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Contesting the Nation(s): Haitian and Mohawk Women's Activism in Montreal

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This chapter comes out of a dissatisfaction with how we understand the so-called second wave feminist movement, that is, the resurgence of feminist activism in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, in Canada, and in particular in Montreal. While there have been a number of compelling studies on feminism in the province of Quebec, the historiography tends to focus on predominately white, French- and English-speaking women. Indeed, Montreal's women's history—for various reasons—nearly exclusively portrays the lives of working-, middle-, and upper-class French Catholic, English Protestant, and Ashkenazi Jewish women.¹ Building on recent scholarship, this chapter seeks to shed light on the multiplicity of women-centered narratives in Montreal, thus expanding the narrative regarding this period of Canadian women's history.² At the crossroads of the two Canadas, French and English, Quebec's metropolis was, and remains, a contested space. The city's fraught status stemmed not only from its dual national and multiethnic character but also its location on Indigenous territory. Indeed, white French-speakers—and not only Indigenous peoples—mobilized a colonized identity as part of a broader quest for self-determination during the period under investigation.³ Within this context, notions surrounding advantage and disadvantage, colonialism and anticolonialism were heavily debated. They were also integral to the upsurge in feminist activism in Montreal.

In order to uncover women activists' divergent priorities and goals informed by their respective social locations, this chapter conducts two case studies. The first focuses on the push for sovereignty as well as the campaign to eliminate article 12(1) (b) of the Indian Act in Kahnawake, a Mohawk community bordering Montreal. Under article 12(1)(b), women lost Indian "status" upon out-marriage. In turn, they forfeited the right to own property in the community and pass on membership to their children.⁴ The second case study outlines the multifaceted nature of Haitian Diaspora feminism where women's quest for autonomy was intrinsically linked to the transition of newcomers to the city as well as the transnational struggle to end the Duvalier dictatorship. The father-son regime in Haiti lasted from 1957 to 1986. Therefore, this chapter thinks seriously about the differences between marginalized women and how these differences influenced their civic engagement. It exposes the

entirely specific, territorial dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the material reality of racism in the lives of black peoples. By putting these case studies in the same analytical frame, however, the chapter also seeks to bring Indigenous and African Canadian historiographies in conversation with each other. The chapter therefore points to the interconnectedness of Canadian (and Québécois) settler colonialism and the country's neocolonial role in the Caribbean. Because women's location within these structures shaped their understandings of gender oppression, it argues that resistance to both phenomena on the local and international stages were major sparks behind the resurgence of feminist activism in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

Although building upon previous studies of the "second-wave" feminist movement, this chapter goes beyond traditional analyses where only autonomous women's organizations have been studied.⁵ To this end, it maintains that feminist activism does not have to take place strictly within women-only spaces. More specifically, the chapter highlights Indigenous and Haitian women's leadership roles in mixed spaces dedicated to self-determination or anti-Duvalier struggles, as well as, when applicable, their parallel participation in settings where women predominated.⁶ The chapter also suggests that feminist activism existed in spaces where the label was not necessarily used. Historically, Indigenous and black women have been reluctant to adopt the term "feminism," both because of its association with white, middle-class women as well as Indigenous and Haitian women's own prioritizing of anticolonial and antiracist struggles.⁷ In other words, there were common organizational and ideological underpinnings behind Indigenous and Haitian women's activism. These commonalities transcended the limits of Montreal; that is, representatives from Indigenous and Haitian women's groups were highly active on multiple scales. They demanded equality within their communities and within the broader Canadian and Québécois contexts. They also took their campaigns to the global arena, participating in international conferences to end gender and racial oppression. Thus, Indigenous and Haitian women's activism mirrored the transnational nature of settler colonialism and neocolonialism. In Montreal, as we will see in the conclusion, the unequal social structures stemming from these two systems served to bring Indigenous and African Canadians together locally as well.

Resisting dispossession: Kahnawake Mohawk women's activism

On Montreal's south shore, the Kahnawake Mohawk community has a long-standing, worldwide reputation for assertiveness and militancy.⁸ During the 1960s and 1970s, however, political organizing took on new, revitalized forms where Indigenous youth, in particular, adopted the stance that the status quo was unacceptable.⁹ In this context, Kahnawake activism took on a paradoxical character, where, on one hand, it was localized and nationalistic, and on the other, it assumed Canadian and Québécois dimensions. For this reason, Kahnawake (also known as Caughnawaga) was simultaneously at the heart of a revitalized Haudenosaunee (also known as the Iroquois or Six Nations) nationalism, as well as the base for the Indians of Quebec Association (IQA) and the Quebec Native Women's Association (QNWA). Although

Indigenous leaders by and large encouraged equality through self-determination, Red Power ideology was by no means monolithic, and divisions existed between political groups. After Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's 1969 White Paper, which threatened to eliminate special status for First Nations peoples, Indigenous leaders across the country were especially on edge. Indeed, a significant rupture occurred between organizations such as the QNWA—the latter seeking the elimination of section 12(1)(b) of the Indian Act where women lost Indian status upon out-marriage—and men (along with some women) who wanted to maintain the article within the legislation, fearing an erosion of an important basis for autonomy. The following section analyses the multifaceted nature of Mohawk women's activism in a manner inclusive of, but not limited to, the campaign to amend the Indian Act.

In Kahnawake, women were very willing to enter the broader political discussion on behalf of their people. In this era of rising French-speaking nationalism, white Francophone radicals laid claim to colonized status within the Canadian federation. This discourse opened up a space for Indigenous peoples, however narrow, to advance their own agendas. In 1965, for example, Kahn-Tineta Horn, a former member of the National Indian Council, the precursor to the National Indian Brotherhood (NIB), who would later become a prominent, if controversial, Red Power figure,¹⁰ refuted the notion that French-Canadians were a colonized people at the public hearings on the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. She instead named them "the first invading race." "This would be more appropriate," Horn argued, "and then the English could be the second invading race." By participating in the *Preliminary Hearings*, the Kahnawake resident advanced perspectives that were, in her words, "suppressed, suppressed in the history books, suppressed everywhere." Although she participated in the public debate, her viewpoints were neither Canadian nor Québécois. As she asserted, "I am not a citizen of Canada. I am a private citizen of the six nations Iroquois Confederacy." Thus, the Red Power leader advanced an Indigenous national narrative and history. Referring to the Confederacy, she reminded her audience that, "We still follow the treaties and we still follow our constitution of our nation, which was developed in the year 900 A.D., and we still follow a constitution which is one thousand years old and the United Nations follows that constitution because they adopted the principles of our constitution in the year 1950. Now, we are a separate sovereign nation."¹¹ For residents of Kahnawake then, the scale was land, and the territory Haudenosaunee, that is, the area between Quebec, Ontario, and New York State.¹²

In response to changes at the federal and provincial level, however, Kahnawake residents organized in a pan-Indigenous fashion, refuting the White Paper as well as spearheading the foundation of the Indians of Quebec Association (IQA) in 1965 when, to quote *Our Land, Our People, Our Future*, "the province's native population became increasingly aware of the need to form a common front to handle negotiations with the provincial government."¹³ With the rise of a more assertive, territorial-based Francophone nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, the provincial government aimed to increase its presence within Indigenous communities. In the words of Martin Papillon, "Quebec and Aboriginal nationalisms rapidly collided in this context."¹⁴ Speaking to its understanding of indigeneity, the Indians of Quebec Association (which likely had

women members) argued that Indigenous peoples held special rights because they were the "original inhabitants" of the land, predating "any claim by the French and the English." "The Indian and Inuit People," as President Andrew Delisle reminded readers, "have never surrendered, ceded, or relinquished their lands—and never will."¹⁵ Based in Kahnawake, the IQA exemplified the community's leadership role in pan-Indigenous organizing. Residents of Kahnawake also travelled across the province to defend Indigenous peoples from Euro-Canadian encroachments. For example, Horn traveled to New York to seek funds to assist a Sept-Îles community. After the Royal Canadian Mountain Police (RCMP) and provincial game wardens tried to stop the community's inhabitants from netting salmon, twenty-eight people were arrested upon their refusal to cease this way of life.¹⁶ In other words, Indigenous leaders were active on many fronts.

Still, Kahnawake women's activism mirrored their own understandings of nationhood. In December 1968, hundreds of people from the Mohawk communities of Akwesasne and Kahnawake blockaded the International Bridge at Cornwall, Ontario, in order to protest duties levied on items worth over five dollars. Like the 1929 debacle, when Kahnawake's Paul Diabo was arrested in Philadelphia as an illegal alien, the customs were an affront to the Haudenosaunee understanding, or refutation, of the Canada-US border. Diabo, an ironworker following the tradition of many of his counterparts who moved to the United States for employment, petitioned against his deportation on the grounds that he was Indigenous, and therefore exempt from immigration laws as guaranteed under article 3 of the Jay Treaty of 1794. The latter recognized the Iroquois Confederacy's existence as nations and guaranteed their peoples' right to travel freely and without levy between the two territories.¹⁷ In 1968 as well, women and teenagers—speaking to the integral role they played in Indigenous societies—obstructed the passage of goods and people on the bridge. In response to this action, the RCMP arrested forty-one people, including Horn and her brother. Although she was later acquitted, the 29-year-old woman was initially accused of concealing an "offensive weapon."¹⁸ During the trial coverage, the defendants' lawyer referenced the Jay Treaty. John Sponika argued that the case took place against a wide "historical background," thus raising some "serious issues which appear to transcend the immediate charges." Demonstrating the events' importance, Six Nations chiefs, clan mothers, family members, as well as representatives from Cree, Blackfeet, and Micmac nations were in attendance during the trial.¹⁹ Despite strong political views, however, Horn, a former fashion model, was frequently dubbed an "Indian Princess." Euro-Canadian media made other references to Horn as well, commenting on her "pretty, mini-skirted," "attractive," "curvaceous," and "beautiful" appearance.²⁰

Nevertheless, Horn managed to defy the dichotomous view of Indigenous women—princess or squaw—in order to enter the public debate in a manner that ran counter to settler colonial tropes or victimhood.²¹ In an interview with *MacLean's Magazine*, Horn asserted an oppositional identity, claiming that Mohawk women were superior to white women: "I'm sorry if this upsets some people . . . I just happen to be able to judge the women I meet in the world—in New York, on reserves, in television, magazines, businesses—and the women of my reserve, for example,

impress me as being mentally superior and physically as having fewer aches and pains and more energy. I just happen to believe that Indian women have a higher standard of intelligence than other women.”²² The Haudenosaunee leader’s motivations were context-specific, and coming out of a particular historical moment. As Horn stated in the same interview, “The only kind of integration we can accept is an integration that means freedom to live, breathe, move, develop our culture within the framework of the whole community. We can’t accept integration if it means that all Indians become white, or all whites can become Indians.”²³ Therefore, Horn put forth a discourse of group persistence where Indigenous peoples sought equality vis-à-vis non-Indigenous citizens. Rather than viewing these demands as part of a larger dynamic, however, the federal government turned a deaf ear to community leaders who wanted “to re-write the Indian Act as they see fit.” Moreover, the government looked fearfully south where, as reported in *Akwesasne Notes*, “Some Ottawa politicians who see what Black Power has done in the US are worried.” Pointing to both the strength of the Red Power movement in the 1960s and early 1970s, as well as Horn’s personality, the same article reminded its readers that “if Ottawa doesn’t accede, some fear a new crop of Indian militants might emerge that will make Kahn-Tineta Horn look like a Girl Scout.”²⁴

In addition to the Red and Black Power movements, the mainstream feminist movement was also part of this period of heightened contestation. After years of lobbying by the Committee for Women’s Equality, the federal government set up the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) in 1967 in order to assess the socioeconomic status of women across the country. In total, Indigenous women presented nine briefs, detailing the extent of the discrimination they faced.²⁵ Encouraged by the Fédération des femmes du Québec’s (FFQ) Thérèse Casgrain, Kahnawake’s Mary Two-Axe Earley, on the part of thirty other Mohawk women, submitted a brief to the RCSW in 1968. This action led to a crucial Commission recommendation in 1970 that the Indian Act be amended in its treatment of women.²⁶ Two-Axe Earley married an Irish-American in 1938 and moved to Brooklyn. Once her husband passed away, she attempted to return to her birthplace, but was blocked by the Indian Act’s provisions.²⁷ The woman activist’s own experiences, as well as those of her friends, led her to challenge the discriminatory legislation. Thus, the issue of legislative sexism was most important to those whose lives were directly affected by it.²⁸ Two-Axe Earley’s decision to reach out to Euro-Canadian women through the RCSW also laid the groundwork for future collaborations between major feminist organizations. However, Indigenous women organized separately first, founding pan-Indigenous organizations such as the Native Women’s Association of Canada and its provincial affiliates. Established in 1974, the Quebec Native Women’s Association, for example, was formed as a result of the landmark First National Native Women’s Conference, convened in Edmonton in 1971. Attendees came from every province and territory to discuss the possibility of founding a national Indigenous women’s organization as well as questions surrounding poverty, education, housing, and self-government.²⁹ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, Indigenous women’s organizing extended significantly beyond issues that could be construed as strictly women’s or legal concerns.

Against a backdrop of grassroots organizing that encompassed a range of issues, Indigenous women turned to the Canadian state to rectify the Indian Act's discrepancies. In 1970, "as Indian and women's consciousness rapidly expanded," legal scholar Kathleen Jamieson explains, "Jeanette Lavell, from Wikwemikong, Ontario, decided to contest section 12(1)(b), on the grounds that it discriminated against women on the basis of race and sex and thus contravened the Canadian Bill of Rights." Six Nations' Yvonne Bédard followed Lavell shortly thereafter.³⁰ The two women were buoyed by the RCSW's 1970 report, which condemned article 12(1)(b) as discriminatory.³¹

Although the push to eliminate section 12(1)(b) was always conceived as a battle against the federal government and not in opposition to other Indigenous groups, the turn to legislative recourse on the part of some women still resulted in a political rupture between Red Power leaders. For Harold Cardinal, the prominent leader of the National Indian Brotherhood, if the Bill of Rights was to reign supreme over the Indian Act, "that decision would wipe out the Indian Act and remove whatever legal basis we had for our treaties." Retrospectively recounting the emotional fallout concerning issues of membership vis-à-vis intermarried women, Cardinal explained that "those injustices can be best rectified when the Indian Act is amended." "We freely admitted that such a step was still down the road a way," as he wrote nearly a decade later, "but insisted that we had to first make sure that we have an Indian Act that was strong enough to stand by itself without being overshadowed by other pieces of federal legislation. That was the focus we had to maintain, not whether or not women who married off the reserve should lose their status." Another concern expressed by male leaders concerned the question of property rights because Indigenous men (and women) were fearful that white men, through marriage, would be able to gain ownership or sell Indian land. Within this context, the National Indian Brotherhood, along with the provincial organizations that included the Indians of Quebec Association, decided to publicly oppose Lavell.³² In February 1973, the Supreme Court of Canada heard the Jeanette Lavell and Yvonne Bédard cases together. By a five to four decision, the Court ruled against the two non-status women.³³

Shortly afterward, Two Axe Earley and sixty other women from Kahnawake attended the UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, making their cause known to a global audience. The UN sponsored three World Conferences on Women during the Decade for Women. Held in Mexico City (1975), Copenhagen (1980), and Nairobi (1985), these unprecedented gatherings on gender justice brought together feminists from all over the world. While she was in Mexico, however, Two-Axe Earley received a phone call from her daughter informing her that she faced eviction from Kahnawake. She immediately used the conference to tell the world of her plight, provoking an enthusiastic and supportive response from nongovernmental delegates.³⁴

In fact, the UN-sponsored conference consisted of two types of meetings. The first, the International Women's Year Conference, was for official, governmental delegations. The second, the International Women's Year Tribune, was open to anyone. As reported in *Akwesasne Notes*, Indigenous women were either absent or tokenized at the first conference. Moreover, the theme of the gathering—Equality, Development, and Peace—was approached in an "extremely narrow" fashion with no discussion of important subjects such as racism, imperialism, and colonialism. In contrast, Indigenous

activists from across the Americas were highly active and visible at the Tribune. For example, the US-based activist Madonna Gilbert (Thunder Hawk), representing the International Indian Treaty Council and the American Indian Movement (AIM), shared the stage with attendees from the South African, Zimbabwean, Chicano, and Australian Aboriginal liberation movements. During this multinational conversation, all the women identified a common struggle for survival vis-à-vis European colonization. Since they knew very little about the Indigenous peoples of North and South America, as the Red Power newspaper reported, these conversations were highly informative for African and Asian women. Thus, the women in attendance “made contacts with people from all over the world which will help in the struggle for self-determination.” They also fostered ties with each other, especially Indigenous delegates from Canada, the United States, and Mexico.³⁵

In other words, Kahnawake Mohawk women spoke for themselves on the international stage. By doing so, they undermined the authority of the Canadian state by not only pushing an agenda that ran counter to the federal government’s position on non-status women but also making ties with other Indigenous and anticolonial activists. Moreover, Two Axe Earley and her fellow Indigenous delegates called into question, even if indirectly, the “global feminism” of white North Americans. As Madonna Thunder Hawk said, “We’re fighting as a people for survival.”³⁶ Born and raised on South Dakota reservations, Thunder Hawk became active in the late 1960s as an AIM founder and leader, participating in the 1969–71 occupation of Alcatraz Island and the 1973 siege at Wounded Knee. She then went on to cofound the Women of All Red Nations in 1978. This women’s group sought to address, among other issues, sterilization abuse, culturally appropriate education, and the forced adoption of Indigenous children.³⁷ Sources confirm the distinct differences among women in Mexico City. In the FFQ’s *Bulletin*, Ghislaine Patry-Buisson, the president of the Fédération des femmes du Québec at the time, portrayed the dual tendencies present at the gathering, where women from the “Global North” prioritized access to abortion, equal pay for equal work, and state-funded day care, in contrast to their “Southern” and, in particular, Latin American counterparts who insisted on discussing literacy, agricultural work, and American imperialism.³⁸ The UN World Conference of Women, then, was a moment of encounter, where Indigenous women further inserted themselves in transnational, anticolonial social movements and white Canadians and Quebecers paused for a moment of self-reflection regarding their place in the global political economy, even if the gendered effects of settler colonialism were left under-examined. For Two-Axe Earley, her intervention in Mexico City provoked a national and international media storm. As a consequence, the eviction notice was eventually withdrawn, yet the issue of non-status remained unresolved.³⁹

Although Two-Axe Earley’s stance could be interpreted as gendered anticolonialism, some members of the community, both men and women, saw the campaign to eliminate article 12(1)(b) by overriding the Indian Act as a direct threat to Indigenous sovereignty. As former NIB president George Manuel wrote in his seminal book, *The Fourth World*, “We cannot accept a position where the only safeguards we have had can be struck down by a court that has no authority to put something better in its place.”⁴⁰ Yet the complexity of article 12(1)(b) and its consequences extended beyond legal issues to

encompass a dearth of resources in the face of a potentially rising population. During discussions on intermarriage, Kahn-Tineta Horn, for example, expressed concern over the availability of housing in the community in her opposition to amending the Indian Act. On this point, Eileen Marquis, the editor of *Kahnawake News* and Quebec's delegate to the First National Native Women's Conference, agreed with her.⁴¹ There was, to say the least, a wide range of opinions among Indigenous women. Some women's organizations, however, advocated for the self-determination of Indigenous peoples, yet within a framework where non-status women were explicitly included in the political project.⁴² The Association des Femmes Autochtones du Québec/Quebec Native Women's Association (QNWA), a multilingual organization established in 1974, was a case in point. As a branch of the Canadian Native Women's Association, the QNWA was active on all levels—local, regional, and provincial.⁴³ More specifically, the Quebec Native Women's Association lobbied the federal government to eliminate section 12(1)(b), as well as to tackle disparities relating to education, health, economic development, and social services. The QNWA submitted a range of briefs, from the out-adoption of Indigenous children to the lack of culturally competent health care professionals in communities across the province.⁴⁴ As part of its dedication to cultural continuity, moreover, the Quebec Native Women's Association stressed the need for community control over education.⁴⁵ According to Red Power leaders, all students needed a culturally appropriate education.⁴⁶ In other words, male- and female-dominated Indigenous organizations' goals closely resembled each other, despite significant divergences on the question of non-status women.

After a long battle, the federal government decided to eliminate article 12(1)(b) for an estimated 16,000 women and 40,000 of their descendants. After many years of frustration, Two-Axe Earley was the first woman to regain her Indian status.⁴⁷ The most impactful event arguably occurred at the international level, however, when Maliseet Sandra Lovelace from New Brunswick went to the United Nations, arguing that Section 12(1)(b) was in violation of Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The latter "protects the rights of minority groups to enjoy their culture, practice their traditions, and use their language in community with others from their group." In 1981, the United Nations ruled against Canada and in favor of Lovelace, thereby forcing the federal government to change the Indian Act in 1985. In order to bring the legislation in line with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, Ottawa enacted Bill C-31, or a Bill to Amend the Indian Act.⁴⁸ This bill reinstated in the federal government's registry those who had lost their status due to out-marriage; in addition, it left the decision up to the bands to enroll these new members on their own respective lists.⁴⁹ In Kahnawake, the incorporation of "C-31s" was read in terms of the broader discussion on group boundaries, diminishing land base, and limited resources. In the context of shortages of housing or space and of external threats to the community, there was a great deal of anxiety surrounding who should be welcomed back and at what cost. Some worried that new members might not behave appropriately and according to collective notions of survival.⁵⁰ For these reasons, the community consented to the Moratorium of Mixed Marriage in 1981 and the Mohawk Law on Membership in 1984. Reinstatement "was far from automatic," as anthropologist Audra Simpson explains, due to these preemptive measures, based, in large part, on blood quantum.

New members who descended from non-status women had to have at least 50 percent Mohawk blood to be welcomed back into the community.⁵¹ The painful divisions and emotional debates surrounding membership therefore continued into the 1980s.

In other words, since Indigenous peoples were denied the mechanisms to ensure their collective survival and well-being in the face of territorial dispossession and a distinct lack of resources, non-status women and their descendants did not gain full equality vis-à-vis their respective nations.⁵² At the federal level, moreover, Bill C-31 created a new provision in section 6(2) called “the second-generation cut-off rule” or the “half blood requirement.” As Pamela Palmater explains, “This new rule meant that, after two generations of out-marriage both men and women will lose status.” “While Canada is not the only state to have ever used blood quantum,” as the legal scholar argues, “It has the dishonor of being the last.”⁵³ Although the Native Women’s Association of Canada conducted extensive advocacy work in order to assist those who wished to apply for Indian status, the organization nevertheless maintained a critical perspective, arguing that the Indian Act “remains an oppressive piece of legislation and only further entrenches discrimination and, in fact, threatens our future generations.”⁵⁴ Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, gender conflicts were exacerbated once reinstated women and their children returned to the community.⁵⁵ The tensions resulting from discriminatory legislation may have even discouraged women from residing in the community.⁵⁶

Though clearly imperfect, the revisions constituted a victory for some First Nations women; it is possible that they may not have had the same success without the support of Euro-Canadian feminists who continued their support for non-status women even after the RCSW. For example, the FFQ’s president, Sheila Finestone, made a series of phone calls to successfully halt the forced eviction of a non-status woman from Pointe-Bleue in 1978.⁵⁷ When interviewed by Judy Rebick, however, Gail Stacey-Moore, from Kahnawake, underlined the importance of political links between women of diverse origins, but also the significant differences in life experiences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, rendering deep and genuine relationships difficult.⁵⁸ In sum, membership questions cannot be separated from issues surrounding territorial dispossession and resources. To this day, who can or cannot reside in Kahnawake remains an explosive issue, one inherently linked to community survival.

Haitian diaspora feminism in Montreal

According to sociologist Carole Charles, three elements shaped Haitian women’s activism in the Diaspora: opposition to the Duvalier dictatorship (1957–86), antiracist struggles, and exposure to the ideas of North American feminists.⁵⁹ Similar to black women across North America, moreover, Haitian women remained active in mixed settings throughout the height of the resurgence of feminist activism. More specifically, Haitian-born women were involved in multiple political groups during this period, from male-dominated groups, Haitian women’s organizations, to multiracial women-only settings, such as the Congress of Black Women of Canada and the *Ligue des femmes du Québec*.⁶⁰ Although there were multiple Haitian women’s

groups in Montreal, in the interest of coherence and brevity, this section focuses on the activities and membership of one group active since the 1970s, *Nègès Vanyan* (Strong, Vibrant Women), sometimes referred to as the *Rassemblement des femmes haïtiennes* (RAFA). RAFA consisted predominately of women associated with the *Maison d'Haïti*, an organization founded in 1972 to help new arrivals adjust to Quebec society. Its mandate was twofold: its members responded to the socioeconomic marginality faced by the Haitian Montreal community at large; and they continued the struggle for the restoration of democracy in Haiti, even, or arguably especially, while exiled abroad.

Similar to their Indigenous counterparts, Haitian women put forth an anticolonial political project that transcended, but was also highly informed by, the Canadian and Québécois national contexts. Referred to as transmigrants, Haitian exiles, in the words of sociologists Nina Glick Shiller and Georges Fournon, "live simultaneously in two countries, participating in personal and political events in both the (Diaspora) and Haiti." Expatriates remained attached to their country of birth long after leaving, sending money to family members, maintaining regular contact with friends, and closely following the political situation of their home country. In the Haitian case, the latter has been particularly salient.⁶¹ "Transmigration," to quote Barbara Burton, "is also about the traveling of much-layered and highly charged ideals."⁶² Haiti's iconic place in world history as the site of an unprecedented and inspiring slave revolt in 1804 only contributed to this tendency, reinforcing the community's "long-distance nationalism."⁶³ For instance, Yolène Jumelle, *Maison d'Haïti* founder and future president of the Congress of Black Women, started her 1989 study of the Haitian family in 1804, and after a sweeping gendered analysis, ended the text in contemporary Montreal.⁶⁴ Like the family, however, the transnational nation contained its own set of gendered hierarchies where women faced a particular set of challenges adapting to life in Quebec.⁶⁵ For both these reasons, it is unsurprising that the Montreal Haitian feminist narrative started in Haiti.

Whether writing from the perspective of Haiti or the Diaspora, activists and scholars trace the beginnings of Haitian feminism to the *Ligue féminine d'action sociale* (LFAS), a middle- and upper-class women's group established during the final months of the 1915–34 US occupation of Haiti. Historian Grace Sanders provides an excellent analysis on the continuities between the *Ligue* and women's activism in Montreal, and virtually every publication authored by Diaspora women referenced the LFAS, paying homage to the organization.⁶⁶ Regardless of their personal ties to the *Ligue*—in fact, many Montrealers were related to its original members—Diaspora leaders acquired extensive political experience in the Caribbean.⁶⁷ For instance, Adeline Chancy, one of the founders of the *Maison d'Haïti* and the *Rassemblement des femmes haïtiennes*, had been a member of *Femme Patriote*, an anti-Duvalier group active in the early 1960s in Haiti. The organization's reason for being formed was reflected in its newsletter: "Struggling for the establishment of a democratic society, struggling for the betterment of the Haitian woman, these are the objectives of *Femme Patriote*. The two struggles are inseparable." The women's group was associated with *HAITI-DEMAIN*, a clandestine anti-regime movement that published a widely distributed French- and Creole-language newsletter.⁶⁸ Adeline Chancy and her husband Max had to flee Haiti in 1965 because of these and other Leftist anti-regime activities.⁶⁹ Once

they left Haiti, the migrants' previously acquired political baggage came with them into the new context. Building on their experience, they were able to put forth a critical analysis of both Haiti and Canada/Quebec. From there, their sphere of political activity only expanded.

The French-speaking Haitian middle class settled in Montreal at a time when its public sector was undergoing a massive expansion. Because French-speakers were needed to fulfill important public service jobs, Haitian migrants, women included, were hired in the educational and health care sectors with relative ease, even if they were at times hired below their qualifications. Whereas the average Haitian woman in the first wave of immigration had more years of schooling than her typical Quebec-born counterpart, from 1972 onward, new arrivals came with decreasing levels of formal education, making integration into Montreal society more difficult. From 1976 to 1980, 60 percent of women immigrants who came to the city had not completed primary school. The statistics were not much better for men, or only marginally so. For this reason, new arrivals, and women in particular, were segregated in the manufacturing, textile, and domestic service sectors. This second wave of immigration, moreover, was relatively feminized. Out of the 24,300 Haitians admitted to the province from 1968 to 1980, 12,700 were women.⁷⁰ In fact, women often started the process of "chain migration" to Quebec's metropolis by responding to the industrial "opportunities" available to them.⁷¹ The reality of low education levels and female-headed households aggravated the problems inherent in migration, such as ensuring an adequate family wage or establishing a safe home for one's children. The issues that the Haitian community faced, one could argue, were in fact women's issues, although at times they were not only of concern to women.

As a direct response to the sharp increase in Haitian immigrants, Max and Adeline Chancy, together with other political exiles, founded the *Maison d'Haïti* in 1972–73. The center quickly became a reference for the growing community, and was completely funded by donations until 1978. While the organization gained government funding in 1978, which provided salaries for two fulltime employees and paid for select programs, citizen participation remained the driving impetus behind its initiatives. Young, progressive students such as Yolène Jumelle and mature adults with a history of political engagement worked together in this cultural and political space, with, significantly, a predominately female clientele.⁷² The *Maison d'Haïti* was extremely active on a number of fronts, focusing on the adaption, as opposed to complete assimilation, of Haitian Montrealers. Its leadership sought to promote the maintenance of tradition among the collectivity's youth, while at the same time encouraging their integration into the broader society.⁷³ To this end, the organization played an advocacy role, attempting to bring governmental attention to the "miseducation" of young black Montrealers, irrespective of mother tongue and in conjunction with the Quebec Board of Black Educators.⁷⁴ Members also ran activities for youth, providing cultural reinforcement outside the home.⁷⁵ Middle-class Haitians therefore took on the responsibility of leadership, trying to assist their working-class counterparts, who were increasing in numbers.

Not only were women among the original founders of the *Maison d'Haïti*, but they also addressed issues disproportionately affecting women. Indeed, the day-to-day

issues faced by the community, without discounting the difficulty that Haitian men faced in Montreal, were highly gendered. Starting in 1973, the Maison d'Haïti put into place French-language classes to assist Creole-speaking newcomers. By 1978, the objective of these courses shifted focus once the organization decided to concentrate more extensively on combatting high illiteracy rates, particularly prevalent among women.⁷⁶ In one of many *Collectif Paroles* addressing the issue, Chancy argued that low education levels was a problem embedded as much in the sending as in the receiving society, and that the inability to read exacerbated the challenges relating to the adaption process. Poorly educated newcomers from the so-called Third World were segregated in low-paying "subaltern" occupations. Because they possessed a precarious legal status, Haitian workers were oftentimes unwilling to contest their poor treatment in the workplace, while their children, subjected to social, economic, and racial discrimination, were at risk for high dropout rates.⁷⁷ In short, the Maison d'Haïti provided a space, even if occupied by both sexes, where women could also tackle the gendered difficulties inherent in migration.

Though based in Montreal, Chancy and her colleagues took their activism to the international stage, submitting a brief to the 1975 World Congress for International Women's Year, held in Berlin. The document they submitted to the conference, entitled "Femmes Haïtiennes," quickly became a reference point, as a "pioneering study of the condition of women in Haiti in the context of the struggle for democracy."⁷⁸ Indeed, the World Congress for International Women's Year provided an ideal setting for activists to speak out against the Duvalier dictatorship. For example, Anita Blanchard, a self-identified "peasant woman," recounted her experiences in prison, recalling how Duvalier's oppressive paramilitary forces, the Tontons, came to her village in search of her brother, whom they accused of being a communist. When they were unable to find him, the Duvalier militia captured Blanchard, torturing the young woman in an attempt to get her to divulge the names of her sibling's companions. In Berlin the Haitian woman asked the international community to stand in solidarity with the people of Haiti, especially the men and women who chose to speak out against the regime. She drew particular attention to the case of Laurette Badette, who, like many others, was imprisoned without trial since 1971, the whereabouts of her children unknown.⁷⁹ By relying upon a global network, Haitian feminists based outside the country were able to foster international support for both democratic and women's rights. Badette's liberation from prison in 1977 was considered a major victory for the pro-democracy movement, especially, as "Femmes Haïtiennes" makes clear, for women in the Diaspora, who were heavily invested in this particular national project even while abroad.⁸⁰

In short, the fate of women and their families was intrinsically tied to that of their countries. "Femmes Haïtiennes" attributed Haiti's underdevelopment to the country's neocolonial relationship with many industrialized countries, including Canada—one of the foreign powers propping up the Duvalier regime by supplying aid in exchange for important concessions to businesses.⁸¹ The Caribbean country, as RAFA argued, was in a state of economic catastrophe due both to Duvalier's policies and the imperialistic penetration of its economy. Not only was the country mired in dependency and underdevelopment, but the fundamentally unequal relationship

it had with First World countries led to the exodus of thousands to those countries where both political exiles and economic migrants faced exploitation, the fear of deportation, and racism on a daily basis.⁸² The former were often, not coincidentally, young, dynamic, and in the prime of their lives, as Canada (and the United States) sought to attract highly educated immigrants once racial quotas were eliminated in the 1960s.⁸³ This sort of analysis was part of a broader community discussion on the connections between neocolonialism, starting with missionaries and the businesses that followed them, political repression, emigration, and racial oppression in North America.⁸⁴

"Femmes Haïtiennes" also stressed the gendered nature of migration, because, for many women, "their position as primary financial supporters of the family forced them to migrate in order to fill this role," as well as the integral role women played in the Haitian economy. For example, multinational corporations, including those run by Canadians, took advantage of Haiti's large reserve of cheap labor and lax labor regulations. Approximately 70 percent of Haitian workers in multinational industries were women, who were making baseballs or television and radio parts for citizens of the First World. The presence of these companies reinforced Haiti's economic dependence and further delayed development, which, in part, led to emigration.⁸⁵ In this case, patterns of immigration to Canada resembled that of their American counterparts, where, as historian Donna Gabaccia argues, migrant trajectories in the 1960s "mirrored the geography and history of American empire-building in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia." "It was no accident," Gabaccia suggests, "that the immigrants Americans deemed least desirable by century's end came from those places in the world where investors, merchants, missionaries, and diplomats worked to expand American influence."⁸⁶ Euro-Canadian colonialism can therefore be understood as extending past the country's borders, going beyond, as well as complicating, the Indigenous-settler dynamic. Indeed, Paul Dejean, community leader and priest, referred to recent arrivals as the new "wretched of the earth" in his well-regarded book on the Montreal Diaspora, an explicit reference to anticolonial thinker Franz Fanon.⁸⁷

Yet, French Quebecers also combined feminism and anticolonialism. At the World Congress for International Women's Year, the *Ligue des femmes du Québec* "used our presence in Berlin to publicize our national problem," making sure they had the Quebec flag in view during the opening ceremony.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, the extent to which French-speaking black women's concerns were accounted for by predominately white organizations begs consideration. In the lead-up to the International Women's Year conference, Chancy attended a meeting with the other Berlin-bound groups from Quebec. The *Ligue des femmes*, the *Parti Communiste du Québec*, the *Conseil Québécois de la Paix*, the *Fédération des femmes du Québec*, among others, met to discuss the international gathering as well as women's issues more generally. The meeting minutes indicate the primary themes raised by each organization. For the Haitian group, "the immigrant woman and discrimination" were the most important concerns, highlighting the extent to which these issues were overlooked in most white feminist settings.⁸⁹ These questions carried over into other settings. The FFQ, for instance, paid scant attention to racial stereotypes in school textbooks, focusing solely on gender imbalances in the curriculum.⁹⁰ In contrast, for the Congress of

Black Women (to which many Haitian women belonged), the Maison d'Haiti, and the Quebec Native Women's Association, the elimination of racist and assimilationist thinking in the school system was a major part of their programs.⁹¹ In other words, African Canadian and Indigenous women's intersectional feminist discourses were in fact more all-encompassing, with deeper analyses of social inequalities that included, but were not limited to, sexism.

Although exposed to the discourses of the white Francophone women's movement, and in select cases to members of French-Quebecer-dominated organizations, women from the Maison d'Haiti appeared to work primarily within the Haitian community or within the broader black community—their two activist “homes.”⁹² In addition to the Berlin 1975 event, RAFA members attended numerous Congress of Black Women conferences from 1972 onward, participating in and shaping the activities of the pan-Canadian, mostly English-speaking women's group.⁹³ The autonomous women's organization stressed “the centrality of race and racism” in the lives of black women, as well as the reality of “triple-oppression.”

The Congress also explicitly used a global lens to consider the oppression of black Canadians.⁹⁴ Haitian Montrealers were key contributors to the internationalist ethos of the organization. At the 1977 conference, Constance Beaufile spoke of women's problems in the Caribbean country, as well as the “need for strengthening the bonds of sisterhood between black Canadian women and the women of Haiti.” Chancy similarly brought attention to the specificities of life under Duvalier and the importance of transnational political engagement, authoring two resolutions in 1977. In the first resolution, the Fourth National Congress of Black Women expressed its “solidarity with the struggles of people of Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa for their liberation against colonialism and from apartheid and demands that the Canadian government stop any form of aid to the racist government of Ian Smith and B. J. Vorster,” the presidents of Rhodesia and South Africa, respectively. And in the second resolution, the Congress vowed to support “the struggle of Haitian people for democracy,” demanding that “the democratic rights of political prisoners be respected; namely those of Laurette Badette and Denise Prophète, imprisoned since 1971 and 1973 without judgment,” and aimed to push “the Canadian government to take a stand against the violations of human rights in Haiti.” Similarly, Chancy insisted that the Canadian government intervene back home on behalf of the incarcerated husbands of two Haitian women living in Montreal, Françoise Ulysee and Lisette Romulus.⁹⁵ The presence of Haitian women, then, broadened the reach of the organization, extending its focuses beyond Canada and the English-speaking Caribbean.

Françoise Ulysee was in the audience at the Fourth National Congress of Black Women and gave a speech addressing both Haitian and Diasporic issues. “To be a woman in North America is already difficult,” she began, “but to be a woman and a Black immigrant can become a nightmare.” “As a woman [one] must face the social and economic discriminations that exist against the women in our society.” As she explained, “What is more, [women] undergo a cultural shock resulting from the migration process.” Part of their adjustment included living with “constant fear,” as foreign-born women were kept unaware of their rights, “haunted by the specter of expulsion,” making them “vulnerable to the exploitation of employers.” Their problems

were compounded by dependency on male partners, since, according to Ulysse, "The fear of being abandoned and obliged to take care of herself and her children alone constitutes one of her worst nightmares." For these women migrants, the situation was even more complicated as "their husbands are often refugees or political exiles." On that point, Ulysse's husband, Edner, had been detained for thirteen years in the Caribbean country, and as his wife reminded the audience, "It is the same for thousands of others." As Ulysse stated in her concluding remarks, "Only a new political thought will permit the Black woman to assume, in a positive way the differences of culture and way of living in North America."⁹⁶ Thus, Haitian women's positionality was informed by socioeconomic conditions in both Haiti and Quebec; and their activisms were shaped by the ideas and actions of autonomous groups located in Haitian, Québécois, and, in the case of the Congress of Black Women, Canadian national contexts.

Although the pan-Canadian organization was bilingual from its inception, French-speaking black women in Montreal still founded their own chapter in 1987, as differing linguistic preferences among activists interrupted the flow of meetings. According to Amanthe Bathalien, president of the organization, Haitian women found communication with other black and immigrant communities difficult. Even after the Francophone chapter's establishment, the group had warm and friendly relations with Filipina women, for example; yet, because the latter favored English, the relationship was short-lived. In response to the language barrier, French-speaking black women from various ethnic and class backgrounds came together under their own section, the Ville-Marie chapter of the Congress of Black Women. While mostly Haitian and middle-class, that women's group still managed to attract people from manufacturing sectors as well as other countries. It was a multigenerational space, where women brought their children.⁹⁷

Yet, reflecting its bilingual nature, French-speaking women were not marginalized in the broader Congress. Despite her preference for French, Maison d'Haiti founder Jumelle, a colleague of Bathalien and the person who first introduced her to the pan-Canadian organization, assumed the presidency of the Congress in 1988–89 and was vice-president from 1984 to 1988. Arriving in Canada in 1971 at the age of twenty-seven, Jumelle, the daughter of a murdered Haitian politician, was at the epicenter of the first wave of highly political Haitian emigrants.⁹⁸

It was also in the 1980s that the Duvalier dictatorship began to crumble. Once democracy was restored to Haiti in 1986, many members of the Montreal community returned to their country of birth to contribute to the rebuilding process. With this rebirth came a resurgence of women's activism. According to sociologist Carolle Charles, "The presence and rate of participation of diaspora women in most of the new Haiti-based groups was striking."⁹⁹ Nearly two-thirds of the founding members of new groups like Solidarité Famn Ayisyen (SOFA, Haitian Women's Solidarity) and Kay Fanm (Women's House) had returned from exile outside Haiti.¹⁰⁰ Pointing to activist continuities across borders, Adeline Chancy, a leader in literacy work in Montreal, assumed the position of director of the National Bureau for Participation and Popular Education in Port-au-Prince. There, Chancy remained committed to women-only political spaces, running a workshop on the rights and role of women in Haitian development. For Chancy, overcoming gendered norms in the formal

and informal education of women was integral to Haiti's future, as "the democratic struggle demands the massive participation of women. Yet sexist ideology remains one of the obstacles to this participation."¹⁰¹ Significantly, Chancy's workshop was partially funded by the Conseil du Statut de la femme du Québec, a well-funded government body, and the Canadian International Development Agency.¹⁰² It was also part of a larger push on the part of Haitian feminists to assert the integral role women played in national development and reconstruction.¹⁰³ Haitian Diaspora and antiracist feminism continues to this day, as women in Montreal maintain close ties with their counterparts in the Caribbean.

Conclusion

Much research remains to be done on the rapport between Indigenous and African Canadians. For the moment, however, we can note points of contact between leaders in these communities, which seemed to extend beyond the linkages fostered by the Quebec Native Women's Association and the Fédération des femmes du Québec. There were significant ideological differences between the two organizations, ones, however, that did not impede them from working together. Still, this rapport was not necessarily an instance of coalition-building, that is, fostering relations between women of similar social locations, but, rather, a question of strategy. In contrast, Indigenous and African Canadian women—over and above the actual alliances between the two groups—recognized each other's shared structural position. For instance, Évelyn O'Bomsawin, a QNWA president in the late 1970s, recalled leaving Odanak, an Abenaki community in the Center-of-Quebec region, to work in a factory near Montreal during the Second World War. Speaking about her experiences with discrimination, she mentioned the support networks to which she belonged alongside other racialized women, especially black women.¹⁰⁴ Feelings of solidarity went both ways. The Congress of Black Women of Canada, for example, reached out to Indigenous women during a 1974 gathering in Montreal.¹⁰⁵ Moreover, *UHURU*, a Montreal-based, English-speaking Black Power newspaper published in the late 1960s and early 1970s, criticized the unjust treatment of Japanese, Indigenous peoples, and black Canadians, thus highlighting potential pathways toward solidarity across community lines.¹⁰⁶

This mutual recognition translated into transnational social movements. Indeed, the Quebec Native Women's Association and the Congress of Black Women participated in the Hemispheric Seminar on Women Under Apartheid, held in Montreal in May 1980.¹⁰⁷ More than 200 delegates and observers descended on Quebec's metropolis in order to attend this conference organized by the Ligue des femmes du Québec. Attendees discussed the effects of South African apartheid on women, the role of women in the liberation struggle, and possible avenues of assistance that included a call for economic sanctions and divestment campaigns. Importantly, the Women Under Apartheid seminar was sponsored by the Secretariat of the World Conference of the UN Decade for Women.¹⁰⁸ For the Congress of Black Women, this conference was part of a long-standing commitment to antiapartheid activism, as evidenced by the 1977 meeting. In 1983, Montreal hosted the Third Conference on Latin American Women.

Haitian women's groups were well represented among the participants who denounced human rights violations and neocolonialism in the region. There, delegates suggested that Indigenous leaders from across the continent meet each other, demonstrating the inclusion, at least rhetorically, of Indigenous people in African Canadian, and in this case, specifically Haitian, antiracism.¹⁰⁹ Montreal, thus, was also a site of globally minded activism where Indigenous and African Canadians occasionally reached out to each other. By analyzing Canada's ongoing role in empire-building at home and globally, we can gain a deeper knowledge of power relations within the women's movement and beyond. The history of feminism in Quebec and Canada is only beginning to be rewritten to include the voices, experiences, and political practices of Indigenous women and women of color.

Notes

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