

Labour

Journal of Canadian Labour Studies

Le Travail

Revue d'Études Ouvrières Canadiennes



“They Didn’t Even Realize Canada Was a Different Country” Canadian Left Nationalism at the 1971 Vancouver Indochinese Women’s Conference

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Volume 84, Fall 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1066543ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/lt.2019.0038>

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this note

Klein, C. (2019). “They Didn’t Even Realize Canada Was a Different Country”: Canadian Left Nationalism at the 1971 Vancouver Indochinese Women’s Conference. *Labour / Le Travail*, 84, 231–258.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/lt.2019.0038>

Article abstract

From 1 to 6 April 1971, over 600 women gathered to attend the Vancouver Indochinese Women’s Conference (viwc), an international women’s antiwar conference organized by women’s liberationists in Vancouver. The conference was intended to bring women together under the banner of an international sisterhood, but this desired goal did not happen. Instead, tensions between American and Canadian women divided conference organizers and attendees, culminating in verbal and physical conflict. The viwc is useful for examining how Canadian women experienced interactions with American feminists and radical activists in attendance at the conference. Several women viewed the actions of American delegates as imperialistic. The experiences of conference organizers and attendees show how the viwc represents a moment in women’s liberation where the limits to international feminism were particularly visible.

RESEARCH NOTE / NOTE DE RECHERCHE

"They Didn't Even Realize Canada Was a Different Country:" Canadian Left Nationalism at the 1971 Vancouver Indochinese Women's Conference

Candice Klein

FROM 1 TO 6 APRIL 1971, OVER 600 WOMEN gathered in Vancouver to attend the Vancouver Indochinese Women's Conference (VIWC), an international women's antiwar conference organized by women's liberationists in that city. For the second day of the conference one of the organizers, Margo Dunn, had planned a "cultural exchange day" for six Indochinese women who were the guests of honour. These six guests – whom hundreds of people came to see that evening – were nowhere to be found and Dunn was anxious for their arrival.¹ Musical acts, plays, and poetry readings were scheduled throughout the evening to entertain delegates in the Student Union Building at the University of British Columbia and these performances went ahead as planned in hopes that the guests would soon arrive.

Several hours passed with no word on the whereabouts of the Indochinese women, all of whom had arrived the day before and were staying in the Vancouver neighbourhood of Shaughnessy. They had been picked up that morning but never arrived at the cultural exchange. Unbeknownst to organizers, the women were missing because members of the Black Panther Party visiting from Oakland had taken them to Chinatown for dinner – with no intention of bringing them back for the festivities.² Black Panther delegates felt

1. Margo Dunn, interview by the author, Vancouver, May 2016.

2. Dunn, interview.

that the antiwar conference focused too heavily on the needs of white women and that such an intervention was warranted.³

Attendees of the cultural exchange and viwc organizers were upset, and Dunn saw this incident as “100 percent a disaster.”⁴ By acting as they did, the Black Panthers made it clear that they were not interested in meeting with Canadian women. They had their own agenda, which was to secure one-on-one time with the Indochinese women, even if it was at the expense of other conference attendees. Dunn felt that the executive decision made by Black Panthers to prohibit the Indochinese women from attending the cultural exchange – an event these Indochinese guests had specifically requested – demonstrated a typical American attitude toward Canadians at the viwc: that Canada as a country was insignificant, the needs of Canadian organizers were irrelevant, and the conference should support *American* ideas of sisterhood. This attitude was unexpected because American women were supposed to be allies, not enemies.

What Canadians described as “American imperialism” at the viwc divided, rather than united, women.⁵ I argue that the viwc reflects the limitations of international collaborations built on the shaky ideological grounds of “sisterhood”: Canadian national identity became a more unifying force than the intensive desire for international sisterhood. My conclusion is based on archival sources, oral testimony, and *She Named It Canada* (SNIC), a radical history published by Canadian women specifically for American delegates at the viwc. There was also a key issue that represented the ultimate form of American imperialism for Canadian organizers – the demand for rifles and machine guns by American delegates. When Canadian women refused this request, a divide ensued that could not be healed, and hostility overruled sisterhood.

American women demanded that their political issues remain central to the ideological building blocks of this women’s international antiwar, antiracist, and anti-imperial conference. While Americans were not an entirely homogenous ideological group, their political priorities did not include Canadian perspectives and issues, which Canadian women interpreted as chauvinistic.

3. In order to combat what people of colour perceived as too much racism in white women’s liberation, the Black Panthers requested that they be able to meet with the Indochinese women on separate days. The organizers agreed and accommodated these requests. As such, the first day was for Voice of Women and Women Strike for Peace, the second and third days were for Third World Women and women of colour, and the last two days were for women’s liberation and white women. See Kathleen Gough, “An Indochinese Conference in Vancouver,” unpublished paper, May 1970, 1, Women’s Movement Collection (Anne Roberts collector), Simon Fraser University Archives, Burnaby, BC (hereafter Roberts collection).

4. Dunn, interview.

5. The term “American imperialism” refers to their experience of American imperialism within the viwc, perceived as the domination of American politics, social issues, and problems at the expense of Indochinese and Canadian women. On imperialism more generally, see Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Random House, 1993), xi–11.

When Canadian women attempted to address this concern, American women were dismissive. They argued that the roles of Canadian women were to organize the conference and facilitate discussions between American and Indochinese women – nothing more. This attitude created new resentments and reinforced pre-existing ones between American and Canadian women, and tensions played out during the conference.

The term "imperialism" for these American behaviours and actions would not be used today. This terminology may seem inappropriate, and disproportional to the reality that the United States did not invade or dominate Canada by conquest or violence, as it did elsewhere in places such as Vietnam. Furthermore, by describing their experiences as a result of "American imperialism," Canadian women invoked their own nationalist rhetoric, rooted in British imperialism, which, ironically, they were often critical of. However, the horrors of the Vietnam War were acutely experienced more directly by Americans, so they perceived a certain right to dominate the agenda. Taking these issues into account, "imperialism" is still the term invoked by some of the activists I interviewed for this study. In their experience, the conference was a life-changing moment that reinforced and even created a further divide between themselves and American women.⁶ Before the VIWC, a global sisterhood – at least in terms of American and Canadian women – seemed possible, but afterwards, it was all but a shattered vision.

Some of my narrators explicitly used the term "imperialism," without qualifiers, to describe how they perceived behaviours and actions by American feminists at the VIWC – a conference created, organized, and designed largely by Canadian women for American and Vietnamese women.⁷ The goal of this article is not to debate the term but rather to understand both how the situation was understood and framed by Canadian women's liberationists during this conference and the political consequences for an emerging "left nationalism" in Canada. Thus, for Canadian organizers of the VIWC, the behaviour and

6. Each narrator states that the VIWC was a major motor of change, affecting how they saw both themselves as activists and the organizations they belonged to. Dunn, interview.

7. While some would distinguish or subcategorize this form of imperialism as "cultural imperialism," I do not use such a qualifier. This is because I am interested in my narrators' experiences, and they perceived the behaviours of American conference attendees as an extension of US imperialism and global domination. To them, American attitudes, behaviours, and political goals within women's liberation were in line with nation building, empires, and colonial discourses. Feminist oral history theory and literature argue for the autonomy and legitimacy and expertise of historical narrators in their own right. In oral history practice, one uncovers the experience of narrators. See Nan Alamilla Boyd & Horatio N. Rocque Ramirez, *Bodies of Evidence: The Practice of Queer Oral History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Ruth A. Frager, "Labour History and the Interlocking Hierarchies of Class, Ethnicity and Gender: A Canadian Perspective," *International Review of Social History* 44, 2 (1999): 217–247; Joan Scott, "The Evidence of Experience," *Critical Inquiry* 17, 4 (1991): 773–797; Katrina Srigely, Stacey Zembrycki & Franca Iacovetta, *Beyond Women's Words: Feminisms and the Practices of Oral History in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Routledge, 2018).

actions of American delegates were interpreted as American imperialism on Canadian soil. In sum, Canadian women who organized and participated in the VIWC felt that American political, military, and social domination threatened Canadian sovereignty and identity.

The VIWC represents a moment in which the limits to international feminism were particularly visible; Canadian women perceived American thoughts, behaviours, and actions as imperialistic. The use of “imperialism” to describe Canadians’ experiences of their encounters with American women may be Vancouver-specific and may not have resonated in the same way with women elsewhere in Canada. This may be a geographically situated issue because of the large volume of draft dodgers and war resisters who fled to British Columbia and Vancouver’s close proximity to the American border.⁸ Nonetheless, the VIWC is a useful lens through which to examine how these western Canadian women experienced their interactions with American feminists and radical activists at the conference, illustrating a microhistory of left nationalism and American “imperialism” within the women’s liberation movement.

Diverging Feminisms and Left Nationalism

POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND CULTURAL tensions between Canada and the United States increased during the 1960s and 1970s and, arguably, have never dissipated. Political differences and tensions also existed within Canadian feminism. Canadian labour historian Ruth A. Frager shows how working-class women of the early to mid-20th century faced an “interlocking hierarchy” within the working class, as they fought for equitable wages, union membership, safety, and improved working conditions.⁹ The history of feminism, from suffrage to the 1960s, reveals different ideologies – liberal, socialist, labour – at play, as well as moments of collaboration and coalition. Canadian women’s liberationists of the 1960s and ’70s faced similar issues within their feminist organizations, and working-class women fought to be heard by middle-class feminists.¹⁰ Working-class women advocated for their

8. The complexity of relationships between draft dodgers, their partners, and New Left activists is rich in scope. For a well-analyzed and in-depth look at these relationships, see Lara Campbell, “The Moral Grandeur of Fleeing to Canada: Masculinity and the Gender Politics of American Draft Dodgers during the Vietnam War,” in Peter Gossage & Robert Rutherford, eds., *Making Men, Making History: Canadian Masculinities across Time and Place* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018); Campbell, “Women United against the War: Gender Politics, Feminism, and Vietnam Draft Resistance in Canada,” in Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills & Scott Rutherford, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); David S. Churchill, “American Expatriates and the Building of Alternative Social Space in Toronto, 1965–1977,” *Urban History Review* 39, 1 (2010): 31–44.

9. Frager, “Labour History,” 220–223.

10. Meg Luxton, “Feminism as a Class Act: Working-Class Feminism and the Women’s

grievances to be recognized, and over time, middle-class feminists were forced to acknowledge proletariat injustices. As a result of this tireless work and advocacy, alliances were made between labour, socialist, and middle-class liberal feminists that ensured working-class interests and politics were a part of women's liberation in Canada.¹¹

One way that women formed alliances across class, cultural, and ethnic barriers was by engaging in feminist discourse via independent publications outside of academia. Joan Sangster argues that feminist newspapers "suggest distinct concerns and political pathways, shaped by Canada's own history of exploitation, oppression, and colonialism," which differed from that of the United States.¹² Along with Sangster, scholars Tessa Jordan, Lois Pike, and Valerie Korinek document similar discourses within feminist magazines including *Kinesis*, *Herizons*, *The Velvet Fist*, *La Vie en Rose*, *Broadside*, *Pandora*, *Upstream*, and *The Beaver*, which responded to male-centred colonial scholarship that largely ignored women's emotional, physical, and socioeconomic labour in Canadian history.¹³ Press Gang, a radical and feminist publishing company based in Vancouver, published articles and books by Marxist and radical feminist authors.¹⁴ One of my interviewees, Ellen Woodsworth, was a part of a Toronto-based lesbian feminist collective that published *The Other Woman*, the first lesbian feminist publication in Canada.¹⁵

Many authors and contributors from these publications engaged in conversation, if not heated debates, with one another. Canadian feminism was not hegemonic, as women from different class, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds organized themselves into various feminist organizations and groups. Québec feminists, for example, mobilized around their subordinated relationship to English Canada, addressing not only gender oppression but also the economic, cultural, religious, and linguistic subjugation of Québec within

Movement in Canada," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 64; Joan Sangster, "Creating Popular Histories: Re-interpreting 'Second Wave' Canadian Feminism," *Dialectical Anthropology* 39, 4 (2015): 386, 387–392.

11. Within women's liberation in Canada, a class-based analysis existed that saw gender-based oppression in conjunction with class. See Naomi Black, "The Canadian Women's Movement: The Second Wave," in Sandra Burt, Lorraine Code & Lindsay Dorney, eds., *Changing Patterns: Women in Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 155; Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2005), 5.

12. Sangster, "Creating Popular Histories," 383.

13. Tessa Jordan, "Branching Out: Second-Wave Feminist Periodicals and the Archive of Canadian Women's Writing," *English Studies in Canada* 36, 2/3 (2010): 63–90; Valerie J. Korinek, "The *Chatelaine* Legacy," *Canadian Woman Studies* 26, 2 (2007): 14–21; Lois Pike, "A Selective History of Feminist Presses and Periodicals in English Canada," in Ann Dybikowski, ed., *In the Feminine: Women and Words/Les femmes et les mots* (Edmonton: Longspoon Press, 1983), 209–218; Sangster, "Creating Popular Histories," 381–404.

14. Pike, "Selective History," 213–214.

15. Ellen Woodsworth, email message to author, Vancouver, March 2018.

Canada.¹⁶ Québec feminism was distinct from that in “the rest of Canada” in that it included language rights, religion, and other issues of specifically Québécoise concern.¹⁷ One of the first periodicals written by and for French-Canadian women was *Le Coin du feu*, which discussed women’s issues and Québec nationalism as early as the 1890s.¹⁸ Post-1960s publications such as the *Québécoise deboutte!*, *Les Tetes de Pioches*, and *La Vie en Rose* reflected the social and political interests of Québec feminist groups.¹⁹ Although at times alienated from English Canada, Québec feminists were a major part of Canada’s women’s movement, making their feminist politics a distinct form of feminism that was not found within the United States. Overall, Canadian feminist grassroots publications were integral to the women’s movement because they provided an accessible and diverse platform for Canadian women to engage with feminist discourse.

Akin to linguistic and cultural rifts, there were also divisions based on ethnicity, race, and colonialism. Kathleen Jamieson argues that Indigenous women faced “multiple jeopardies” – they were under threat from the Canadian government, white settlers, and their own Indigenous community members.²⁰ This was in part due to the racism and sexism entrenched within Canadian society. Similarly, African American women in the United States faced a “double jeopardy,” a term coined by Frances Beale in 1969, as they encountered sexism and racism simultaneously.²¹ Building on this notion, the highly influential Black feminist Combahee River Collective recognized that Black women faced more than racism and sexism; oppressions based on class and sexuality were also pervasive. Thus, for racialized American women, their intersectional experiences of race and class could not be separated from sexism. This would be a point of contention at the VIWC between American and Canadian women of colour who did not see their ethnicity as a means to bridge the international gap. Instead, when the VIWC presented an opportunity to form a coalition, Indigenous Canadian women rejected racialized American women’s offers of collegiality, instead stating that they would remain independent.²²

16. Frager, “Labour History,” 234.

17. Luxton, “Feminism as a Class Act,” 65–66.

18. Susan Mann, *The Dream of Nation: A Social and Intellectual History of Québec* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2002), 185.

19. Sangster, “Creating Popular Histories,” 387.

20. On the history of the Native Women’s Movement, and the struggle against systemic and internalized racism, see Kathleen Jamieson, “Multiple Jeopardy: The Evolution of a Native Women’s Movement,” *Atlantis* 4, 2 (1979): 157–178.

21. Benita Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism: Black, Chicana, and White Feminist Movements in America’s Second Wave* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11–13.

22. “The Indochinese Conference Committee: Memorandum” (hereafter ICC memorandum), 12 March 1971, 2, Roberts collection.

The viwc must also be situated in a wider political context of the rise of Canadian "left nationalism." The use of the term "US imperialism" was not limited to Canadian women's liberationists; it was used by radical left nationalists as well. During the 1960s, left radicals formed various groups such as the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA) and the Waffle.²³ The Waffle, founded by radicals of the New Left, the SUPA, and the New Democratic Party, developed a position that Canada was largely dependent on the United States owing to a weak manufacturing, production, and capitalist class.²⁴ As Bryan Palmer shows, many left nationalists – such as Robin Matthews, a prolific left radical politically active in the 1960s and 1970s – viewed the Waffle as "the only serious force fighting U.S. imperialism in Canada."²⁵ Matthews later published an article titled "Draft Dodging and U.S. Imperialism in Canada," arguing that American war resisters who brought "Americanization" into Canada should be deported and make a monetary donation to the Waffle Manifesto Group as reparations.²⁶ Matthew's views were at the extreme end of the left nationalist group, and not all left radicals shared them. However, most left nationalists were anxious about the level of economic, political, and cultural control the United States had over Canada, and they incorporated rhetoric that was against American imperialism in their politics.²⁷ By the 1970s left nationalists in the Waffle had become overwhelmingly anti-American in that they were worried about American economic control in Canada, especially over the development of resources such as oil and gas.²⁸ Many women's liberationists were part of the Waffle and similar leftist groups; thus, left national political analyses were influential in women's organizations.

The antiwar movement was one of the central issues for Canadian women's liberationists of the late 1960s and early 1970s. As with most leftist antiwar activists, "nationalism manifested itself in the nexus of the anti-war movement," and women's liberations, along with the left in general, felt a growing sense that "the country has increasingly become an economically dependent colony of the United States."²⁹ The viwc emerged at a time when debates about Canadian nationalism and sovereignty in relation to American imperialism

23. Bryan Palmer, *Canada's 1960s: The Ironies of Identity in a Rebellious Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 293.

24. Paul Kellogg, *Escape from the Staple Trap: Canadian Political Economy after Left Nationalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 7; Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 293.

25. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 293.

26. Cited in Palmer, 293.

27. Kellogg, *Escape from the Staple Trap*, 57, 219.

28. John Richards & Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979), 49, 50, 82, 257.

29. David S. Churchill, "Draft Resisters, Left Nationalism, and the Politics of Anti-Imperialism," *Canadian Historical Review* 93, 2 (2012): 232–237.

were widespread, not just within liberal and conservative circles but also among the left. Left nationalism embraced aspects of debates on Canadian nationalism, including the notion that Canada was at the cultural, social, and economic mercy of the United States.

Histories of Canadian women's liberation organizations have rarely explored Canadian nationalism, American imperialism, and tensions therein. While historians such as Palmer, Paul Kellogg, John Richards, and Larry Pratt have shown how left nationalism embraced and perpetuated anti-Americanism, this has yet to be explored in terms of the women's movement. Canadian organizers of the viwc were negotiating their identity in an international arena of sisterhood that largely prioritized American sociopolitical issues above all else. The viwc represents a moment that encapsulates how Canadian women defined and resisted American entitlement and chauvinism. Many Canadian women also attempted to use the viwc as an opportunity to educate American women on how imperialism was not just an issue across the Pacific Ocean; for them, it was an issue north of the 49th parallel.

Analyzing the viwc from the perspective of its Canadian organizers shows how American women's liberation was not immune to what can be seen as American superiority and entitlement. Clearly there were limits to international feminism, and the viwc is a case study of such boundaries. The project of women's liberationists to form a globally united antiwar sisterhood was intended to unite women under a common project, but rather than bring women together, it divided them. Due to perceived imperialistic attitudes within American political organizing, Canadian women separated themselves from American feminists and instead rallied together based on their Canadian identity. Even though Canadian women's liberationists were generally critical of Canadian nationalism and its ensuing rhetoric, they used this identity to mobilize against American dominance at the viwc.

"Sisterhood," historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese argues critically, was a term used by women's liberationists to signify a unique, female experience that sought to transcend racial, sexual, and cultural divides, as well as to act together for feminist ends.³⁰ Organizers of the viwc hoped that their shared experience of gender-based oppression would facilitate international political unity in the fight against American imperialism in Vietnam.³¹ However,

30. Fox-Genovese argues that "sisterhood" holds two different meanings: one separates nurturing women from competitive men via the public/private binary; the other is a "means for political and economic action based on the shared needs and experiences of women." Fox-Genovese, "The Personal Is Not Political Enough," *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1979/1980): 95.

31. White women understood the notion of sisterhood as political solidarity between women under the notion of a common oppression. See bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984). Historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu provides an excellent overview of the viwc's being motivated by a "global sisterhood." See Wu, *Radicals on the Road: Internationalism, Orientalism, and Feminism during the Vietnam Era* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 193; "Indo-Chinese Women's Personal Stories," unpublished document,

concepts of sisterhood varied, and while many incorporated class differences not everyone adequately recognized differences in race, class, and sexuality in ways that satisfied all vested interests.³² Ending the Vietnam War via sisterhood failed to unite women on a global scale because it ignored the inequalities and fundamentally different lived experiences of women, and the VIWC exemplifies the conflict that ensued.³³

Origins of the VIWC

AS THE VIETNAM WAR RAMPED UP, so too did North American antiwar activism.³⁴ In Canada, the Voice of Women (vow) was a significant antiwar and anti-nuclear organization. Founded in 1960, it partnered with Women Strike for Peace (wsp) – a similar antiwar maternal-feminist organization – in the United States. Many women within these two groups drew on a maternalist ideology that positioned women as peacekeepers and caretakers both by nature and by experience, stemming from their family roles.³⁵ These groups consisted mainly of middle-class white women, often new to political activism. Some members of vow and wsp were active in communist circles, and through this work they were able to form friendships with politically active women from

1 April 1971, 1–4, Roberts collection.

32. The rich scholarship on second-wave feminism in North America includes (but is not limited to) Lara Campbell, Tamara Myers & Adele Perry, eds., *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2016); Nancy Adamson, "Feminists, Libbers, Lefties and Radicals: The Emergence of the Women's Liberation Movement," in Joy Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 253–255; Agatha Beins, "Sisterly Solidarity: Politics and Rhetoric of the Direct Address in US Feminism in the 1970s," *Women: A Cultural Review* 21, 3 (2010): 293–308; Nancy Schrom Dye, *As Equals and As Sisters: Feminism, the Labor Movement, and the Women's Trade Union League of New York* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1980); Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–75* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); Jessica Frazier, "Collaborative Efforts to End the War in Viet Nam: The Interactions of Women Strike for Peace, the Vietnamese Women's Union, and the Women's Union of Liberation, 1965–1968," *Peace & Change* 37, 3 (2012): 339–365; Carol Giardina, *Freedom for Women: Forging the Women's Liberation Movement, 1953–1970* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2010); Valerie Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Roth, *Separate Roads to Feminism*; Joan Sangster, "Radical Ruptures: Feminism, Labor and the Left in the Long Sixties in Canada," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 4, 1 (2010): 1–21.

33. Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 193.

34. Anne Roberts, interview by the author, Vancouver, November 2015; Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 193–195.

35. Some of these women drew on essentialist understandings of gender and feminism, but it is important to note that not all members participated in this ideology. See Luxton, "Feminism as a Class Act," 64; Shannon Stettner, "'We Are Forced to Declare War': Linkages between the 1970 Abortion Caravan and Women's Anti-Vietnam War Activism," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 46, 92 (2013): 423–441.

Hanoi in the 1950s and '60s.³⁶ Their activism focused mainly on antiwar and anti-nuclear campaigns, as well as sending hand-knit clothes and care items to Vietnamese children and to help raise awareness for their campaign.

Some members of vow had communist ties via other organizations, through which they had formed relationships and political alliances with women from Indochina throughout the 1940s, '50s, and '60s, and they carried these international relationships over to vow. Women who were active in these early antiwar and anti-imperialist organizations made it possible to create two international women's conferences (one in 1969 and the viwc in 1971) against the Vietnam War and American imperialism, and the Indochinese groups they worked with called vow the "Old Friends" to signify their longstanding political alliances.

In 1967 dozens of these "Old Friends" met with Vietnamese women in Hanoi to strategize ways for more women to become involved in the North American antiwar movement. The Montréal chapter of vow brought three Vietnamese women who had attended the 1967 meeting to Canada in July 1969: Vo Thi The, Nguyen Ngoc Dung, and Le Thi Cao. During their two-week visit the three women travelled as guests of vow across Canada, with stops in Nanaimo, Vancouver, Regina, Winnipeg, Toronto, Niagara Falls, Ottawa, and Montréal to discuss their experiences of the Vietnam War with ordinary Canadian and American people.³⁷

In the summer of 1970, wsp and vow members invited several women's liberationists who had political ties to antiwar and anti-nuclear activists to meet with twelve Indochinese women with whom they had personal and political connections. There was a generational shift in the feminist organizing between the cohorts of wsp and vow, on the one hand, and women's liberationists, on the other. Many of the young women's liberationists viewed the politics of vow and wsp as less radical, and outdated, compared to their own.³⁸ Some groups were able to close the divide on antiwar issues; however, the younger cohort often placed a higher value on dismantling racism, sexism, and homophobia through radical means that went beyond politics and war.³⁹ Although women's liberationists were dependent on vow and wsp connections to attend a 1970

36. Roberts, interview.

37. "Vietnamese Women Visit Canada," grouping of unpublished papers, July 1969, 1–5, Roberts collection.

38. I purposefully leave out much of the vow/wsp testimony. This is intentional, as there is already a plethora of information on vow and wsp and their involvement with feminist conferences. See "Vietnamese Women Visit Canada," 1–5; Francis Early, "Canadian Women and the International Arena in the Sixties: The Voice of Women and the Opposition to the Vietnam War," in Dimitry Anastakis, ed., *The Sixties: Passion, Politics, and Style* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 25–41; Roberts, interview.

39. Linda Gordon, "Intersectionality,' Socialist Feminism and Contemporary Activism: Musings by a Second-Wave Socialist Feminist," *Gender & History* 28, 2 (2016): 340–357.

meeting in Hanoi, their ideological differences were already apparent as the discussion included strategies for women to organize politically against sexism, racism, and imperialism. During these meetings, personal connections and friendships were forged between white representatives of the WSP, VOW, women's liberationists, and Indochinese women. It was during these early meetings that the Vietnamese women, who would become the guests of honour at the VIWC, expressed a strong desire to "meet with representatives from Women's Liberation and Third World women."⁴⁰ They also wanted to meet with women of colour, impoverished women, and the wives of GIs.⁴¹

These Vietnamese women had many years' experience as war resisters. They believed that Indochina would only be free with support from around the world, especially from North America, the geopolitical locus responsible for perpetuating war and violence in their region.⁴² The Vietnamese Women's Union (VWU) and Laotian Women's Union (LWU) already had ties with North American women's groups through communist political organizations, but they needed broader support from mainstream American and Canadian activists. Indochinese resistance groups thought that the best way to bring American and Canadian women to join their cause was to have a conference where they could meet with those at the forefront of the antiwar effort in North America. The Indochinese women wanted the conference to be held in North America so as to meet with as many American and Canadian women's unions, groups, and individuals as possible.

Together, the VWU, WSP, and VOW decided that an international conference held in Canada would most effectively reach a wide audience to discuss women's experiences in Indochina and to build unity to fight against the Vietnam War. Muriel Duckworth, president of VOW, and those under her leadership chose Vancouver, Toronto, and Montréal as prime geographical locations that ensured the greatest number of women from across North America could attend, because they could not meet in the United States.⁴³ Thus, the WSP, VOW, VWU, and women's liberationists initiated the organization of the Indochinese Women's Conferences.

VOW and WSP were responsible for the initiation of the VIWC; however, my narrators hardly mention them. This omission signals an intergenerational tension and divide between VOW, WSP, and women's liberationists – in particular, between the former's focus on antiwar activities and younger women's

40. Roberts, interview; Anonymous, "Chicanas Attend Vancouver Conference," in Alma M. Garcia, ed., *Chicana Feminist Thought: The Basic Historical Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 151; Ellin Hirst & Alice Wolfson, "Projected Conference in North America with Indochinese Women: Origins of the Conference," unpublished paper, 1970, Roberts collection.

41. Roberts, interview.

42. Gough, "Indochinese Conference."

43. Kay MacPherson, *When in Doubt, Do Both: The Times of My Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 127.

broader emancipatory agenda. They may have shared similar goals, but the age gap seems to have been too wide to allow formation of a cohesive singular political group. Nonetheless, the connections between VOW, WSP, and Indochinese delegates made it possible to create an international peace conference, and the VIWC would not have occurred without these early feminist connections and political alliances.

Thirteen Indochinese women were originally selected and scheduled to attend the tentative Toronto, Vancouver, and Montréal conferences from 24 March to 7 April 1971.⁴⁴ In the end, only six women were able to come to Canada, along with three men who acted as their interpreters. Thi The Vo, Thi Xiem Nguyen, Minh Hien Phan, Thi Houng Dinh, Bouppha Khampheng, and Pholsena Khemphet comprised the women's delegation, along with interpreters Tri Nguyen, a French professor from Hanoi, Van Anh Trinh, from South Vietnam, and Srithirath Souban, from Laos.⁴⁵ Women from Cambodia were unable to attend and instead sent messages of solidarity through the other Indochinese delegates.

Anti-Americanism in Canada

AT THE OUTSET OF THE VIWC, women mobilized around anti-imperial initiatives that sought to dismantle American power in Vietnam, including creating *She Named It Canada* for American audiences. For Canadian women, anti-imperialism meant opposing American destruction and violence in Vietnam through education and by critiquing US imperialism.⁴⁶ North American women looked eastward in hopes of building an international alliance, engaging with Indochinese women as they sought new ways to organize against gender inequality, and dismantling imperialism.⁴⁷ Drawing inspiration from their Indochinese "sisters," they also hoped to form a new feminist collective and identity. The goal of building a coalition based solely on the notion of a womanhood free from imperialism was difficult to achieve, however, because it was overshadowed by hostilities between different women's groups.

For Canadian women specifically, the VIWC was an American conference on Canadian soil. American women's liberationists, including the Third World Women's Alliance (TWWA) and members of the Black Panthers, made it clear that they were only interested in coming to Canada for an antiwar conference so long as American priorities took centre stage. To ensure this, they demanded

44. The Montréal conference was cancelled in response to security concerns.

45. Gough, "Indochinese Conference," 1.

46. Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, "Journeys for Peace and Liberation: Third World Internationalism and Radical Orientalism during the U.S. War in Vietnam," *Pacific Historical Review* 76, 4 (2007): 579.

47. For an interesting and in-depth reading on how this manifested in something called "radical orientalism," see Wu, "Journeys for Peace," 579.

that at least 80 percent of seats be reserved for their organizations; otherwise, they would not attend.⁴⁸ American women also ignored the limit of delegate quotas from their organizations, saying that if they could not come with their group, they would attend as individuals, straining Canadian resources and billeting. American groups also insisted that the conference organizers address the tensions between African American and white women's groups, which many Canadian women felt ill equipped to do as they did not have the same organizations as in the United States.⁴⁹ In sum, Canadian organizers felt overwhelmed by the demands of American delegates, and it became clear that each side had differing perspectives on conference goals and provisions.

Even though Canadian women were upset with American demands, a North American Indochinese Women's Conference was only possible in Canada. The Vietnam War made it impossible for the Indochinese guests to travel to the United States. Canadian women had to choose to either comply with American demands for attendance or not have the conference at all. Thus, Canadian women allowed themselves and the conference to go ahead, because the antiwar effort was extremely important to them politically. Furthermore, as Sangster shows, Canadian women had a long history of incorporating internationalism into their feminist politics as well as acts of "solidarity and emotional investment in international sisterhood" that dated back to the early 20th century, when Canadian women participated in pro-suffrage demonstrations in Washington.⁵⁰ The desires of the Indochinese women, the need for anti-Vietnam War solidarity, and a meeting ground to facilitate international consciousness-raising sessions overrode American chauvinism and hurt feelings. The planning of the VIWC went ahead despite the growing animosity between American and Canadian women.

During the planning phases of the conference, Canadian women used nuanced language to address what organizer Dunn described as "imperialist attitudes" held by some American women.⁵¹ According to a report from one VIWC planning meeting held in Portland, Oregon, Canadian women explicitly stated that "Canada is a country colonized by the US, under heavy cultural and economic domination of the US."⁵² Canadian women wanted Americans to know that Canada functioned as an imperial satellite of the United States and that this needed to be addressed before the VIWC. American women, however,

48. Conference Planning Committee (CPC), "Minutes of Portland, Oregon Meeting," 6-7 February 1971, 1-3, Roberts collection.

49. CPC, "Minutes of Portland, Oregon Meeting," 1-3.

50. In 1913, on the advent of President Woodrow Wilson's inauguration in Washington, DC, Canadian women's suffragists put aside their differences and animosity in order to join American women for a pro-suffrage march. See Joan Sangster, *One Hundred Years of Struggle: The History of Women and the Vote in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018).

51. Dunn, interview.

52. ICC memorandum, 1.

were not aware of their cultural influence in Canada. New Left discourse about Canadian nationalism articulated a specific kind of dependency theory co-opted by women's liberationists; this theory argued the Canadian economy was dependent on exports of raw material to the United States and thus under its economic control – a highly contested theory, though more so in recent years.⁵³ Nonetheless, this nationalist rhetoric invoked by women's liberationists provided the language to process what they experienced as imperialist attitudes and a power imbalance between themselves and American women at the VIWC.

It is important to set the political context. Concerns about American control of the Canadian economy, and political power imbalances, went beyond the New Left. In 1967, the *Toronto Daily Star* released the results of a poll it conducted, in which everyday American citizens were asked about Canada. The poll responses demonstrated what Palmer argues was an "ignorance on the part of a U.S. citizenry that clearly wanted no controls placed on its imperialist reach into Canada."⁵⁴ In 1969 Canadian prime minister Pierre Trudeau addressed the disparities between the nations in Washington, DC: "Living next to [the United States] is in some ways like sleeping with an elephant. No matter how friendly and even-tempered is the beast, if I can call it that, one is affected by every twitch and grunt."⁵⁵ Trudeau's statement expressed many Canadians' fears of and frustrations with their southern neighbours. Thus, American dominance and the issue of "imperialism" was a widespread topic of debate.

Historian Murray Smith argues that Canadian nationalism was inspired not only by its British prototype but also by "anti-imperialist struggles in the colonial and semi-colonial Third World."⁵⁶ In other words, socialist ideologies that encompassed anti-imperialist and self-determinist principles popularized in the so-called Third World heavily influenced left nationalism during the 1960s and '70s.⁵⁷ This was, of course, especially true in Québec, where leftists and feminists read anticolonial writings and saw their own predicament as a colonial one, from which they needed national liberation. Historian Sean Mills argues that as Québécoise references to British conquest declined, they were replaced by an "overwhelming emphasis on the grip that American imperialism

53. Robert C. H. Sweeny, *Why Did We Choose to Industrialize? Montreal, 1819–1849* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), 40.

54. Palmer, *Canada's 1960s*, 291.

55. Jayantha Dhanapala, "Canada's Role in Arms Control and Disarmament," in Fen Osler Hampson & Paul Heinbecker, eds., *Canada among Nations, 2009–2010: As Others See Us* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 321.

56. Murray Smith, "The National Question: Political Economy and the Canadian Working Class – Marxism or Nationalist Reformism?," *Labour/Le Travail* 46 (Fall 2000): 350.

57. Canadian nationalism emanated from all political and social facets throughout Canada, not just the left; however, for the purposes of this project, I focus solely on the left. See Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, 4 (2000): 634; Smith, "National Question," 350.

held over the province [of Québec]," and thus Québec nationalists and intellectuals aligned themselves against American dominance and control over the Canadian and Québec economies.⁵⁸ The only significant base of Canadian identity seemed to be the fact that it was *not* the United States. Thus, when American women declared Canada an extension of American sociopolitical systems during the viwc, Canadian women felt that this demonstrated a fundamental lack of knowledge and respect for Canadian identity. In particular, it flew in the face of Canadian nationalist rhetoric associated with the New Left.

Canadian women who organized and participated in the viwc had to constantly educate American women about the sociopolitical climate in Canada. Cathy Walker, viwc attendee and contributing author to the document *She Named It Canada*, observed how many Canadians "were really into the national struggle at the time" and noted that the struggle to assert one's identity was "yet another fight against US imperialism. ... [T]here's the belly of the monster right next door to us and we need to do something decidedly different in Canada."⁵⁹ On more than one occasion, American women expressed disdain for Canada's political policies, which they believed to be an extension of "President Nixon's agenda."⁶⁰ Canada had its own political, social, and cultural issues independent from the United States, and Canadian delegates and organizers, upset that American women acknowledged neither these differences nor Canadian sovereignty, thus responded with hostility during the viwc. In other words, American women's liberationists opposed imperialism in Vietnam but, according to Canadian women, were blind to their projection of American politics, culture, and social norms onto Canadian women. They were unable to see that their American-centrism and privileging of US political views and practices were perceived by Canadian organizers as a form of imperialism on Canadian soil.

This perception of American imperialism in women's organizing was not just experienced by younger women's liberationists – it was also a widespread experience of older vow members. Kay MacPherson, a prominent vow member and conference attendee, recalls that after interacting with American women at the viwc, vow dubbed them "American Imperialists of the Left" and, because of this, vow "became more and more Canadian every minute."⁶¹ Perceptions of American imperialism within women's political organizing were an intergenerational experience for many Canadian women and in turn reinforced Canadian national identity as a source of resistance in reaction to what they perceived as American imperialism.

58. Sean Mills, *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montreal* (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 29.

59. Cathy Walker, interview by the author, Surrey, BC, July 2016.

60. Dunn, interview.

61. MacPherson, *When in Doubt*, 127.

Guns, Firearms, and Violence: American Issues on Canadian Soil

AMERICAN ATTENDEES OF THE VIWC demanded that they be provided with security and firearms. This was because American feminist activists' experiences of sexism, racism, and oppression were different than those in Canada. In the United States political harassment and violence were a common experience for white women and women of colour within and outside of their political organizations.⁶² During the Vietnam War, anti-Vietnamese attitudes increased, as did harassment of anti-Vietnam War protestors and violence against Asian women.⁶³ One TWWA/East Wind member said that she was harassed at the Los Angeles airport by two men in the military who asked her if she had "a slanted cunt."⁶⁴ Violence and harassment were common experiences for American delegates of the VIWC; however, these experiences did not always register with Canadian women. Conference organizer and attendee Marsha Ablowitz stated, "There was nobody [at the VIWC] that was anti-Vietnam or anything like that. We didn't have a 'Kill the Vietnamese' type group demonstrating or anything like that, so there was no need for anybody to be guards."⁶⁵ Despite this fact, American delegates were wary of possible danger – for good reason, as many had been targets of state violence – and were unrelenting in their demands for armed security. Thus, diverging experiences with their respective nation-states resulted in the inability of women on both sides to understand each other's different perspectives on the matter.

Canadian women attributed these demands to paranoia and ignorance of Canadian sociocultural norms. Unlike in Canada, gun culture in the United States had flourished since the American Constitution was amended in 1791. Security of the state via gun ownership had been written into American law, and this was reflected in the development of American cultural identity. Historian Michael Bellesiles argues that enthusiasm for gun ownership increased substantially after the American Civil War and that most white American men possessed firearms by 1865.⁶⁶ This fascination with guns never subsided, and the enthusiasm sustained itself throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries. Gun ownership became synonymous with American identity, and American

62. Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006) 63, 64, 187–194, 227, 228.

63. The pro-war movement – which was a response to antiwar sentiment throughout the United States – demonstrated, held blood drives, advocated for conservative ideologies, and celebrated American "victories" during the Vietnam War. See Sandra Scanlon, *The Pro-war Movement: Domestic Support for the Vietnam War and the Making of Modern American Conservatism* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2013).

64. Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left*, 79–80, 133.

65. Marsha Ablowitz, interview with the author, Vancouver, July 2016.

66. Michael A. Bellesiles, "The Origins of Gun Culture in the United States, 1760–1865," *Journal of American History* 83, 2 (1996): 426, 452, 453.

women's liberationists were not necessarily aware that Canada had different attitudes toward firearms. Moreover, during the 1960s and '70s, the harassment – and even assassination – of left-wing radicals in the United States led some Americans on the left to believe they needed arms for "self-defence."

To negotiate American demands for firearms and security details, a meeting was held between Black Panthers, American women's liberationists, and three members of the Conference Planning Committee (CPC) at the home of a conference organizer in Vancouver one week before the VIWC.⁶⁷ At this home meeting, tensions were high, and what began as a discussion turned into arguing. Several Black Panthers and other American women demanded that VIWC organizers supply them with firearms such as rifles and machine guns; Canadian organizers were stunned. The American women continued to argue, stating that guns were necessary to protect both women of colour and the Indochinese guests and making demands that Canadian women could not accommodate.

In the end there was no resolution, and the American women stormed out of the meeting. The CPC did not know how to acquire enough guns or ammunition to outfit an entire security team, and the American women did not understand why. Ablowitz explains:

They were in a completely different space, those women. We thought they were being paranoid. But ... I understand it [now]. [The government and police] were killing them. They were paranoid for a good reason, but it wasn't too valid here, but it wasn't that it wasn't a valid issue. ... Our issue was the Vietnam War, and napalm bombing people. ... We wanted to publicize that. And they had other agendas. Which was valid, we just hadn't thought of them.⁶⁸

While systemic racism against people of colour existed in Canada, many local women's liberationists thought that the acquisition of guns was an extreme reaction to racism and was disrespectful of Canadian customs. American women thought that attending the VIWC posed a significant threat to themselves and the Indochinese delegates and that the Canadian response was insufficient. This lack of understanding on both sides reflects the social, cultural, and political disconnect between American and Canadian women.

Even if Canadian organizers had felt more comfortable with the idea of armed security, Canadian gun laws would have made it difficult for Vancouver women to acquire guns and ammunition. In 1969, Prime Minister Trudeau passed gun control measures that changed the legal age to purchase guns, banned the sale of firearms to those deemed of an "unsound mind," prohibited convicted offenders from carrying or possessing a firearm, and created the gun classifications "prohibited," "restricted," and "unrestricted."⁶⁹ Even though

67. I am not at liberty to discuss the exact location of the meeting or the name of the homeowner, at the request of my interviewees. This information came from an anonymous source interviewed in July 2016.

68. Ablowitz, interview, July 2016.

69. R. Blake Brown, *Arming and Disarming: A History of Gun Control in Canada* (Toronto:

hunting rifles could be purchased at department stores across Canada in 1971, they were expensive – and were not the semi-automatic firearms requested by the Black Panther women.

While some Canadian women did have access to prohibited and restricted guns via the black market, the process to obtain such contraband was time consuming, expensive, and risky because many women's liberationists were under surveillance by the RCMP and the FBI.⁷⁰ The American women dropped the gun issue; however, the TWWA decided that “delegates themselves would take on the responsibility for the safety [of] the Indochinese friends with no dependency on the Vancouver or national Canadian pig forces.”⁷¹

The CPC reluctantly agreed to the TWWA/Black Panther request that they be responsible for a security checkpoint where they would conduct body searches for weapons, hidden recording devices, and the like on incoming attendees of the conference.⁷² VIWC delegates and organizers such as Dunn, Ablowitz, and Anne Roberts thought these measures were excessive; however, the Black Panthers and TWWA insisted their demands be met.⁷³ Organizers reluctantly agreed to security screenings because they wanted to respect the wishes of women of colour. During the first two days of the VIWC, all attendees were questioned, had their bodies searched, and went through metal-detecting screenings by American women holding batons.⁷⁴

Many women were visibly uncomfortable with what they saw as unnecessary and excessive security measures, and the Indochinese guests asked organizers to stop.⁷⁵ The Black Panthers and TWWA were not happy and were reluctant to listen; however, in the end they decided that the wishes of the Indochinese guests should be respected. Even when Canadian and Indochinese women were noticeably uncomfortable, American women still insisted that safety and security had to be ensured through a militarized regime. This was ironic because the

Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 2012), 165–166.

70. For a comprehensive analysis of women's liberation groups under surveillance in Canada, see Christabelle Sethna & Steve Hewitt, “Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP,” *Canadian Historical Review* 90, 3 (2009): 475–476.

71. “General Information for All Third World Delegates,” pamphlet, n.d., 1–2, Roberts collection; Marsha Ablowitz, interview by the author, Vancouver, May 2016.

72. The conference planning committee agreed in an attempt by white women to acknowledge the wishes of women of colour as important voices in the antiwar solidarity movement, even if they felt it was excessive. They also agreed to a checkpoint because many of these political activists had been intimidated, jailed, and even had counterparts murdered for their actions in the United States. Ablowitz, interview, July 2016; Dunn, interview; Roberts, interview.

73. Ablowitz, interview, July 2016; Dunn, interview.

74. Ablowitz, interview, July 2016; Dunn, interview.

75. Ablowitz, interview, July 2016; Dunn, interview; Roberts, interview.

VIWC was a conference organized around peace and the dismantling of imperialism – something that American women's actions, at times, contradicted.

This does not mean that American women were overly sensitive or paranoid. On the contrary, as historian Judy Tzu-Chun Wu argues, American women of colour experienced racial profiling and surveillance on their way to the conference after they crossed the border.⁷⁶ On a visit to Vancouver's Chinatown, TWWA delegates were charged for jaywalking and were sometimes followed (although by whom is unclear).⁷⁷ There were also agent provocateurs in attendance – some suspected to be conference organizers – and women of colour were worried they would be targeted.⁷⁸ It seems that American women of colour *were* warranted in their suspicions.

Indeed, RCMP files show that women's liberationists and the Vancouver Women's Caucus had been under RCMP surveillance since 1969, and agents infiltrated the VIWC as delegates (and possibly one as an organizer).⁷⁹ Concerns for the safety of women of colour were valid; however, as was common at the time, Canadian women were not aware that the RCMP and FBI shared intelligence information.⁸⁰ Nonetheless, the first days of the VIWC security measures were clearly futile against agent provocateurs, and the risk of bodily harm was not significant enough in the eyes of most women to warrant excessive use of search or force. Certainly, the possession of firearms would have done little to protect women of colour or white women's liberationists.

The demand for firearms, and the difficulty American women had in understanding that their supply was not possible, was perceived by VIWC organizers as American imperialism on Canadian soil. For Canadian VIWC organizers the firearm mandate was no different than the United States demanding land and resources from less powerful countries. This was a shared intergenerational experience for Canadian women, as members of VOW also thought that guns and bodyguards for the Vietnamese women were inefficient and "totally unnecessary."⁸¹

Canadian women criticized what they saw as excessive and abusive security detailing, such as rough pat-downs and unfriendly posturing, and

76. Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 227.

77. Wu, 227–228.

78. I am unable to name the main suspects, at the request of my narrators. Ablowitz, interview, July 2016; Dunn, interview; Steve Hewitt, *Spying 101: The RCMP's Secret Activities at Canadian Universities, 1917–1997* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 188; Wu, *Radicals on the Road*, 227–228.

79. Sethna & Hewitt, "Clandestine Operations," 474–476.

80. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the FBI and RCMP, and what kind of intelligence was shared and why, see Hewitt, *Spying 101*, 160–162.

81. MacPherson, *When in Doubt*, 127.

demanded that American women lessen their militancy.⁸² American women ignored how their dedication to security and safety actually made many Canadian and Indochinese women feel *unsafe*. Canadian responses fell on deaf ears, which they saw as representative of the larger issue at hand: that Americans were ignorant of their role as a dominating power in Canada, thus making sisterhood between groups impossible. The failure to grasp the linguistic, cultural, and social issues that were important to anti-oppression organizations in Canada shows that Americans mobilized around oppression differently.⁸³ Issues around French language, labour history, Indigenous activism, and anti-Americanism created a distinct social milieu that was ignored and rejected by American women.

Save for a few individuals, Canadian organizers of the viwc were overwhelmingly white. However, women of colour attended the conference, and Angie Dennis, an Indigenous woman, was a part of the cpc.⁸⁴ There is little evidence to show that Canadian women of colour at the viwc found ethnic and racial solidarity with their American counterparts. For example, when the American-based twwa demanded that Canadian women of colour join their delegation as sisters, this was vehemently rejected by a group of women from Vancouver.⁸⁵ In their response, they said they felt imposed upon by the demands for solidarity made by American women, and they would not unify as racialized women with those south of the border.⁸⁶ Thus, the refusal by Canadian women of colour to be included as delegates of the twwa complicated international racial and ethnic solidarity.

The twwa did not understand how their status as Americans would make them outsiders or why some women of colour in Canada refused to mobilize around an American-based racial solidarity. The twwa essentialized race as a universal structure, failing to accommodate different meanings and experiences for those in Canada. After consulting with several groups of Indigenous, Black, and Asian women in Vancouver, Canadian organizers wrote a statement in response to the twwa's criticisms that Canadian people of colour lacked visibility:

A group of native and black people met in Vancouver this week and came to these conclusions: 1) there is no third world group in Vancouver. They do not consider themselves third

82. Ablowitz, interview, July 2016; Dunn, interview; Roberts, interview.

83. The narrators I interviewed about the viwc, and the primary source material, use imperialist language as well as the term "imperialism" to describe how they felt about their interactions with American women. See Dunn, interview; ICC memorandum, 2.

84. The conference planning committee included several women of colour, of whom Dennis – a prominent feminist activist within the Vancouver Women's Caucus and Indigenous activist groups – was one of the most well known and politically active. The overwhelming majority, however, were indeed white. Dunn, interview.

85. ICC memorandum, 2.

86. ICC memorandum, 2.

world – they are native women, black women, Chinese women, etc. 2) Right now, they see their priority as working within their own communities. 3) They have seen the conference as imposed upon them by white Canadian and American women and by third world women in the US. Full communication with them from all groups is lacking. 4) As individuals they wish to attend parts of the conference and as individuals they will help with some of the billeting.⁸⁷

While this memorandum was authorized primarily by white Canadian women, it demonstrates that women of colour, in Vancouver at least, did not embrace the racial and ethnic solidarity espoused by the TWWA. This is not to say that women of colour in Canada did not have an anti-imperialist agenda and did not participate in demonstrations of sisterhood with white women – they certainly did. Rather, this statement and the lack of participation of women of colour in the conference shows a broader rejection of *American*-based racial identities and is further proof of the uniquely Canadian context of the VIWC. This lack of acknowledgement of the special circumstances of Canadian women of colour (and their white counterparts) further exacerbated tensions and fed perceptions that American women were acting in an imperialistic way.

She Named It Canada: Targeting American Imperialism through Education

MEMBERS OF THE CORRECTIVE COLLECTIVE (CC), an intellectual writing group and offshoot of the Vancouver Women's Caucus, decided to compile a critical and radical colonial history of Canada for American VIWC delegates, *She Named It Canada because That's What It Was Called (SNIC)*.⁸⁸ Published by Press Gang just before the conference in 1971, its purpose was to educate American women about the history of Canada and to ensure they knew that "they were in another country."⁸⁹ CC members Karen Cameron, Colette French, Andrea Lebowitz, Barbara Todd, Cathy Walker, Dodie Weppler, Marge Hollibaugh, and Pat Hoffer had all experienced personal frustrations with American women, including during the planning of the VIWC.⁹⁰ They thought that the distribution of a graphic magazine about the history of Canada would

87. ICC memorandum, 2.

88. Walker, interview.

89. Frances Wasserlein interviewed Andrea Lebowitz, a contributor to the Corrective Collective who was also an active member of the Vancouver Women's Caucus and involved in nationalist and anti-imperialist politics. Lebowitz quoted in Wasserlein, "An Arrow Aimed at the Heart: The Vancouver Women's Caucus and the Abortion Campaign 1969–1971," MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1990, 32.

90. Walker, interview.

educate American attendees about their roles as “imperialists” in Canada.⁹¹ *SNIC* contributor Pat Davitt stated that American viwc delegates had a

remarkably deficient understanding of Canada as a separate country (from the US) with a separate history quite different than their own, and with all that those differences mean – different money, a border with border guards that you have to plan for (as in hiding any subversive, i.e. political materials) etc. *SNIC* was intended to give them a slightly better understanding of their wonderful neighbour to the north.⁹²

As Davitt notes, Canadian women were upset and even hostile toward Americans for what they saw as ignorance of and disrespect for Canadian sovereignty – a stance that some Canadian organizers interpreted as simply imperialist in nature.⁹³

American viwc attendees were not the only audience the cc had in mind. At the time of *SNIC*'s release Canadian women's history was relatively unknown, and the collective focused on women's roles, labour, and resistance throughout Canadian history.⁹⁴ Collective members decided that *SNIC* would entail a radical interpretation of Canadian history for both American and Canadian readers.⁹⁵ To start, on page 1, the cc acknowledged Indigenous people as the original inhabitants of Canada and the first resisters to colonialism and imperialism. However, they intentionally did not provide an in-depth analysis of First Nations history, stating that the “history of the native people was omitted at their request. This omission in no way suggests that we are unaware of the crucial importance of their history on this continent.”⁹⁶ Women's liberation groups in Vancouver had connections with First Nations women's groups and many were committed to decolonizing history but, in this case, believed they were respecting the wishes of Indigenous women.

91. Andrea Lebowitz, a founding member of the Vancouver Women's Caucus, Abortion Caravan supporter, and member of the Corrective Collective, was interviewed by Frances Wasserlein on her role in the viwc and in the production of *SNIC*. The term is hers, quoted in Wasserlein, “Arrow Aimed at the Heart.” 32.

92. “An Interview with Corrective Collective Member Pat Davitt,” Graphic History Collective website, 8 March 2016, <http://graphichistorycollective.com/news/she-named-it-canada-news/interview-corrective-collective-member-pat-davitt>.

93. Dunn, interview; Walker, interview.

94. There had not been a committee on Canadian women's history until 1975, when the Canadian Committee on Women's History was founded. See Franca Iacovetta, “Gendering Trans/National Historiographies: Feminists Rewriting Canadian History,” *Journal of Women's History* 19, 1 (2007): 206; Joan Sangster, “Contextualizing She Named It Canada,” Graphic History Collective website, 8 March 2016, <http://graphichistorycollective.com/news/she-named-it-canada-news/contextualizing-named-canada-joan-sangster>.

95. Walker, interview; “An Interview with Corrective Collective Member Cathy Walker,” Graphic History Collective website, 8 March 2016, <http://graphichistorycollective.com/news/she-named-it-canada-news/interview-corrective-collective-member-cathy-walker>.

96. Corrective Collective, *She Named It Canada: Because That's What It Was Called* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1971), 15–21.

Shifting colonial powers – first the French and English and later the United States – were critiqued using labour, socialist, and Marxist historical lenses. Throughout the graphic history, iterations of successful labour resistance were ubiquitous, reflecting the activism at the time. White settlers were continuously referred to as “workers” and a major focus of *SNIC* was their resistance to exploitation, capitalism, and religion. For example, the CC focuses on the 1837–38 Rebellion, when the French in Lower Canada resisted British colonial powers through armed conflict, and the subsequent hanging and deportation of French combatants.⁹⁷ By arguing that the French had been colonized by the English in Canada, the collective intended to show that resisting imperialism has a strong history in Canada. *SNIC*’s focus on French resistance was meant to inspire Canadian women and educate Americans by drawing a comparison between American and Anglo imperialism. Québécoise women at the time of the conference felt that they too were imperial subjects, not just of the United States but also of English Canada, and invoked Third World decolonial theories to encapsulate their collective experience.⁹⁸ Imperialism, in other words, was a continuing reality in Canada.

The document heavily criticized American imperialism. The CC argued that Canada had always been under the thumb of imperialism: first through colonization by France and England and then by the United States. The collective argued that the advent of World War I set forth the process “by which the U.S. wrested the Imperialist lead from England and France [over Canada].”⁹⁹ They continue, stating that “Canada was always a profit maker for someone else. ... [A]lthough it might appear that [Canada] had simply gone from being a colony of Britain to a colony of the United States there was really more to it than a slight managerial shift.”¹⁰⁰ Showing how capitalism had become entwined with the US Constitution, they argued that both capitalism and American imperialism were linked to the distortion of and domination over Canada’s economic, social, cultural, and political growth. It was a complex history that explored the differences between the development of Canada and that of the United States, which the CC hoped would dismantle what they perceived as imperialist attitudes and behaviours.¹⁰¹

While the collective situated the wresting of “imperialism” from Europe to American powers during World War I, the effects of American expansionism

97. Corrective Collective, *She Named It Canada*, 19–21.

98. It would be beyond the scope of this article to interrogate the complex history of how intellectuals and activists in Québec invoked Third World decolonization theory and anti-British imperialism and saw themselves as subjects to Canadian imperialism. See, among others, Mann, *Dream of Nation*; Mills, *Empire Within*; Pierre Vallières, *Les Héritiers de Papineau: Itinéraire politique d'un "nègre blanc," 1960–1985* (Montréal: Québec/Amérique, 1986).

99. Corrective Collective, *She Named It Canada*, 50.

100. Corrective Collective, 68–69.

101. Corrective Collective, 50.

were felt north of the 49th parallel centuries before. In *SNIC*, the collective drew on previous American wars as examples to show how Canadians had been resisting American imperialism long before their Indochinese sisters. Starting with the British Loyalists fleeing the United States after the Declaration of Independence in 1776, the CC described the refugees as the first “draft dodgers” welcomed to Canada.¹⁰² This is where, according to the authors, Canadians got their first experience of American entitlement, chauvinism, and imperialism on Canadian soil. The authors state, “These ‘loyalists’ came to Canada, where they were met by the American War Resisters Committee who helped them be landed immigrants. ... In fact the loyalists took most of the land. ... They also took what land the Acadians had left. The Loyalists introduced the black population to Canada (through slavery) ... and the loyalist wives came too. (tho [sic] slavery wasn’t new to Canada).”¹⁰³ Here, the authors placed the theft of land, the displacement of Acadians, and the transport of slaves squarely on the shoulders of the original draft dodgers – the Loyalists. Clearly, anxieties around the importation of American entitlement, culture, and displacement via American draft dodgers during the long sixties were an issue for Canadian feminists. This kind of reasoning and historical interpretation ignores that their oppression was rooted also in British imperialism and reflects how eager these Canadian women were to conclude that American imperialism was the main source of Canadian economic and political discontent.

Continuing with the War of 1812, *SNIC* included a quote from Henry Clay, an American House Representative, who declared war on Canada: “We have the Canadas as much under our command as Great Britain has the seas. The conquest of Canada is within [American] power. ... I believe that the militia of Kentucky are alone competent to place Montreal and Upper Canada at [America’s] feet.”¹⁰⁴ Here, the CC attempted to show how Canada had always tried to resist American expansionism – often unsuccessfully – and was under imperialist threat. Canada, according to *SNIC*, was an imperial colony of the United States, and if the American reader had not understood this by page 71, they were to “go back 10 squares and reread all about American Imperialism.”¹⁰⁵ The quote from Clay was significant, as it asserted that their experiences and interactions with American women before and during the VIWC were perceived as American imperialism on Canadian soil.

The authors of *SNIC* were quick to remind Americans that the very drawing of the border favoured American interests (they were equally quick to remind them that “Yes folks, there’s a border...”).¹⁰⁶ Canada’s economic woes,

102. Corrective Collective, 11.

103. Corrective Collective, 11.

104. Corrective Collective, 14.

105. Corrective Collective, 71.

106. Corrective Collective, 25.

exploitation, and suffering were the result of how North America was divided both geographically and politically. Canada was at the mercy of the United States, leaving "Canadian workers with little to do but cut down trees for the Americans. This is mostly what they are still doing today."¹⁰⁷ The United States held immense economic and political power over Canada, and *SNIC* revealed that women's liberationists believed that the fight against American imperialism was not just an Indochinese issue, but a *Canadian* issue. Thus, *SNIC* showed one of the greatest anxieties that Canadian women had during the VIWC: that international sisterhood remained impossible without American women acknowledging that their attitudes and behaviours were understood as imperialistic by the Canadian organizers.

The authors of *SNIC* argued that Canadian economics were tied to the United States well before the Vietnam War. Because Canada "was a hinterland of the United States[, and Canada's] economy was (and is) heavily dependent on the US," once the value of Canadian-produced staples such as agriculture products had sharply declined at the beginning of the American Depression, Canada's economy soon followed.¹⁰⁸ Economic stability and survival had been destroyed via Canada's dependency on the United States, and the fallout of the Depression increased this reliance. Once Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King lowered US tariffs on production, Canada became "an economic colony of the US rather than Britain."¹⁰⁹

This interwar transition from British to US economic colony in the interwar period was then matched by a loss of political autonomy after World War II. Even though Canada was the only nation that did not have a debt to the United States after World War II, the CC argued that this "was hardly a measure of our independence. We were rapidly becoming an economic and political satellite of the U.S., yet the threat was subtle, and it was not in our immediate economic interest to resist."¹¹⁰ Post-World War II, the economic and military power that the United States wielded over Canada was widespread, and the United States was the new "master."¹¹¹ This nuanced language regarding political, economic, and military dominance over Canada pointed to imperialism.

Canadian feminists questioned how American women could dismantle their own country's imperialism while wilfully ignoring the historical and social milieu of a country over which they had great power and influence.¹¹² Canadian women were resentful that their country continued to be "just

107. Corrective Collective, 25.

108. Corrective Collective, 58.

109. Corrective Collective, 60.

110. Corrective Collective, 68.

111. Corrective Collective, 70–71.

112. Ablowitz, interview, July 2016.

another part of the USA where draft dodgers can be safe.”¹¹³ In *SNIC*, the collective highlighted these tensions in an attempt to educate their American sisters on their roles as colonizers in Canada – an aim believed to be important for developing sisterhood between Canadian women around the issue of national identity. There is no evidence to suggest that American women acknowledged, engaged with, or even read *SNIC*, which indicates that the document was much more important to Canadian women than their American counterparts.

Anti-Americanism and Conflict at the VIWC

ANTI-AMERICAN RESENTMENT exploded during the women’s liberation meetings on days three and four of the VIWC. Canadian attendees felt that they were being treated as “janitors” and that the structure of the conference reflected the needs of Americans and ignored Canadian issues.¹¹⁴ In a personal report on the VIWC, attendee Kathleen Gough argued that “most Canadian delegates shared a sense that, in their ardor to claim identification with the Indochinese, many US delegates forgot that they were guests in a foreign country. Phrases like ‘welcome to our country’ and ‘in this country we...’ grated on Canadians, who [were] becoming increasingly alert to US imperialism in Canada.”¹¹⁵

Canadian women, fed up with American attitudes, became hostile. As Dunn notes, some Canadian delegates had “just had it with women, American women, talking about ‘here in our country,’ and [Canada’s] president. It’s just they had no concept that they were in another sovereign nation, it was unbelievable how ignorant they were.”¹¹⁶ Many American attendees believed President Nixon was the leader of both the United States and Canada.¹¹⁷ What seemed most troubling to Canadian delegates was that Americans did not seem to comprehend that Canada operated within a completely different political and electoral system and was a sovereign nation in its own right.

Dunn went on to say, “I think, well ... they didn’t understand us, and we didn’t understand them either. I think we had more of a chance to, because so much of our media and our publications were from the United States.”¹¹⁸ Owing to the power dynamics between the two countries, Canadian and American women had different views about the goals of the conference as well as sisterhood in general. Canadian women understood the differences between their

113. Anti-American attitudes can be seen in “How to Commit to Revolution” and “Curses,” written collectively by activists involved in the VIWC and published in an “occupied” edition of the *Georgia Straight*, 8–13 April 1971, 17.

114. “Curses,” 17.

115. Gough, “Indochinese Conference,” 32.

116. Dunn, interview.

117. Dunn, interview.

118. Dunn, interview.

views and those of Americans as stemming from Canadian experiences of American imperial oppression. For Canadians, anti-imperialism and solidarity could only start from an acknowledgement and redress of this American imperialism in Canada. For their part, the Americans believed that the conference should focus on the wants and needs of Indochinese women, not the feelings of Canadians.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, some Canadian women were very hurt and upset by the way they were treated by American delegates, and it negatively impacted their experiences at the conference.

Canadian organizers called a meeting during the last day of the women's liberation portion of the conference in hopes of reducing the growing anti-Americanism and resentment. A group of American delegates met with Canadian women to discuss problematic attitudes and the lack of mutual understanding that many felt permeated the conference atmosphere. Tensions were high, and after several hours of discussion with no resolution made, five members of the Canadian Union of Rabid and Senseless Extremists (CURSE), a guerilla activist theatre group, burst into the meeting room. Their intention was to disrupt and protest against American women. They were told to leave, but the women from CURSE refused. After verbal threats did not deter CURSE, American women physically attacked the group (which included a pregnant woman), beating them with their hands.¹²⁰

Both American and Canadian women intervened in the assault, but the rogue demonstrators continued to protest verbally and refused to leave until they were heard. Reluctantly, women at the meeting allowed them to speak. CURSE continued to criticize American women. The majority of their grievances stemmed from the fact that only 30 Canadian delegates had been permitted to attend the conference, whereas over 400 delegates were from the United States.¹²¹ They were also upset that American women were treating Canada as if it were simply a US territory.¹²² It was ironic that violence broke out at a conference designed to negotiate peace and sisterhood, and this was not lost on delegates. In all, the American-Canadian meeting did little to change the relationships between women, and resentments only increased after the incident of physical violence. It was clear that American women were neither ready nor willing to acknowledge Canadian grievances, and thus the conference continued under a tense climate.

After the final meetings at the viwc, attendees had conflicting reactions. On the one hand, there was hope and inspiration from listening to the stories of the Indochinese women, but on the other, there was increased hostility between

119. ICC memorandum, 2.

120. Margo Dunn states that the Canadian women from CURSE were attacked and beaten specifically by attendees from Los Angeles; this is corroborated by a *Georgia Straight* article about the demonstration. Dunn, interview; "Curses," 17.

121. Many Canadian women ignored this quota and attended the viwc anyway. "Curses," 17.

122. "Curses," 17.

North American activists. Although women found the conference to be a useful political experience, group dynamics within the viwc resulted in participants fundamentally questioning certain ideas of group identity and belonging. In an article published in the *Georgia Straight* on the aftermath of the conference, viwc organizers Anne Roberts and Liz Breimberg wrote, "WHO IS THE REAL ENEMY? Many of us had hoped that ... the Women's Liberation members would work well together. The movement showed that in reality it is deeply divided; that there are no common politics within it; that there is no common understanding about leadership and organization."¹²³ This lack of unity reflected the diverse and fractured nature of both the women's liberation movement and the women's peace movement. The viwc typified trends existing in the women's movement at the time, making the conference a useful window into the contested nature of second-wave feminism. The conference also shows that, although in close proximity, the exchange of feminist ideologies across borders between seemingly similar groups was sifted through nationalist lenses.

While the Canadian women's liberationists at the conference were generally critical of Canadian nationalism, during the planning and operation of the viwc, these women embraced a nationalist identity when they experienced what they perceived as American imperialism from US attendees. Essentially, a sense of nation undergirded much of the conflict that manifested at the viwc. Tensions around Canadian nationalism and American imperialism played out at the conference and undermined the attendees' best efforts to build a unified front against the Vietnam War. Assumptions that Canadian women could be easily subsumed by American categories and priorities insulted viwc organizers, who saw these American attitudes as imperialistic. Canadian delegates felt pressured by American compatriots to abandon their Canadian identity in the fight against imperialism. Ironically, American women did not understand that Canadians felt they too were at the mercy of US imperial control and had been for a long time.

In sum, the viwc was a moment where Canadian nationalism united Canadian women against Americans rather than creating a feeling of international commonality. For Canadian women involved in the viwc, this anti-imperial conference seemed, ironically, to reinforce the very ideology it was intended to fight. These experiences were made salient through oral histories, which in turn allowed me to tease out similar tensions from the written sources.

These perceptions of American imperialism within women's liberation are rarely explored in the historical literature on Canadian women's organizing. While a plethora of scholarship regarding the student movement and left nationalist discourse exists that positions Canada at the economic and political margins of North America, these discussions do not include the women's movement. By taking these experiences seriously in historical study we are forced to re-examine and re-conceptualize what women's activism looked like Canada.

123. Anne Roberts & Liz Briemberg, "Factions Rather Than Unity," *Georgia Straight*, 16–20 April 1970, 5.