also an ironic nod to the inefficacy of bygone protest tactics. In playing croquet and serving lemonade, the activists were conceding that little has changed, and that much has yet to be accomplished. At the same time, they created a space where Second Wavers could participate and recognize this as feminist activism initiated by young women. As another tactic reminiscent of Second Wave activism (teach-ins and sit-ins), Miss G. held a "read-in" at Queen's Park where participants were invited to bring and share feminist literature, history, and cultural productions.

In disseminating its message, the Miss G. Project clearly uses the aesthetics of Third Wave. Miss G. blends old and new feminist methodologies—blogging and internet media, list serv email technologies, sticker campaigns, squats, irony, cheekiness and humour, as well as demonstrations, petitions, postcard campaigns, and political lobbying. At the same time, Miss G. is not eschewing coalition and solidarity work with more conventional Second Wave partners. For example, trade unions such as the Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) Local 88 women's committee, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation (OSSTF), and the Ontario

English Catholic Teachers Federation are numbered among the supporters. In addition, state-brokered coalitions such as the Canadian Federation of Students are Miss G.'s allies. While, in one sense, Miss G. is narrowly focused on education, in another, it has demonstrated far-reaching possibilities for coalition-building and transformations in Canadian feminist activism. Consequently, the Miss G. Project serves as an excellent example of bridging the waves.

Miss G. may be seen as a template for achieving many of the goals of Canadian feminist activism. It is liberating to realize that feminism is neither dead nor irrelevant and that feminists do not need the state to legitimate the pursuit of our goals. Bigger is not necessarily better—what seems to make a difference is the extent to which solidarity can be actualized among diverse groups, ideas, and strategies. In the current climate of neoliberalism, activists must avail themselves of every possibility and opportunity to create and develop such innovative coalitions, recognizing that past tactics at times have worked, yet new tactics are also required. To resist the backlash to which all activists are subjected, it is more useful and efficient to find our common ground and to resist those who would define and control feminist activism in one homogeneous and monolithic way. Common ground does not preclude individualized activism as Third Wave DIYers demonstrate. Rather, it reappropriates the term "individual" to which neoliberal discourse lays claim, and defines the individual as always connected to community, activity, and an ongoing history.

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¹We offer this collaborative work in the spirit of showing that feminist activists can and do work in solidarity to effect change.

²For an excellent depiction of the melodrama of the F-word, see the short film *The F-Word* (1994, Eyes Wide Production, Marcia Jarmel and Erin Gallagher, producers), which reminds us that the question of who defines and owns feminism is very much alive.

³“The truth is that the last decade has seen a powerful counterassault on women’s rights, a backlash, an attempt to retract the handful of small and hard-won victories that the feminist movement did manage to win for women. This counterassault is largely insidious: in a kind of pop-culture version of the Big Lie, it stands the truth boldly on its head and proclaims that the very steps that have elevated women’s position have actually led to their downfall.... The backlash has succeeded in framing virtually the whole issue of women’s rights in its own language” (Faludi xviii).

⁴Third Wave feminism is about the empowerment and participation of (young) women and girls in women’s movement. Third Wave feminism will be defined and discussed at greater length in the latter part of this paper.

⁵A broker is an agent acting as a facilitator of connections among various groups or parties. State-brokered feminism is a term we are coining here to indicate that the state is a key facilitator of resources, particularly financial, for women’s movement among various feminist groups, such as the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC), the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW), the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), the National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), and the Women’s Le-

gal Education and Action Fund (LEAF). In state-brokered feminism, the state controls the agenda of the activists and activism is state-centric, focusing for example on policy initiatives and lobbying. State-brokered feminism adopts liberal, equal-rights feminist theory and methodologies associated with Second Wave feminism in Canada: for example, working within state-centric structures to effect change for women. For further reading on Second Wave/liberal feminism see, for example, Hamilton; Mandell.

⁶The National Post has played a critical role in constructing a tension among feminisms in Canada. As Judy Rebick contends: “From their first issue they have been on a reckless campaign against feminism in general and women’s groups in particular ... the Post goes out of its way to publish articles that criticize the women’s movement” (qtd. in Babstock A1).

⁷One notorious example of such a popularized post-feminist is Barbara Amiel, who enjoys widespread publication in Canadian popular media. She claims that “...for a very long time now, feminism has had absolutely nothing to do with equality for women—quite the opposite. It is now a movement whose name has been hijacked by radicals fundamentally opposed to all our institutions and heritage” (B7).

⁸Mike Harris notoriously instigated the so-called Common Sense Revolution in Ontario (1995-2002), which resulted in massive cuts to social program spending. Ralph Klein gained national attention early in his political career by publicly blaming “eastern bums and creeps” for straining the city of Calgary’s social services and police.

⁹Stephen Harper has instituted a series of accountability measures in response to the perceived crisis caused by Liberal corruption that swept his government to power, including the cuts to Status of Women that are discussed at greater length in this paper.

¹⁰Chomsky’s point is that crisis is a “necessary illusion” for the acceptance of neoliberal policies, which are detrimental to the common good and challenge the very notion of common sense. “

¹¹“Marthaesque” refers to the power that the image of the elite, perfect homemaker/designer/entertainer wields over popular representations of women, most notably marketed by Martha Stewart. This term also ironically evokes the biblical Martha, sister of Mary Magdalene, referenced for centuries as the epitome of the toiling wife and mother. The reinforced dichotomy of virgin-whore is thus ever-present.

¹²Gloria Steinem, co-founder of Ms. Magazine, has been represented, for example, as the face of Second Wave feminism. She has been both revered and famously pilloried by the popular media (Izzo).

¹³See for example the resolutions recommended, themes raised and workshops organized at the 2004 PSAC and 2006 Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) women’s conferences (CLC, Abou-Dib, Genge and Valiani).

¹⁴Most famously, former NAC president Sunera Thobani has been often cited about the racialized divisions within NAC as precipitating its demise (Goddu). Also, Denise Andrea Campbell, past president, who just prior to her resignation in 2001 highlighted generational divisiveness and an establishmentarian old guard as a central inhibitor to women’s movement (Habib).

¹⁵On February 17, 2006, the Canadian Labour Congress Women’s Committee formally wrote to the NAC Executive to withdraw its membership and participation from NAC. Many affiliates of the Canadian “house of labour” followed suit, including the PSAC. Union women questioned the ability of NAC to effectively represent the diversity of Canadian women and its viability as a national feminist organization (personal correspondence with authors).

¹⁶Post-feminists works include Camille Paglia's *Sex Art and American Culture*; Kati Roiphe's *The Morning After: Fear, Sex and Feminism on Campus*; Christina Hoff Sommers's *Who Stole Feminism?*; and Rene Denfeld's *The New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order*.

¹⁷To DIYers, joining such organizations holds little appeal. For example, Audra Williams describes her attempt to access NAC: "I once tried to join NAC so I could go to an annual general meeting (AGM) and was told to join another group first and then get them to send me. I'm not even sure about that last part because I stopped listening." at "Join another group first." http://www.rabble.ca/in_her_own_words.shtml?x=47467 (accessed May 2006)

¹⁸See the Miss G. Project website at <http://www.themissgproject.org/about/organization.html> (accessed February 2006)

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ELIZABETH WOOD

Bloodshed

When
we are strong enough to mourn
the weeping of one child,
When
the loss of
a flower or a tree
is suffered,
When
we tremble
in silence
in the power
that births
the dawn,

Our wombs will be safe.

Originally from rural Ontario, Elizabeth Wood is a Montreal-based educator, visual artist, art writer, and poet.

ADEBE DERANGO-ADEM

black hawk

perched on a tree
stump, eyes old and full of all that is bleak
within the earthly realm

it sings dark moans, unbird-like

drones a heart full of stones not even
semi-precious

I sing out to you but am inclined to disappear
similar
to you and your army

did I say
you
again?
I simply meant the bird
flying fast
loveless
and without warning
over the blue horizon.

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