The Occupation of Vancouver Transition House, 1985-86: Reflections on Women and Community

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ABSTRACT

Feminist political thought stands in ambiguous relation to the concept of community as it has been traditionally conceived. In the spirit of the shared experiences through which generations of women develop profound bonds of love and duty toward one another, the ideal of community is often embraced as both a description and a goal of feminist politics. At the same time, recent scholarship has identified the limiting implications for women of the social and institutional relationships typically invoked by the concept of community. In particular, feminist readings of the term in the discourses of social policy, political theory, and contemporary social movements, have revealed its ideological function in reinforcing patterns of female exclusion, subordination, and exploitation. For some feminists, the patriarchal biases that are perceived to inhere in conventional formulations of community have led to a skepticism toward, if not outright rejection of the communitarian ideal as a useful goal for women.

In this account, the tumultuous events surrounding the occupation of Vancouver Transition House in 1985-1986 serve as an opportunity for exploring feminist theories of community. Drawing on the results of 25 personal interviews, combined with extensive primary research into the history and politics of the battered women's movement in Vancouver since the early 1970's, the account traces the multiple and conflicting conceptions of community that were articulated in relation to local women's efforts to preserve Transition House - at the time one of Canada's only publicly-operated and unionized feminist facilities for battered women - from the provincial government's policy of privatization. In contrast to the essentialist and/or patriarchal definitions of community implicit in the actions of the various state, labour, charity, social service, immigrant and visible minority organizations involved in the episode, this thesis moves toward an alternative conceptualization of the term grounded in the feminist principles of movement, diversity, and the complexity of identity. In this context, the theme of transition - as it relates in the transition house movement to the opening-up of identity experienced by battered women as they move out from under the coercive influence of violent relationships - proves especially useful as a metaphor for reflection on women and community.

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Introduction

> *I am concerned with children and families and communities and not so much with narrow constructions of "women's interests". I am engaged by the relation between rights and responsbilities. I struggle...with how to articulate a set of strong claims that do not have the effect of silencing the voices of others.*
>
> Jean Bethke Elshtain, 1990[1]

Thinking about community

In this thesis, I examine the impact that women's activism in the battered women's movement has had on social policy, political practice, and theoretical concepts. The particular theme I develop as a means for pulling all of this together is community, a notion that bears on all of these areas of consideration in ways that are highly relevant for women. The theme of community is important for social policy, because communities are the locales in which policy decisions made by governments and politicians are lived out by ordinary people. With respect to political practice, the community has a seemingly universal attraction, and the strategic appeal to community is among the most powerful of rallying calls for the mobilization of political energies. Finally, to study community as a concept in social theory is to reflect on the meanings and possibilties that are manifest in the human desire for togetherness.

A year prior to becoming involved in this project, I took the volunteer

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[1] *Power Trips and Other Journeys: Essays in Feminism as Civic Discourse* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), p.xii.

training course offered by a newly established battered women's agency in the small town where I live, and had been offering my home as part of a community "safe home" network. Two years later, after I completed this research and had returned home from university to write my thesis, I resumed contact with this organization only to discover that the small grassroots network had been transformed into a big, well-funded organization, complete with a large, comfortable transition house, a fully-equipped downtown outreach office, and upwards of seventeen full and part-time professional staff. Clearly, the service provided out of the new Transition House is preferable to what was previously available. It is much more comprehensive, and offers the women and children who use it greater privacy and confidentiality. What has been lost in the change, however, is the opportunity the original service created for meaningful and educational forms of community involvement in a serious social problem. For myself and the other volunteer safehome operators, the experience of exposing ourselves and our homes to families in crisis taught a great deal about issues of respect, responsibility, and citizenship, in relation to our own families as well as our local community. It was precisely this question of community, then, and the apparent tension that exists in social policy between the relative benefits of solutions that come from within the community vs. those that are delivered and paid for by governments, that I subsequently became interested in exploring. The more I thought about this tension, the more I observed how much currency "the community" has in social discourse. Feminists use it prolifically to describe

or defend their preferred model of wife assault intervention - that is, one that is "community-based" or "responsive to the community" as opposed to an institutional or system-based approach.[2] Officials of the state, picking up on its appeal among social activists, have ensured that their policy responses to wife assault acknowledge the importance of the community through informing the community, involving the community, directing funding to the community, building partnerships with the community, developing services in a greater number of communities, or what have you.[3] In addition, I observed that while the term is used and appears with great frequency, it is seldom defined. Nor is it contested, or subjected to the kinds of critical debate that apply to other social and political concepts in vogue. In discussions that take place among transition house workers and residents it is common to probe the meaning of terms like feminism, of ideas like "justice" or "equality", or of the implications of women's relationship to "the state". Most involved in the field have even developed some sensitivity to the emergence of "wife battering" as a discourse that is itself problematic, engaged as it is in the social construction of particular

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[2] See *Is Anyone Listening?: Report of the British Columbia Task Force on Family Violence* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1992), pp.56-58, for comparison of community-based and system-based wife assault services. Also, Lisa Price, *In Women's Interests: Feminist Activism and Institutional Change* (Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1988).

[3] All of these references to community and many others as well are contained in the latest policy document on wife assualt from the B.C. Ministry of Women's Equality, *Stopping the Violence: A Safer Future for B.C. Women*, 1992.

roles, identities and institutional arrangements.[4] In contrast, the term community is used descriptively, its meaning assumed, implied, or otherwise portrayed as self-evident, but hardly ever interrogated for the questionable kinds of social relations it may invoke. My project, then, is to problematize and interrogate the concept of community, and ultimately to move towards a feminist definition of the term that arises from that setting.

Research method and presentation

I first approached the main subject matter of my case study - the 1985-86 occupation of Vancouver Transition House - during the summer of 1991 as a research assistant. My task was to investigate the alliance which formed between the group calling itself the Women's House Saving Action and the City of Vancouver during the period of the House's occupation, and which had continued up until the time I became involved. The research sought to explore how these events might link to broader questions concerning the relationship of social movements to local government, and to institutions of the state.[5] In the

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[4] See, for example, Donileen R. Loseke, *The Battered Woman and Shelters: The Social Construction of Wife Abuse* (State University of New York Press, 1992); Marlena Studer, "Wife Beating As A Social Problem: The Process of Definition". *International Journal of Women's Studies*, 7, November/December 1984, pp.412-421; Gillian Walker, *Family Violence and the Women's Movement: The Conceptual Politics of Struggle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

[5] See Leslie Kenny and Warren Magnusson, "In Transition: The Women's House Saving Action", forthcoming in the Fall 1993 issue of the *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology.*

following interpretation however, the same issues are reconsidered through the related but distinct framework of community.

There are two main components to the research material presented here. The first consists of a set of open-ended interviews and/or conversations with twenty-five individuals (twenty-four women and one man), all of whom have played important roles in the development of policy and services for battered women in the Vancouver region. The combined effect of these interviews produced a very rich and complex web of stories, some but not all of which are incorporated into my narrative. The one consistency among these interviews is that they are representative of the views of self-identified community-based groups and agencies, and not at all of the officials of the state. This reflects a conscious effort to marginalize the state as the prime determinant of public policy, and to focus instead on the contributions brought by women of differing persuasions to the policy process.

The second component consists of information gained from primary documentary materials, many of which were provided by the people interviewed, and which included such items as minutes from meetings, correspondence, internal memos, statements and position papers, and press releases. The extensive newspaper coverage of the Occupation and related issues also provided an important source of information.

The framework in which all of this material is brought together is formed by theoretical writings by women and some men on the theme of community.

The tensions that exist in this literature concerning the relative strengths and dangers of community as a concept for women are then reflected in the narrative of the Occupation. For example, feminist theory displays a striking paradox between its celebration of community as the source of women's supposedly more humane and non-instrumental values on the one hand, and its denunciation of community as the locus of female oppression and confinement on the other. This is a tension that appears in different guises within feminist debates about "essentialism", about the representation of difference and identity, and about the particular versus the universal loyalties of women as political subjects. Similar tensions can be found in the context of the Occupation. Undoubtedly a "community of resistance" formed in opposition to the government's decision to close Vancouver Transition House, raising the question of the community versus the state. Closer analysis reveals, however, how unlikely this same community was, and how precarious the terms of its unity.

The story itself is not revealed in linear style, but is unfolded in layers, each one examined from a different perspective and offering a different set of problems and issues for consideration. In Chapter One, the significance of community for feminist politics is clarified with reference to a sampling of some of the issues and scholarly debates it has generated. The episode of the Occupation is then situated within this framework, and the sequence of events introduced. Chapter Two problematizes the distinction between community and

state by focusing on the anomalous relationship that developed between the militant group of feminists inside the House, and the group of bureaucrats and politicians at City Hall who helped them to bring their protest to a successful conclusion. In Chapters Three, Four, and Five, alternating time frames and points of view provide a historical sense of how the type of community symbolized by feminist activists contrasted with the understandings claimed by others: social workers, organized labour, the women's movement, and the post-colonial struggles of First Nations and other minority groups. The important conceptual point in this context concerns the permeability of established norms of identity and community in response to feminist interventions. Conversely, the analysis also illustrates how feminism is itself constituted by the shifting and often contradictory identities of the women who come to their feminist sympathies through radically diverse life situations. As a counterpoint to my own representations of these sectors, finally, Appendices 1-8 contain self-representations of many of the organizations and agencies involved, in the form of mission statements or promotional materials.

In the course of these events, a number of difficult questions emerge for which I can offer no firm resolution. What are the essential factors that contribute to a group's sense of having a community - as opposed to an alternative family, political, institutional, movement, etc. - identity, and what is the relationship between these various languages of identity? Do community values have an authentic existence that can be preserved or defended, or is the

community an ideal that has yet to be realized? What kind of gendered, racial, and cultural meanings and relationships are determined through the discourse of community? While I do not for a moment suppose that the consideration of these questions will lead to apocalyptic advances in the feminist movements for social change, I do suggest that feminists would do well to take heed of the conceptual nuances of community. Indeed, a conclusion one might draw from the analysis is that the battered women's movement has suffered from its intellectual neglect of community. Its uncritical use of the term has at times aligned it with narrow or dualistic forms of thinking that are antithetical to feminism's emancipatory project. In addition, feminists' failure to clarify precisely what forms of identity and social relations they intend by their use of community leaves them vulnerable to the conservative and patriarchal assumptions that may underly the rhetoric of community in social policy. At the same time, however, the history and politics of the Women's House Saving Action indicates that the battered women's movement has a great deal to contribute to the creation of open, healthy communities. In this sense, one may conclude that the practical responses of feminists to the problem of wife assault offer clues to a compelling imagery of community beyond the limits of what has yet been imagined. The following thesis is an attempt to articulate in theoretical terms what is already being accomplished in practice.

Chapter One

Wife Battering, Feminism, and the Paradox of Community

> *Wife battering is the loss of dignity, control and safety as well as the feeling of powerlessness and entrapment experienced by women who are the direct victims of ongoing or repeated physical, psychological, economic, sexual and or verbal violence or who are subjected to persistent threats, or the witnessing of such violence against their children, other relatives, friends, pets and/or cherished possessions, by their boyfriends, husbands, live-in lovers, ex-husbands, or ex-lovers.*
>
> Linda Macleod, 1987[6]

Gendered concepts/conceptual dilemmas

One of the most notable achievements of feminist scholarship and activism over the past twenty-five years has been its effectiveness in giving visibility to an entire dimension of modern experience which had previously been unrecognized: namely, the pervasive victimization - physical, sexual, and emotional - which women claim is routinely perpetrated against them by their husbands and male partners. As this disturbing aspect of women's experience began to emerge with intensity during the late sixties and early seventies,

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[6] From *Battered But Not Beaten ...Preventing Wife Battering In Canada* (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1987).

feminist responses took a variety of forms, including public protest, political lobbying, community organizing, and the establishment of alternative shelter and support services for battered women and their children. An immediate result of these activities has been the rapid increase in society's responsiveness to the configuration of issues variously described and contested within the now popular discourses of "domestic violence", "wife battering" "wife assault", and "wife abuse". However, as the following account of the battered women's movement in Vancouver will emphasize, the real impact of feminist practice in this regard far exceeds its capacity for affecting the empirical conditions of women's lives. In the course of this discussion, I am concerned to show how women's activism against violence, beyond its value as a lifeline to the many thousands of women and children who are abused in their homes, contributes in vital ways to a liberatory reconceptualization of political meanings and modes of organization.

To date, the impact of this transformative quality of feminist critical practice has been observed to have influenced a broad range of traditional concepts and conventions. First, there was feminism's unique politicization of the family, and of marriage, institutions which were previously considered to be beyond the purview of serious intellectual inquiry.[7] Then, influenced by trends

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[7] See, for example, Michele Barrett and Mary Macintosh, *The Anti-Social Family* (London: Verso,1980); Irene Diamond, ed. *Families, Politics, and Public Policy: A Feminist Dialogue on Women and State* (New York and London: Longman, 1983); Carole Pateman *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988).

in psychoanalysis and European philosophy, feminism looked questioningly at the discursive codes and practices through which our feminine and masculine identities are constructed. This line of critique questioned the presumed fixity of gendered subjects, as indeed of subjectivity itself, and disturbed the predominant accounts of sexuality which characterized women as the 'natural' and 'essential' inferiors of men[8].

Increasingly, feminism has extended its theoretical influence over an ever wider field of view. It has explored and found wanting the dominant conceptions of history, of politics and economics, of science and religion, media, art, and culture, discourses which it finds are themselves gendered[9], and which seem inevitably to reflect masculine interests and perspectives. Beginning always with the complex texture of our own female lives, feminist thought offers a startling re-reading of the contemporary post-industrial/post-welfare state and its supporting system of values and institutions. In addition,

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[8] For a review of feminist criticism in the poststructuralist and postmodernist streams, see the following edited anthologies: Seyla Benhabib, Drucilla Cornell, *Feminism as Critique* (Polity: Cambridge, 1987); Linda J. Nicholson, ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990); Michele Barrett, Ann Phillip eds. *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1992); also, Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism, and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), and Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

[9] For discussion of the gendering of political concepts, See Kathleen B. Jones, "Citizenship in A Woman-Friendly Polity", in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* Vol.15, no.4, Summer 1990, pp.782-812.

and most importantly perhaps, it seeks to formulate new perspectives on old concepts like freedom, justice, democracy, truth, (and love) - all toward the long-term goal of enabling more just forms of governance for all people.

It is in this light that I seek here to articulate the implications of feminist practice upon one political theme in particular: the ideal of community. For all of its grand history as a unifier and mobilizer of diverse peoples and interests, on behalf of causes and struggles which span the whole of the political spectrum, the concept of community has nonetheless remained, as Raymond Plant wrote in 1978, "one of the most neglected by social and political philosophers".[10] Other commentators have despaired as well at the carelessness and imprecision with which notions of community are deployed. In one survey of the concept published in 1955, the author identified 94 different meanings of community[11], a figure which thirty years later could no doubt be expanded yet again. Yet in spite of the ubiquity of the concept, how often do we encounter a clear definition of community? Given its wide use in discussions of social policy, and its vast popularity as a legitimating term for any and all manner of social enterprise, this vagueness which continues to surround the concept of community strikes Plant as both an embarrassment and a major hindrance to our understanding of contemporary social and political life.

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[10] Raymond Plant, "Community: Concept, Conception, and Ideology". *Politics and Society* 8, no.1, 1978, pp.49-78.

[11] George A. Hillary, "Definitions of Community: Areas of Agreement", *Rural Sociology*, vol.20, 1955.

In qualifying the plea which Plant and others[12] have made for a more rigorous approach to understanding the evocative appeal of community, I would add the need for a distinctly feminist account as well. Such an account would fulfill two functions. The first is critical; it would look beyond the merely descriptive or neutral characterizations of community, to examine the ideological effect of the latter for reinforcing patterns of female exclusion, subordination, and exploitation. This is the tack taken by Elizabeth Wilson in her examination of the term's use in British welfare policy.[13] Wilson argues that the particular view of community held by many politicians and policy makers in Britain is imbued with reactionary and deeply conservative assumptions about women. Consequently, the social programs and policies they design ostensibly in response to the needs of 'communities' - programs based on themes like 'community planning', 'community action', 'community economic development', 'community care', 'community work', etc. - are seldom adequate for recognizing or addressing issues that are of primary concern to women. Kari Dehli confirms this in the Canadian context as well. As both a concept and a form of

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[12] See the essays compiled in the Miami Theory Collective's *Community at Loose Ends* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); also, Roxana Ng, Gillian Walker, Jacob Muller eds. *Community Organization and the Canadian State* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990).

[13] "Women, the 'Community' and the Family", in Alan Walker ed. *Community Care: The Family, the State and Social Policy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell and Martin Roberson, 1982),pp.40-55.

social intervention, Dehli writes, the term community has "assumed the presence of women in the family as available providers of care, nurture, services and particular forms of organizational labour. Nevertheless, ...recent community work strategies...have for the most part ignored women's experiences in the family and community as starting points for practice. Instead, the work of women in the community is quietly assumed and practically confirmed." In this way, Dehli concludes, the discourse of community in social policy "takes a gendered character".[14]

The second aspect of a feminist account of community must respond to these demonstrated inadequacies with some sense of an alternative. It must draw upon the creative and visionary aspects of feminist thought to conceive a definition of community that acknowledges, and is 'friendly' toward the specificity of women, however this specificity is defined.[15] Such an approach would look to the ways in which feminists have reclaimed the discourse of

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[14] Kari Dehli, "Women in the Community: Reform of Schooling and Motherhood in Toronto", in Ng, Walker, Muller, *Community Organization and the Canadian State,* op.cit., p.47.

[15] For discussion of the theory and politics of female difference see Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol.13, no.3, 1988, pp.405-436; Kathy E. Ferguson, "Interpretation and Genealogy in Feminism". *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society,* Vol.16, no.2, 1991, pp.322-337; Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, *Sexual Difference: A Theory of Socio-Symbolic Practice*, Translated by Patricia Ciconga and Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

community. It would examine carefully the social meanings and relationships which are designated by feminism's use of the term, particularly in comparison with other more traditional or conventional characterizations.

This aspect of my project poses more difficulty than may be apparent, since there is little consensus to be found among feminists concerning either the meaning or the desirability of the concept for women. For some, in the spirit of the shared experiences, both positive and negative, through which generations of women experience profound bonds of love and duty toward one another, the term community has often been advanced as both a description and strategy of feminist politics. This is the sense evoked by Rosalind Delmar, for example, in her description of the momentous force of the early women's liberation movement.

> "The unity of the movement was assumed to derive from a potential identity between women. This concept of identity rested on the idea that women share the same experiences: an external situation in which they find themselves - economic oppression, commercial exploitation, legal discrimination are examples; and an internal response - the feeling of inadequacy, a sense of narrow horizons. A shared response to shared experience was put forward as the basis for a communality of feeling between women, a shared psychology even. Women's politics and women's organizing were then seen as an expression of this community of feeling and experience".[16]

For others, however, the discourse of community is perceived to impose

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[16] Rosalind Delmar, "What is Feminism?" in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley *What is Feminism?: A Re-examination* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), p.10.

a restrictive or homogenizing affect upon female sociality, particularly in light of new concerns over the representation of difference and diversity in the feminist movement. Some have argued that the feminist ideal of community embodied in notions like "sisterhood" and "solidarity" privileges unity over diversity, and suppresses the actual multiplicity of identities within and among subjects.[17] The promise of a secure and essential identity offered by the ideal of community is here exposed as a technique of exclusion, marginalizing those perceived as different, and perpetuating a dichotomous opposition between self and other. Another line of critique suggests that the commmunitarian model of face-to-face, consensus-based politics favoured by many feminist organizations has prevented women from developing alternative approaches to the persisting issues of accountability, representation, minority rights, etc., which are essential to the formation of lasting, effective and broadly-based feminist institutions.[18]

Community and the battered women's movement

Within the broad network of organizations involved in providing crisis services and advocacy to battered women, the concept of community suffers

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[17] Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference". Linda J. Nicholson ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp.300-323; Shane Phelan, *Identity Politics: Lesbian Feminism and the Limits of Community* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989).

[18] Jill Vickers. "Bending the Iron Law of Oligarchy: Debates on the Feminization of Organization and Political Process in the English Canadian Women's Movement, 1970-1988", in Jeri-Dawn Wine and Janice Ristock, eds. *Women and Social Change* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, Publishers, 1991) pp.75-94.

from a similar kind of confusion. On the one hand, the existence on such a large scale of women who are disposessed of their home, family, and friends at the hands of a violent husband is profoundly disruptive to any sense of community that may be associated with a neighbourhood or locality. Consider, for example, the following testimony of a battered woman:

> If there had been somewhere to go to ask questions right here, right close to where I live, I would have done something sooner. You know, if I could have just been out taking the baby for a walk and could have dropped in to ask some advice, my husband wouldn't have been the wiser and I would have known my rights. It was just too hard to find out the information I needed. It took too much planning, so that when things weren't so bad I figured it wasn't worth it and when things were really bad I didn't have the energy to go to the city to find out what I had to do.[19]

In this case, the absence of a relevant basis of support or understanding within her immediate locality reveals the unreality of 'community' for a woman who survives in the isolation of an abusive relationship, no matter where or by what lifestyle she lives. As Dehli discovered in her study of community work in Toronto, the issue of violence against women in the family was consistently perceived to lie outside the boundary of what constitues community work practice. As such, the willingness to recognize and deal with that problem was typically suspended by the threat such action would pose to the "already fragile organization of communities" that existed there, as well as its potential for

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[19] Linda Macleod, op.cit., p.106.

shattering "the presuppositions of a consensus latently 'there' to be developed".[20] In a similar context, black activist Beth Richie describes the threatening impact her growing awareness of wife-battering had upon the sense of movement solidarity at the small, multi-cultural community agency where she worked.

> "After a period of time, I gradually realized that some of these strong, culturally-identified families, which we had been supporting so vehemently, were dangerous places for some women to live. Furthermore, the political machine at the forefront of the grass-roots community movement was, in fact subtly exploiting women by denying the reality of sexual oppression...Black women, be forewarned. It is a painful, unsettling task to call attention to violence in our community. You may find yourselves feeling caught by the trap called loyalty".[21]

This marginalization of women's experience of violence within standard representations of community thus contributes to a certain wariness on the part of battered women's activists toward solutions which rely too much upon the good will of the community.

Paradoxically, the roots of the battered women's movement can also be traced within a tradition of radical social work in which the principles of local control and 'community action' are key. Far from the static (and patriarchal)

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[20] Dehli, op.cit., p.50.

[21] Beth Richie, "Battered Black Women: A Challenge for the Black Community". *Black Scholar*, March/April 1985, pp.40-44.

complacency of its more conservative counterparts, this particular notion of community practice - which can be traced from early experiments in socialism through to the contemporary social movements of feminism, environmentalism and pacifism - was conceived as an oppositional discourse. Its main objectives were political. In the context of the welfare reform movements of the late 1960's and 1970's, the widespread emergence of grassroots-based and volunteer-staffed 'alternative service organizations'[22] was motivated by a desire to combine service delivery with a new vision of social change emphasizing the empowerment of the most marginalized groups within the community: youth, women, the elderly, the handicapped, tenants, ex-psychiatric patients, and so on. With their commitment to a democratic structure, their recognition of the link between social inequalities and individual problems, and their preference for hiring and training staff from within the local community rather than from the ranks of university-educated professionals, these organizations endeavored to challenge the centralized and technocratic forces of the state-run welfare bureaucracies.[23]

Likewise, in most historical accounts of the battered women's movement, the communitarian, or grassroots-based, character of the early efforts to

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[22] Eric Shragge,"Community Based Practice: Political Alternatives or New State Forms?", in Linda Davies, Eric Shragge, eds. *Bureaucracy and Community* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1990), pp.137-173.

[23] See Brian Wharf, *Communities and Social Policy in Canada* (Toronto: Mclelland and Stewart, 1992).

establish refuges for battered women is strongly emphasized as an indication of the movement's distinctiveness from "top-down" models of bureaucratically-imposed social reform.[24] The first shelters did not arise from the initiative of governments, but were a response which came from within the informal and locally-based women's consciousness-raising groups of the late sixties and early seventies. "Typically" as one recent account describes it, "women would start a women's centre. The women's centre would receive numerous calls from women who were being beaten. In response, the women's centre would begin to lobby government for services such as a transition house".[25] Initially, transition houses in Canada were staffed by volunteers, many of whom had direct life experience with wife battering. Most operated on a collectivist model of democratic decision-making which often involved the participation of the battered women who were clients of the services being offered. The philosophy of community-based feminist agencies was to provide an informal alternative to the impersonal professionalism of conventional social services, one which

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[24] For historical accounts of the battered women's movement see Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (San Fransisco: Glide Publications, 1976); Linda Macleod, *Wife Battering in Canada: The Vicious Circle* (Ottawa: Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1980); Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence* (New York: Penguin Books, 1988); Susan Schechter, *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement* (Boston: South End Press, 1982); Kersti Yllo and Michele Bograd, ed. *Feminist Perspectives on Wife Abuse* (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1990).

[25] *Is Anyone Listening?: Report of the British Columbia Task Force on Family Violence* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1992), p.73.

placed the needs of victims - women and children - above the inflexible and paternalistic dictates of bureaucratic systems.

In British Columbia, this process was directly facilitated by a controversial piece of legislation brought about by the NDP government during its brief reign from 1972-1975. The 'Community Resource Boards Act' introduced by the Department of Human Resources initiated a sweeping reorganization of the province's welfare system based on a radical philosophy of decentralization and citizen participation. Through the creation of locally elected Community Resources Boards, similar in design to the existing school, hospital, and parks boards systems, the government hoped to promote greater citizen involvement in the design and delivery of social services within their immediate communities.[26] In Vancouver, the Vancouver Resources Board (VRB) became the central agency for a network of fourteen locally elected Community Resources Boards with a mandate to integrate and coordinate statutory and non-statutory social services throughout the City. It was during this period of social democratic experimentation that the fledgling Vancouver Women In Transition Society was able to elicit funding and support for its proposal for a shelter for battered women. When Vancouver Transition House opened its doors in December of 1973, not only was it among the first services of its kind to appear in Canada, but it was additionally remarkable for its non-professional,

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[26] Michael Clague, Robert Dill, Roop Seebaran, Brian Wharf eds. *Reforming Human Services: The Experience of the Community Resource Boards in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984).

community-based approach, as well as for its unorthodox collective structure - a marked divergence from the standard organizational model of government services, but one which accorded with the proclaimed objectives of the VRB and the government.

Over the years, the struggle to preserve the community-based quality of feminist shelters against the bureaucratizing pressures of government funders has remained at the forefront of the battered women's movement. However, as the following study of the history and politics surrounding the demise of Vancouver Transition House illustrates, this struggle is hindered by the confusion that exists over precisely what issues and which groups or individuals are constitutive of the 'community'. In the process of advocating services to battered women, feminists find that their own conceptions of community are in conflict with those of governments, of labour, of service providers in the charity and volunteer sectors, and of cultural activists representing First Nations, immigrant, and other minorities. For many within the battered women's movement the effect of these conflicts is debilitating; they represent if anything the privileged capacity of the patriarchal state to manipulate public debate in a way that obscures its own reluctance to act in support of women. For others, the continuing disagreements over how the issue of wife-battering will be defined and addressed in social policy is taken as a sign of the battered women's movement's own failure to ensure the dignity and safety of women as

a primary value within every community.[27]

My own account of the battered women's movement casts a more favourable light upon these contests over the meaning and substance of community, precisely because of their implications for re-defining the concept in terms more favourable to women. Although the particular struggle of the Women's House Saving Action - in which a collective of women sought to save Vancouver Transition House from closure by an unsympathetic government - was ultimately lost, what is significant in this process is the fluidity with which alliances were formed, and issues formulated by feminists embraced in places where previously they had been marginalized. In relation to the problem of community, this story illustrates the capacity of the battered women's movement for problematizing the interests, structures, and ideologies that are constitutive of any claim to community - be these with respect to notions of national identity, working class solidarity, or the promotion of Christian family values, to cite just a few examples. In doing so, it contributes to the creation of an alternative political sensibility, where attention to the essential elusiveness and contestedness of the boundaries defining community is foregrounded in the day to day choices and actions of individuals.

In effect, I am promoting a reconceptualization of community along the

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[27] N. Zoe Hinton, "One in Ten: The Struggle and Disempowerment of the Battered Women's Movement", *Canadian Journal of Family Law*, Vol.7, 1989, pp.313-335.

lines of the specific activities and principles that the Action was intended to save - the practices of the transition houses. As battered women have discovered, transition is not a simple movement from here to there, in which the inside and the outside, the past and the present, can be kept distinct. Nor is it a process marked by sudden enlightenment or triumphant victories. It involves rather a deeper recognition of complexity, an enhanced sense of one's power and responsibility, and a renewed feeling of openness towards the wider world. A further component of transition lies in its explicit valorization of female sociality. In the culture of the transition house women encounter an environment where their perceptions are granted the unqualified legitimacy and authority that within most outside communities is typically reserved for men. It is this feature above all, subtle in appearance, yet immensely powerful in its implications for women's self-esteem, which enables a 'battered woman' to move beyond the label society has imposed upon her toward an alternative identity of her own making. In its challenge to the presumed fixity of identity then, and in its affirmation of the value of girls and women, the theme of transition thus provides a useful metaphor for reflection on community.

Setting the context: The Women's House Saving Action

On the morning of June 28, 1985, the telephone service was cut, and the doors to Vancouver Transition House officially closed. Six weeks previously, the Social Credit government of British Columbia had announced that this

emergency shelter and advocacy service for battered women and their children was redundant, and would be closed "temporarily" until a more "suitable" operator for the service could be found. Efforts by staff and concerned citizens to reverse the decision were unsuccessful. As the remaining few employees prepared to leave the house for the last time that Friday morning, a group of women unexpectedly entered and announced their intention to occupy the building. In a statement released later that day, the women stated:

> "We're here, and we will remain here, providing what level of service we can, until the government re-instates Vancouver Transition House. This service, even if the government doesn't realize it, is a life and death matter for Vancouver women who face violence in their homes"[28]

Thus began the Women's House Saving Action, an initiative taken by an informal network of Vancouver residents, activists, and professionals - all women reacting to the government's attack on one of the city's most important feminist institutions. The occupation of Vancouver Transition House was sustained, under difficult circumstances, for eight long months. During this time, over a hundred women took direct part in providing crucial shelter and assistance to at least sixty women and their children who would otherwise have had no place to go. The occupiers also engaged in a long campaign to get the province to restore its funding for the service. In the end, they gained the support of the City of Vancouver, which took up the cause of re-establishing

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[28] Megan Ellis, for the Women's House Saving Action. Press release issued June 28, 1985.

Transition House. It was with the City's pledge of support that the occupiers finally left the House, in February of 1986, to continue the campaign by other means.

The decision by the women to occupy Transition House had evolved spontaneously during the week or two previous to the closure, but it was predictable, given the turbulent political climate of the previous two years. A harsh package of "restraint" legislation introduced by Social Credit during the summer of 1983 threatened to gut much of the existing system of social services available to women in both the public and private sectors. Early in 1984, Transition House - notable for its status as one of Canada's only fully publicly-funded and unionized shelters for battered women - was put out to tender to the private sector where it was picked up by the YWCA. There then ensued a year of tense relations in which it became apparent that the exigencies of the former Ministry agency and feminist collective could not easily be fit into those of the frugal and traditional YWCA. Amidst a cross-fire of allegations - from the Transition House workers that the Y was an elitist and anti-union "old girls club" with no sensitivity toward the needs of battered women, and from the Y that the Transition House "collective" was overstaffed, inefficient, and an administrative nightmare - the Y decided in April of 1985 that it would not renew its contract for the operation of the shelter.

The gap left by the YWCA provided a perfect opportunity for the government to do what many suspected it had wanted all along, which was to

divest itself completely of an organization that was openly critical of the government's social and legal policies regarding the status of women. Although the decision to close the house seemed particularly harsh, involving the eviction of women and children and the firing of eighteen full and part-time staff, the government proceeded with characteristic disregard for the public's loud cry of protest.

The saga of the Women's House Saving Action raises with poignancy the vulnerablity of women, and the battered women's movement in particular, to the many different guises that the patriarchal conception of community can take. Most prominent among these perhaps, is the model of political community defined and enforced through the institutions of the state. Indeed, this idea of feminist struggle against the state represents for many people the crux of what the Occupation was all about. It is a tension that finds clear expression in the prolific debates among feminists over government funding. The more community-based services like Vancouver Transition House come to depend on the state for their livelihood, the argument goes, the more they make themselves susceptible not only to cooptation and increased regulation from competing interests, but to virtual elimination - as in the case of Transition House - during periods of political conservatism. Within this debate the discourse of community - understood here in reference to the state's mandate for funding 'community-based' organizations - becomes the primary vehicle through which the state is enabled to manage and rule the political activities of

women while maintaining an ostensible degree of distance. Some feminist organizations, like Vancouver Rape Relief, had responded to this dilemma by distancing themselves early on from the state through the establishment of private funding sources. Others, like Vancouver's Women Against Violence Against Women, and Transition House itself, campaigned vigorously for their right to exist as public facilities, accessible by women of all religious, class, and cultural backgrounds. In any case, the Occupation was widely understood by activists of all stripes as an effort to preserve the feminist and communitarian values which Transition House had come to symbolize in spite of its status as an institution within the state.

Ultimately, however, this characterization of the Occupation as a struggle by feminists against the state proves inadequate as a category of analysis. This inadequacy becomes evident partly through the recognition of how the success of the Occupation depended so much upon the quite anomalous set of alliances that were formed at points within the state - with the police and court system, with sympathetic bureaucrats at the provincial and federal levels, and with a large block of support at Vancouver City Hall. Far from possessing a pure or self-generating source of identity in isolation from the state, the Women's House Saving Action was enacted within a complex network of support and resistance, complicity and interference, which defies easy simplification. A further difficulty arises in the tendency of this particular analytical device for obscuring a whole set of conflictual dynamics that emerged

in the relationship of the House Saving Action to key centres of power that are peripheral to the state apparatus. By examining some of the positions taken as a result of the Occupation by organized labour, the voluntary social service sector, and miscellaneous women's organizations with differing levels of allegiance to feminist ideology, the question of women's relationship to the concept of community becomes ever more problematic. For in every case, the particular set of analyses and practices developed by Transition House for supporting battered women proved disruptive to the vision of community implied within these networks of power: to the voluntary sector - including organizations such as the United Way, the YWCA, and the Salvation Army, because of Transition House's politicization of wife-battering as a social, rather than an individual problem; to the labour movement, because of the shelter's insistent stance on the primary value of women's domestic and reproductive labour; to the First Nations and other visible minority communities, because of the battered women's movement's unwillingness to compromise the safety of women and children for the goal of winning cultural autonomy.

Finally, the real paradox of community in the context of the battered women's movement emerges in the recognition of how feminism's own claims to community, implicitly and explicitly expressed in diverse ways throughout the Occupation, inevitably brought feminist organizations face to face with the problem of their own reproduction of the very structures of hierarchy and domination they sought to overcome. Thus we observe how the Occupation

was constituted by relationships of tension, contradiction, and exclusion on the basis of class, race, and ideological differences among the women who supported it. In the present day, these divisions are perpetuated through the bitter rivalries that continue to characterize relations among some of Vancouver's key service-providers to battered women. These divisions might be construed to represent some of the more pernicious aspects of community as a social ideal; i.e. its logic of enclosure, its uproblematic assumption of a final or essential basis of unity to be achieved; its reliance upon a hegemonic group identity - one that is inevitably articulated in oppostion to what Chantal Mouffe describes as the 'constitutive outside', "an exterior to the community that makes its existence possible".[29] What is missing in this abstract critique of community, however, is consideration of the specific practices of transition as they are promoted within the battered women's movement - practices which have necessitated the rejection by women of static notions of community. In the final analysis, the critical practices of transition point to a model of community that embodies the principles of movement, heterogeneity, and self-critique; community in this sense can and must give way continually to new and unpredictable configurations of identity.

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[29] Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Citizenship and the Political Community", in the Miami Theory Collective's *Community At Loose Ends*, 1991, op.cit., p.78.

Chapter Two

The Women's House Saving Action: In and Against the State

> *While state funding to community services is an indication of the battles fought and won by grassroots community struggles, we should not forget that community struggles extend beyond the formation of service organizations funded by state programs. There are other terrains of struggle (eg. mass protests, alliances with other movements...) which are equally important and complement the advances made through state-funded community services.*
> Roxana Ng, 1988[30]

The state

An important theme in much feminist scholarship has been the attempt to understand the relationship of women, and the women's movement, to the state. In the North American context, one of the major dilemmas and sources of debate amongst feminists derives from the movement's nearly total dependence on various forms of government funding for its network of educational, political and service organizations. While some writers have declared a cautious approval of the potential benefits and opportunities for women which are created through the expansion of the modern welfare state, many others remain

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[30] *The Politics of Community Services: Immigrant Women, Class, and State* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1988), p.98.

highly critical of the increasing regulation of women's lives under new regimes of "public patriarchy".

With regard to the battered women's movement, recent scholarship has focused explicitly on the processes through which the political momentum of grassroots feminist organizations is diffused and coopted the more it becomes absorbed into the bureaucratic structures of the state.[31] Informal, woman-centred refuges become professionalized government agencies, while the experiences of battered and raped women are subsumed by their classification as "clients" and "welfare cases".[32] An even harsher line of critique identifies the state, through its legislative and policy-making functions, as the primary adjudicator in a dominant "political economy" of male violence.[33] The necessity for feminism to better comprehend the political implications of "the state" for women becomes clearer, then, as one considers the persistence of crimes such as wife-battering in spite of twenty years of state "support" (control?) of feminist initiatives. For, as one Vancouver activist writes, "from our experience, institutional response seemed most often to result in a new set of problems for

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[31] Gillian Walker, "Family Violence, the Women's Movement, and the State", *Studies in Political Economy,* 33 Autumn 1990, pp.63-90; Jan Barnsley, *Feminist Action, Institutional Reaction: Responses to Wife Assault* (Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1985).

[32] Somer Brodribb "Winonah's: In the Spirit of the Place", *Resources for Feminist Research*, Vol.7, no.13, 1988, pp.49-55.

[33] Jean Grossholtz, "Battered Women's Shelters and the Political Economy of Sexual Violence", in Irene Diamond ed. *Families, Politics, and Public Policy: A Feminist Dialogue on Women and the State* (New York and London: Longman, 1983), pp.59-69.

women and women's groups rather than acceptable solutions."[34]

This conceptual opposition of the "state" to the more community-based, and hence more liberatory practices of feminist politics has for the most part provided a crucial and effective impetus to the organized struggles of women. But as Ng has aptly suggested, the state's centrality in dictating the terms of women's oppression - as much as for regulating the parameters of women's resistance - ought not to be emphasized at the expense of alternative ways of conceptualizing issues of power, of domination, or of women's agency as political subjects. In this chapter, the events that transpired during the Women's House Saving Action are interpreted to reveal a shifting and indeterminate boundary separating the state from the community of resistance that formed against it. The image of community that emerges problematizes dramatically any sense of a simple opposition of a grassroots movement to the state, since the main strength of the Action lay in its ability to operate at multiple and contradictory points both inside and outside of the state.

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[34] Jan Barnsley, op.cit., 1985, p.4; See also Karlene Faith, and A. Mackenzie Petersen, "Sheltering Women: A Patriarchal State Enterprise. Vancouver, 1973-1986." Pre-publication draft (Vancouver: School of Criminology, Simon Fraser University, 1992); Lisa Price, *In Women's Interests: Feminist Activism and Institutional Change* (Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1988)

A community of resistance

When news of the probable closure of Transition House first broke in May of 1985, it spread quickly through the feminist community; in fact, by the first day it had reached all the way to the meetings of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women in Ottawa, where a resolution was passed demanding reinstatement of the city's only facility for battered women. Other actions quickly followed; while the news was not completely suprising given the Social Credit record over the previous two years, there was a sense among many women that in this instance the government had taken things one step too far. Thus, while public meetings were held around the city, and efforts were made by a group of prominent feminist professionals to form a new non-profit Vancouver Transition House Society that would replace the YWCA as contractor for the shelter, another group of women began considering the possibility of a more illicit line of defense.

When the occupation of Vancouver Transition House began, it was on an ad hoc and last minute basis. The core group of organizers had waited until the last possible moment before informing anyone of their intentions. When it became clear, as this group had predicted, that the government had no intention of responding to the proposal from the Vancouver Transition House Society - in spite of the fact that this organization had the full backing of key women's groups and social service organizations - an "emergency tea party" was called, which brought together a network of about thirty activists. Most of

them were women who were known for their interest in and commitment to feminist politics, especially on issues of violence against women. Other participants had been personally involved at some time or other with Transition House, either as workers or volunteers, or clients.

The mood was one of excitement, but also fear and uncertainty. This was not the first occupation on behalf of the Vancouver women's community,[35] but it was the first time an attempt would be made to combine political protest with the operation of a social service. A question on everyone's mind concerned the reaction of the staff. Special care had been taken to protect them from any knowledge of or liability for the illegal occupation for fear of jeopardizing their job security in the event the service was maintained. No one really knew what to expect: would the staff be alienated by the action? Would the occupiers be physically removed or arrested, or would they be ignored by the authorities? Would battered women continue to come to the shelter?

Once things were underway, these questions began to answer themselves in a more or less positive way. Although certain of the staff disapproved of the action, many others expressed great appreciation that local women were putting themselves on the line for Transition House. Meanwhile, across the rest of the city, the occupation immediately generated a large and

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[35] Previous sit-ins by Vancouver women had occurred in 1974, at the Daycare Information Center; in 1975, at the Canada Manpower offices; in 1981, at the Department of Indian Affairs by the Concerned Aboriginal women; and in 1983, when members of Women Against the Budget occupied government offices on Robson Street.

enthusiastic display of solidarity. Within a few days a full-scale mobilization was in place. Posters were up all over town explaining the action, the media was devoting high profile coverage to the story, and donations of food and money were flowing in. Dozens of women were coming forward to volunteer their time to the occupation. They were quickly organized under an umbrella of eleven committees, representatives from which met on a daily basis to form policy and strategy.

One of the remarkable features of the Women's House Saving Action was that at the same time as it was acting ostensibly *against* the state, it relied on the complicity of numerous state departments and authorities. The official line adopted by the Ministry of Human Resources in response to the occupation was defensive rather than punitive or interventionist. Minister Grace MacCarthy claimed that the Ministry was neither closing nor limiting transition house services, and that no one who came forward for help would be turned away. The Minister was referring here to the existence of nine other lower mainland shelters which she claimed had ample space to take in women from Vancouver, as well as to the fact that social workers at the downtown Emergency Services office were prepared to put battered women up in motel rooms if necessary. She explained further that proposals from private societies were under review, and the hope was to have a new emergency shelter in place within a few

weeks.[36] Aside from this statement, the Minister was not available for comment; however, neither was any attempt made either to identify or evict the occupiers.

The house itself belonged to the Ministry of Lands, Parks, and Housing, which extended tacit support to the occupation. When B.C. Telephone refused initially to service the illegally occupied premises, sympathetic parties within the ministry overruled arrangements made by the Ministry of Human Resources in order to ensure that occupiers would be able to provide the 24-hour crisis line that is crucial to supporting battered women. Five months later in the struggle, when the occupiers were in the process of negotiating the establishment of a new city-operated shelter, the Ministry indicated it was prepared to make the site available for such a project. An official from the Ministry was sent to the house to discuss its proposal in person with the occupiers.[37]

Other services from the state were also continued: the house received electricity from B.C. Hydro (a provincial crown corporation), water and sewerage from the Greater Vancouver Regional District, and garbage collection from the City of Vancouver. Meanwhile, the Vancouver City Police and local social service agencies - most of them funded if not run by one level of government or another - continued to refer battered women to the shelter for assistance. In this way, the illegally occupied Transition House continued to

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[36] "No violence victims turned away", letter from Minister of Human Resources Grace McCarthy, *The Province*, Wednesday, July 3, 1985, p.12.

[37] "Ministry offers squatters transition house talks", *The Vancouver Sun*, December 6, 1985, p. A24.

operate as a public service with extensive support from agencies at every level of the state.

One explanation for this unlikely scenario is that provincial authorities had simply decided to wait the occupation out, without provoking an incident that might generate adverse publicity. After all, the women were not interfering with any essential public service. Indeed, they were providing one - for free at that. From the government's perspective, a position of complete indifference might well have appeared as the best strategy available for undermining the militance of the protesters.

However, there is more to the story than this. In fact, the occupiers testify that they had reliable contacts with sympathizers in the Attorney-General's Office, the police force, the Ministries of Human Resources and Lands, Parks and Housing, B.C. Hydro, and B.C. Telephone. Thus, they had advance warning of adverse government actions, and informal understandings with various agencies that assured them of the services they needed. It is not clear that the government was fully aware of the support that was coming to the occupiers from its own agencies. On the other hand, it is quite clear that the occupiers had sufficient support from "the state" itself to mount stiff resistance to any "state" action to evict them from the premises. The occupiers were thus "in" the state in a way that made it difficult for the government to apply even gentle pressure upon them.

Given these numerous and diverse lines of support, it is difficult to

maintain an analysis of the Women's House Saving Action as a community of resistance that was autonomous from the state. This is not to deny that the action embodied many of the qualities which are definitive of "community" in the politically progressive sense of the term - a connection to the grassroots, an adherence to the principles of participatory democracy, a powerful sense of shared purpose and identity amongst women in defending their right to protection from male violence. It was, however, a community of many faces, which materialized across a broad cross-section of social groups and interests, including some which were firmly aligned to the institutions of the state.

In part, the profile of the House Saving Action reflects the fact that Transition House was itself an institution at the intersection of the state and local community. After twelve years of operation, the House had achieved a high degree of legitimacy in its relationship with the welfare and criminal justice branches of the state. It is not inaccurate to describe the role of Transition House as something of an adjunct to the police, since its work involved the control of violence and other forms of anti-social behaviour.[38] Because of its roots in the grassroots feminist movement, however, the shelter took measures to perform its role not as an institution over/against the community it served,

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[38] Gillian Walker describes this as one of the unintended dilemmas resulting from the women's movement's adoption of the term "violence" to describe and identify the experiences of battered women. The result has been to align feminists within a "law and order" discourse that is antithetical to the goal of liberating women from patriarchal authority. *Family Violence and the Women's Movement: The Conceptual Politics of Struggle* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), pp.95-110.

but rather in the context of a mutually supporting network of contacts inside/outside the state - some public, some private, some radical, some conservative, all with varying degrees of commitment to the goal espoused by Transition House of seeking a political solution to the "problem" of wife-battering.

The House, and the political campaign to save it from being closed, thus exemplify the fundamental indeterminacy of the state and community as categories of analysis, particularly with regard to women. This problem is reflected in the difficulty of ascertaining precisely where and how the repressive function of the state originates in relation to women, and where it ends, or at what exact point the resistance of a community originates. It also plays upon the interesting and debatable question of whether a place like Transition House is best understood as a creature of the state or as a creation of the women's community. What is more important in this context, however, is the sense that emerges of the inadequacy of simple formulas and conventional concepts for describing or explaining the phenomenon of women's political resistance. The inadequacy stems in large part from women's historical exclusion from the traditional channels of political power. If the concepts of community and state convey meanings that uphold the representation of women as passive, apolitical, and of a subordinate social status relative to men, then their uncritical adoption when describing the political experiences of women may result inadvertantly in the reinforcement, rather than the transformation of that

exclusion. The sense that emerges is thus the absence of a language that can accurately capture the political significance of the battered women's movement. As we saw, the momentum that was generated by the loss of Transition House could not be contained within a political party, or a department of the state, or a particular neighbourhood within the city, but was something which cut unpredictably across these and other jurisdictions. It was not the product of a particular policy or party line, and it did not seek to appeal to or reflect the interests of any one group of women over another. Rather, it gave and received support from individuals in a variety of positions and locations, including some - police, bureaucrats, "conservatives", etc. - whose interest might in other instances have been perceived as antagonistic. Such indeterminacy is no detriment to women's political resistance. In this case, it was precisely because of the absence within the occupation of a singular grand agenda or party line that a creative and productive relationship was able to flourish between the Women's House Saving Action and the local state, in the guise of Vancouver City Hall.

The City Hall strategy

A further result of the Occupation - and one which developed quite unexpectedly for everyone involved - was the degree to which the municipal government of Vancouver voluntarily aligned itself with the occupiers as an advocate for battered women, and indeed, for the goals of feminist politics. For

many of the people involved, the positive relationships forged between women activists and city politicians and bureaucrats during this time marks one of the more significant accomplishments of the Women's House Saving Action.

From the time the province first announced its intention to close the house in May of 1985, the City of Vancouver had mounted its own campaign of resistance independently of the feminist community. A report drafted by the Social Planning Department notifying the government that any interruption of Transition House services was unacceptable to the City of Vancouver was received with unanimous approval by City Council, along with the following recommendations:

> 1)Vancouver must have an emergency facility, specifically for women and children who are victims of domestic violence;
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> 2)the facility must be staffed on a 24-hour basis by women experienced in working with battered women; and
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> 3)the sponsor must not represent any particular religious or philosophical viewpoint. That is, the facility must operate and be perceived to operate in a manner that is open to all women regardless of race, economic status, religious preference, etc.[39]

Six weeks later, when the occupation had begun, members of council voiced open support for the illegal action. Bruce Eriksen, alderman and chair of Vancouver's Community Planning Committee, said his committee was 100% behind the women's efforts to keep the house open. He pointed out that the action was more than a "sit-in", since the occupants were ensuring that battered

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[39] Minutes from Vancouver City Council meeting, May 23, 1985.

women would have a place to go. Alderman Libby Davies also supported the occupation, and indicated that she would continue to appeal to the province for a reinstatement of the service.[40]

As the action intensified over the summer and fall of 1985, so too did the role of City Hall as an institution at the forefront of the campaign to save Transition House. Among the first steps taken was the sponsorhip of two press conferences, on July 23 and August 7, in which representatives of the Women's House Saving Action and supporting women's organizations were invited to outline their demands to the government. By making itself available as a forum for women's groups, the City helped to increase the credibility of the protesters, as well as providing them with a neutral space in which to meet and develop their postion.

It was in the wake of the second "summit" meeting and press conference that a plan began to take shape amongst concerned women at City Hall and the Women's House Saving Action for establishing a new shelter to be operated by the City of Vancouver. Until this point, it had never occurred to the women involved in the occupation to seek a solution to the issue of battered women at the level of local government. The women generally had very little knowledge of how city politics operated, who had power, how things got done, etc. What they discovered, however, was a much more friendly, responsive, and

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[40] Sit-in at battered wives' shelter a stand-off", *The Vancouver Sun*, July 2, 1985, p. A11.

accessible environment for political action than had been encountered at either the provincial or federal levels of government.

By the end of July, after a full month of occupation, the province was still refusing to say when and if it would open the service again, or who the successful contractor would be. Meanwhile, the 10-bed house was operating at full capacity, staffed by a still-enthusiastic army of volunteers from the feminist community. With the help of women from City Hall, the occupation gained new momentum. The focus was directed less toward protest against the provincial government, and more toward the development of an innovative concept in service delivery.

The main advantage of the proposed "City Hall Transition House and Advocacy Center", as the project later came to be called, was its ability to provide a program of high-quality services to battered women, within a much more accessible framework of public control than is available through either private societies or the provincial government. The proposal would emphasize an enhanced legal advocacy function, as well as a multi-cultural orientation, both areas in which the former Transition House was weak.

The idea immediately sparked support from the women's groups in Vancouver, who were then able to convince Council to undertake a feasibility study for a city-sponsored transition house. The study was developed over the next five months by women inside the Social Planning Department, who worked in close but shadowed consultation with core members of the Women's House

Saving Action. In January of 1986, the completed report was released, indicating that Vancouver had some of the poorest emergency services for battered women in the country. The study noted that an additional 10-bed facility would significantly improve this situation, but would still leave Vancouver with the highest bed-to-population ratio (1:17,300) among all of the Canadian metropolitan areas surveyed.[41] The report also confirmed that from a service point of view, a city-operated transition house would be preferable to a privately-operated one for reasons of control and accountability. It pointed out, however, that the proposed annual budget of $475,000 for such a service would far exceed the municipality's ability to pay. The report recommended, therefore, that Council approve in principle the establishment of a new shelter for the City of Vancouver, with direction being given to the Director of Social Planning to negotiate a funding schedule with senior levels of government. At the Council meeting of January 28, 1986, to great cheers from the gallery, these recommendations were approved by a 5-3 margin.

In a statement released February 3, the Women's House Saving Action commended City Council for its decision, and announced that it would soon bring its occupation of Vancouver Transition House to a close. When the women officially left the house on the last day of February, 1986, it was with a great sense of satisfaction that their demands had been met by the

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[41] "Shelter for women backed: Study cites strain on city services", *The Vancouver Sun*, January 16, 1986, p. A20.

government, although in a form that could never have been anticipated when the action was first undertaken. There was also satisfaction in the knowledge that the episode had provided a tremendous infusion of energy and empowerment to the women's movement in B.C., after a long period of Social Credit-induced despair.

One important lesson to emerge from the occupation is the importance of bureaucratic as opposed to political support for an issue. For real movement to take place, it was not enough to secure the lip-service of elected politicians. In this case, the success of the City Hall strategy depended almost entirely on the behind-the-scenes support of women in the Social Planning bureaucracy who had the necessary expertise to manoeuver the proposal through the appropriate channels. This involved such techniques as steering the proposal to Council by way of carefully selected committees in order to avoid having it opposed in advance by senior officials in the Social Planning Department who were unsympathetic to the idea. When presenting the final study and recommendations to Council in January 1986, the women timed their delivery strategically to coincide with the absence of the Mayor, whose position on the issue was deemed unreliable. In addition, they coached the leaders of the Women's House Saving Action on strategies for lobbying city politicians, and mobilizing an effective coalition of community support for the motion. In fact, in almost every instance where assistance was provided to the occupation from any department or level of the state, it was usually as a result of a similar kind

of bureaucratic support.

Clearly then, to the extent that the Women's House Saving Action formed a successful "community of resistance", it did so with support from multiple and apparently contradictory locations. Membership in this community had nothing to do with one's position in relation to the "state", and everything to do with one's relationship to the complex of oppositional meanings and practices which underly feminist consciousness. What is even more perplexing to consider are the tensions which existed within and between the different points of resistance that were constitutive of the Women's House Saving Action community. What emerges in an examination of certain of these conflicts is that the occupation of Vancouver Transition House bore upon a number of struggles which are in many ways peripheral to debates about the state. A less simplistic understanding of the issues at stake in the occupation would thus involve reading against the grain of a number of "progressive" ideals, including those contained within the discourses of social welfare, of the labour movement, and of feminism itself, in order to discover the discontinuous quality of women's political resistance.

Chapter Three

Vancouver Transition House; History of a Social Service Vanguard

What is it then that community workers have to learn from the Women's Movement? In the first place that daily life is political - political in a deeper sense than most community workers understand. I think also that many feminist activists have shown a greater sensitivity and understanding about what women's lives are really like than have community workers, whose comprehension has often been as superficial as their goals have been unclear. Perhaps most important of all, the Women's Movement, whatever its difficulties and contradictory tensions, has demanded the right for women to speak for themselves...Commmunity workers must learn to listen to women, instead of telling them what they want, what they are 'really' like and how they should be. But in order to do that, of course, they will first have to realise that women are there - that they exist, out in the 'community'.

Elizabeth Wilson, 1977[42]

The Transition House community

Lenore Walker, in her groundbreaking research on wife-battering, described the transition house as a "total therapeutic community"[43]. Indeed, one of the most tangible adaptations of community as a concept within the battered women's movement refers to the houses themselves, and the

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[42] From "Women in the Community", in Marjorie Mayo, ed. *Women in the Community* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p.9.

[43] Lenore E. Walker, *The Battered Woman* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

environment of internal cooperation and security they provide for women escaping from life-threatening situations. In subsequent accounts, this ideal of community - where "participants develop holistic relationships that are valuable in themselves"[44] - is often emphasized as a crucial component of the feminist transition house model. The personal bonds which are formed amongst staff and residents, the sharing of meals, house work and childcare that take place in the shelter, writes one commentator, all help "make it possible for women to break out of their isolation and exchange experiences with other women in similar straits, all within a context of *community* life".[45] Playing on the irony of battered women's relationship to the concept, still others have noted the unusual juxtaposition of the two divergent types of domestic community encountered by battered women in transition: the one, a blissful familial exterior concealing an interior of hidden shame and abuse; the other, a dynamic woman-centred enclave which transforms the meaning of house into "a school for liberation", a "center for learning one's rights and the cornerstone of a general approach which serves as both a community and a domestic model".[46]

From its inception in the early 1970's, Vancouver Transition House was

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[44] Meera Srinivasan and Liane V. Davis, "A Shelter: An Organization Like Any Other?" *Affilia*. Vol.6, no.1, Spring 1991, p.48.

[45] "The Shelter Movement in Canada: Where it Came From and What it's Doing", in *Vis-a-Vis: A National Newsletter on Family Violence*, Vol.7, no.2, Summer 1989, p.1.

[46] Micheline Beaudry, *Battered Women* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1985), p.37.

symbolic of this particular form of community. Not only did the 10-bed residence provided free 24-hour emergency shelter to women and their children who were in need of protection from violent partners; through its advocacy work, and its dynamic relationship to larger national and international networks of political activism, Transition House offered the women who came there a point of entry to the much broader and unbounded dimension of possibility comprised by the political community of feminism. It was this latter connection which surrounded the shelter in controversy, and not only in relation to its state funders. In fact, some of hardest struggles encountered by Vancouver Transition House over the years were in relation to its counter-part organizations within the City's community-based social service sector. Here, the shelters' commitment to feminist and egalitarian values appeared in stark contrast to the more conservative structures and practices of the major charities and other private sector social service agencies. The conflicts that arose in this context around the issue of wife-battering concealed at a deeper level a profound divergence of view regarding the nature of community in social welfare discourse.

Background to the closure

Transition House services in Vancouver and elsewhere had not arisen from either government agencies or the private charities. It was within the feminist movement that the issue of wife-battering was first identified, and met

by the formation of informal, volunteer-run refuges.

The "Women's Place" drop-in centre near Burrard and Broadway (since closed) is most frequently cited as the place which provided the main catalyst for the establishment of a battered women's shelter in Vancouver.[47] The initial idea, as Macdermot writes, was to use the centre as a refuge for women who "needed a rest" from their husbands and children. However, it soon became apparent that the situation was much worse than supposed. Most of the women who came to the centre were escaping from physical as well as mental abuse from their husbands. An additional problem identified by the centre staff was that women who left their children behind risked losing custody of them altogether. The need then, was for a specialized service that could provide emergency accommodation both to women and their children, and "much more leaning toward a permanent separation than we had first envisaged".[48]

The ad hoc committee which formed in response to this need included representatives from Women's Place, as well as from Vancouver Status of Women, The Vancouver Women's Health Collective, Vancouver Rape Relief, and the University of British Columbia's women's caucus. When funding for the

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[47] See Valerie Macdermot "An Account of the History and Operation of Vancouver Transition House" in Jan Barnsley, *Battered and Blamed: A Report on Wife Assault From the Perspective of Battered Women* (Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1980), Appendix IV; also, Megan Ellis "Vancouver Transition House: A Case Study", unpublished paper, 1984; Jan Barnsley, 1985, op.cit., pp.18-23; Gillian Walker, 1990, op.cit., pp.22-23.

[48] Macdermot, p.1.

project was eventually provided by the NDP government, along with a two-storey east side duplex, it was through an arrangement which granted the committee a wide margin of administrative autonomy. The result was a service which reflected far more the philosophy and structure of the Vancouver "women's liberation" network than it did the standardized norms and practices of its funder, the Department of Human Resources.[49]

Structurally, Transition House was organized on the basis of the collectivist principles characteristic of many feminist organizations. An attempt was made to rotate management tasks and shift-work equally, and in a non-hierarchical fashion, among all members of the staff. Decisions were made on the basis of regular meetings and a carefully designed and practised system of constructive communication.

The essential philosophy of Transition House revolved around the necessity to understand wife-battering in the context of the systematic inequality between men and women, as well as of the prevailing norms and attitudes which have historically condoned men's use of violence in the family. A 1979 study conducted at Vancouver Transition House of the circumstances and consequences of wife battering concluded:

> "Wife assault is a reality in our society because men have the socially ascribed authority to make the rules in marriage; and

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[49] In 1976, the Department of Human Resources in British Columbia became the Ministry of Human Resources. In 1987, the name changed again to the Ministry of Social Services and Housing, and as of 1992 is referred to as the Ministry of Social Services.

> because violence against their wives is accepted, in the eyes of society, as an appropriate instrument of control. The social and economic structure of marriage, as an institution in which women are dependent on men, requires this assignment of authority to men in order to uphold the institution."[50]

The Transition House model sought to challenge those norms: by naming and validating women's experience of violence in the family; by offering support, rather than "treatment", to battered women; by placing the responsibility for the violence squarely on the shoulders of the men who commit it. These innovations were unusual by comparison with more conventional social work practices, and for this reason, applicants with a traditional social work background were avoided in the hiring process, in favour of women with a broad, and not necessarily professional, 'life experience' background.

The goal of these strategies was to create an alternative form of community from that of the outside world, one in which women were encouraged to value themselves and each other as peers and equals. It was a process which aimed ultimately, as the name indicates, for a "transition", or transformation, of consciousness. In one early account of Vancouver Transition House by Jillian Ridington, the environment is described as a "reconstitutive milieu", which provides "a social context in which alternative ideologies and behaviours are necessary and workable."[51] In another account, the

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[50] Jan Barnsley, 1985, op.cit., p.126.

[51] Jillian Ridington, "The Transition Process: A Feminist Environment as Reconstitutive Milieu", *Victimology: An International Journal*, Vol.12, no.3/4, 1977/78, pp.569.

reconceptualization of women's power is emphasized:

> "The battered woman, whatever her class or background, is rendered powerless and degraded by the man who violates her. Her transition thus necessitates finding a way to regain her sense of control over her life, to relearn independence and to find her strength. The experience of living co-operatively with other women allows her to recognize herself in the lives of these other women and to both give and receive assistance and support. Sharing in the day to day tasks of maintaining the house, trading off childcare with other residents, taking on the struggles with the welfare office, family courts, and finding a place to live, all contribute to a woman's regaining a sense of being able".[52]

In addition to providing emergency shelter to battered women and their children, the Transition House staff considered the tasks of political advocacy and public education to be a crucial part of their work. The growing body of evidence reported by women who came to the shelter indicated that the reality of the situation far exceeded the public's image of a few isolated cases of "domestic squabbles". In fact, women reported frequent vicious attacks from their partners, as often as three or four times a week. The injuries they sustained were extreme, ranging from bruises, burns, and lacerations, to fractures, concussions, miscarriages, and even death.[53] Sexual abuse in the

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[52] Megan Ellis, "The Vancouver Transition House: A Case Study" (Unpublished paper, Vancouver, 1984).

[53] In Canada in 1989, 119 women were murdered by current or former husbands or partners. See *The War Against Women* (Ottawa: Report of the the Standing Committee on Health and Welfare, Social Affairs, Seniors, and the Status of Women, 1991), p.7. For an account of the violence reported by women using Vancouver Transition House see Jan Barnsley, *Battered and Blamed...,* 1980., op.cit. Further descriptive accounts are contained in Linda Macleod, *Wife Battering in Canada*..., 1985, op.cit.; Lisa Freedman, "Wife Assault", in Connie Guberman and Margie Wolfe eds. *No Safe Place: Violence Against Women and*

form of rape and harassment was frequently reported as well, and most battering appeared to take place in an overall atmosphere of psychological abuse that included threats to use violence against the woman or her children, terrorizing her with a gun or knife or by driving recklessly, belittling or attacking her beliefs or values, preventing her from working or from visiting her family and friends, and depriving her of sleep or food.[54]

Perhaps most alarming of all the abuses reported by women was the continuing tendency of mainstream legal and social service institutions to deny, minimize, and/or ignore the violence. "Our outrage grew," writes Gillian Walker about her experience in the early battered women's movement in Vancouver. "We learned from women's experiences, and from attempts to find ways to support them in making changes in their circumstances, that institutional responses were punitive, victim-blaming, or more commonly, denial or disbelief, a minimizing of the injuries, and a refusal to intervene even in life-threatening circumstances."[55] Maintaining control of the issue in the political context of male violence against women, as opposed to the depoliticized and gender-neutral discourse of "inter-spousal conflict", or "family violence" adopted by the majority of professionals in the field, was of primary importance to the Transition

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Children (Toronto: Women's Press, 1985).

[54] Joanne Dunaway, *Victim Support Worker Handbook: Wife Assault* (Vancouver: Justice Institute of B.C., 1988), p.5.

[55] Gillian Walker, *Family Violence and the Women's Movement...*, 1990, op.cit., p.25.

House concept. To this end, the staff openly took part in and promoted women's events and demonstrations, and actively lobbied for procedural and legislative changes in the way wife-battering was handled by the courts, the police, the hospitals, and social workers. One final practice which further set apart the Transition House collective, at least during its early phase, was its strong separatist philosophy which insisted not only on a woman-only environment, but also on not permiting government supervisors of any gender onto the premises. As one former employee of the shelter recalled, "inside that cocoon of Transition House we had power to make decisions that I don't think any other agency ever had".[56]

There were three main factors which contributed to the viability of this otherwise militant and nonconforming social service agency. The first was its connection to the dynamic women's movement in Vancouver, from which it drew a great deal of strength and momentum. The second was the populist and communitarian ideology underlying the NDP's decentralization of social services during the early 1970's into the hands of the voluntary sector, and which granted this and other reform and advocacy oriented organizations a considerable degree of decision-making autonomy.[57] Third and most important was the obvious necessity of the service being provided, and the

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[56] Muggs Sigurgeirson. Personal interview, Vancouver, June 21, 1991.

[57] See Clague, Dill, Seebaran, Wharf, *Reforming Human Services: The Experience of the Community Resource Boards in B.C.*, 1984, op.cit.

effectiveness with which the Transition House staff performed their work. Within one month of opening its doors in December 1973, the shelter was operating at full capacity. The number of women served during the period of the shelter's operation averaged from 100 to 200 per year, plus an equal number of children. But the actual dimensions of the wife-battering problem as it unfolded after the shelter's establishment are better reflected in the numbers of women who were turned away: in 1983, 1200 women and children victims of battering had to be referred elsewhere for lack of space; in 1984, this number exceeded 1300.[58]

Neither was the Vancouver Transition House an isolated phenomenon. The numbers of women organizing shelters as a practical and immediate response to wife-battering increased rapidly during the 1970's in Canada and internationally. By 1980 there were 85 shelters operating in eight out of twelve province/territories; in 1991, this number had increased to 300.[59] This network of shelters is a movement in its own right, with considerable policy influence at all levels of government based on its effectiveness and cost-efficiency. In a 1979 study of Vancouver Transition House conducted by the Women's Research Centre, all of the 148 residents interviewed responded positively in their evaluation of the service provided by the shelter. In particular, respondents valued the benefits they derived from having a safe refuge in a

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[58] "City women's shelter must close its doors", *The Vancouver Sun*, May 17, 1985, p. A19.

[59] *The War Against Women...*, 1991, op.cit., p.12.

location unknown to their husbands, from the competence and expertise of the staff in legal and social service matters, and from being supported by other women in similar circumstances to their own.[60]

Out of sorts with the voluntary sector

For all of its accomplishments, the Vancouver shelter nonetheless represented practices and beliefs that were considered unorthodox and at times contentious by others. The operative perception among feminists involved in front line services to battered women was (and continues to be) one of an outside world of family, church, school, workplace, government, etc., which refuses to fully acknowledge or respond to the fact that in Canada women are systematically beaten and abused in their homes. This perception resulted over the years in a number of stand-offs between Vancouver Transition House and other social service/"helping" agencies which do not share a feminist analysis of the issue. They were conflicts which are crucial to understanding the events which led to the closure of Transition House.

The first of these stand-offs occurred in the context of a Symposium and Task Force on Family Violence conducted by the United Way in Vancouver form 1977-79. Transition House women who participated in the 1977 Symposium were alarmed to discover how both their existence and their pioneering contributions to the field were marginalized by the organizers. There

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[60] Jan Barnsley, 1980, op.cit., p.119.

was virtually no representation of women who are the victims of battering; meanwhile, the proceedings were dominated by male social scientists and professionals, and reflected an objectifying and depoliticized understanding of the issues in which the role of men as the perpetrators in the majority of "family violence" incidents was systematically denied or obscured. When feminist activist Gene Errington[61] addressed the audience concerning the necessity for recognizing the broader social patterns of oppression and discrimination against women that structure men's use of violence, she was accused of being hostile and extremist.[62]

There is no doubt that for its time, the United Way's initiative represented a breakthrough in generating awareness and action around a problem which had previously been invisible, and it did so in a way which ostensibly involved members of the lay community. Yet, as Barnsley emphasizes, the report and recommendations which emerged from the two year Task Force, and which were to exercise a tremendous influence at both the provincial and national levels over future developments in domestic violence policy, effectively took control of the issue from the feminist activists whose work had initiated the

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[61] Currently Director of Community Programs, B.C. Ministry of Attorney General.

[62] Gene Errington, "Family Violence: Is It A Woman's Problem?" in Patricia D. Ross, *Proceedings From The Symposium on Family Violence, March 9,10,11, 1977*, (Vancouver: United Way of Greater Vancouver, 1977). See also Jan Barnsley's extended critique of the United Way Symposium and Task Force on Family Violence, in *Feminist Action, Institutional Reaction: Responses to Wife Assault*,...1985.

project in the first place. Although feminist activists continued to participate in the programs set up by the United Way's Committee on Family Violence, they consistently felt that their own initiatives in self-help, support groups, and self-defense for women, etc., were marginalized relative to the clinical approaches taken by "experts" in the field. In contrast to the feminist approaches to defining and responding to wife battering, approaches which begin, Barnsley writes, by listening to and believing the experiences described by women, the methods adopted in the United Way's handling of the issue

> "begin with mainstream social science approaches, traditional political theories, and bureaucratic perspectives...and define wife battering as individual pathology and faulty interaction within the inviolate institution of the family. They do not deem women's experience of wife battering to be worthy of analysis and action on its own terms, nor do they accord status or respect to those who do i.e. feminists and activists. What follows from this approach is a definition of the issue as family violence, subsuming women's experience into a more general frame, worthy of "public" interest; a definition that obscures who is doing what to whom; that reframes political issues as social problems, thus minimizing the inherent structural challenges; that fits more closely the institution's and the state's existing problem-solving apparatus; and that ultimately makes women's situation invisible."[63]

This dissatisfaction eventually led to the feminists' withdrawal from the United Way's Family Violence Committee and the programs it funded, and the establishment in 1979 of Battered Women's Support Services, an organization which operated independently of the United Way's committee. As Barnsley describes it, this split symbolized the return of the issue of wife battering from

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[63] Barnsley, 1985, p.73.

the United Way's control, and "back into the women's community".[64]

The political divisions established between Vancouver Transition House and the United Way during this extended period of policy development and implementation had an adverse influence over the shelter's relationships to other agencies in the community, particularly those operating under the United Way umbrella. It was these tensions as well that resulted in a complete breakdown in relations with the YWCA during the privatization episode of 1984-85, an outcome that was all the more disappointing because of certain expectations which had developed around the idea of the Y as an ally in feminist politics.

It was August 1983 when the government first let it be known that it was intending to contract out the service to "the community".[65] The YWCA did not exactly volunteer for the job of assuming the contract, but agreed to do so under gentle pressure from a group of local women who considered it to be the most acceptable choice from among a number of private and non-profit agencies operating in the city. Not only did the Y have a reputation as a provider of high quality social services to women - including three day-care centres, as well as counselling and related programs for single mothers,

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[64] Ibid., p.62.

[65] "We will look to the community as we have in other communities to pick it up" were the precise words of Human Resources Minister Grace McCarthy. "Battered wives fear losing city refuge: McCarthy hopes someone will take over home", *The Vancouver Sun*, August 6, 1983, p. B4.

immigrant women, and refugee women - but it was also involved directly with issues of violence against women.

In 1979 the YWCA in Vancouver had established Munroe house, Canada's first "second stage"[66] residence for battered women. The idea for such a service had originated from within the organization as a result of its historical involvement with women's housing issues,[67] and was developed in close consultation with Vancouver Transition House. Munroe House is funded by the Ministry of Social Services, but administered by the YWCA. It is widely regarded as a very successful service, and one that is openly feminist in its orientation.

The expectation that Transition House would be comfortably accommodated within the Y umbrella was never realized, however. In part, this was a result of conflicts over the union, which continued to represent the staff of Transition House after privatization. Most of the YWCA services were non-union, and the board was admittedly concerned over the effect the wide differential in benefits and wages paid to the House's staff would have on the rest of its employees.

The more difficult issues revolved around the Y's intolerance for the

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[66] "Second stage housing" provides long term as opposed to emergency shelter services, for periods of up to six months or a year, within a confidential and supportive transition house environment.

[67] See *A Review of Munroe House: Second Stage Housing for Battered Women*, (Vancouver: Women's Research Centre, 1980).

politics of radical feminism. The Y was and is a women's organization, the largest one in British Columbia in fact, and insofar as it supported the suffragist movement during the first world war, is pro-choice on abortion, and focuses on the special needs of women, it defines itself as feminist. The Y was founded in a different era, however, and reflects an older, more liberal kind of feminism than what grew later out of the fervour of the 1960's. It has always had a traditional administrative structure, and is much more like a government department than a feminist collective in its manner of operation. This is partly a matter of scale, but it also reflects the fact that, from the Y's perspective, the financial and administrative controls common in any large organization are not effects of "patriarchy", but simply of the need to ensure that scarce resources are used efficiently and the highest standards of professional conduct observed.

In relation to Transition House, there were a number of issues which arose immediately over styles of management, and which proved very difficult to resolve. The first of these involved what the Y considered to be an inordinately high ratio of staff to residents in the House (eighteen full and part-time staff: ten residents). The staff, however, insisted that the availability on an on-call basis of one-on-one counselling and support for battered women was essential to its task. Other issues involved the frequent and lengthy meetings required by the staff to work out its policy collectively, as well as its intense style of interaction with the House residents. The Y perceived that the staff were failing to make an essential distinction between their professional responsibility

to women in crisis, and their personal interests in advancing a certain kind of political agenda, and that the quality of the service was suffering as a result. For the staff, however, such a distinction was impossible to maintain.

Thus, while the government was prepared to continue its funding for Transition House via the YWCA (albeit at arm's length and with a reduced budget), the latter found after one year that the costs of running the service far outweighed the benefits, and so decided to cancel its contract. It is important to recognize that it was the YWCA, a community-based women's organization, and not the state, which issued the final termination to the workers and residents at Transition House.

The Salvation Army coup

A similar complex of debates surrounded the role of the Salvation Army in the provision of social services to women in Vancouver, with particularly damaging implications for Transition House in the context of the 1985 occupation.

These tensions first emerged in 1973, when the Salvation Army opposed the establishment of Vancouver Transition House. This reflected a rejection (shared by conservative Christians and non-Christians alike) of the feminist analysis that locates women's structural inequality at the root of wife-battering. The more conventional view held by charity and mission organizations such as the Salvation Army sought to treat the issue of violence as a moral, as opposed

to either a political or criminal issue: a problem experienced by individual "families" - usually as a result of alcoholism, poverty, or other forms of indigence - within an otherwise functioning status quo. As one operator of a Christian women's shelter in the downtown eastside put it:

> "There definitely is a difference of philosophies. Men are allowed to visit their wives under strict supervision [at our facility]. We never had a problem with that. We don't see any villains in this. We're for healing".[62]

From the feminist perspective, the Salvation Army was, as one activist put it, like a "black hole", swallowing up social problems so that they could never be seen again. The Salvation Army did not engage in political advocacy, it was not connected with the organized women's movement, it was not unionized, and it was connected with the conservative elites that supported the Social Credit Party. Grace McCarthy, for example, the Minister of Human Resources in 1985, sat on the board of the Salvation Army.[63]

These "differences in philosophy" were seriously exacerbated during the Transition House crisis of 1985. From the point of view of the House supporters, it became increasingly apparent that the government's decision to close Transition House was motivated not by a desire to eliminate the service so much as to eliminate its feminist content - to stifle a political organization committed to ending the social and legal practices which uphold masculine

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[62] "We see no villains, we're for healing", *The Vancouver Sun*, July 23, 1986, p. B5.

[63] See "Conflict charged in shelter contracts", *The Vancouver Sun*, August 7, 1985, p. A3.

authority inside and outside the family. This was evident in the government's rejection of the proposal from the feminist-sponsored Vancouver Transition House Society, and it was evident in the wording of the Ministry's published advertisements for the contract. As one critic noted in the July issue of *Kinesis* (a women's news monthly published by the Vancouver Status of Women), the tender called only for the provision of an "emergency family shelter", and a program "supportive to the integrity of the family unit", but made no mention of battering, or male violence, or of the specific protection needs of women and children escaping a life-threatening situation.[64]

To this end, the feminist organizations worked to come up with a clear set of criteria by which a new service for battered women could be evaluated. The report, released at the July 22 "women's summit" at City Hall by a coalition of 13 women's organizations, called upon government to award a contract that would ensure a "women-only" environment, unionized staff, a confidential address, a self-help and cooperative approach, referrals to community services, and an ability to serve disabled women and women from ethnic minorities.

Their efforts were in vain. On August 6, the government announced that two new contracts for the provision of services to battered women in Vancouver would be awarded to the Salvation Army and Act II, a locally-based social service agency. When the Salvation Army's Kate Booth House did open its doors on October 9, 1985 - three months into the occupation - it was in a

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[64] "B.C. ignores battered women", *Kinesis*, July 1985, p.1.

separate location from Vancouver Transition House, and had a new and non-unionized staff. Not only did the new contractors ignore requests by the Women's House Saving Action to discuss the criteria that had been established, but they refused to make public any details concerning the content of their service to battered women.

It was over the issue of the Salvation Army, and the antagonism directed toward it from the feminists inside Transition House, that the high level of public and media support initially gained by the Women's House Saving Action first began to falter. On one level, the events were illustrative of how the Action had failed to make clear for the public the importance of feminist as opposed to non-feminist perspectives in developing services to battered women. Criticism of the Occupation at this point, including claims about the self-interest of the protesters in seeking to preserve their own jobs (even though the staff were neither informed of, nor involved in, the occupation),[65] and of the prejudice and misinformation being spread by feminists against the Salvation Army,[66] seemed to echo Minister Grace McCarthy's own opinion in defense of Kate Booth House that "charity", after all, ought to "begin in a church". [67] Thus, the occupier's decision to continue their protest even after Kate Booth House had

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[65] "First things first": editorial, *The Vancouver Sun*, August 10, 1985, p. A4.

[66] Peter McMartin, "A slur based on fear, hyperbole": editorial, *The Vancouver Sun*, August 29, 1985, p. A5.

[67] "Women's groups press for shelter plan details", *The Vancouver Sun*, August 8, 1985, p. A19.

begun operations was both questioned and criticized by those who failed to grasp that "charity" toward battered women was precisely the kind of attitude the House Saving Action was attempting to combat. Intent on defending the rights of battered women to secular and feminist services, and in view of the fact that the occupied House was still receiving women in need of shelter (and continued to do so throughout the eight months of the protest), the Women's House Saving Action vowed to continue its protest until these demands were met.

The stand-off between the feminist community and the Salvation Army in Vancouver has continued to the present day. For its perceived cooperation with a government hostile to feminism and labour unionism, and for offering what many consider to be an apolitical alternative to the transition house movement, Kate Booth house has been a pariah. It is not included in the B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses, and not even listed by the Vancouver Status of Women, in spite of the fact that it is Vancouver's *only* emergency shelter specifically for battered women. The fact is, however, that although Kate Booth House avoids high profile political activities, it does provide a woman-centred service, and has increasingly come to define itself as an advocate of women's empowerment in the feminist tradition. The irony is that most of the practices advocated by feminists twenty years ago - which generated so much controversy at the time - have now become accepted as norms, and are

followed as a matter of routine within Kate Booth House, as elsewhere.[68]

Arguments about the detrimental effect of "bureaucratization" on feminist organizations as they are increasingly absorbed by the state appear somewhat spurious in the light of these struggles within the community-based social services sector in Vancouver. As the examples of the United Way and the YWCA illustrate, processes of professionalization and depoliticization are by no means solely the maladies of the state, but can be reproduced in any number of guises, including the guise of community. In this case, feminists' framing of wife-battering as a consequence of gender inequality within the family contrasted dramatically with the unproblematic view of the family assumed by mainstream agencies in the social service sector. As Dalley and Neysmith have both argued, this latter view, which they define as the "ideology of familism"[69],

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[68] Numerous authors acknowledge the early role of the Salvation Army in providing shelter to abused women long before the onset of the contemporary feminist movement. Mariana Valverde describes the boldness with which the Army broke ranks from the elitism of 19th century protestantism, in particular through the unprecedented of measure of freedom and authority it accorded to its female officers. See Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, Inc., 1991), p.65. Tracing the role of the Salvation Army in the U.S. battered women's movement, Susan Shecter concludes that in most cases, the Army "reacted with discomfort and fought back with intense pettiness" against the innovations in service delivery proposed by grassroots feminist organizations. See *Women and Male Violence: The Visions and Struggles of the Battered Women's Movement,* 1982, op.cit., p.75. See Appendix V of this document for the Salvation Army's Kate Booth House Statement of Purpose and Philosophy.

[69] Sheila Neysmith writes, "Familism is the idealization of what we think a family should embody: A conflict-free private domain where emotional and physical needs are tended to." Gillian Dalley adds "Familial ideology affirms...that there is

has formed the basis for most social welfare policy at the level of the community. It is a model in which the profile of the community becomes confused with that of an idealized nuclear family; meanwhile, the needs and interests of the women whose voluntary contributions to family and community welfare are both assumed and expected, become obscured. As Anne Bullock comments:

> "The notion of a community that relies on the 'family' for its existence is a contradiction. Community implies egalitarian social organization that benefits all of its members. Family implies a privatized, hierarchical and gendered work organization that does not equally benefit its members and also foments the differences among families who are thought to comprise the 'community'.[70]

For this reason, Gillian Dalley has argued for an ethic of collectivism in social welfare policy, as a substitute for what she views as the regressive and exploitive standards of "community care". Dalley's collectivist policy approach encompasses feminist principles of localized and informal responses to social

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indeed something natural and appropriate about women's place being predominantly in the domestic sphere...further, it affirms as natural the dominance of men within the private sphere and, inevitably, in the public sphere...It is a mark of the hegemonic nature of familial ideology that, in recent years, it has become the foundation of public policy for care as well as of private care - at a time when the actuality of family structure has been demonstrated to be fluid and shifting in form." See Neysmith, "A Social Model of Care" in Carol T. Baines, Patricia M. Evans, Sheila M. Neysmith, eds. *Women's Caring: Feminist Perspectives on Social Welfare* (Toronto: Mclelland and Stewart, 1991),p.285; Gillian Dallie, *Ideologies of Caring: Rethinking Community and Collectivism* (London: Macmillan Education, 1988), pp.24-5.

[70] Anne Bullock, "Community Care: Ideology and Lived Experience" in R. Ng, G. Walker, J. Muller, eds. *Community Organization and the Canadian State* (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1990), p.75.

problems, while recognizing the importance of responsible government for ensuring an equitable degree of regulation over, and compensation for, the delivery of these services.[71]

These ideological tensions help to account for the unlikely turn of events through which the effort to maintain Transition House as a direct government service emerged as the central objective of the Women's House Saving Action. In this case, the particular bureaucratic controls of accountability, neutrality, and professionalism endorsed by the Ministry of Social Services proved more favourable to feminists than those practiced by agencies in the voluntary sector. They could thus be understood as a defensive response of feminists themselves against the pernicious agendas of institutions such as the Salvation Army, the United Way, or the YWCA, all of whom showed little tolerance for the ideal of community promoted by Vancouver Transition House. There is thus considerable irony in the knowledge that the Women's House Saving Action represented a "women's community" of resistance which identified itself in explicit opposition to a number of established "community" organizations, and which mobilized ultimately on the basis of a shared desire to deliver Transition House back into the fold of the state.

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[71] Dalley, 1988, op.cit.

Chapter Four

Divisions of Labour:
the Battered Women's Movement at Work

An analysis of the ideology of community from the standpoint of women...suggests that the notion is part of a socially-constructed, abstract and rationalized method of ruling which, while it does not represent an organized elitist conspiracy to bamboozle, is in fact a mode of domination in the interests of the continued accumulation of capital and those in position of ownership and control.

Gillian Walker, 1990[72]

Feminist challenges to organized labour

The feminist critique of organized labour - and of the discourse of socialist political economy in general - intersects with the question of community in at least two significant ways. First, it is contended by feminists that malestream[73] socialist theory focuses too much on the relations of *production* in

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[72] From "Reproducing Community", in R. Ng, G. Walker, J. Muller, 1990, op.cit., p.42.

[73] Heather Jon Maroney, Meg Luxton, "From Feminism and Political Economy to Feminist Political Economy", in Maroney and Luxton eds. *Feminism and Political Economy: Women's Work, Women's Struggles* (Toronto: Metheun, 1987), pp.5-30.

capitalist society, at the expense of ignoring how the economic conditions of the workplace are themselves structured by relations of *reproduction* - that is, of sexuality and child-rearing primarily - in the domestic sphere.[74] Christine Di Stefano claims a general agreement among feminists that the socialist categories of "production", "labour", "exploitation", and "class", "fail to capture important dimensions of women's lives". As such, orthodox socialism is "found lacking as a strategic theory of social change for women."[75] With respect to community, the result of this analytical schema is that women's work, and women's interests, are relegated in the politics of the left to an apolitical private sphere constituted by the household/family/community configuration. Women's activism in the community is then ignored or easily dismissed as falling outside the sphere of real politics. Moreover, the ideological separation of community from the serious world of public affairs - a world inhabited by organized labour - is then observed to account for the low wages and low status typically accorded those who work in the community sector.

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[74] Feminist scholarship on marxist and socialist theories of the left is prolific. A very selective list includes: Christine Delphy, *Close to Home: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* (Amherst: University of Massechusetts, 1984); Zillah Eisenstein, ed. *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Juliet Mitchell *Woman's Estate* (New York: Random House, 1973); Mary O'Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Catharine A. MacKinnon, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* (Harvard University Press, 1989).

[75] From "Masculine Marx", in Mary Lyndon Shanley and Carole Pateman eds. *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991),p.147.

A second problem arises insofar as the organized labour movements are themselves conceived as an oppositional community, bound in mutual struggle against the state and private capital. Here, the socialist ideal of community,[76] often expressed in the language of solidarity, collective action, and shared class interests, is questioned by feminists once again for its neglect of the gendered inequalities that mark the division of labour within this ideal of community. For women who identify themselves as part of the labour movement, this exclusion is experienced in the isolation they feel within male-dominated trade unions, especially when the issues they bring to the table - issues of maternity leave, pay equity, or sexual harassment - are frequently the first to be cast aside in the opening rounds of negotiations.[77]

The issue of wife-battering brings these problems into further tension, for it is a reminder of the violent tactics that are deployed by men across all classes, and in every community, as a means of maintaining the sexual division of labour. At the same time, concerns about class oppression, the exploitation of women's labour, and the importance of unionization have long been at the forefront of political debates within the battered women's movement. In the

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[76] For further discussion see Eve Brook, Dan Finn, "Working Class Images of Society and Community Studies"; Bill Schwartz ed. *On Ideololgy* (University of Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, 1978), pp.125-143; Eugene Kamenka, *Community as a Social Ideal* (London: Edward Arnold, 1982); Raymond Plant, "Community: Concept, Conception, and Ideology", 1978, op. cit., pp.90-95.

[77] See Linda Briskin and Linda Yanz, eds. *Union Sisters: Women In the Labour Movement* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1983).

context of its struggle to preserve Vancouver Transition House from divestment into the private (community) sector, the Women's House Saving Action thus found itself simultaneously affirming and challenging the principles of organized labour. The occupation was marked throughout by the tensions and contradictions that arose from this twofold movement.

The main issues in this context related to differences between the style of unionism endorsed by working class feminists and those upheld by the more conventional, male-dominated labour movement. The conflict first emerged during the 1970's, when a struggle between the B.C. Government Employees Union, a large public sector union, and the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada, a small, independent feminist union, resulted in the latter's loss of control over the certification of Vancouver Transition House. During the House's occupation ten years later, the BCGEU assumed a leading role in the campaign to keep the shelter open. However its motivations for doing so were different from, and in many ways incompatible with, the motivations of the Women's House Saving Action. Quite unintentionally, the BCGEU initiated actions which were at cross purposes with the objective of supporting battered women, and which had the additional effect of exacerbating tensions between socialist, anarchist, and radical feminist factions in the Vancouver women's community.

The Feminist Syndicalism of SORWUC

In 1974, shortly after the opening of Vancouver Transition House, the staff began investigating the possibility of unionization. The service was at that time under the administrative jurisdiction of the newly instituted Vancouver Resources Board (VRB) where a favourable climate was established for labour relations in the community services sector.[78] Several service agencies took the opportunity to become organized into a number of different unions. Vancouver Transition House was the only agency to seek certification with the fledgling Service, Office, and Retail Worker's Union of Canada (SORWUC), however. What this union lacked in numbers and clout, it made up for in its militant understanding of the special forms of exploitation faced by women in the labour market.[79] Part of that understanding involved the recognition that work

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[78] Some have suggested that the decentralization of the welfare state in B.C. under the NDP during the 1970's set the climate for Social Credit privatization policies ten years later. An important difference is that unlike the latter strategy, the establishment of Community Resource Boards was not intended as a means of downsizing social services, nor did it involve a challenge to organized labour. In fact, the NDP's restucturing policies were accompanied by a favourable climate for labour, as well as by large increases in funding to non-profit and voluntary social service organizations. Allocations to the province's Community Grants budget between 1971 and 1975, for example, increased from $242,678 to $9.3 million. See Marilyn Callahan and Chris McNiven,"British Columbia", in Jacqueline S. Ismael, Yves Vaillancourt, eds. *Privatization and Provincial Social Services in Canada: Policy, Administration, and Service Delivery* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1988), pp.13-39.

[79] For further discussions of "feminist syndicalism" see Heather Jon Maroney, "Feminism at Work" in Maroney and Meg Luxton, eds. *Feminism and Political Economy: Women's Work, Women's Struggles* (Toronto: Methuen, 1987), pp. 85-108; Jackie Ainsworth, Ann Hutchison, Susan Margaret, Michele Pujol, Sheila

traditionally performed by women - cooking, cleaning, minding children, providing emotional support and nurturance, etc. - is socially and economically productive labour. Given that these tasks form the largest part of jobs performed by transition house workers, the issue was not simply one of unionizing for the purposes of economic defense; what SORWUC offered was the opportunity, as Ellis writes, for the staff "to establish for themselves, for the residents, and for their new employer [the VRB], that this work was worth union wages and union conditions." [80]

Bargaining unit autonomy was encouraged by SORWUC, and enabled the staff to maintain their collective structure and circumvent rules and regulations that would otherwise interfere with the service they were trying to develop. The staff were also supported in writing and negotiating their own contracts. Significant clauses included the institution of International Women's Day as a statutory holiday, and the right of workers to bring their children to work when necessary. In addition, SORWUC was supportive of the staff's efforts to politicize the gross instances of male violence they were witness to. The union offered assistance by "amplifying" its workers' voices in press releases to the media[81], and by consciousness raising within its own networks.

Perret, Mary Jean Rands, Star Rosenthal, "Getting Organized: In the Feminist Unions" in Maureen Fitzgerald, Connie Guberman, Margie Wolfe, eds. *Still Ain't Satisfied* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1982), pp.132-140.

[80] Megan Ellis, "Vancouver Transition House: A Case Study"..., 1984, p.8.

[81] Megan Ellis...., pp.8-9.

Like Transition House, SORWUC had close ties to the second wave women's movement, but it was similarly tied to the class-identified goals of the trade union movement, from whose ranks it had broken. In spite of its small size, the feminist syndicalism of SORWUC posed a threat to the mainstream unions on a number of fronts. In the first place, its success in organizing private sector banks, restaurants, daycares, etc. - long considered employment ghettos that were simply too difficult to organize - exposed the extent to which women's interests as workers had been neglected by the male dominated trade union movement. Secondly, for the public sector unions especially, the idea that women could organize themselves autonomously was dangerous. Since these unions were almost the only ones to expand in the face of the neo-conservative trend of the 1980's, the image of organized labour seemed to depend on its ability to incorporate or defuse the challenges raised by feminist unions.

Moving closer to government

The period of autonomy enjoyed by Transition House under the Vancouver Resources Board was short-lived. When the Social Credit were returned to power in 1975, one of the first tasks undertaken by the new Minister of Human Resources, Bill Vander Zalm, was to dismantle the community resources boards, and to hand control over social service agencies in B.C. to the centralized systems of the government. Part of this transfer process

involved an application by the BCGEU to the provincial Labour Relations Board for successorship rights to all of the VRB unions, a request which was granted; however, in a closed meeting with the government, it was decided that the SORWUC bargaining unit [Vancouver Transition House] would not be included in the application. Presumably, the government hoped to use this loophole as means of eliminating the shelter altogether, an effort which had at least the tacit approval of the BCGEU.

It was only by chance that the staff heard of the deal that was being made behind their backs, and were able at the last minute to make their own application for inclusion in the transfer. This was an extremely difficult decision to make. The choice was one of crossing over to the BCGEU, or remaining with SORWUC as a privatized agency with no guarantee of future funding. It was not without a good deal of bitterness that the staff resolved to make what compromises were necessary in order to preserve Transition House as a publicly-funded service of the state.[82]

Things changed considerably at Transition House after its absorption into the Ministry of Human Resources. The combined pressures of the bureaucracy

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[82] Megan Ellis writes: "...The next morning the women took an unprecedented step. At 9:30 a.m. two members filed to have the SORWUC bargaining unit transferred to the BCGEU. AT 10:00 a.m. two others appeared the bargaining table. The BCGEU's John Fryer was not happy to receive the new bargaining unit. At a break in the negotiations he shouted at the women, and admitted having made a deal with the government to not pick up Transition House. He was angry that he had been made to look as if he had double-crossed the government", p.9.

and the BCGEU required the staff to conform to a more conventional style of administrative control. A new level of management was installed, which transferred the primary decision-making power from the collective to supervisors appointed by the Ministry. The political work of staff was also curtailed, partly due to the fact that the BCGEU did not consider advocacy on issues of violence against women to form part of its mandate. Some of the more militant staff became intolerant of what they perceived as a slow erosion of the unique community they had developed, and quit. Other, less militant people were hired, in accordance with more bureaucratic recruitment and selection procedures. Transition House thus began to resemble a more traditional social service agency.

There were certain advantages to the new arrangements, however. Affiliation under the powerful influence of the BCGEU provided the staff with a standard of living and a degree of job security seldom realized by shelter workers anywhere. Although the political advocacy work was diminished compared to the earlier SORWUC days, it was still considerable relative to other departments within the Ministry. As one former staff member explained it, one could simply not do this kind of front line work - dealing every day with the bruises, the broken bones, and the not infrequent murder, of women - without becoming politicized. Now, however, their advocacy was focused more inside the state than on the outside community - on educating other social workers, health workers, bureaucrats, etc. on the dynamics of wife abuse. This was

valuable work in its own right, and as unionized staff they had the power and the credibility to do it effectively.

In 1982, the House was moved from its eastside location into a new facility in the affluent Shaughnessy area in Vancouver's west side. Some people claimed this decision reflected a basic (and unwelcome) shift in the class orientation of the shelter as a result of its closer ties to the government; others were simply glad for the chance to provide battered women with a larger, cleaner, and more comfortable facility than had previously been available.

In sum, the overall level of status and benefits enjoyed by both the staff and the women who came to Transition House increased visibly during this period of institutionalization. Improvements in the material resources of the shelter could not, however, make up for the nagging sense that what Transition House had to offer was little more than a band-aid solution - and an increasingly narrow one at that - to a problem that was seriously out of control and showed no sign of abating. For the staff, this tension surfaced most dramatically in the conflicting allegiances they experienced toward their union, which could protect them only at the cost of greater entrenchment within a large, and depersonalizing bureaucracy. This was a discontinuity which became increasingly apparent during the privatization controversies of 1983.

1983: the 'sell-out'

By all accounts, the massive wave of opposition mounted throughout the

province against the repressive "restraint" legislation of 1983 was unprecedented in the history of B.C.[83] It is significant, however, that throughout the period of escalating protest from July to November 1983, the distinction between "labour" and "community" interests was starkly reflected in the division within the ranks of opposition between trade unionists - represented by the leadership of the powerful Operation Solidarity - and the conglomeration of citizens' and community groups, including feminist organizations, which came together in the more informal and democratic Solidarity Coalition.

For the hundreds of women who formed the feminist core of the Solidarity Coalition, Women Against the Budget, the attitude was one of a guarded but sincere optimism regarding the inroads achieved in their talks with the trade union leaders. As one Kinesis writer put it:

> "To anyone who has watched the entire progressive community of B.C. repeatedly divide itself in the face of various government attacks over the years, surely the most interesting and unexpected

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[83] The legislation in question consisted of a comprehensive package of 28 bills intended to radically tailor the social fabric of the province in terms of a neo-conservative appeal to the international investment community. A sampling of the legislation includes: measures to abolish seniority and collective bargaining rights in the public sector unions; a repeal of the Human Rights Act and the Human Rights Commission; repeal of rent controls and the Rentalsman's Office; elimination of regional planning, of local representation on college boards, of mandatory motor vehicle testing; as well as severe revisions to the Medical Services, Employments Standards, and Labour Code statutes. Most of these bills were muscled through the legislature in a process which demonstrated an alarming disregard for public and political opposition. See Warren Magnusson, William K. Carroll, Charles Doyle, Monika Langer, R.B.J. Walker eds, *The New Reality: The Politics of Restraint in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1984); also Bryan D. Palmer, *Solidarity: The Rise and Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1987).

> alliance within Operation Solidarity is that between labour and feminists. Although there has always been the basis for some form of affinity between the two groups, the historical relationship has been strained at best and wrought with public antagonisms at its lowest points. Indeed, at times, relations have deteriorated to such an extent that feminists have openly thrashed labour's seeming inability to take women's issues seriously...Yet, here we have the unforeseen, and the potential power such a partnership holds is nothing less than devastating for the Socreds..."[84]

This optimism reflected feminists' belief that the key to a successful resistance campaign would lie in Operation Solidarity's capacity to mobilize support from women. It was women, their children and families, they argued, who were most adversely affected by restraint. The Socred agenda of downsizing the public sector was focused almost entirely in the areas where women are represented in far greater proportion than men as both employees and clients of the state: health, education, and social services. Since women generally accrue less seniority then men, and are segregated in lower-level positions of employment, their jobs would be the first to go during times of lay-offs.[85] For the majority of women who's jobs are not organized in unions, or who are unemployed, the effect of reduced welfare rates, of increases in government fees and sales taxes, the attack on human rights, and the reduction or elimination of a range of

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[84] "Budget creates unexpected alliance", *Kinesis*, September 1983, p.4.

[85] As many as 15,000 public sector jobs were lost in B.C. after 1982 as a result of Social Credit Restraint policies. See Stan Persky and Lanny Beckman, "Downsizing and the Unemployment Problem" in Magnusson, et.al. *The New Reality*...pp.192-208.

crucial health, education, and social services,[86] would be devastating.

The decision by Women Against the Budget to join under the Solidarity umbrella was predicated on the assurance that these issues would not be made secondary to the demands of organized labour. The combined force of this alliance culminated in the gathering of 70,000 people in the streets of Vancouver, followed by a wave of public service strikes in early November 1983. The Coalition strategy calling for an all-out province-wide general strike was never realized, however. Instead, in a closed meeting with the Premier, the leaders of Operation Solidarity negotiated an end to the strikes on the basis of a few minor concessions. The nine point agreement contained in the November 13 "Kelowna Accord" did succeed in forcing a withdrawal of some of the more damaging pieces of labour legislation. What the settlement did not address was the broader legislative attack on social, democratic, and human rights, which had formed the basis of community support for the Coalition across the province.

Needless to say, women activists who had stood with organized labour

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[86] Of particular concern to women was the elimination of programs such as Child Abuse Teams, Family Support Workers, Post Partum Counselling, Planned Parenthood, Emergency Homemakers, Consumers Centres, Senior Citizens Centres, and a range of services available to elderly, disabled, and immigrant women. The political center of the women's movement in Vancouver was disabled as well, through the elimination of provincial funding to the B.C. Coalition of Sexual Assault Centres, the Vancouver Women's Health Collective, and Vancouver Status of women. See "Privatization: a step backward" in *Kinesis*, November 1983, p.2; also Marilyn Callahan, "The Human Costs of Restraint", and Stella Lord, "Women's Rights: An Impediment to Recovery?" in Magunsson, et.al.,*The New Reality,* 1984, pp.227-241, and 179-191.

felt betrayed by the outcome of the settlement; they were neither consulted by leaders nor informed by them of the deal after the fact, in spite of clearly outlined protocols for open communication and democratic decision-making within the Solidarity Coalition. What had started out as a hopeful alliance between labour and the women's movement thus ended in animosity.

1984: the privatization of Vancouver Transition House

This period of repression and resistance in B.C. marked a difficult time for the staff at Transition House. Although they had been spared during the first round of cut-backs, the government had indicated its intent to privatize the service by the following spring. Aside from this ominous bit of knowledge no information was forthcoming, and their hands were tied in any case. In spite of an obvious interest in ensuring that the contract go to a "sympathetic" organization, the BCGEU forbade the staff from taking part in any activities related to privatization. Meanwhile, government policy prevented them from taking part in public protests. The constant need to balance concerns about their own issues as workers with issues of importance to battered women was a cause for great distress.

Although there was no official connection between Transition House and Women Against the Budget (WAB), the staff did undertake some public education initiatives advocating that the service should stay with the government, and at one point they appeared before the WAB steering

committee to clarify this position. Some of the staff attended WAB meetings and demonstrations as private citizens. It was generally a time of renewed ties and solidarity with individuals and organizations of the women's community, from which Transition House had become isolated over the years.[87]

As the deadline for the privatization of Transition House grew nearer in the spring of 1984, concerned members from the feminist community took steps to intervene, much to the relief of the staff. Although they were powerless to reverse the government's regressive policy of divestment, the group was able to strike an agreement with the YWCA that was suitable to government, staff, and feminists - in particular since it involved the Y's taking on the service with the union more or less intact.

For the BCGEU, however, this was not good enough. The union had remained firm in its opposition to privatization schemes, and it was particularly hard on private sector agencies that picked up services that, in its view, ought to have remained under government management. From labour's perspective, privatization symbolized the very essence of right wing contempt for the democratic values of collectivism and social welfare, and the hard won entitlement of the working classes to a basic level of personal dignity. The strategy of "privatization" promised to defeat those values by breaking the

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[87] There is a much clearer connection between the WAB coalition and the group who later occupied the House in 1985. Interestingly enough it was these same leaders of WAB, many of them prominent trade unionists, who later went on to form a splinter group within the occupation over issues of class and working conditions.

unions, and by off-loading public services and activities to the vagaries of the market.

The BCGEU was as disparaging of the non-profit and voluntary private sector agencies as it was of the proprietary (for-profit) sector in this respect. Hence, when the YWCA decided to take on Transition House, not only did it find itself caught between its own traditional feminism and that of the House workers; it was also squeezed in a bitter struggle between the BCGEU and the provincial government.

The tactic employed by the BCGEU was to apply pressure on the Y via a boycott of the United Way, its primary funding agency. For years, the BCGEU's "Community Services Fund", financed by payroll deductions from the membership, had provided one of the largest sources of support for the United Way. Under the "new reality" of Social Credit, however, the union was reluctant to continue its investment in the privatization of its own jobs, since these same United Way agencies were the now recipients of numerous contracted services. Sometime during the fall of 1984, the BCGEU let it be known that its donations to the United Way would be withdrawn as long as the Y continued to cooperate with the government's privatization of Vancouver Transition House. It was this pressure, combined with the difficulties the Y faced in managing Transition House, which eventually compelled the YWCA board to drop the contract.

The occupation: divisions of labour

By the time of the closure of Vancouver Transition House in June of 1985, the BCGEU had implicated itself in a somewhat problematic relationship with the women who lived and worked inside, as well as with its supporters in the community. The union's proven force and effectiveness on issues of job security were not matched by a sensitivity to the sexual politics at stake in the "privatization" of battered women. Its efforts to claim authority over the protests which ensued against the government's actions were thus vehemently contested by some women who viewed these as a form of "police tactics" against the feminist community, and possibly signs of a replay of the events of 1983.

This position was taken up vehemently by supporters of Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter, a rival feminist organization run by a volunteer collective without any funding from government, and claiming a broad constituency of support throughout the lower mainland. The episode of the Occupation brought into sharp relief the issues which since the early 1980's had been the source of a serious split in the Vancouver women's movement.

Formerly, things had been different. Like Transition House, Rape Relief was started in 1973 with funding from the NDP government, and for several years the two organizations were the closest of allies. Rape Relief's mandate was somewhat different from Transition House's. It was not a shelter *per se* but operated a crisis and resource centre from which it provided advocacy, court

accompaniment, and referrals to women who were sexaully assaulted. During the late 1970's, under the jurisdiction of Social Credit, Rape Relief came under increasing pressure to give a bureaucratic accounting of itself. One of the key issues concerned the collective's defiance of guidelines for reporting child sexual abuse. Rape Relief was critical of the way cases were handled by Ministry child abuse teams, and had many times counselled the teenage women who came to them to avoid seeking help from police and social workers. The government was also demanding access to the personal files of women who used the service, a point on which Rape Relief refused to cooperate. Since Transition House also could not lawfully harbour minors without reporting them to the Ministry, this, combined with the issue of confidentiality, motivated Rape Relief to consider opening its own facility. Using monies raised through a variety of creative strategies - including the formation of a men's fundraising committee - the collective was able to buy its own house and open an autonomous women's shelter in 1981.

The decision to open a new shelter did not sit well with other feminist groups in the city, however, who were concerned over the quality of service it delivered. There was a pervasive feeling in the women's movement that pressure should be maintained on the state to pay up - to assume its share of responsibility for violence against women, and to provide adequate resources and appropriate compensation for women dealing with the consequences of that violence. Rape Relief, in contrast, defended its dependence upon

unsalaried volunteers for the operation of its shelter on the grounds that this placed them in a more egalitarian, and less professionalized relationship to the women they served. From this perspective, Transition House was becoming too professional. Rape Relief was also critized for its irreverence towards the criminal justice system, which it regarded as abusive of women, class and race biased and wholly ineffectual in dealing with male violence against women. The non-judicial alternatives Rape Relief offered often involved direct confrontation with an attacker at his workplace or in his home community. Aside from the obvious risks to women victims of this practice, critics of Rape Relief claimed the policy was being imposed upon vulnerable women in a dogmatic and moralistic way.[88]

Rape Relief's final breach with the government came in February 1982, when its refusal to participate in a goverment "evaluation" of its non-shelter services led to the complete termination of public funding for the organization itself, and the four other centres under its umbrella. To its feminist critics, Rape Relief appeared to be jeopardizing the financial resources and public credibility of the women's movememt as a whole. By the time the dust had settled, Rape Relief had been officially denounced by important sectors of the feminist

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[88] For discussion of Vancouver Rape Relief see Jillian Ridington, "Providing Services the Feminist Way", in Fitzgerald, et.al. *Still Ain't Satisfied...*, 1982, pp. 93-107; Stan Persky, "Women, Children and Revolutionaries First", *This Magazine*, October 1985, pp.16-19.

commmunity,[88] and its rape crisis advocacy functions replaced by a new agency - Women Against Violence Against Women (WAVAW). From that point on, there was clear polarization between the two organizations: Transition House, which in alignment with WAVAW claimed to represent the mainstream of the feminist movement that sought to assist women through the proper legal channels while working for reform, and Rape Relief, which held out an alternative increasingly focused in its ostensible independence from the state.

Thus, when the 1985 Occupation was planned, not only were members of Rape Relief excluded from participating, but the whole issue was articulated in terms of the need to ensure the Rape Relief Women's Shelter would not become, even temporarily, the only option available to battered women in Vancouver. Not suprisingly, Rape Relief developed a harsh critique of the Women's House Saving Action, although they supported its intention. Rape Relief claimed that their own work, and the large constituency they represent, were censored as a result of the Women's House Saving Actions' acquiescence to the state-centric interests of the BCGEU/NDP alliance. They claimed that the potential for a much broader mobilization against the closure of Transition House than actually occurred had been thwarted early on by the oppressive imposition of the BCGEU's arbitration protocols. One Rape Relief worker describes a packed meeting in Vancouver's downtown eastside prior to the

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[88] This consisted of a twenty-four point letter of indictment published in the May 1982 issue of *Kinesis*, and signed by eighty-one women, who claimed the organization was "no longer supportive of women".

occupation.

> Everybody was there. Carnegie, Dera [Downtown Eastside Resident's Association], End Legislated Poverty, Vancouver Status of Women, Downtown Eastside Women's Centre, [Alderman] Libby Davies. They were ready to take action, this was their meeting. Here we had the staff of Transition House, front line workers for battered women, at a community meeting full of feminists willing to stand up, and the BCGEU wouldn't let them speak. We were saying,'what's going on here?' Why can't they speak? We came up with many many suggestions, every time the BCGEU blocked it...The BCGEU is totally ignorant of what feminists are. Their view was that shelter workers are the same as the road workers or liquor store workers. They are very hierarchical and very antithetical to feminist processes.[89]

Without meaning to, Rape Relief argued, the BCGEU did a terrible disservice to the Transition House staff, and to the long-term interests of battered women's services in general.

Needless to say, this analysis is refuted by the women who led the occupation,[90] and who are unequivocal in their position that Rape Relief has no legitimacy as a transition house.[91] This is not to say that the organizers of the Women's House Saving Action were not similarly troubled and divided by issues surrounding the BCGEU's involvement. One of their central demands was that the service ought, in principle, to be run by unionized workers. This was not just a matter of the staff's own welfare, but related as well to the symbolic

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[89] Bonnie Agnew, from an interview in Vancouver, November 20, 1991.

[90] See the heated exchange between Rape Relief and the Women's House Saving Action which appeared in letters published in the April and May 1986 issues of *Kinesis*.

[91] See Appendix IV of this document, "Letter from WAVAW to Vancouver Rape Relief". Note as well that Rape Relief has membership in the B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses.

devaluation of women's labour in the private and voluntary sectors. There was less agreement over whether or not the restored Transition House should be operated, as it had been before 1984, as a government service rather than as a non-profit society, although union policy dictated strongly toward the former arrangement. Radical feminists, who were suspicious of the state, viewed this as a difficult but necessary concession to the socialist feminists, who shared in labour's struggle to preserve the integrity of public services.

These choices provided a strong basis of unity with the BCGEU, who gave official endorsement to the occupation, although they discouraged staff members from participating directly. The public position of the staff members was one of dissociation from the action. This reflected the fact that as many as half of the eighteen staff members - in particular, those who took a more mainstream and "professional", as opposed to a political, approach to their work - felt angry at being unknowingly associated with an illegal act, and affronted at the prospect of having their jobs usurped by unskilled volunteers. Several others chose to support the occupation by providing information on the details of managing the house, or by doing on-call telephone shifts, but they did so without actually entering the premises. Officially, the group decision was to stay away from the occupied house, and to leave the political work to the women's community of Vancouver.

These pressures ultimately came to a head three months into the

occupation, when a number of the socialist feminists[92] decided to withdraw from the occupation. They articulated their complaints in class terms, and there were two main issues: the first concerned the working conditions of both the staff and the occupiers. They were very concerned that their actions would be used as a strike against the staff in their arbitration proceedings with the government. They also feared they were being manipulated into scabbing for the government, and feeding right in to its desire for volunteer labour and a free service. Indeed, the recruitment process for the occupation was very haphazard. There was no hiring or selection of who would do the work; people just showed up, and followed had their own agendas. It was not very long before, in the estimation of this group of women, the quality of the service began to deteriorate, and the occupation to defeat itself.

The second issue concerned a classic division of labour in the organization of the occupation, between those who were running it and those who were actually inside doing the work. This group of women became increasingly uncomfortable with the fact that they seemed to be working under the direction of a core group of middle-class Westsiders, who had planned, organized, and continued to lead the occupation, but who did few shifts, and were seldom present on the site. Their own analysis of the situation - that the occupation had reached its limit and should be brought to an end - was rejected by this "core collective", who wanted to continue until something

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[92] Or "NDP women"/"trade union apologists" by other descriptions.

significant had been achieved. It was at this point that this key group of socialist feminists withdrew from the occupation, although they continued to support it in principle, and gave public support to those who remained.

Meanwhile, the union's efforts to protect the rights of its own members above and beyond the interests of battered women ended in losses for both, much as Rape Relief had predicted. The BCGEU's application for successorship rights to Kate Booth House went to hearing in January of 1986. From the start of the occupation, the BCGEU had claimed publicly that, feminist interests aside, the primary motivation behind the government's closure of Transition House was its desire to break the union.[93] This hunch proved correct when the union's appeal for certification of Kate Booth House was denied by the Labour Relations Board on the grounds that the Salvation Army and Act II were providing a "different" service from Vancouver Transition House. The jobs of the 18 staff members were lost, and with them the precedent of unionized shelter workers in British Columbia.

Labour and community

Within feminist discourse, important questions about the meaning and value of human labour, and its division into the gendered categories of home and workplace, are easily polarized into debates which pit the interests of

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[93] "Shelter contract delay called stall to oust union", *The Vancouver Sun*, August 2, 1985, p.A13.

organized labour against the interests of women, and - by extension - of the community. To the extent that women's waged labour is segragated into low status occupations which mirror their work in the domestic sphere, it has seldom benefitted from advances made by organized labour. Indeed, the underpaid services provided by women in the community and voluntary sectors are viewed antagonistically by organized workers, who see it is as a negative pressure towards the further privatization of their own public sector jobs.[94]

During the Occupation of Vancouver Transition House, this polarization was played out in Rape Relief's portrayal of a potentially powerful grassroots movement overtaken by the interests of big labour, just as it was evident in the rivalry between the large trade unions and the community coalition during the Solidarity protests of 1983. With regard to that struggle, it is significant that many people at the time recognized that the "sell-out" by the Operation Solidarity leadership was not exclusively of community groups, but of its own rank and file constituency as well. As one commentator notes,

> ...the major achievement of the solidarity movement, amongst both labour and community groups alike, had been the understanding that in fact, labour issues *were* community issues, and community issues were also labour's. Obviously, this understanding, so visible throughout the province, never managed to rise to the top.[95]

In the same way, the dichotomy also proves inadequate for representing

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[94] Katherine Scott, "Labour Relations and the Welfare State: Labour Relations in the Community Service Sector". Unpublished manuscript (York University: Dept. of Political Science, 1992).

[95] From "What Happened?", *Kinesis*, December/January, 1983, p.1.

the complexity of issues that divided different women's commitments to the Occupation. In effect, the labour practices developed in the battered women's movement disrupt the ideological separation of public and private, economy and community. By linking the principles of organized labour to the struggle to save Transition House, the House Saving Action was breaking new ground, a process that was understandably painful and confusing for everyone involved. At a symbolic level, the significance of the Action is the potential it carries for an institutional restructuring of the welfare state - one that reflects feminist interests in the revaluation and democratization of human labour.

Chapter Five

RE-VISIONS OF COMMUNITY

The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of third world feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. Thus it is not color or sex which constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the <u>way</u> we think about race, class, and gender - the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, women of all colors (including white women) can align themselves with and participate in these imagined communities. However, clearly our relation to and centrality in particular struggles depend on our different, often conflictual, locations and histories.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 1991[96]

Aftermath: culture and community

Obviously, the occupation had not achieved its original objectives: the House was closed, leaving the Salvation Army's facility as the city's only refuge exclusively for battered women. On the other hand, to sustain the occupation and continue the service "illegally" for eight long months was no mean feat.

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[96] From *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, Lourdes Torres eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p.4.

Although the Social Credit government was not moved, the occupiers had had repeated propaganda successes, and managed to raise consciousness around issues of male violence, and the need for transition house services in the city, within a wider and wider constituency. Moreover, they had effectively distinguished the kind of service generated by the women's movement -- grounded in women's shared experience, informed by feminist analysis, and inspired by the openness and egalitarianism of women's collectives -- from the de-politicized charity favoured by the government. At least a majority of the City Council had been won over to the idea that effective facilities for battered women in transition had to be based on the principles that had emerged from the women's movement. Thus, the ideal of a restored Transition House and Advocacy Centre, open to all women and operated as a feminist agency under the City's jurisdiction, remained on the political agenda, and gave focus to lobbying efforts for a number of years.

During this period, the ideal of community embodied in the feminist transition house model underwent its own set of transitions in response to challenges from Vancouver's non-white, and non-Anglo communities. In this way the Women's House Saving Action became the catalyst for some innovative developments in the design of services to battered women, but this was not achieved without serious re-examination of their own feminist assumptions in the process. The context for these transitions was a Committee established through the Social Planning Department for the development of a

new project proposal. The hope was that, by demonstrating a need in the form of a strong proposal, and with continuing political support from the City, funding from senior levels of government would eventually be forthcoming. The Women's Protection Committee was comprised of leaders from the Women's House Saving Action and other activists from front-line wife assault services. In addition, given the objective of developing a strong multi-cultural component for its program, representatives from Vancouver's Asian and Indo-Canadian, Latin American, Iranian, Black, and Native communities were also invited to participate in the Committee. This made it one of the first forums ever in which women of colour were given a voice in decisions concerning the design and delivery of services to battered women.

One of the major conclusions to emerge from the Women's Protection Committee emphasized the importance of understanding and addressing wife assault within the specific historical and cultural contexts in which it occurs. In order to be accessible to greater numbers of women, the feminist analysis of male violence would need to incorporate greater sensitivity to the histories of colonialism and imperialism, and their impact on the way violence is experienced by women in specific communities. For native women, it was impossible to separate family violence issues from the devastating effects of European colonization on aboriginal peoples as a whole. The abuse and degradation of women and children, they claimed, was not an aboriginal tradition prior to the arrival of white culture to North America, but is perceived

as a symptom of the oppression, discrimination, and cultural loss they have suffered. For these women, the primary concern was for recognition by mainstream society of the inherent authority of First Nations for deciding their own solutions and priorites to family violence. Secondly, they expressed the need for responses that are holistic, and culturally appropriate. As Syvia Maracle writes,

> Our elders and traditional people encouraged us to look at initiating a healing approach rather than continuing to focus on the negative, on the violence. The concepts of healing - rather than merely responding to incidents of violence - and the focus on wellness demand a strategy that is different from the current responses to family violence. There is a contradiction between a solution that seeks harmony and balance among the individuals, family and community, and one that is crisis-oriented, punishes the abuser, and separates the family and community.[97]

The perceptions of other racial and ethnic minority women who took part in the Women's Protection Committee reinforced the concern that feminist services lacked an understanding of how the relationship to one's extended family or indigenous community remains a primary source of social and personal identity for many women. The Anglo-feminist language of 'autonomy' and 'rights' was perceived by some to reflect an individualistic or instrumental ideal of community that is unappealing to, exclusive of, or in other ways

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[97] From "Family Violence: Aboriginal Perspectives", in *Vis-A-Vis: A National Newsletter on Family Violence,* Vol.10, no.4, Spring 1993, p.4. See also Sharlene Frank, *Family Violence in Aboriginal Communities: A First Nations Report* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1992); Ontario Native Women's Association, *Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence,* December, 1989.

threatening to the values of non-Western women. Moreover, whereas the feminist model of isolating the needs of *women* from those of the *couple*, the *marriage*, or the *family* has had wide success as an intervention technique in white culture, this is not an approach which is favoured by social workers in immigrant communities. As one participant in the Women's Protection Committee explained:

> Our focus is on women, absolutely. The empowerment of women is our goal, but it is on women *and* their families. We have to deal with the husbands and the extended family if we want to get her into the transition house...We feel the feminist approach seeks to help women alone, and ends up losing them because of this.[98]

Criticisms from immigrant and refugee women further revealed the partiality of the Transition House community toward the values of the dominant white society. These women identified a general insensitivity within feminist front-line services toward the special problems they face [99]- their vulnerability as

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[98] From a personal interview with Shashi Assanand, an Indo-Canadian social worker, December 19, 1991.

[99] The factors that complicate immigrant and refugee women's experience of wife abuse are complex. Some women experience abuse by in-laws, fathers or brothers or adult children. Many employed as domestic workers are victimized by their employers. In addition, write Macleod and Shin, "many of the women, particularly refugee women, have not had any choice about moving to Canada or about settling in a particular town or city. Others are picture or mail-order brides who have no family or friends in this country, and who may have the added challenge of adjusting to an interracial marriage. Still other women in Canada as visitors (students, temporary workers or tourists), who are sponsored by their Canadian resident husbands, are vulnerable because they have no permanent status in Canada while their immigration applications are being processed. For those women who are temporarily residing in Canada as wives (dependents) of international students, their situation becomes even more precarious." See Linda Macleod and Maria Shin, *Isolated, Afraid, and Forgotten:*

a result of the economic hardships, political upheavals, and the loss of friends and family which may have preceeded their arrival in Canada; language barriers, compounded by a lack of information about their legal rights or their immigration status (resulting in a fear of deportation); a systemic racism that is reflected in the form of transition house workers' inacessibility to immigrant women, or intolerance of immigrant women's cooking their own food or observing their own cultural or religious practices. Of particular concern is the tendency for white activists to blame a woman's culture for the abuse she experiences. In most cases, this perception derives from stereotyped understandings about the traditional 'pre-modern' aspects of non-Western gender and kinship relations - stereotypes that are predicated upon Western feminists' assumptions of themselves as more secular, more liberated, and generally more advanced than non-Western women.[100]

Remarkably, following a difficult three year process of discussion and negotiation, the Women's Protection Committee succeeded in 1989 in reaching

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The Service Delivery Needs and Realities of Immigrant and Refugee Women Who Are Battered (Ottawa: National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 1990); also, Fauzia Rafiq, *Towards Equal Access: A Handbook for Service Providers Working With Survivors of Wife Assault* (Ottawa: Immigrant and Visible Minority Women Against Abuse, 1991), and *Breaking the Barriers: A Joint Conference for The Immigrant and Visible Minority Women's Association and the B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses: Final Report* (Vancouver: June 1992).

100 What is missing is the recognition that for women struggling against racism, "culture is not only important in creating oppression, but also in the social construction of resistance". See Enashki Dua, "Racism or Gender?: Understanding Oppression of South Asian-Canadian Women". *Canadian Woman Studies*, Vol.13, no.1, Fall 1992, pp.6-10.

a final agreement on the design and constitution of the proposed Multi-Cultural Transition House and Advocacy Centre. The proposal gained the approval of the federal Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, which agreed to provide capital funding for the facility. The provincial government was now indicating a new interest in expanding the number of emergency services for battered women in Vancouver. At the last minute, however, the Committee was suprised to discover that a proposal from the Vancouver-based United Native Nations for an aboriginal transition house was also being prepared. An effort by the Women's Protection Committee at this point to draw the native group into their own plan for a multi-cultural facility with an aboriginal component was unsuccessful.[101] Early in 1990, joint funding for a separate native shelter was approved by the Ministries of Social Services and Housing and Native Affairs, and in June 1991, Helping Spirit Lodge opened its doors. Helping Spirit Lodge is a large, thirty-seven bed shelter which accepts native women and children from anywhere in the province. It is the first phase in a comprehensive plan by the United Native Nations to develop extensive emergency and second stage housing for native women and children, and a treatment program for male

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101 One news story described how the Native women's proposal "came close to failing...when a Vancouver social planning department committee proposed using provincial operating funds committed to a native women's transition house for a "multicultural" transition house..." "Native women's safehouse urged", *The Vancouver Sun*, February 9, 1990, p.B2.

offenders.[102]

While pleased at the response to the native community's appeal for funding, participants in the City Hall committee were nonetheless frustrated at the government's apparent strategy of placing women's organizations at odds with one another in a competition for woefully inadequate funding. Their own campaign for a facility that would be sensitive and accessible to women from all types of backgrounds was thus continued, and in 1991, the government agreed to back a new advocacy service - not a transition house - to assist battered women from immigrant and minority groups. A contract was put out to tender, and once again the feminist perspective - represented in the proposal submitted by Vancouver's Battered Women's Support Services - was defeated in favour of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of B.C., an organization which focuses its work on family violence more in the context of inter-cultural, rather than a strictly gender-based understanding.

In December of 1991, the Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multi-Cultural Family Support Services project began operations from a large office in Burnaby. The women involved in the new agency feel it is preferable to the multi-ethnic facility contemplated in the City Hall proposal - first, because the latter would most likely have been under the control of a white/Anglo organization, and secondly, because it would have had the effect of

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[102] See Appendix VII of this document, entitled "Selected Recommendations Addressing the Needs of Aboriginal People".

concentrating non-white women in one downtown location. In the present arrangement, the agency functions as a satellite service providing badly-needed liaison and support in six different languages to the twelve transition houses operating in the Vancouver region. This enables the agency to educate workers, and to mediate services to battered women in all of the existing shelters in the city and surrounding suburbs in a way that exposes everyone to new cultures. For immigrant and refugee women, it provides a valuable opportunity to interact with Canadian women with the support of someone who shares a similar cultural background.

In sum, in the aftermath of the Women's House Saving Action, the profile of the community engaged in resistance to male violence in Vancouver changed dramatically from its status prior to the occupation. The feminist theories of gender oppression which informed the early organization of battered women's services had generated an ideal of commonality amongst women that tended to bypass women's actual location within vastly differentiated racial, class, and cultural contexts. The therapeutic community of the transition house was subsequently found to be oppressive or alienating by some women, or at the very least inadequate as a resource for addressing the specificity of abuse in non-Western communities. New understandings of violence, and of wife abuse, were developed to reflect the realities of immigrant and racial minority women. Following that, culturally-specific services to battered women were established that combine feminist values with a strong analysis of the different

contexts of violence - racial, political, and military - that frame women's experience of wife abuse.[103]

For some, the tendency is to view this fragmentation of the battered women's movement in a negative light. The segregation of services along cultural lines is perceived as a threat to the unity of the political movement against male violence, especially given the ambivalence expressed by some of these agencies toward feminist ideology. In the absence of a firm basis of outside feminist support, it is feared that minority women's efforts to speak out about violence will be vulnerable to extreme forms of silencing and backlash from male community leaders.[104] In addition, the trend toward culturally-specific services runs the risk of isolating the issues of racism and cultural imperialism into service ghettos, instead of ensuring their incorporation into the dominant system - where they are most needed. Read more positively however, the emergence of Helping Spirit Lodge and Multi-Cultural Family Support Services - indeed, even the development of Kate Booth House as a Salvation Army facility

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103 Maria Shin, "Immigrant and Racial Minority Women Organize", *Canadian Woman Studies*, Fall, 1991, pp.53-54.

104 For example, the Ontario Native Women's Association spent a full year debating whether or not to release the findings of their report on family violence, *Breaking Free*, for fear of the negative impact it would have both inside and outside of their communities. After deciding to proceed with the report's release on the grounds that the protection of women and children was paramount, it was met, as predicted, with a hostile response from male aboriginal leaders, who continued to deny that such abuse occurs. See Susan Hare, "Breaking Free: A Proposal for Change to Aboriginal Family Violence", *Canadian Woman Studies,* Summer, 1991, pp.79-80.

- can be understood in terms of the transformative potential of feminism for continually reconstituting itself in multiple ways and contexts. None of these initiatives would have been conceivable without the pioneering feminist efforts to clarify the issues and develop the most appropriate responses to male violence against women in the home. Even if these new organizations relocate their efforts in the context of cultural difference and lend more support than feminists would like to "traditional family values", they still bring feminist practices to bear in contexts that would otherwise be immune.

With regard to community, the episode represents an intersection of the feminist ideal of social change with a range of culturally distinct collectivities for whom the term "community" is used in large part to designate their difference, and especially their marginality, from the "dominant" society. One problem that arises from the use of community as a signifier for oppressed or marginalized groups is that it categorizes them in ways which repress the complexity of people's lived experiences. The capacity for engaging in social change is thus bounded, as Sue Findlay argues, "by our acceptance of a definition of 'community' - as 'women', as 'racial minorities', as 'natives', as 'people with disabilities' - and its expression...as a 'natural' representation of our lived experience rather than one that is socially constructed."[105] Within this narrow definition of community, the complexity of identity is lost. The heterogeneity of

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105 Sue Findlay, "Issues of Democratization: Representing Difference in Local Government", (Unpublished paper, Toronto, 1992), p.7.

indviduals' multiple loyalties and subject positions is supressed through the appeal to a singular and unified source of group solidarity. Faced with conflict, the typical response of the rigid or closed community involves the further reinforcement of this fictive identity. Structures and processes for dealing constructively with difference are never acquired, and the repressive cycle of retreat and entrenchment within communities becomes ever more refined.

In the example of the Women's Protection committee, however, we observed the disruptive impact of feminist ideologies upon the narrow definition of community. The intensity of women's desire for resisting domestic violence generated a productive interaction among groups with a shared history of conflict. In particular, the critical responses of immigrant and racial minority women to the feminist transition house model necessitated the opening up of established communities to new ideas and new forms of practice. It was only by challenging assumptions about women derived from their chosen or ascribed labels - 'lesbian', 'Western', 'Christian', 'women of colour', 'battered women', etc.- and through the open and empathetic exchange of understandings about violence among different communities, that the necessary broadening of services for battered women could occur. In the process of feminist inter-cultural communication, an understanding emerged of the fluidity with which women move back and forth in their identification with, and loyalty to, the demands of diverse communities. The inherernt instability of feminist social relations and categories of analysis - manifested in the susceptibility they

demonstrated to new and unanticipated conceptual transformations - was tangibly marked as well. In this sense, perhaps one of the most important outcomes of the Women's House Saving Action lay in the recognition by battered women's activists that the apparent rejection of particular versions of feminist discourse by women of different cultural and religious denominations did not necessarily translate into a rejection of politics that seek an end to violence against women. In the new political spaces created as a result of the Action, rather, a sensitivity to the ongoing necessity for supporting and respecting the diversity of women's choices for resisting abuse is paramount.

Conclusion: faces of community

The more we examine the multiple faces of community, the more unlikely seems the possibility of reaching consensus about its nature as a social and political concept. We can observe that the term has a wide array of descriptive meanings. At different points in the Women's House Saving Action, it was articulated in reference to locality, to a municipality, to a social movement, to groups bound by shared political beliefs and commitments or by the deeper historical and traditional connections of a shared cultural identity. In contradictory fashion, the term referred to all of the rather different social groupings that were constitutive of the battered women's service network in Vancouver, i.e. The Salvation Army, Rape Relief, The YWCA, the Social Planning Department, Transition House and the government ministry where it

was located, Helping Spirit Lodge, and so on. All of these organizations saw their work as occuring within - and in response to the needs of - a broader community, although their conceptions of the kinds of social relationships that embodied this community varied widely.

A second observable feature of community is its normative function, through which it bestows a positive or commendatory connotation upon whatever is being described. Indeed, this "warmly persuasive" quality, writes Raymond Williams of the term which "seems never to be used unfavourably", is what distinguishes community from other terms of social organization, such as state, nation, or society.[106] During the Women's House Saving Action, we saw how this quality functioned to legitimize, or lend an air of consensus - to the activities of the different groups who used it. Just as Transition House preferred to see itself as a 'community-based' service even after it had been absorbed into the Ministry of Social Services and Housing, the government, likewise, justified its privatization of the house on the basis that it enabled a return of the service to the "community". Clearly, the positive evaluation of community implied in these two claims concealed vastly different understandings about what communities are and how they should function; however, the transparency with which the term is typically used - its self-evident disposition - dispelled the need for groups or organizations to give a further accounting of themselves in this respect.

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106 Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (London: Fontana, 1976), p.76.

The complexity of community - its descriptive/evaluative function as a concept, and the warm appeal it evokes, is further complicated by its links to quite divergent intellectual traditions. The Oxford dictionary identifies two etymologies for the term, the one - *comunis* - signifying a sense of joint ownership or obligation, the other - *comunus* - proposing a more totalized sense of being together as one. The range of definition thus progresses from reference to the legal status of an organized social body, to the mutual feeling of fellowship a group may share. In the classic social theories of the West, this distinction is detected in the contrast between the organicist notion of political community embodied in the feudal kingdom, and the more contractual forms of communal association popularized by Locke and other social contract theorists of the enlightenment.[107] A more trenchant account yet is offered by nineteenth century German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, who characterized the transition from medieval to modern Europe in terms of the erosion of *Gemeinschaft* - the particular, familial and affective communal ties of the village, in the face of the expanding effects of *Gesellschaft* - the impersonal, formal and instrumental relations of modern mass society.[108] This schema resonated widely throughout twentieth century political thought among conservatives, liberals, and socialists

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107 See George Van Den Abbeele, in the Miami Theory Collective's *Community At Loose Ends,* 1991, op.cit., p.xi.

108 Ferdinand Tonnies, *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (Commumunity and Association, trans. C.S. Loomis),(London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955).*

alike , who in their respective ways were all concerned to articulate an antidote to the social chaos and dislocation associated with capitalist forms of urban and industrial development.[109] As such, the confusion over definitions might be understood to derive from the impossibility of isolating any precise meaning for community apart from the multiple and contradictory ideological backgrounds through which it becomes operative.

Into this confusion, feminists have now introduced gender as a framework for thinking about community. In one version of feminist analysis, the 'natural' and 'biological' differences between the sexes depicted in malestream social theory were found to mirror the polarity that exists between the values assigned to rural or pre-modern community life, and those associated with the city and marketplace. Thus, in the prevailing historical and sociological accounts of the family, the womanly role was increasingly equated with the warmth, intimacy, and stability characteristic of this sentimental view of community, while the masculine role came to embody the rationalistic, intellectual, and formal qualities of the industrial world men inhabit outside of the family. Feminists determined that the actual benefits accruing to women as the bearers of these ostensibly esteemed and desirable qualities are very minimal indeed. Hence, a strong tendency in feminist politics has involved the struggle of women "to break free of the legal and political

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109 See Plant, 1978, op.cit.; Kamenka, 1982, op.cit., for an inventory of definitions of community in conservative, socialist, and liberal thought.

domination of communities",[110] and to claim their entitlement as individuals to the same legal and civil rights, and the same degree of personal and sexual autonomy as that enjoyed by men. In the context of social policy, this line of critique is articulated in the demand for socialized or collectivized models of the social welfare - along the lines of those established by the battered women's movement - as opposed to those which would shift the burden of responsibility for social care to an idealized community. For as Wilson suggests, too often when the word community is used in connection with welfare provision, it should really be read as 'family', and beyond that even as 'women', since what it really intends is the withdrawal of state supports that have traditionally upheld women's dual obligations in the paid workforce and domestic sphere.[111]

Other feminists are not so quick as Wilson to reject the term out of hand, regardless of its dubious status as an "ideological portmanteau"[112] of women's oppression. For them, the sense of connection and relationship women derive from their ascribed role as nurturers within the community symbolizes the best of what feminism has to offer in terms of an alternative to the instrumentalism of politics in the modern liberal state. This line of critique refuses the image of the passive, oppressed, or pathetic victim of patriarchal community, just as it rejects the ideological division between community and politics/public and private - a

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110 Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Feminism Without Illusions: A Critique of Individualism* (University of North Carolina Press, 1991), p.40.

111 Elizabeth Wilson, 1982, op.cit., p.40

112 ibid., p.55.

division which ironically, some of the most radical of feminist critiques of the family have helped to sustain. Instead, feminist scholarship in this vein seeks to reinterpret women's traditional roles as wives, mothers, neighbours, etc. as chosen and vital expressions of civic virtue. It seeks to document the history of women's outstanding contributions to the *building* of communities - through their tenacious organization of educational, health and social service networks outside of the household, and through their pioneering efforts in moral and urban reform.[113] Finally, whereas dominant sociological accounts have gauged the relative absence of women from mainstream politics as a measure of their fundamental immaturity as political subjects,[114] the feminist reclamation of community involves the recognition that women's activism in the "private" sphere is predicated on a sophisticated moral and political sensibility, albeit one that diverges considerably from the masculine political norm. Hence, in constrast to those who would reject traditional familial and communitarian forms for their reactionary implications, these feminist theorists of community have

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113 See Shulamit Reinharz, "Women as Competent Community Builders: The Other Side of the Coin". Annette Rickel, Meg Gerrard, Ira Iscoe, eds. *Social and Psychological Problems of Women: Prevention and Crisis Intervention*, 1984, pp.19-43; also, Linda Kealy and Joan Sangster eds. *Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989); Guida West and Rhoda Lois Blumberg eds. *Women and Social Protest*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

114 For a review of the literature on women's political participation, see Virginnia Sapiro, "What Research on the Political Socialization of women can tell us about the political socializtion of people", in Christine Farnham, ed. *The Impact of Feminist Research in the Academy*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp.148-175.

forcefully emphasized the need for a politics modeled on - and preserving of - the ethic of social care and responsibility symbolized by women's community ties.[115]

If these accounts can help to provide some useful background and perspective to the question of community, they can not ultimately alleviate the central problem of the term in relation to women, which consists in its radical contestability, combined with a normative structure that, by virtue of its unquestionably positive connotations seems to invite dogmatic formulations. In addition, we observed how the ideological properties of community function in various ways to reproduce the conditions of women's oppression. In social policy, this was apparent in the tendency of 'community-based' services and programs to tacitly impose a masculine social ideal which denied or minimized men's systematic use of violence against women in the home. Notwhithstanding its comforting associations to personalized and locally-determined models of care, the rhetoric of community in its conventional sense offered little recourse, either practically or conceptually, through which women

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115 See Martha A. Ackelsberg, "Communities, Resistance, and Women's Activism: Some Implications for a Democratic Polity" in Ann Bookman and Sandra Morgen eds. Women and the Politics of Empowerment (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), pp.297-313; Jean Bethke Elshtain, "Feminism, Family, and Community" *Dissent*, Fall 1992, pp.442-449; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, op.cit.,1991, esp. Ch.2, *Women and Community*; Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918". Nannerl O. Keohane, et.al. eds. *Feminist Theory, A Critique of Ideology* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp.55-76.

could critically address the inequities they were experiencing. In the supposedly progressive discourses of the left, meanwhile, the ideological separation of 'community' from 'labour' issues effectively prevented a critical engagement with the politics of women's domestic and reproductive labour from taking place. By virtue of their location within the "community" sector, feminists found, at least initially, that services to battered women were devalued and depoliticized by the male dominated trade union movement. Later on, after the transfer of Vancouver Transition House into the BCGEU's jurisdiction, this tension was alleviated somewhat, but at the expense of feminists having to abandon their more radical earlier committments to collectivized forms of workplace organization.

Finally, in their adoption by post-1960's emancipatory social movmements as a critique of the liberal patriarchal state, communitarian ideologies of resistance pose a perplexing set of problems for women. Part of the difficulty originates in the tendency within communitarian theory toward simplistic or reductive conceptualizations of identity.[116] Within these schemas, the state is typically conceived as a unified and coherent instrument of domination by (male) capitalist elites, while its

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116 For differing accounts of communitarian theory see Patrick Neal and David Paris, "Liberalism and the Communitarian Critique: A Guide for the Perplexed". *Canadian Journal of Political Science,* September 1990, pp.419-439; Michael Waltzer, "The Communitarian Critique of Liberalism". *Political Theory,* Vol.18, no.1, February 1990, pp.6-23; also Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1990).

counterpart - the community-based political movement - is conceived as an oppositional, although similarly self-constituting entity. The political analyses that derive from communitarian logic tend to locate the sources of oppression as originating from somewhere external to the community of resistance that has formed, thus minimizing the need for internal self-critical reflection. For women, not only has this resulted in the perpetuation of sexist relationships within movements for social change; more importantly still, feminists' uncritical alignment with communitarian theories of resistance has prevented a more sophisticated understanding of complexity and ambiguity in social relations from emerging. Feminist political thought, that is to say, while offering a compelling critique of modern patriarchal formations, is perhaps less aware of its own complicity with essentialist and oppressive notions of identity than would utlimately be helpful to its project.

In the context of the Women's House Saving Action, assumptions shared by feminists concerning the necessity for ideological purity in one's political committments, combined with the affective nature of community rhetoric in striking a passionate response, might be interpreted to have contributed to the deep factional divisions that continue to plague the operation of battered women's services in Vancouver. As well as exacerbating the bitter conflicts among women - including those sustained by the Women's House Saving Action against both Rape Relief and the Salvation Army, and those which resulted in a severe break-down in the Occupation itself - the confusion created

by feminists' conflicting and dogmatic claims to commmunity may also have made them more vulnerable to divisive action by the provincial government, than they might otherwise have been. In particular, both the transfer of Vancouver Transition House to the the Salvation Army, and the rejection of the Multi-Cultural Transition House proposal by the Ministry in favour of services delivered by specific ethnic communities enabled the government to claim the moral high ground of respect for "women's diversity", against what increasingly appeared as a tenacious defense by the Women's House Saving Action of an out-moded and ineffective 'one-house-fits-all' model of feminist transition house practice.

Community and the politics of transition

The various ideolgical perils of community as a concept of social change would suggest the need for caution by women who make claims to the term. Indeed, without careful attention to the nuances of community, the choices are limited: women can either take a stand against the oppressive implications of community, but at the risk of sacrificing the integrity of their local and informal networks of caring to the bureaucratic and masculine authority of the state; or, women can continue on bearing the lion's share of unglamorous and uncompensated labour in pursuit of a naive and sentimental ideal of social harmony. In either case, the logic of community pre-supposes a totalizing set of expectations that must ultimately lead to feelings of defeat and frustration.

In my interpretation of the Women's House Saving Action, I have attempted to draw on the specific practices developed by activists in the battered women's movement as a way of conceptualizing some alternative approaches to thinking about community. My own sense is that women do in fact have a great stake in the creation of healthy communities, due to their continuing responsibilities as the carers and nurturers of children and other dependent people. One of the great achievements of feminism in this respect has been the visibility and affirmation it has lent to women's accomplishments in the community sphere. As my account has attempted to show, however, what is clearly needed as well is the further revaluation of the structures, ideologies, and interests that are constitutive of traditional notions of community. I believe such a process is as crucial to addressing the dynamics of domestic violence as it is for attending to the issues of racism and other forms of cultural oppression.

Ironically, the process of reconceptualizing community does not lead in the direction of clear or final solutions to the problems I have posed. Indeed, perhaps the really important lessons of the battered womemn's movement derive not from any definition it can provide of what communities essentially are, but rather from what they are not. Thus we saw how men's use of violence against women was revealed by feminists to form a pervasive component of community life, and we observed the feminist insistence that any form of community initiative, community development, or community work must

incorporate explicit approaches to addressing and responding to this issue. However, what feminist interventions also revealed is that communities, much like battered women themselves, do not tend to correspond with the neat categorizations they are typically assigned. Communities are not static, nor fixed in place or time. They do not exist as coherent, self-constituted entities, independent of outside influences, but are constructed and take their meaning rather in complex and continually changing relation to the political, economic, and cultural systems of which they form a dynamic part. Neither do communities exist apart from, or prior to, the individuals who inhabit them. Rather, it is through the unique relationships and and practices of specific communities that individual identities are formed. Much like the individual subjects they define, moreover, communities are never fully homogeneous, but are in a continual process of inner tension and flux that can never be reduced to a fixed or essential nature. The importance for women of this particular approach to conceptualizing community is its open-endedness; while enabling an appreciation of and a respect for the unique social and cultural and contexts that are constitutive of identity, it emphasizes as well the inherent potential within every community for constructive transformation.

The connection I have drawn in my reading of the Women's House Saving Action between identity and community is not new to feminist thought. Marilyn Friedman, in her critique of communitarian thought for what she describes as its toleration of "traditional communal norms of gender

subordination", nonetheless seeks to embrace and expand upon the alternative, more 'relational' conceptions of identity and subjectivity that such accounts have enabled, in contrast to the rational, autonomous subject of the liberal paradigm.[117] This leads Friedman in the direction of a notion of community modeled on human friendships on the one hand, and urban relationships on the other. The key theme in Friedman's ideal of community lies in the capacity of individuals for exercising choice and agency in such a way as to move beyond the 'found' or 'nonvoluntary' communities into which we are born, toward 'communities of choice' that are reflective of the particular values and committments we acquire as subjects in process.

In a similar vein, Teresa de Lauretis notes how the shift undergone within feminism in the past ten years towards a more differentiated concept of identity has contributed in a parallel way to the reconceptualization of community "as inherently unstable and contextual, not based on sameness or essential connections, but offering agency instead of passivity". This description corresponds closely with the understanding that emerges from the Women's House Saving Action of communities whose boundaries shift, and whose differences - both internal and external - can be renegotiated through either political or interpersonal strategies. What is even more striking, perhaps, is how

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117 Marilyn Friedman, "Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community". Cass R. Sunstein, ed. *Feminism and Political Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp.143-158.

closely de Lauretis' account of the shifting theory of the subject resembles the opening-up of identity enabled by - and crucial to - the transition of battered women. In the context of this intellectual transformation, she writes:

> The shift entails, in my opinion, a dis-placement and a self-displacement: leaving or giving up a place that is safe, that is "home" - physically, emotionally, linguistically, epistemologically - for another place that is unknown and risky, that is not only emotionally but conceptually other; a place of discourse from which speaking and thinking are at best tentative, uncertain, unguaranteed. But the leaving is not a choice: one could not live there in the first place.[118]

For battered women, the 'displacement of self' that occurs in the process of leaving a violent situation can be very profound indeed. Typically, the conditions for surviving a relationship with a violent man require a complete shutting down of life energy on the part of the woman. She finds that she cannot speak her mind, trust her feelings, or reach out to people without punitive consequences. All contact with friends and family is compromised, or severed completely. Any prospect of change, growth, or movement appears increasingly remote. The complexity of identity is subsumed by a rigid, static, and predominantly negative sense of self. Unfortunately, such is the invisibility

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118 Teresa de Lauretis, "Eccentric Subjects: Feminist Theory and Historical Consciousness", *Feminist Studies* 16, no.1, Spring 1990, p.138. For further accounts of the relationship of identity and community in feminist thought, see Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty "Feminist Politics: What's Home got to do with it?" in Teresa de Lauretis, ed. *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), pp. 191-212; Iris Marion Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference" in Linda J. Nicholson ed. *Feminism/Postmodernism,* 1990, op.cit., pp.300-323.

or namelessness of this condition that women often exist within such a closed system for years without any conscious awareness of what has been lost. Transition, on the other hand, involves a process of moving out of isolation, and of walls coming down. The goal is for a recovery of the self, but one that depends as much on a woman's capacity to choose and create the kind of person she wants to be, as on her discovery of aspects of herself that have been hidden or repressed. In this context, recovery comes from the strength that is gained by letting go of the assumptions, the denial, and the inflexible truths that dominated one's existence, and by learning to make oneself open to the complexities and undetermined opportunities that life offers.

In sum, it is the process of transition, and in particular the unique spaces and organizational procedures feminists have developed for facilitating that process, that emerge as the primary contribution of the battered women's movement to the theory of community. Examples of these practices include a strong emphasis on collective settings, where the experiences and pain of individual women can be received by a supportive group of peers without judgement or interference. It includes as well a recognition of the therepeutic benefits women derive from simply being valued - listened to, respected, and supported - by other women. Finally, there is the attention given by practitioners in the battered women's movement to the psychic and emotional dimensions of identity as fully political and crucial motivators of change. As recent scholarship on the relationship of 'self-help' and social change has

indicated, the recognition of boundaries internal to one's identity, and the development of new strategies for breaking through such boundaries, is rapidly becoming a crucial component in the movement toward healthy, functional communities.[119]

The story of the Women's House Saving action revealed the efforts of a group of women to have these practices affirmed and upheld by the institutions of the state, but it revealed much more than that as well. It revealed the elusiveness of the power that state institutions wield, and their vulnerability to influence from non-institutional and grassroots-based points of resistance. Thus, while the provincial government may have succeeded in eliminating Vancouver Transition House, in the long term, the struggle has spawned the emergence of transition houses and safe home programs in over 60 B.C. communities.[120] Moreover, the intensity of the conflicts engaged in by battered women's activists in relation to various labour, community, and other non-governmental organizations further served to displace popular understandings of the state as the singular or primary determinant of women's oppression. In effect, by exploring the dynamics of women's resistance from the perspective of "community", we saw how the claims to oppositional, familial, or progressive

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119 See Dieter Hoehne, "Self-help and Social Change", in Frank Cunningham, Sue Findlay, Marlene Kadar, Alan Lennon, and Ed Silva, eds. *Social Movements/Social Change: The Politics and Practice of Organizing* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1988), pp. 236-51.

120 B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses, May 1993.

ideals upheld by the proponents of community could in fact translate into the same kinds of essentialist or patriarchal social relations as those upheld by the state, and were thus antithetical to the goal of ending violence against women.

From the tumultuous political struggles of the Women's House Saving Action, finally, the sense emerges that the concept of community - both in relation to the localities where violence occurs, and to the protected environment of the transition house - is itself a transitional concept, that disrupts attempts to fix it within a singular definition or framework of analysis. In this sense, the fragmentation of services to battered women subsequent to the dissolution of Vancouver Transition House ought not to be regarded negatively, for it reflects the flexibility with which feminist practices are transmitted into different cultural contexts. It reminds us as well that the complexity of wife assault demands a multiplicity of responses, rather than attempts to design a singular policy solution. In the end, for the time being at least, the bottom line remains the same: for many - perhaps most - battered women, there comes a point where basic survival will necessitate the complete severing of oneself from the community where one is at home, and that is cause for grave concern. The value of transition, however, is its symbolization of a politics that emphasizes the capacity of women, as of all people, for transforming the identities ascribed to us by communities, through new relationships and new communities of our own design.

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APPENDIX I

List of Persons and Organizations Interviewed

Bonnie Agnew	Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
Shashi Assanand	Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multi-Cultural Family Support Services.
Jan Barnsley	Women's Research Centre/ Women's House Saving Action
Debbie Bradley	Women's House Saving Action
Nancy Drewitt	YWCA Munroe House
Gail Edinger	Vancouver Battered Women's Support Services
Megan Ellis	Women's House Saving Action
Jerry Fordyce	Salvation Army Kate Booth House
Jeff Fox	B.C. Government Employees Union
Anne Kloppenborg	Vancouver Social Planning Department
Gardia Koolwine	Former employee of Vancouver Transition House
Lee Lakeman	Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter
Betty Lough	Black Women's Congress of Canada/Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of B.C.
Monica Matsi	Former employee of Vancouver Transition House
Vicki Morris	Vancouver Social Planning Department
Parvin Parvoti	Vancouver Society on Immigrant Women
Lisa Price	Women's House Saving Action

Ajax Quinby	YWCA Munroe House
Judy Rogers	Former director YWCA Social and Community Services Department
Esther Shannon	Editor, *Kinesis* 1985-1988
Muggs Sigurgeirson	Women's House Saving Action
Greta Smith	B.C./Yukon Society of Transition Houses
Mercy Thomas	Helping Spirit Lodge
Frances Wasserlein	Women's House Saving Action

Chronology of Events

December, 1973	-	Vancouver Transition House (VTH) opens its doors, one of the first shelters of its kind in Canada.
1974	-	Staff are certified with the Service, Office and Retail Workers Union of Canada.
1975	-	Social Credit Party returned to power in a provincial election.
1978	-	VTH transferred into the Ministry of Human Resources, and the staff become members of the B.C. Government Employees Union.
1982	-	VTH moves to a new location in Vancouver's West Side.
July, 1983	-	Provincial Government announces its intention to privatize Transition House.
July 1984	-	Young Women's Christian Association assumes operation of Transition House.
May, 1985	-	YWCA announces it will not renew its contract with the government. Transition House staff are terminated pending one month's notice.
June 28, 1985	-	Transition House is occupied by the Women's House Saving Action on its final day of operation.

August 6, 1985	-	Contracts for new services to battered women are awarded by the Ministry of Human Resources to the Salvation Army and Act II.
August 27,1985	-	Vancouver City Council approves a study to explore the feasibility of a City-operated transition house.
October 9, 1985	-	The Salvation Army opens Kate Booth House.
January 28,1986	-	Vancouver City Council approves in prinicple the establishment of a City-operated transition house, and directs the Social Planning Department to lobby senior governments for operational funding.
February 28,1986	-	The Women's House Saving Action terminates its occupation of Vancouver Transition House.
1986-1989	-	The Women's Protection Committee is formed under the coordination of Vancouver's Social Planning Department, comprised of core organizers of the Women's House Saving Action as well as numerous representatives from local immigrant and multi-cultural women's organizations. A proposal is developed for a multi-cultural/multi-ethnic City Hall Transition House and Advocacy Centre.
June 1991	-	Helping Spirit Lodge is opened.
December 1991	-	Vancouver and Lower Mainland Multi-Cultural Family Support Services, a project sponsored by B.C. Immigrant and Minority Women, is opened in Burnaby.

APPENDIX III

Women's House Saving Action Statement of Principles
July 2, 1985

A. We the occupiers demand that:

1) Battered women have a Transition House in Vancouver that puts their needs and their rights to make their own choices first.

2) Vancouver Transition House be re-opened immediately with full monies from the Ministry of Human Resources. Furthermore, we oppose privatization and therefore call for the current Transition House workers to be rehired with full rights and full wages.

B. We, the occupiers, are committed to keeping the Vancouver Transition House open for battered women until the above demands are met.

C. We can and will provide support and referral assistance by operating a crisis line staffed by committed women in our community, and providing shelter and support for battered women who seek us out.

D. We cannot and will not on a volunteer basis provide full service, e.g. childcare workers, transportation, accompaniment.

We cannot guarantee battered women that Vancouver Transition House is currently a safe place because as occupiers we are under threat of police or court action.

Unless and until we receive a guarantee that battered women who come to the house will not be subjected to police or court action, we will only provide the service outlined in (C). However, we will not turn away any battered woman who comes to the door (we will explain the situation and she will make her own choice).

E. We are committed to working toward the goal of keeping a feminist Transition House for battered women.

Letter from Women Against Violence Against Women/Rape Crisis Centre to Vancouver Rape Relief, June 25, 1985

WAVAW/RC has concerns about the tactics you have employed in response to the threatened closure of Vancouver Transition House. Your participation in the activities to protest this move by the provincial government appear to us to constitute a campaign to capitalize on a situation which adversely affects the future of a vital service, as well as the lives of numerous women.

Specifically, we cite your conduct at the Vancouver Transition House Society press conference, where you tried to turn concerns over available resources for battered women to your advantage by advertising the Rape Relief Shelter as a remedy. This was done by means of a press release, issued against the wishes of the society, and through interruption of the question period.

In addition, we have heard that in your recent efforts to solicit donations for what you have always called a "women's shelter" you have referred to that facility as "Rape Relief Transition House". This would, of course, create confusion in the minds of anyone concerned about the loss of Vancouver Transition House, a situation from which you only stand to benefit.

We hope that you will, in the immediate future, show more respect for the difficulties facing Vancouver Transition House workers and the concerned women's community.

WOMEN AGAINST VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN/
RAPE CRISIS CENTRE
for the Collective

cc. Women's Research Centre
Women's Health Collective
Battered Women's Support Services
Vancouver Status of Women
Vancouver Transition House
Downtown Eastside Women's Centre

[The following is a copy of the press release referred to in the correspondance from WAVAW on the previous page. It was issued by Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter on May 21, 1985.]

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Grace McCarthy has recently announced that the Socred Government will be definitely shutting down Vancouver Transition House. McCarthy claims that there are plenty of places for battered women to seek shelter in the Lower Mainland.

Our experience of operating a women's shelter for the past three years in Vancouver tells us otherwise. We know that shelter for women in need is already inadequate, and if Vancouver Transition House closes, we expect our work will double. We are afraid for the women who will decide to just stay home and take the next beating rather than chance that there may not be a place for them to escape to.

Our own experience of being cut off by the Socred government in 1982 leaves us with the clear understanding that this is not a government that cares about violence against women. Transition House is just one more example. Instead, this is a government that channels our tax money into expensive circuses - like Expo '86.

Vancouver Transition House has been an essential service for many years in Vancouver, and if it is forced to close its doors, it will be a great loss for women.

VANCOUVER RAPE RELIEF AND WOMEN'S SHELTER

The Salvation Army Kate Booth House
Purpose and Philosophy

The primary purpose of Kate Booth House is to provide a safe, secure environment for women and their children fleeing domestic violence.

The Salvation Army will offer a supportive, caring atmosphere for up to 15 days and in consultation with the Ministry of Social Services and Housing an additional 15 days care will be offered as required. Referrals to Act II Society will be offered to provide an alternative follow-up service to women and their children for second stage housing.

Residents will be encouraged to take control of their lives and make decisions about their living situation and plans for the future. We will present the various alternatives that are available to resolve each particular problem.

We will emphasize individuality, independence, and will assist each client in defeating feelings of helplessness. We will help the woman resolve the guilt feelings she may experience about leaving her husband or companion and we will assure her that she has taken a constructive step toward rebuilding her life.

We will discourage the battered woman from returning to her abuser until the batterer has received professional help and has evidenced a change in behaviour. In cases where the abuser does not want help or will not acknowledge the problem, we will encourage or suggest that the woman not return to her abuser. We will educate the client as to what she can expect in terms of the cycle of battering if she returns home.

We are aware of the tremendous need for the woman to take charge of her life following an abusive episode and to make constructive decisions and changes. We will recommend that the woman take whatever steps are necessary (legal etc.), to protect herself and her children from further harm and we will introduce her to a range of possible alternatives and options for her life.

We will report all cases of actual or suspected child abuse to the Ministry of Social Services and Housing.

The Salvation Army will serve women and children who are the victims of domestic violence. We will not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, religion, creed, marital status, or age.

Description of Service

Kate Booth House is a confidentially located shelter for abused women and

their children, operated by the Salvation Army in Vancouver. The shelter's services are offered 24 hours a day, seven days a week for victims of domestic violence.

Housing
- Secure, emergency shelter in home-like atmosphere
- Emergency medical and dental referrals
- Clothing
- Provision of basic necessitites

Counselling
- Trained domestic violence counsellors
- Crisis phone
- Crisis counslling
- Advocacy
- Individual counselling
- Weekly support groups

Other
- Strict confidentiality
- Linkage with community resources
- Weekly house meeting
- Employment Program referrals
- Chaplaincy service for all faiths

Children's Program
The children's program will consist of a weekly children's group, parent counselling, individual child counselling, children's activities and child care under supervision of the Child Advocate. The emphasis in all these activities is to interrupt the cycle of violence by providing an opportunity for self-expression and by providing and strengthening anger-coping tools, positive parenting and non-violent parenting skills.

Women's Program
This program has three-fold purpose - to support, to educate and to explore options. Group and individual counselling will be provided daily. Education in parent effectiveness, assertiveness, and in understanding the battering cycle will be provided on an on-going basis. Information regarding resources and employment will be supplied and referrals to agencies will be made. Follow-up support groups will assist both present and previous residents.

APPENDIX VI

VANCOUVER RAPE RELIEF AND WOMEN'S SHELTER

[Exerpted from a 1991 Rape Relief pamphlet]

Rape Relief: Who We Are, What We Do, and How You Can Use Us
Vancouver Rape Relief was opened in 1973 by two women. Over the past 18 years we have grown into a volunteer feminist collective joined together in the fight to end violence against women.

In the fall of 1981, we opened a transition house because we wanted a place to offer more of what women actually need to resist - more safety, more time to organize their lives, a place to dream and scheme together. If you don't have safe shelter, free from attack or fear of attack, our transition house is available for you to come to.

- Call us anytime. We take emergency calls all day and through the night, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

- Try not to be isolated from other women who could understand your situation. Our Support, Education and Action groups, including an ex-residents' group, meet once a week. Sharing emotional support and knowledge helps us all join together to act for change.

- Face to face counselling is available for emotional support, to help you strategize and fight back.

- You'll need information if you're dealing with the Ministry of Social Services and Housing, the police, court and/or hospital. Phone for an appointment to come and find out what we know.

- We will accompany women to the hospital, to the police, through court proceedings, appointments with lawyers, Financial Aid Workers, and Social Workers, providing emotional support and advocacy.

- We have articles, films, and speakers on male violence against women and we are interested in sharing our resources with other groups.

We respect every woman's right to confidentiality. It is important for women to share our stories because making our experiences known to each other corrects myths and distortions about our lives. We celebrate all the ways individual women and groups of women choose to resist and survive.

APPENDIX VI

End Violence Against Women

Rape, battering, the sexual assault of children and sexual harassment are all abuses of power in which men force us into violent situations against our will. Male violence against women is an attempt to control us, to deny us the right to control our own bodies. Rape and battering are acts of aggression, anger and contempt for women.

Men have the advantage of power over women - just as white people have power over peoples of colour and the rich have power over the poor. Men who attack us use whatever power they may have, including brute physical force, weapons, firing or harassing us out of jobs, They betray the trust of wives, daughters, friends. They invade our homes. They use the state to threaten us with the loss of our children, with deportation, and with institutionalization.

What You Can Do About Violence Against Women

- Speak out. Expose men who attack. Silence is their protection.

- Talk with your neighbours, friends and workmates. Plan to make surroundings as safe as you can.

- Talk frankly with your children about sexual assault. Let them know they can talk to you.

- Keep emergency numbers handy. Plan what to do if you are attacked. If you know of a woman in danger, help her - at least by giving her the number of a rape crisis line or transition house.

- Join our work. We always need new volunteers.

- WOMEN: It is easier to protect ourselves and fight back if we are not alone. A Support, Education, and Action group is a good place to start. Join the Women's Liberation Movement. We can put in touch with groups of women in your area.

-MEN: Men who refuse to be violent with the women and children in their lives can do many things to support our struggle for Women's Liberation. Call us to find out how.

APPENDIX VII

Selected Recommendations Addressing The Needs of Aboriginal People

[From "Strengthening the Circle", a conference on wife assault in the Native community held in Vancouver, April, 1991, and published in Is Anyone Listening? Report of the British Columbia Task Force on Family Violence (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1992), pp.322-324.]

The major topic areas discussed were:

- Victim and Family Support Within the Community
- Racism in the System
- Dealing With Resistance

Victim and Family Support Within the Community

A majority of conference participants **RECOMMEND THAT VICTIMS WERE ENCOURAGED TO CHARGE THEIR ASSAILANTS.** This practise is not something that Native women are doing, according to a recent survey done in East Vancouver.

Problem: Victim blaming by police, frontline and community workers including native organiztaions, band offices, tribal councils, M.S.S.H., courts, and community/individuals.

Recommendation:

- To provide more education and awareness training to the above on issues of Family Violence.

- to provide more than three hours of training to police officers as early as the first block of their training, before they can be influenced by veteran officers with old ideas on dealing with family violence.

- to ensure that the Wife Assault Policy is being enforced by having a community organization for victim complaints that ensures problems are being corrected.

- to ensure through policy that all native and non-native organizations dealing with victims have dealt with all issues surrounding family violence and are not still acting out. This would include board/council, administration and frontline workers. For organizations dealing with victims all should be drug and alcohol free for a period of three years.

Problem: A majority of our Native women are not seeking help and when they do, are returning to the abusive relationship. Family violence and specifically sexual abuse has many effects including continuing the abusive cycle, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, stealing, unhealthy relationships. These issues must be dealt with or the dysfunction in our communities will not be stopped. It is the responsibility of the community to intervene.

Recommendation:

Before more awareness and education is introduced programs must be in place to support, prevent and educate. Transition houses and treatment centres for our Native women and children need to be set up and provide quality and safe care.

- Programs to be delivered by trained Native staff.

- Training that is quality, certified and transferable to recognized colleges and universities.

Problem: Native families suffering the effects of oppression have lost their identity, have low-self-esteem and self-respect.

Recommendation:

That Native programs are culturally and spiritually designed.

Problem: Children who witness Family Violence and experience abuse need programs.

Recommendation:

To provide education for awareness and prevention within the schools.

- to educate shcool counsellors and have mandatory parent counsellor communication.

- to provide counselling and therapy groups for all ages of children, including out patient as well as in transition houses, and treatment centres.

- to allow children to accompany mom to treatment centre for only women and children.

Problem: Native women are reluctant to charge because they are familiar with the treatment of violence the men experience within our

institutions. This leads to further violence and because most women return to the relationship this needs to be addressed.

Recommendation:

Violence in institutions be stopped, community intervention through complaints being corrected would give these men the message that violence is not acceptable in any situation.

- programs and treatment centres that are culturally oriented should also be made available for men.

- mandatory counselling should be part of the sentence when charged with assault.

- more support for women when going through the court process.

- more awareness on the wife-assault policy.

Racism

Problem: Women are reluctant to come forward because of the past and present experience with racism within the institutions including M.S.S.H, police, courts, Native and non-native organizations.

Recommendation:

Cross cultural and unlearning racism workshops on a continuing basis throughout all institutions.

- more education within the schools on the above.

- more multi-cultural activities.

Dealing With Resistance

Problem: Dysfunctional families lead to dysfunctional organizations. The silence must be broken, problems must be talked about and solved within native organizations and Bands' Tribal Councils.

Recommendations:

Native people must educate themselves on choosing leaders that live healthy and are educated on the major issues our communities need.

- more women needed to be on boards and councils.

Multicultural Support Services to Women in Transition

[excerpts from the proposal submitted to the Ministry of Social Services and Housing by Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of B.C.]

IMMIGRANT AND VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN OF B.C. is a non-government, non-profit, non-partisan umbrella organization comprised of a wide variety of women's groups throughout B.C.Our aim is to promote a better and more equitable society for immigrant and visible minority women.

RATIONALE:

In a multi-cultural/multi/ethnic/multi-racial society, the need for culturally sensitive services to all people is one that, unfortunately, remains too often unfulfilled. The current reality of social services delivery, rooted as it is in the mores of the majority dominant culture, proves inadequate in the degree to which so many women of racially identified groups and from immigrant communities are unable or unwilling to better utilize the services offered by existing agencies.

Allowing for the low awareness of these services within these communities, one can see that even where there is some knowledge of services, the low levels of use indicate a need for approaches which will inspire greater confidence.

Domestic violence, as one of the most critical of our social problems today, occurs in all communities. To deal with this problem to maximum effect and to best serve its victims, society must offer useable, adaptable services which understand and can be understood by those who need them.

TARGET COMMUNITIES

The client population, on whose behalf we submit, may be most easily defined as those who, because of their ethnicity, colour, or customs, feel alienated from or threatened by what is generally referred to as mainstream society, its institutions and style.

While ethno-specific and immigrant-serving community organizations sometimes attempt to address some of these needs within their own groups, they are generally lacking in resources to give much more than sympathy and referrals. Volunteers and staff with other responsibilities sometimes become overburdened, trying to do for these women and families in need what is generally accepted as being provided to the public in general by public

institutions. The net effect is that women in need in the racially indentified and immigrant communities remain inadequately served.

Structure

Ministry of Social Services and Housing

Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of B.C.

|

Advocacy, Education, Multicultural Family

| |

Networking Support Services

Delivery of Services:

Phase I:
The Executive Director will be hired who will be responsible to develop a program that will provide service to multicultrual women in transition houses and after they leave transition houses in the Vancouver and Lower Mainland area through consultation and liason with already existing mainstram and community organizations. Services will also be made available to women who are living in violent situations through outreach, education and creating awareness within the multicultural communitites.

Phase II:
To create awareness within the multicultural communities of the dynamics of family violence and alternative models of treatment. To provide consulation services and cultural sensitization to professionals. Recognizing that most immigrant women's ultimate wish is to return home, M.F.S.S. will assist these women where possible,to ensure their safety through:
- counselling and support services to women in transition houses
- supportive services to women in their dealings with the legal system
- support groups for women during and after their stay in the transition houses
- crisis intervention, support, and assistance to women who wish to leave violent homes.

Vita

Surname:	Kenny	Given Names:	Leslie Anne
Place of Birth:	London, Ontario	Date of Birth:	May 19, 1960

Educational Institutions Attended:

University of Victoria	1981 to 1984
Laval University	1980 to 1981
Capilano College	1978 to 1979

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Honours and Awards:

B.C. Hydro Scholarship	1983

Publications:

"In Transition: The Women's House Saving Action" (with Warren Magnusson). Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, Fall, 1993.

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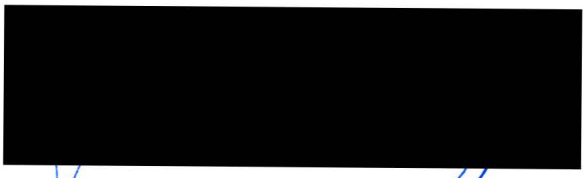
Author: 

LESLIE A. KENNY

September 26, 1993