

**Women organizing against austerity in Quebec:
Feminist popular education in practice**

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ABSTRACT

Women Organizing Against Austerity in Quebec: Feminist Popular Education in Practice

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The project on which this thesis is based examined the way that women who are part of marginalized groups, those who are often excluded from social movement leadership, engage with policy, and take political action with the support of community-based feminist organisations providing popular education in Quebec. Many of these organisations have challenged neoliberal governmental policies in the province through various forms of political actions. This examination has taken the form of a qualitative study based on interviews with five key informants from four feminist community-based organizations in Montreal that: 1) practice feminist popular education 2) are part of the Quebec social movement against austerity 3) offer services to women who are from marginalized groups. The data collected illustrate the way these feminist popular education groups support the inclusion of women in a mass social movement against neoliberal policies through strategies adapted to the nature of the women who participate in them and use their services.

Three interesting themes have emerged for further research and examination: first, the role of organisational structure in the application of feminist popular education; second, the issues of accessibility of popular social movements and third, the role of informal spaces for social movement learning and popular education.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to all the women interviewed for this research: Kavitha, Martine, Ghazala, Juvaria, and Camille. I am grateful for the time you have provided me despite being in a context of cuts and compression. I thank you for the wealth of knowledge you have shared with me.

Your dedication has inspired me and pushed me to the finish line.

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Chapter 1: Statement of Problem, Research Questions, Literature Review

Statement of Problem

Feminist popular education aims to render visible the voices of women as a response to and rejection of patriarchal hegemonic knowledge. Building upon popular education principles, it values lived experience and education for social justice action. Many feminist community organizations have adopted feminist popular education methods in their organizing.

In this research, I propose to examine whether the telling of lived experiences as popular education in community organizations that are part of social movements leads to greater social action. More specifically, I am interested in the way that marginalized and oppressed women, those who are not viewed as leaders of social movements, learn about policy and political action with the help of a feminist popular education approach.

Since the last few years in the province of Quebec, the late provincial Liberal government has forcefully implemented austerity measures through cuts in public services like health care and welfare. Members of Quebec's civil society have been organizing throughout the province for social action against austerity, including many community organizations in Montreal that have a feminist popular education approach.

The provincial organization called le Regroupement des centres de femmes (L'R des centres de femmes) has published a report in 2016 about how Austerity impacts women (L'R des centres de femmes, 2016). L'R is a provincial umbrella organization that represents most women's centres across Quebec. They've been leading a week of actions in April of each year for women's centres visibility, but more recently demanding more funding for the centres, because funding is either getting cut or not increasing with inflation and demand. L'R leads a lot

of the provincial-wide campaigns, but local women's centres may do some political work, albeit at a more local level.

There is another civil society coalition that is resisting austerity measures, at a regional level, the Front régional de l'action communautaire autonome (FRACA). This common front of 'autonomous community action' is part of a larger campaign called *Engagez-vous pour le communautaire* (Get engaged for the community sector), and their demands are for a major refinancing of the community sector and an acknowledgement of its contributions to society. This campaign has led community sector strikes in the last few years and other actions against austerity policies.

Research Question

Does the use of a feminist popular education approach make organizing against austerity more accessible to women living in precarity or marginalized? This research will seek to answer the following sub-questions:

1. What does an application of feminist popular education in a community organization look like?
2. Does the effort of relating political issues to personal lived experiences make these issues more accessible to marginalized women?
3. Do women served by, and involved in, community organizations in Montreal who are members of the social movement against austerity measures in Quebec get engaged with the social movement against austerity?
4. What are their reasons for joining the social movement?
 - a) Feminist popular education approach

b) Other reasons?

Rationale

The rationale behind doing this research is to contribute to the existing literature about the place of women who are marginalized in Quebec social movements, a place that is not well documented, nor acknowledged. It is further important for me to create this place since, as Emejulu and Bassel (2015) claimed, minority women are disproportionately disadvantaged under austerity because they are more likely to be employed in the public sector, and they are more likely to be accessing public services because of gendered caring responsibilities (p.88). On top of these material obstacles, Emejulu and Bassel (2015) add that minority women also have to navigate discursive obstacles: “about whose crisis counts, who can legitimately interlocate on their behalf, and who can mobilise for social justice.” (p. 88-89). Choudry (2015) also questioned whose voices are valued in social movement scholarship. In other words, it is important for me to centre not only the lived reality of austerity by marginalized women, but also to document their engagement within the movement.

Literature Review

This section offers a review of the relevant literature to analyzing the learning that happens through participation in social movements. The topics that I explore in this review in order to situate my research are: transformative learning theory, feminist pedagogy and popular education, and social movement learning theories.

Transformative Learning Theory

The adult education theorist to whom the development of transformative learning theory is attributed to is Jack Mezirow. The theory is generally defined as a process by which individuals, or groups, undergo a deep shift in perspective that leads them to a new way of seeing

and interpreting the world. The basic premise of the theory is that there is an unexpected event that makes us aware that we hold a limited or distorted view (Cranton, 2002); Mezirow called this a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 22). According to Lange (2004), this disorienting dilemma is similar to a cognitive disequilibrium, where the internal core needs to be disturbed and destabilized for a deep change in the individual’s knowledge to occur. Since it is easier to maintain habits of mind, the disorienting event is often a dramatic one (Cranton, 2002). Merriam and Caffarella (1999), in turn, add that this dilemma can be a crisis, such as illness, death or a job loss. Nonetheless, transformative learning theory acknowledges that transformation does not uniquely occur after a disturbing event, but that it can be incremental and the individual can even be unaware that the transformation is happening (Cranton, 2002).

According to Merriam and Caffarella (1999), Mezirow’s transformation theory aims a change in perspective, which he defines as the lens through which individuals interpret the world and from which new meanings, beliefs and values emerge. Emancipation can come through this change of perspective, because it is usually our perspective that holds all the presuppositions and assumptions that restrict the way we perceive our daily experiences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Reflection on our experiences plays a pivotal role in transformation, because it is in our attempts to try to understand and make sense of what is happening in our lives that we come to the conclusion that perhaps our old ways of thinking do not work (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Experiences that we cannot comprehend push us to critically examine our assumptions and make us aware that we hold a limited or distorted view (Cranton, 2002). Mezirow (1997) notes that human beings have a strong tendency to reject ideas that fail to fit their preconceptions, often labeling those ideas as “unworthy, of consideration-aberrations, nonsense, irrelevant, weird or mistaken” (p. 5). One of the benefits of transformative learning, he adds, is that it leads to a

frame of reference that is more “inclusive, discriminating, self-reflective, and integrative of experience” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).

Furthermore, Lange (2004) identifies the centrality of individual experience as one of the main themes of Mezirow’s transformative theory. She claims that in Mezirow’s perspective, it is through an ongoing process of externalizing, problematizing and critically evaluating one’s actions and thoughts that a critical self is constituted (Inglis, 1997). It is thus not through the evaluation of others’ actions, thoughts, frames of references and habits of mind. She admits that although Mezirow recognizes that individuals develop a self-concept through socialization and interaction with others, they do not have a determining influence (Inglis, 1997).

This central focus on the individual is what some scholars have identified as a problem within transformative learning theory. Lange (2004) finds that transformative theory privileges cognitive transformation; it psychologizes social relations and portrays the individual as an isolated actor. The isolation of the individual as actor gives a false sense of emancipation, according to Inglis (1997), who claims that social movements are the agency of social change rather than the individual. Additionally, through privileging cognitive transformation and the psychological perspective on empowerment, transformative theory neglects the class and socio-cultural constraints of oppression (Inglis, 1997). Overcoming these oppressions becomes very difficult if we give individuals a sense that they can emancipate themselves through their own cognitive processes. But Mezirow does not speak much of social change, because in his perspective social change can only happen through individuals changing (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

In addition to the critique of the individualistic orientation of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory, Lange (2004) has taken issue with the theory’s idea of disruption through a

disorienting dilemma. Through her research, she discovered that it was the restoration of participants' foundational ethics to a conscious place in their everyday lives that brought about critical transformation (Lange, 2004). Lange (2004) called this process restorative learning, that she defines as "an empowering starting point that tapped old ways of being and helped the participants overcome alienating social relations in which they were embedded including disillusionment, fragmentation, exploitation, and meaningless work" (p. 135). Restoration to foundational ethics grounded the participants of her research so they could withstand the disorientation features of transformation in order to remain open in the future to new knowledge that appears threatening at first (Lange, 2004). If individuals would get continually disoriented without a solid ground that they can fall back to, it would not be worthwhile. Lange's (2004) research participants recovered suppressed values and ethics, and also engaged in a critique of dominant values while embracing new values.

Although Mezirow is often credited with developing transformative learning theory, Merriam and Caffarella (1999) identify Paulo Freire's philosophy of education as a predecessor to Mezirow's transformative theory; they view both Mezirow and Freire as transformative learning theorists. Carlos Alberto Torres (2003) calls Freire's educational philosophy "transformative social justice learning," because while Freire's learning theory also focuses on individual change, this change is set within a large framework of radical social change. Similarly to Mezirow's theory, transformative social justice learning takes place when "people reach a deeper, richer, more textured and nuanced understanding of themselves and their world" (Torres, 2003, p. 2). Central to Freire's framework is his concept of *conscientization* (Freire, 1970/1995), or consciousness-raising, as Merriam and Caffarella (1999) translated it. Conscientization occurs when individuals achieve a deep understanding and comprehension of the roots of the socio-

cultural reality that shapes their lives (Freire, 1970/1995). Freire's transformation process includes awareness of the structures that oppress us, be it social structures or internal structures (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Conscientization, like Mezirow's transformative theory, is a learning process that consists of "becoming aware of one's assumptions, beliefs, and values and then transforming those assumptions into a new perspective or level of consciousness" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 325). It is a dynamic process that invites us to rethink our past in order to understand our present condition, and encourages us to imagine our self as an agent of social change (Torres, 2003). Although Mezirow (1997) emphasizes the importance of discourse in transformation, because it is through discourse that we validate our critical reflection, in Freire's perspective on the other hand, dialogue does not consist of mere validation of the individual's pre-established critical reflection, but plays a more active role in raising consciousness (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Freire (1970/1995) held that as the oppressed become more critical of the world around them, they are better positioned to understand the system that oppresses them and will want to challenge it through social action.

Even though Freire's learning theory includes a perspective on social change and challenging oppressive structures, it still views a common experience of oppression, one that does not enable the recognition of different experiences based on gender differences. Feminist pedagogy offers a good framework to understand the experience of women in social movements. Feminist pedagogy takes root in Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy and brings a feminist perspective to it. There are many commonalities between the two pedagogies, as both pedagogies are aimed at social change. According to Kathleen Weiler (1991), feminist pedagogy and critical pedagogy both assert the existence of oppression in people's lives and both see human beings as subjects and actors in history as they fight for liberation. Feminist critics claim that alternatively,

pedagogy should reflect the stories of women, because they differ from those of men. Freire's dualism of oppressor-oppressed suggests that either you are the oppressor or you are the oppressed, and feminists have critiqued that this does not "directly analyze the contradictions between conflicting oppressed groups or the ways in which a single individual can experience oppression in one sphere while being privileged or oppressive in another." (Weiler, 1991, p. 450) As a result, feminist pedagogy has set out to recognize that women have their own story and subjectivities that need to be articulated as they try to interpret the world (Weiler, 1991) It is important to note that, although feminists have critiqued Freire's critical pedagogy's universal claim, Freire had himself encouraged the development of other pedagogies (Weiler, 1991).

Feminist Pedagogy and Popular Education

Feminist pedagogy is entrenched in praxis; one of its purposes is to transform theory into social action. This is revealed in its ideas about "empowering individuals within a larger project of social change" (Crabtree, Sapp, & Licona, 2009, p. 4). Feminist pedagogy acknowledges that the stories of women have been historically and systematically silenced and negated and therefore it emphasizes the validity of women's personal experiences as knowledge (Crabtree et al., 2009). Recognizing other types of knowledge is very crucial to feminist pedagogy, because the mainstream forms of knowledge have mostly been dominated by male voices. LuAnn Cooley (2007), in her study of women participating in consciousness-raising sessions, claims that there is difference in the way women made meaning in their lives after these sessions. She finds that linking transformative learning theory to feminist consciousness is reflective of third-wave feminism, as this wave embraces individual experience and politicizes personal stories (Cooley, 2007). Feminist popular education scholars English and Irving (2015) emphasize that stories'

ultimate goal of critical transformation comes through “a process of creative expression, reflection and collective building” (p. 52).

This research is framed among feminist popular education scholarship, because it studies women specifically. Feminist popular education emerged as a critique of male-centered popular education that dominated social movements (Manicom & Walters, 2012). Walters and Manicom have written extensively on feminist popular education (1996; 2012), which they have defined as a “participatory, democratic, non-hierarchical pedagogy” (Walters & Manicom, 1996, p.7). They elaborate on some characteristics of feminist popular education, namely that it valorizes local knowledge but also works collectively to produce knowledge (Manicom & Walters, 2012). Though the previously mentioned characteristics also mark popular education, they differ in that feminist popular education focuses on the conditions and positions of women (Manicom & Walters, 2012). Their definition will be used in examining the contexts in which women living in precarious conditions engage with each other to organize as part of the social movement.

Social Movement Learning

Before I begin explaining what social movement learning is, I will share how social movements are defined. Social movements are often a reaction to a particular issue, which makes them oppositional in nature. They are responses to social, political, economic changes (Walters, 2005). Social movements are voluntary associations of people and can either be conservative or progressive (Walters, 2005). Welton (1993) identifies three principal components to social movements: a clear collective identity, antagonistic relation to an opposed group and a normative orientation. Finally, social movements are sustained by the issue they are opposed to (Walters, 2005).

According to Budd L. Hall (2006), social movement learning in turn refers to two things: it refers to learning by persons who are in the movement, or, the learning by persons who are not in the movement made possible through the actions or existence of the social movement. The former can include organized and intentional learning through the movement's educational activities, but most of the time the learning that occurs within a social movement is incidental (Foley, 1999). A newcomer in a social movement, for example, quickly learns statistics and facts about the issue at hand through interactions with others, reading the movement's literature or reading what the opponents have to say about that particular movement (Hall, 2006).

Social movements also provide an opportunity for learning by a large number of the public who are not involved within the movement. According to Hall (2006), this type of learning is often neglected in the literature, although it is a very important one. As opposed to the learning that occurs within a movement, the public usually learns from a social movement in an incidental manner. This learning is often a result of activists' attempts to persuade and educate the larger public in order to get what they want (Holst, 2002). For instance, most men have learned a lot from the women's movement without being part of it.

Adult Education theorists have come up with different frameworks and theories for analyzing social movement learning. Dykstra and Law (1994) came up with a framework for analyzing social movements that suggests that the educational life of social movements consists of three interrelated elements: vision, critical pedagogy, and pedagogy of mobilization. The vision element consists of when an individual who is involved in a social movement "relates everyday activities to the values and aspirations they have for the wider community" (Dykstra & Law, 1994, p.124). Critical pedagogy, in turn, involves critical thinking, experiential learning that occurs through engaging in action, imagination that translates itself through the ability to

possibilize, and the dialogue that occurs when people engage in horizontal communication. Finally, the third and final element of Dykstra and Law's (1994) framework, pedagogy of mobilization, relates to the practical work that people do in order to build and sustain the movement. They have established four implicit dimensions to this last element: organizing and building, continued participation which is possible through authentic involvement, political action and coalition and network building in order to strengthen the movement base (Dykstra & Law, 1994).

Still, the above framework focuses mostly on the individual learning that happens when a person is involved in a social movement. As Kilgore (1999) argues, Adult Education theorists need to move their focus from the individuals' inner understandings to the learning community "because it is the dominant shared meaning and identity of the collective that is most closely related to collective social action" (p. 196). Kilgore's (1999) theory of collective learning views the group or collective as a unit of analysis, all the while considering the individual contributions to the group learning process. Kilgore's theory looks into both individual development and group development, and acknowledges the conflicts between the individual and the group that shape the group and individual learning that takes place in social movements. Kilgore's theory of collective learning likens itself to Curry and Cunningham's (2000) co-learning, which sees knowledge as being produced by a series of social interactions within and between social movements. They parallel co-learning to Freire's conscientization, since co-learners see their awareness increased as they engage in political struggle (Curry & Cunningham, 2000). The consciousness-raising aspect of knowledge acquired by participating in social movements is also identified in Jihyun Kim's (2011) study of an environmentalist activist group: "faced with encouraging and frustrating experiences from social movement participation, activists cannot

help but keep asking themselves about the reason for their continued participation; this process, self-questioning and self-answering, is exactly the process of reflection.” (p. 324)

When it comes to studying how activists learn to become activists, Tracey Ollis' (2012) study of Australian activists offers a great analysis. Ollis (2012) identified two types of social movement activists who learn differently: circumstantial activists and lifelong activists. The circumstantial activists are activists who join protests, but do not always align with the social movement, and lifelong activists are activists who usually began their activism early on in their life, such as through student activism (Ollis, 2012). The similarities in the learning of the two types are that it is mindful, embodied and driven by emotions (Ollis, 2012). The difference, on the other hand, is that the learning of lifelong activists is incremental, whereas circumstantial activists' learning is very rapid, since they often join a movement after a crisis or life event (Ollis, 2012). Finally, Ollis (2012) centres her analysis on critical pedagogy, which reflects the concepts that direct my research.

Although scholars have recognized knowledge production in social movements, there is a disjuncture between activists and what gets written about them in academic scholarship (Choudry, 2009). There are many reasons for this, and one of them is that, as explained previously, learning in social movements is often incidental (Foley, 1999), and therefore is not recognized as knowledge production. As Choudry (2009) notes, activists and scholars alike do not pay adequate attention to low-key education and community organizing work. Furthermore, scholars of social movement learning overwrite the ideas and theories of activists because of the culture of academic scholarship that values single authorship, which in turn can fail to “recognize the lineages of ideas and theories that have been forged outside of academe” (Choudry & Kapoor, 2010). The scholarly emphasis on documenting the success of social

movements neglects the knowledge production and learning that happens in movements regardless of the achievement or not of their end-goal (Choudry, 2009). Finally, Choudry (2015) critiques how current social movement theorizing excludes marginalized voices: "History of contemporary social movements written by and about elites, leaders, and notables have often marginalized, omitted, and silenced important perspectives, processes, ideas, and actions." (p.169)

Scholars have established many reasons that support activist research. First and foremost, activists already theorize. Activists are more and more critical of their movements, engaging in self-critiques that explore how systemic forms of oppression, such as sexism and racism, are operating in their movements (Luu, 2004). Another reason is that activists know better what kind of research and theory is more useful to their work. When studying why activists do not read current social movement research, Bevington and Dixon (2005) found that activists are reading autobiographies and histories of popular social movements, but also read books that deal "with the often ignored issues of burnout, emotional conflict, motivation, commitment"(p. 194). These readings have one thing in common: they can inspire activists in their own activist work, by learning from those that came before them. But they are also reading work that is explicitly theoretical (Bevington & Dixon, 2005), such as analyses of movements. Therefore, they do not read academic theory on social movements out of an aversion to intellectualism but because they are not relevant to their realities.

Additionally, Foley (1999) explains that learning in social struggle is complex, and to make a picture of this one would need to write case studies that would not only look at the larger social context in which the social movement evolves, but also at the internal micro-politics and discourses. Activists have more access to this type of information than external researchers.

Activists “talk extensively about organizing and other tactical questions, categorizing methods of mobilization with high degrees of specificity and depth” (Bevington & Dixon, 2005, p. 194).

This information rarely makes it into books, although it is very valuable to other activists.

Furthermore, as Irving and English (2010) note more particularly about women involved in feminist NGOs, those involved in movements often are themselves marginalized by society. If more activists were to write about their learning in social movements, it would give a voice to those who are marginalized, and value their knowledge. By not speaking from a position of power, activists are in a better position to raise questions about the relationship between academic research, epistemologies of knowledge, colonialism and imperialism (Smith, 1999).

To conclude, in this review, I have established the main theories that situate my research. Transformative learning theory and feminist pedagogy, as it relates to consciousness-raising, offer good frameworks to analyze individual transformation as it relates to the work of awareness-raising of social issues and oppressive structures. Furthermore, my research is activist scholarship, and therefore fills a void that has been identified by social movement learning scholars.

Chapter 2: Methodology

For my research, I used a qualitative, narrative approach. My research is not only action-oriented (Anderson, 1998), but it seeks to document how women within community organizations organize and teach themselves and each other about social movements. There was an intended direct impact of this research of informing social movement theorists.

I have used individual interviews for collecting data. More specifically, I interviewed key informants. A key informant for this study is defined as a person who works in an organization that uses popular education, has a feminist approach and is involved in the social movement against austerity. I interviewed employees from the selected organisations who are aware of the issues being examined in this research, understand what feminist popular education entails and were able to provide information on the engagement of women in the social movement against austerity. The sample is five key informants from four organizations. I had initially proposed to interview three to four organizations.

Setting of the Study and Selection of Participants

The setting of this study was community organizations in Montreal. Because I am studying a social movement that is a response to Quebec provincial policies, my research needed to be situated in the province of Quebec. Montreal is a hub of community organizations involved in the social movement.

I initially contacted four organizations in Montreal and Laval identified as using a feminist popular education approach and who are involved in the anti-austerity social movement. My preliminary research had indicated that such organizations existed. I contacted only women's centres, because they were part of the Regroupement des centres de femmes du Québec, the umbrella organization leading a campaign against austerity. Furthermore, I contacted women's

organizations that are situated in neighbourhoods that have a high number of newcomers and lower average income. The four organizations initially contacted are: South Asian Women's Community Centre, Centre des femmes de Laval, Femmes du Monde Côte-des-Neiges, Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs.

I had contacted all of the above organizations through a general email, except the South Asian Women's Community Centre where I had contacted a board member who forwarded the request to the staff of the organization. All of the organizations had agreed by email to be part of the study, but Office of Research required signed letters from each organization confirming they have agreed to be interviewed for this research. Unfortunately, it was not possible for me to get a letter from Centre de femmes de Laval as it was difficult to get responses after the initial agreement email. At this point, I decided to reach out to one more women's centre, Centre des femmes de Verdun, in the hopes that they could participate in the research and provide such a letter. I received a rapid response from the centre and they were able to provide such a letter.

Finally, I did open-ended face-to-face interviews, in the setting of the community organizations. Visiting the premises of these organisations and their websites allowed me to better understand the functioning of the organization. In the paragraphs that follow, I will describe in more detail the process with the four organizations that I studied in my research.

South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC)

I contacted Dolores Chew, a SAWCC board member, to ask how to proceed with studying SAWCC for a thesis research on January 14th, 2018. She informed me that SAWCC has its own research protocol and put me in touch with a board member in charge of the research protocol, Mela Sarkar, on January 18, 2018. I filled out the research protocol that Dolores shared with me and sent it back to Mela on February 2nd, 2018. Mela, who is a university professor,

reviewed it and recommended for approval to SAWCC's Executive Committee. The Committee approved it and I was informed on February 19, 2018 that I could study SAWCC and that I was to interview members of SAWCC's staff, Ghazala Munawar and Juvaria Yasser. In order to attach the approved protocol to my Ethics application, I scheduled to pick up a signed copy on the following Wednesday February 21st, 2018, in the morning, at their centre. At the same time, I met Ghazala and Juvaria and we scheduled a tentative date for the interview, pending the Ethics approval. I received my Ethics Certificate on March 6, 2018. I interviewed Ghazala and Juvaria on Tuesday, March 27th, at 1:30pm, at the centre. The interview took place in a closed meeting room, and lasted about an hour. I provided Ghazala and Juvaria informed consent forms to sign individually before the beginning of the interview. They have both agreed for their name to be shared in the research.

Centre des Femmes D'ici et D'ailleurs

I sent an email introducing myself and my research topic to the Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs' general information email provided on their website on January 27th, 2018. Sonia Haddad, a member of the staff at the centre, replied to me on January 29th, 2018, that she will mention my request at their staff meeting. She asked me if I would be comfortable doing the interview in the welcoming area of their centre, with a risk of disruption and noise. I wrote back to her that I am flexible, that the interview should not deal with sensitive information. She replied to me on January 30th, 2018, that their staff team has agreed to participate in the research and they agreed that Kavitha Culasingham would be the most appropriate staff person to participate in the interview as she has facilitated workshops in the centre about austerity and women. I contacted Kavitha on January 31st, 2018, to ask if her centre could provide me with an official letter stating that the centre has agreed to participate in the research. The letter was ready

and picked up on February 1st, 2018. When I came to the centre on that day, Kavitha introduced me to her colleagues and gave me a tour of the centre. We also convened on a few tentative dates for an interview. The interview took place on March 12, 2018, in the morning, on-site at the centre. It lasted about 45 minutes, and was the first interview out of the four. I provided Kavitha an informed consent form to sign before the beginning of the interview. She has agreed for her name to be shared in the research.

Femmes du Monde à Côte-des-Neiges

I also sent an email presenting introducing myself and my research topic to Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges through their general information email featured on their website on January 27th, 2018. I received a response by phone call on February 1st, 2018. Martine Anglade, a worker at the centre, asked me if I could send her the Interview Guide by email in order for her to present it at their staff meeting and vote whether they would participate. I sent her the Guide the next day, as I had not translated it to French yet. On February 8th, 2018, Martine confirmed that their team agreed to participate in the study. On February 12th, 2018, the official letter of participation was ready and I picked it up from the front desk at their centre. We scheduled an in-person interview that took place on March 12th, 2018, in the afternoon. The interview was the same day as the one with Kavitha (in the morning), therefore the second interview. It lasted approximately 2 hours, and took place at their centre, in a closed classroom that is shared with other community organizations from the building. I provided Martine an informed consent form to sign before the beginning of the interview. She has agreed for her name to be shared in the research.

Centre des Femmes de Verdun

I sent an email introducing myself and my research topic to the Centre des femmes de Verdun on January 31st, 2018 to their general information email that I found on their website. I received a response by email on February 8th, 2018, from Camille Benny Perron, a worker at the centre, informing me that she will bring up the research project to her team the following week. She also added that they were a reduced team and time is often lacking. Camille sent me an email on February 18th, 2018, to tell me that her team agreed to participate and was enthusiastic toward my research topic. We scheduled a tentative interview for March 22nd, 2018, which ended up taking place on that day. Due to the time-sensitive nature of my ethics file with the Office of Research, I sent the email approval to members of the Ethics Committee. The interview took place at their centre in Verdun, and lasted approximately an hour. I provided Camille an informed consent form to sign before the beginning of the interview. She has agreed for her name to be shared in the research.

Interview Guide: Outline of Topics and Examples of Questions

Below is a list of questions that guided the in-person interviews. Since the interviews were in an open-ended format, the order of the questions changed and some follow-up questions were asked that do not appear in the below interview guide.

1. Information about the organization's approach and beliefs
 - a. What are the main issues that the organization hopes to tackle or tackles (what is its mission)?
 - b. What does popular education mean to the organization?
 - c. What does a feminist approach entail?
 - d. Why does the organization use a feminist popular education approach?

- e. Why did the organization join the social movement against austerity measures?
 - f. What does joining the movement entail? (The process- is it a formal process like joining an umbrella or alliance group or is it informal like offering workshops on the subject)
2. The logistics of the popular education that take place through the organization
- a. In what setting(s) do(es) the popular education workshops take place?
 - b. Is there a particular time or room where it takes place?
 - c. How often does popular education take place?
 - d. Who decides on the items that will be discussed?
 - e. Who develops the content of the workshops? How?
 - f. Who takes care of the logistics such as promoting the event, finding a setting, etc.?
 - g. How does the organization make these workshops inclusive to diverse women?
 - h. What kind of action does the organization organize against austerity (please cite examples)?
 - i. Who decides what kind of action will take place? (You can elaborate on the decision-making process of your organization here)
3. The women taking part in the popular education and the social movement
- a. What is the sociodemographic composition of the women who access your organization (race, class, education level).
 - b. Do women who come from marginalized groups attend your popular education activities?
 - c. How is austerity understood by the women who partake in these activities?

- d. Do the women who partake in these activities share personal experiences and impact relating to the effects of austerity?
- e. From what is shared, how does austerity affect the women's lives? What are some similar ways it affects them, and some different ways?
- f. Do you have stories from these activities to share (please do not name names)?
- g. What contribution does sharing lived experiences have on the engagement of the women in the social movement actions?
- h. Do the women in the groups identify as part of the greater social movement against austerity?

Data Collection

I recorded the interviews with an audio recording application on an iPad, while simultaneously taking notes. The application automatically uploaded back-ups of the recording in a Dropbox folder that I created for the interviews. Access to this folder had to be through my private Dropbox account with a password. The interviews were in the preferred language of the informant, either English or French. I had translated the Interview Guide for this purpose. Other than the interviews, the workers that I interviewed all provided me with their centre's current programming, to view the schedule of workshops. Some centres gave me copies of their annual reports, and some centres gave me a copy of their "Code de vie," codes of life, which consist of ground rules for interpersonal relationships at their centre. All of these documents were offered to me by the workers.

After the interviews took place, I transcribed the audio recordings myself. The transcripts were as verbatim as possible. Once complete, I sent them to the interviewees for review, and invited them to modify the transcripts if they were not accurate, or to clarify points if they

wanted to. I gave the organizations two weeks to send me edits. Only SAWCC had some edits, all of the other centres signed off on the transcripts as is.

Ethical Issues

Some ethical considerations for this research stemmed from my personal involvement in the social movement against austerity as well as in the feminist movement. I mitigated this conflict by interviewing key informants whom I had not met before. Another ethical issue pertained to the profile of the key informants, since they were asked about women who are part of marginalized groups. To address this, I successfully sought to have a sociodemographic diversity within the key informants that represents women who are from marginalized groups. Finally, the key informants were invited to share personal testimonies of the women who access their organization. In order to ensure anonymity of the women, I explained that the informants should not name women by their names or any other identifiable features.

Methodological Concepts

An important methodological concept for my research involves the use of narrative, the use of stories and life experiences in social movement organizing and learning. Social movement theorists have written on the role of narrative in social movements; Francesca Polletta (1998) wrote about the role storytelling plays in social movements, especially with regard to recruitment. She writes that the telling of stories tends to make the strange more intelligible for social movement participants.

Because my research looks into the experiences of women, it positions itself as feminist research. Joyappa and Martin (1996) wrote about the particularities of feminist research in the field of adult education. Feminist research can enhance the democratic aspect of adult education

by shaping and impacting adult education and research frameworks (Joyappa & Martin, 1996, p. 12). Their research contributed to the framework of my own research.

Finally, I used intersectionality as the framework of analysis of the problem and the narratives obtained. Intersectionality seeks to understand social issues beyond only one axis of social division (e.g., my research), by considering how other axes of division (e.g., race and class) build and work together in each situation (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Therefore, in order to better understand why and how women get engaged in the social movement, I looked at race and class as influencing the participation of the women.

Chapter 3: Data

This chapter will introduce the data collected from the four women's centres in the sample: Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs, Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges, South Asian Women's Community Centre and Centre des femmes de Verdun. Each centre will have its own subsection that will include data from the interview with the key informant of the organization. Data collected from publicly available sources will complement the results from the interviews when possible. The interview results sought to answer the questions below:

How do they explain their work, individually and organizationally?

How do they use popular education?

Why do they use a feminist approach?

What does their engagement with the austerity movement entail?

What is the role of lived experience?

Therefore, the results will be presented in the subsections following the above order of the questions.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, because this research is feminist research, the use of firsthand voice is important. I have therefore transcribed direct quotes, and I have kept them in their original language, French or English.

Centre des Femmes D'ici et D'ailleurs

The Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs (CDFIA) is a women's centre in the Montreal neighbourhood of Villeray. It was founded in 1985 by a group of women who were domestic

workers and lived in the area. Its website claims that since its origins, it served women of diverse origins and favoured intercultural dialogue (Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs, n.d.).

How Do They Explain Their Work, Individually and Organizationally?

Organization. When visiting the centre to interview Kavitha Culasingham, she gave me a brochure about the centre that was written in both French and English. In the brochure, the work of the centre is explained as follows: “Our Centre develops and solidifies the willingness of activists and participants of the centre to take action towards improving the living conditions of women” (Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs, n.d.). The brochure also explained the organization’s mission “To break the isolation of women from diverse origins. To help develop the autonomy of socio-economically discriminated women and accompany them in finding their own means to improve their living and working conditions, within an individual and collective perspective.” (Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs, n.d.) In other words, the centre claims to service mostly women who are from diverse origins and from lower socio-economic status, who fall within the definition of “marginalized women.”

Individual. When asked about her role in the centre, Kavitha first explained that the centre practices feminist co-management and therefore all workers have the same role in the organization, that of a community organizer:

Nous on travaille en cogestion, donc on a toutes le même rôle ici, comme organisatrices communautaires. Tout le monde on a le même rôle, mais on a des mandats différents, mais des mandats qui peuvent changer. Admettons que la session prochaine ça me tente de faire plus d'accueil, donc je prendrais le mandat plus accueil, c'est très flexible.

Although they all have the same role, the workers have specific mandates that can be changed.

How Do They Use Popular Education?

Understanding the practice of popular education in the four sample organizations entailed enquiring about their definition of popular education, whether on public sources such as brochures or websites, and in the words of the interviewed workers. Then, I sought to examine what it meant in practice: how did the popular education approach influence how they developed and delivered their educational activities, whether formal or informal?

Definition. The brochure of the centre offered a brief definition of popular education: “Activities that are intended to take back the power in our lives both individually and collectively, and to bring social justice in our society.” (Centre des femmes d’ici et d’ailleurs, n.d.) During the interview, I asked Kavitha if she could share in her own words what popular education meant for the centre. She explained that popular education means “from the ground up.” She added that at the centre, popular education entails starting from the needs of the women who come to the centre.

C’est vraiment partir de la base, c’est travailler avec elles, parce qu’au centre on garde vraiment un rapport vraiment très égalitaire avec les femmes qui viennent donc c’est un échange plutôt que « nous on a le savoir qu’on va transmettre »

As Kavitha explains, popular education is an egalitarian exchange with the women who come to the centre, as opposed to a perspective where the workers would view themselves as having a knowledge (“savoir”) that they will “transfer” to the women.

Emergence of popular education themes. The centre offers a variety of popular education activities; their brochure lists “various thematic workshops; French and computer classes; socio-cultural activities” (Centre des femmes d’ici et d’ailleurs, n.d.). The themes of the

workshops that are offered, as Kavitha explains, can depend on the upcoming campaigns or “mobilisation.” For example, for an upcoming march against austerity, they will plan a workshop about austerity before in order to mobilize the women who come to the centre. The centre’s activities are planned on a seasonal basis, and they try to plan the schedule of workshops around actions they know in advance will take place.

Souvent, les mobilisations je dirais, pas toujours, ça peut déterminer c’est quoi les activités qui s’en viennent. Et comment on procède c’est, avant chaque session, comme pour la session d’hiver on se rencontre en janvier pour préparer la programmation, donc on essaie de voir déjà préalablement c’est quoi les mobilisations qui s’en viennent.

The upcoming social and political campaigns were not the sole determinants of the popular education workshop themes that were planned by the centre, Kavitha gave an example of a workshop that was offered to address discrimination among its own members. She referred to a workshop scheduled in their Winter 2018 program about Islamophobia and explained it was in response to Islamophobic comments that were made in their centre. Thus, some popular education workshops are offered as a means of intervention.

Other workshop themes emerge from the support sessions workers of the centre offer to the women of the centre. Kavitha explained that during those sessions, called “accueil” (welcoming), some issues in the women’s lives keep coming up, and the workers would identify them as a need for a workshop.

[Quand] on fait l’accueil on garde des statistiques sur les besoins des femmes, à chaque année, c’est confidentiel, mais on voit que cette année on a vraiment vu qu’il y a des femmes qui parlent beaucoup de santé mentale par exemple, donc là on voit qu’il y a

vraiment un besoin pour ça. Alors la prochaine session on va essayer de voir comment on peut plus amener la question de la santé mentale.

Finally, some workshop themes are directly requested by the women who come to the centre, who request a workshop or “café-rencontre” on a specific topic.

Informal popular education. Popular education takes place informally in the centre on top of formally scheduled workshops. The centre has weekly breakfasts, “déjeuners solidaires”, on Thursday mornings, where food and drinks are offered to the women who come to the centre. Kavitha explained that these breakfasts are informal spaces where the centre’s workers can initiate discussions about upcoming campaigns and educate informally on the issues at stake in those protests. Often when there is an upcoming protest that the centre will take part in, Kavitha will speak to the women at the breakfast about it and invite them to join in a sign-making session in the afternoon. She added that it is during the breakfasts that the most racialized women are present, so it is an opportune place for the workers to reach out to this group of women: “Donc comment on fait pour aller chercher ces femmes-là? C’est là qu’on s’est dit, soit dans les déjeuners, parce qu’aux déjeuners il y a souvent des femmes racisées.”

How Do They Use a Feminist Approach?

Definition. The brochure of the centre described what feminism entailed at the centre:

Feminism advocates egalitarian social interactions. At the Centre, all women are accepted as they are. As feminists, we believe that justice, dignity and solidarity within our society can certainly be reached with laws and policies, but more so with the autonomous and collective fight of women. (Centre des femmes d’ici et d’ailleurs, n.d.).

Kavitha emphasized that a feminist approach meant truly believing what the women are sharing.

C'est vraiment de croire à ce que la personne nous dit, ne pas remettre en question ce qu'elle vit. Ça peut se faire soit à l'accueil, mais aussi dans des interventions de groupe par exemple. À chaque café-rencontre on rappelle le code de vie aux femmes, où on dit que ce n'est pas une place pour remettre en question ce qu'une femme a vécu.

The “code de vie” that Kavitha refers to in the above quote is an agreement with rules of behaviour that women in the centre must abide by, and that they sign onto as they become members of the centre. As we will see in this chapter, other women's centres have such codes.

Link between popular education and feminism. As Kavitha explained the feminist approach of the centre, she made links with popular education and the egalitarian rapport it creates.

Aussi le rapport égalitaire, ça c'est l'approche féministe, et l'éducation populaire, ça se croise beaucoup. C'est vraiment de garder ce rapport égalitaire-là, qu'on est toutes des femmes, chacune on a notre vécu, et on se partage comment nous on a vécu cette situation, par exemple.

Kavitha added that she saw both popular education and feminism linked because both entail starting from the women's needs, which is important in feminist intervention, but that going from the individual to the collective was a feature of both approaches.

What Does Their Engagement with the Austerity Movement Entail?

Rationale. As mentioned in the previous chapter, all the women's centres that are part of the sample were selected because they are engaged in the social movement against austerity measures, although this engagement does not manifest itself in the same manner from one centre to another. It was important for me to ask the interviewees why they think it is necessary to join this movement to understand the rationale. To this question, Kavitha listed multiple ways that she and her colleagues witnessed the impacts of austerity measures on the women they serve at their centre.

Ici au centre on voit vraiment qu'il y a eu un changement dans la vie des femmes. Ça peut être, par exemple, à l'accueil on réfère une femme au CLSC pour avoir un suivi psychologique, finalement elle attend encore. Ce sont des petites choses comme ça que même nous on remarque. Ou bien des femmes qui viennent ici, ces dernières années, deux ou trois ans, il y a des femmes qui viennent nous voir parce qu'elles n'ont rien à manger, donc là on a acheté des sacs de riz, des sacs de fèves, juste pour dépanner la femme cette journée-là. Mais aussi en général c'est quoi les domaines où on coupe beaucoup? C'est la santé, c'est l'éducation, où il y a davantage de femmes. Beaucoup de femmes, soit qui étaient infirmières ou qui sont PAB, Préposées Aux Bénéficiaires, qui fréquentent le centre, ce qu'elles nous racontent, ou quand on a des discussions, elles disent qu'elles sont épuisées. Donc on voit vraiment l'impact.

The women who come to the centre, as Kavitha explains in the quote above, are faced with longer waits to get psychological support at the public health clinic, have difficulty feeding themselves, and often have the jobs in the public sector that are facing more pressures due to cuts

and compressions by the government. She added that austerity has also influenced how they work with the women, that they work a lot to “patch” instead of dealing with more fundamental problems. As well, the campaign against austerity led by l’R des centres implicates a greater engagement from the workers at the centre, which requires a lot of energy.

Austerity education. As mentioned earlier, popular education activities in the centre take place in relation to campaigns, and the campaign against austerity is no exception. For example, at the time of the interview with Kavitha on March 12, 2018, the centre’s winter season program publicized a workshop on austerity cuts on April 11th, 2018 entitled “L’austérité: la pyramide des inégalités” (Centre des femmes d’ici et d’ailleurs, 2018). When I asked Kavitha about this planned workshop, she informed me that the workshop was going to be facilitated by an outside source, the organization *Convergence des luttes anticapitalistes* (CLAC). She explained to me that sometimes the workers of the centre develop the workshops, and other times they will outreach to other community groups to facilitate a workshop for the women of the centre.

Kavitha shared the details of a workshop that she had developed for the centre about austerity measures, more specifically about the cuts to the welfare program. She designed a game where participants were given Monopoly dollars and living scenarios (e.g., a single parent with children, a couple, etc.). They gave them the amounts that the provincial government provides for welfare and asked them to make a budget with spending on transport, rent, etc. Kavitha explained that the women quickly realized that it was impossible to have an apartment in Villeray, their neighbourhood, with the amounts they had.

Donc on a essayé de faire cette activité-là et plusieurs femmes se sont évidemment rendu compte que ce n’est pas assez et même pas pour le loyer par exemple, si tu es une femme

seule tu reçois \$ 642, ou quelque chose comme ça, où le loyer à Villeray un 3 et demie essaie de prendre ça c'est impossible, c'est comme \$ 800. Donc tu prends une chambre, là tu coupes quelque part, mais la chambre te coûte \$ 400, il te reste 200 et quelques dollars à vivre pour le reste du mois.

In terms of the location of the popular education workshops offered by the centre, Kavitha explained that the workshops are offered in the centre for the most part, as it represents a “safe space” to the women who come to the centre.

Austerity actions. Because the Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs is a membre of the umbrella organization Le Regroupement des centres de femmes du Québec (L'R), they partake in actions organized by L'R. Kavitha shared that her centre was going to partake in the “Semaine d'action des centres de femmes” for which the theme this year was related to resisting austerity measures.

The centre also tries to organize local actions in their neighbourhood. These actions are often in alliance with other local organizations.

Women's engagement in the actions. At this women's centre, there is a volunteer committee called “les actives,” the actives. The women in this group, as Kavitha explains, do outreach in the community, mobilize members of the centre and prepare posters and signs for upcoming actions and campaigns. Kavitha shared some comments and reflections about the sociodemographic composition of this committee and the women engaged in protests.

Plusieurs des actives qui viennent aux mobilisations c'est quand même diversifié, mais quand même la plupart des femmes qui participent à des actions collectives, après les

déjeuners quand on fait les affiches c'est très diversifié, c'est comme quasiment que des personnes racisées. Mais rendues aux actions collectives ça change un peu, il y a plus de femmes franco-québécoises que racisées.

Kavitha explains that the workers of the centre did ask themselves why is it that the women who participate in the preparation before a protest are more racially diverse than the ones who end up attending the protest. Kavitha emphasized the importance of reaching out to racialized women: "Parce qu'on sait que l'austérité touche les femmes, mais encore plus les femmes racisées." She added that the workers put extra effort in reaching out to diverse women, during their breakfast activity or in the French classes.

C'est comme un travail après. Donc on essaie, mais il y a quand même des femmes racisées qui viennent aux mobilisations, qui viennent souvent aux mobilisations, qui sont mobilisées. Mais je vois que dans la préparation il y a plus de femmes racisées que dans les actions-mêmes.

Finally, Kavitha explained that some of the women in the centre have barriers to participating in actions such as physical disabilities. Other women who attend the centre are living lots of challenges and protesting cannot be one of their priorities.

Je pense à des femmes qui essaient de se trouver un logement par exemple, elles n'ont juste pas le temps, elles n'ont juste pas d'énergie à se mobiliser pour ça, puis c'est complètement compréhensible et normal que quand tu as dix choses à faire, tu essaies de prioriser des trucs. Puis c'est correct, de toute façon passer au collectif, chacun va à leur rythme.

What Is the Role of Lived Experience?

What the women say. Kavitha explained that the women who come to the centre and share their lived experience of austerity measures rarely say that they are victims of austerity. Instead, they share how they often have to wait a long time to see a doctor, or how little they receive for welfare.

Souvent elles vont nous parler, comme je disais, « ah le temps d'attente est vraiment long ». Ou bien (c'est plus de la gentrification) mais « mon loyer a augmenté ». À l'accueil on reçoit des femmes qui viennent, qui ont été envoyées par l'aide sociale « votre montant va être de tel » ou bien elles vont voir, que si ce sont des femmes qui ont des enfants, elles n'ont plus accès à des orthopédagogues, ou bien autre chose, elles vont le mentionner.

Link with austerity. Kavitha explained that the link to austerity measures, to government policy, is made by the workers following the popular education and feminist approaches explained earlier, meaning that they bring the individual to the collective.

Un des buts du centre c'est d'amener l'individu au collectif parce que le privé est public. Donc on essaie toujours de faire ce lien-là. On laisse les femmes se confier, après dans le café-rencontre on va dire OK, pourquoi il y a telle chose et telle chose et telle chose, c'est quoi le lien qui se passe, présentement dans la société? Pourquoi on coupe autant dans la santé? C'est quoi le buzz? Pourquoi maintenant? (...) Je me rappelle qu'il y a une femme qui a dit « c'était la même chose dans mon pays, on avait tout coupé, tous les trucs sociaux », donc elles font le lien, puis ce n'est pas la première fois qu'il y a une coupure ou qu'il y a tant de coupures. (...) Souvent elles font le lien elles-mêmes, mais c'est vraiment comme on essaie de faire le lien avec le collectif, passer de l'individu au

collectif pour dire que c'est vraiment plus grand que nous et comment on peut s'allier dans tout ça.

Moving into action. When asked whether the women she mentions who either share their lived experience, or those who listen, are moved into action after, Kavitha explained that it does happen. However, because the women need to register in advance to workshops, those who attend the more political workshops already have interest in the topic. But she recalls a workshop when women who were without immigration status shared their reality in a workshop. It moved the women into action.

On essaie quand même d'aller chercher d'autres personnes, je pense à quand on avait eu le café-rencontre sur les femmes sans statut, il y avait eu beaucoup de femmes qui ne connaissaient pas cette réalité-là et deux semaines après quand il y a eu une mobilisation pour elles, il y avait des femmes qui ne viennent presque jamais à des mobilisations qui étaient là.

Kavitha shared that women sharing their lived experience of adversity creates solidarity among the women and takes away prejudice. Additionally, the woman who shares her testimony feels more comfortable in the centre afterwards because she feels better understood.

Déjà le fait de briser les préjugés nous c'est un big win au centre. C'est un peu le but aussi du centre (...) pour la personne qui s'est dévoilée, qui a donné son témoignage, elle se sent plus à l'aise au centre aussi parce qu'elle voit « ah, elles m'ont comprise, puis elles voient que je vis dans des situations comme ça ». Donc il y a comme une solidarité qui se crée, même si elles ne viennent pas à des actions collectives avec des pancartes,

juste le fait qu'elles ont signé la pétition, et puis que maintenant elles comprennent pourquoi elles signent.

Summary

To summarize, the Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs has well developed its approaches and practices of popular education and feminism. For the centre, popular education is understood as starting from the needs of the women, an approach that favours the bottom-up rather than the top-down. This definition translates into how themes are selected for their workshops, for example, needs are assessed during their intervention with the women and then workshops are identified as necessary to address an issue present in many women's lives. Popular education workshops are also planned around social and political campaigns or events to educate and mobilize the women from the centre, such as austerity workshops. Popular education also takes place in the centre informally, in their weekly solidarity breakfasts or other informal gatherings of women. These spaces are where the workers can reach out to women who are not already interested and engaged in the topic, mostly racialized women. Kavitha established links between the popular education and feminist approaches, since they both entail starting from the women's needs and keeping an egalitarian rapport among women.

In terms of the engagement with the austerity movement, the centre offers workshops on austerity measures and is engaged in protests and other actions against austerity. Kavitha noticed the impact that austerity has on the women who come to the centre, who are pushed to greater poverty or cannot access the services they once had access to. Austerity also changes the nature of the work of the centre, since they have to compensate for these cuts by providing more services. Finally, Kavitha discussed the importance that the sharing of lived experience plays in the centre and among the popular education workshops. Women who shared their testimonies of how

austerity impacted their life built more solidarity among the women. In a specific case with women without immigration status, some women who heard their stories joined a protest for their first time afterwards in solidarity with the women. Kavitha shared the observation that when it came to the participation of racialized women, more of them took part in the preparation work that preceded the protest than the actual protest. She reflected on some barriers that these women could be facing, such as undergoing too many challenges in their lives to take part in actions.

Femmes du Monde à Côte-des-Neiges

The women's centre Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges, as its name indicates, services women in the Montreal neighbourhood of Côte-des-Neiges. I interviewed Martine Anglade on-site in their centre.

How Do They Explain Their Work, Individually and Organizationally?

Organization. When I visited the Centre for the interview, Martine gave me a copy of the bilingual Winter 2018 Activities Program, inside of which there was a description of their centre in English: "*Femmes du Monde à Côte-des-Neiges* is a place where women from all over the world come together, regardless of their age, their civil status, their ethnic origin, their religion or their sexual orientation. All our services and activities are bilingual (French and English)." (Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges, 2018, p. 2) Since their services are bilingual, their organizational website is also translated. In it, the organization's mission is described as follows.

Femmes du monde à Cote-des-Neiges is a women's center whose mission is to provide a meeting place, solidarity, mutual assistance, and sharing among women. Our objective is to promote the integration of all women in the community and encourage citizen

participation. We are campaigning to inform and raise awareness about the living conditions of women and defend their rights. (Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges, 2018, p. 2)

Individual. Martine indicated that her official title in the centre is of community organizer, a role that, as she explained, has multiple facets. One facet is the role of “social worker” that she plays. She listens and offers support to the women of the centre. Another facet of her job is to be a reference for other resources in the community for the women.

C'est d'être un point de référence pour elles. C'est-à-dire que si elles ont n'importe quel souci, elles cherchent un organisme ou une institution, elles voudraient savoir qui est à même de les aider dans la problématique qu'elles vivent. C'est que sûr que nous on n'est pas spécialisées du tout, et ce n'est pas notre rôle de tout faire, mais notre rôle c'est presque de tout savoir où elles peuvent le faire, où elles peuvent aller, ou du moins connaître les personnes qui peuvent les aider, les accompagner, peu importe que ce soit des démarches administratives, au niveau de l'immigration, personnelles, pour la garde des enfants, pour la garderie. Bref, il y a tout un travail de références qui est fait, un travail d'écoute.

She specifies that at the centre, there is no caseload, that it is part of the women's centres feminist approach to not have a caseload. Her centre does collective intervention instead of individual intervention that social workers normally do, except if a woman insists she needs to speak to a worker alone. She plays her role of a listener both in person and on the telephone, because some women cannot physically come to the centre. Finally, a facet of her role of community organizer is one of “organization.”

Puis, le travail qui est à proprement parler de l'organisation, de préparer des activités, des ateliers, dans une approche d'éducation populaire, justement pour leur permettre d'être informées de ce qui se passe au niveau social mais aussi au niveau des enjeux personnels. C'est d'être à l'écoute des besoins, des thématiques, des problématiques qu'elles nomment et de voir nous quel type d'atelier ou quel type de projet qu'on peut mettre sur pied justement pour répondre à ce besoin-là.

As she explains in the quote above, her role in the centre is to listen to the women's needs and the issues they are facing in order to see what kind of workshops or projects they can develop in response, as part of their popular education approach.

How Do They Use Popular Education?

Definition. Martine described the popular education approach at length during the interview.

Nous l'approche d'éducation populaire c'est de dire que c'est la population qui a des connaissances, des savoirs, des expériences qui doivent être autant valorisées, autant reconnues, et autant avoir de valeur que d'autres personnes qui ont d'autres types de savoirs, peut-être académiques, plus socialement valorisés. (...) Donc je trouve que l'éducation populaire ça vient redonner du pouvoir à ces personnes qui n'ont pas fait nécessairement d'études mais qui ont des expériences de vie tellement riches et nourrissantes que quand on met ça en commun ce sont les savoirs de la population, c'est la base, qui enfin est reconnue et valorisée. Et ça, ça a un pouvoir immense à partir du moment que ces femmes-là se disent « ça me fait tellement du bien de pouvoir partager mon expérience! » Et ça leur fait tellement du bien de réaliser que leur expérience nourrit d'autres et que d'autres apprennent grâce à elles et que grâce à elles d'autres évitent

certaines embûches. (...) je dirais que le cœur même de l'éducation populaire c'est ça, c'est de reconnaître les savoirs, les connaissances de la population. Mais aussi c'est de se dire que les personnes qui ont des savoir peut-être plus académiques ou plus formels peuvent autant en apprendre de ces femmes-là, de la population, et à l'inverse aussi.

Emergence of popular education themes. To Martine, their role of listening to the women is a crucial part of their popular education approach. She refers to the “accueil” (“welcoming”), which she compared to coming into someone’s living room, drinking tea or coffee, and engaging in a discussion, as the primary place for the workers to take the pulse of what are the most pressing needs of the centre’s women.

Ce qui fait que toutes nos activités, notre programmation comme le petit cahier que tu as, il est construit à partir des besoins à elles. C'est autant ces besoins-là qui sont nommées lors des évaluations à la fin des activités, qu'à l'accueil lorsqu'on est en mode « on papote autour d'une tasse de café de tout et de rien ».

Martine explained that when an issue is brought up multiple times, they recognize a need for a workshop and they reflect on which organization could come facilitate those workshops. In the quote below, Martine explains the process of their popular education workshops.

En même temps c'est justement de rester dans la simplification (...) une personne parle d'un problème, une autre en parle, et là on se dit OK là ça fait plus d'une personne qui en parle. Ou même on voit des articles, des fois ça peut être fait aussi à l'inverse, c'est aussi notre travail d'intervenantes d'être à l'affût de ce qui se passe dans les médias et tout. Donc ça peut aussi être de se dire il y a plusieurs articles qui parlent de cette problématique, on va en discuter à l'accueil voir si ces problématiques-là touchent les

femmes (...) Des fois ça peut être fait de manière à ce qu'une de nos collègues, celle qui s'occupe de la programmation des activités, parfois c'est elle qui a l'idée de dire « il y a tel groupe que je connais qui pourrait venir parler de tel sujet » Ou des fois ça peut être un groupe qui nous a contacté, puis on garde en banque les groupes qui nous contactent pour offrir des ateliers, puis celle qui s'occupe des activités, Patricia, va dire « il me semble qu'il y a un groupe qui nous a approché pour nous parler de telle thématique » Et là elle va aller dans sa liste et on les appelle, on fixe une date, elles viennent, l'activité a lieu. Avant l'activité on en parle aussi au centre avec les femmes, à travers d'autres activités, à la fin de chaque activité on mentionne telle thématique, on mobilise. Aussi pour sensibiliser sur ces enjeux-là, parce que des fois il y a des problèmes qu'elles ne pensent pas nécessairement parler en groupe. (...) Donc ça peut arriver que nous on teste plein de thématiques parce qu'on sait que c'est une problématique sociale et là on veut savoir si elles le vivent, et à l'inverse si c'est elles qui à force de vivre une certaine problématique on dit OK là il y a un problème, et là on approche un groupe. Ça peut être un groupe communautaire, ça peut être un groupe institutionnel aussi. Donc on mobilise, on les invite, l'activité a lieu, et après il y a toute cette évaluation. (...) À la fin de chaque activité il y a un bilan, donc on a une petite feuille bilan de ce qui a bien fonctionné, ce qui n'a pas bien fonctionné, pour la prochaine fois à quoi faire attention, le processus de déroulement comment c'était.

To summarize, Martine explains in the above quote that the process of developing a workshop begins by noticing that an issue keeps coming up in their intervention with the women, or it can also come from an issue that is present in the news. The workers then bounce their ideas with the women, or “test the themes.” Once they have a theme for a workshop in mind, they contact a

community group or an institution from their bank of groups to facilitate a workshop on the issue. They also do an evaluation at the end of the workshop to help future workshops. This sums up their whole workshop development and implementation process.

Popular education workshops. As quoted above, Femmes du monde invites external sources to facilitate workshops in the centre on identified issues and themes. Martine explains that the workers are present at these workshops and help facilitate the participation of the women.

Quand je dis que nous on est vraiment dans une approche où personne n'est experte car tout le monde est expert de sa vie et de ses expériences, quand il y a une personne qu'on invite, une personne invitée qui vient nous parler d'un sujet, on accorde aussi une très grande partie au partage des femmes sur ce sujet-là. Il va y avoir une intervenante, par exemple, je donne l'exemple de femmes immigrantes et retraitées, il va y avoir une discussion de 1h30, la première partie, que l'animatrice peut parler de son thème et aussi il peut y avoir des interventions entrecoupées, mais la deuxième partie va toujours être consacrée, ça c'est une heure presque, consacrée aux questionnements des femmes et au partage de leur connaissance sur le sujet, puis aussi si elles veulent poser des questions et aller plus loin. Donc on est vraiment dans cette approche de « je partage mon expérience, j'en apprends, mais j'en prends autant que j'en donne ».

The workers ask questions to the women to see if they have lived experiences that are relatable to what the presenter mentioned. Martine emphasized that popular education does not happen on its own.

En fait, moi je ne pense pas que l'éducation populaire ça se fait tout seul, qu'il faut laisser ça pousser comme de la mauvaise herbe et dire que ça va prendre tout seul, non. Il y a un travail qui doit être fait. Et c'est ça, je pense que c'est vraiment une position formelle de notre centre, il y a toujours une travailleuse qui accompagne le groupe.

Informal popular education. When Martine described the centre's approach to collective intervention, she made links with popular education. In the "accueil" space, informal popular education takes place. The women who are present can educate one another based on their past experiences with a similar problem.

Du coup, d'écouter une parler de son problème, ça résonne chez les autres qui elles aussi ont vécu, ces types de problèmes là, et là elles partagent les stratégies qu'elles ont utilisé (pourquoi ça n'a pas fonctionné? Pourquoi ça a fonctionné?). Donc c'est vraiment beaucoup plus riche pour elles d'être dans cette approche-là.

How Do They Use a Feminist Approach?

Definition. Martine explained that the feminist approach used at the centre entails putting the woman at the centre of their interventions and of their concerns. As well, it means being conscious of gender inequality.

Je te dirais dans l'approche féministe c'est de mettre la femme au centre, c'est vraiment nos interventions et nos préoccupations, c'est autour de la femme. Mais aussi comme sujet de pouvoir, c'est de se dire que dans l'approche féministe il y a prendre conscience de la situation et des réalités des femmes dans une approche genrée, donc c'est-à-dire par rapport aux hommes. (...) On a conscience qu'on n'est pas là pour changer leur vie, on n'est pas là pour changer la vie des autres non plus, mais comment est-ce que, en se

concentrant sur leurs vies à elles, sur les défis qu'elles traversent sur les obstacles qu'elles traversent et qu'elles ont traversé aussi, comment est-ce qu'elles peuvent devenir des agentes de changement pour elles et pour les autres.

Link between popular education and feminism. Martine vividly defended the importance of popular education within feminism. She explained that feminism without popular education is not true feminism, but that popular education could exclude feminism.

Je ne pourrais tellement pas enlever l'éducation populaire du féminisme, je pense que de l'éducation populaire on peut enlever le féminisme, mais on ne peut pas enlever du féminisme l'éducation populaire. Je ne sais pas quelle forme de féminisme ce serait en fait. Parce que dans le féminisme il y a tous ces enjeux, comme je parlais tout à l'heure de l'éducation populaire, il y a tous ces enjeux qui touchent les femmes. Elles traversent au quotidien des obstacles incroyables. Au fil du temps comme on dit c'est en forgeant qu'on devient forgeron, à tous les jours à force de traverser tous ces différents obstacles qu'elles ont, que ce soit par rapport aux charges familiales, au travail, des attitudes sexistes, le salaire, et tout ça, c'est au quotidien qu'elles apprennent à dealer avec ça. (...) C'est une deuxième nature de dealer avec ces injustices qui sont de l'ordre du sexisme, donc on est des expertes, on a appris à forger donc on est forgeronnes. Pour moi, c'est pour ça que je dis que dans le féminisme il y a de l'éducation populaire, pas prendre en considération toutes ces expériences qu'on vit, tous ces mécanismes qu'on a développé pour se faufiler à travers les différents obstacles qu'on a, ce serait tellement ridicule, de faire fi de toute cette richesse de savoirs et d'expériences qu'on vit pour parler du féminisme. Un féminisme qui ne prend pas en considération les vécus des femmes, c'est un féminisme qui est désincarné, un féminisme qui est juste dans la théorie. Pour moi

c'est un féminisme qui personnellement n'a pas de valeur, parce qu'à travers le féminisme il y a un projet social, ce n'est pas juste un mot qui est cute, ce projet social ne peut pas être réalisé sans sa base.

In the above quote, Martine insists that feminism needs to take into consideration the lived experience of women, because it has great value. This relates to the popular education principle of valuing expertise that comes from the lived experience of issues.

What Does Their Engagement with the Austerity Movement Entail?

Criticism of austerity terminology. When I began asking questions about austerity, Martine insisted in sharing her criticism of the austerity terminology.

J'ai envie de te dire que je suis un peu agacée avec le terme austérité dans le sens où je trouve que c'est plus un terme que le politique a instrumentalisé pour mentionner ses politiques de désengagement de l'état. Pour moi il y a ces politiques depuis les années 80-90. À partir du moment que l'État se désengage au niveau de sa population, que tous ses engagements et ses responsabilités il remet ça au privé, pour moi ce sont des mesures d'austérité. Après, que le gouvernement utilise ce terme c'est juste l'instrumentaliser pour justifier que « bon là on est dans la dette, il faut qu'on y prenne soin, donc il faut couper, il faut couper dans les budgets des politiques sociales » C'est un terme qui est beaucoup utilisé depuis les années 2010, mais bien avant ça il y avait des mesures d'austérité, c'est juste que ce n'était pas le terme. C'est comme si quelqu'un, un politicien, l'a utilisé et d'autres ont fait « ah nice je vais utiliser ça pour me justifier ». Tout comme le féminisme, avant que le terme féminisme existe il y avait des féministes. Avant qu'on parle d'austérité et que ce terme devienne à la mode et populaire il y avait

des mesures d'austérité, bien avant. (...) Donc depuis longtemps, dans cette logique, on intervient contre les mesures d'austérité.

As mentioned in the quote above, one of Martine's main issues with the term austerity is that it refers to policies of disengagement of the State that existed for much longer than the term. Later in the interview she added that austerity not only existed before the term became a buzzword, but the measures will continue to exist after the term loses popularity, because we are living under neoliberal policies and in a market economy.

Rationale. Resisting austerity cuts begins with noticing its impacts, whether on the women who come to the centre, or on the workers. Martine explained that it is impossible to be a community organization and not notice the impacts of austerity.

Aucun groupe communautaire et aucune institution ne peut dire qu'elles ne voient pas ces effets-là. Il n'y a aucune personne qui travaille dans le public qui peut dire « je ne vois pas les impacts des coupures, je ne vois pas les impacts par rapport au chômage, à l'assurance sociale, les coupures dans les garderies aussi. » Ça a une ampleur tellement grande que je dis que ce serait ridicule que quelqu'un dise non je ne vois pas les impacts. Si tu veux que je mentionne des choses plus spécifiques bien évidemment on le voit d'année en année des femmes qui disent, je prends l'exemple de la garderie, « je ne sais pas si je vais pouvoir envoyer mon enfant parce que les coûts de la garderie ça a augmenté ».

She explained that the impacts of austerity are lived by the women who come to the centre, although they do not use the word austerity to speak of it. She witnesses women struggling more and more every day due to austerity.

C'est à tous les jours qu'on voit des femmes qui nous disent qu'elles galèrent de plus en plus parce que les coupures ça a un impact. Mais elles ne mentionnent pas comme ça, elles n'en ont pas conscience, et ça c'est le travail aussi des organismes communautaires, des intervenantes, de mettre les termes sociaux dessus. Elles ne vont pas dire « ah les coupures d'austérité me font mal ». Ce qu'elles vont dire c'est « j'ai du mal à manger », « le coût de tout est super élevé » « le coût de la vie est élevé et mon salaire ne suit pas, et c'est moi qui m'occupe des enfants donc toute la charge familiale ça me revient. »

Martine shared that one of the things they try to tackle as an organization is the feeling of culpability that women have when they are unable to make ends meet. By offering a welcoming space where all the women can share their challenges, the women notice that they are not alone and that it is more of a social issue than a personal one. She further added that the financial pressures become familial pressures and it creates conjugal problems that lead to verbal violence at times and anxiety.

Quand je parle de santé mentale, c'est toute l'anxiété, c'est toute la pression sur le couple, j'irais même encore plus grand : c'est les conflits que ça génère et ça fait effet boule de neige, ça prend des proportions que là ça devient de la violence conjugale, et la violence verbale c'est de la violence conjugale pour les centres de femmes. Contrôler le revenu d'une femme c'est de la violence aussi. Je ne te dis pas que ce sont des conséquences directes, mais ce sont des conséquences indirectes que l'austérité peut créer.

Martine insisted that the government does not take into consideration the mental health problems that austerity measures create.

Additionally, Martine described the impact that austerity has on their work at the centre, as more public services are getting cut.

Il y a tellement de coupures qui sont faites à même les budgets publics, que les CLSC nous envoient. « Désolé on vous envoie à tel groupe communautaire » Mais par contre ils nous coupent notre budget, mais les besoins augmentent, et le gouvernement utilise lui-même nos ressources, en donnant le mot d'ordre aux travailleurs du réseau, le CLSC et tout, de palier quand ils peuvent. Leur caseload est trop énorme. Nous on dit que ça aussi ça fait partie des mesures d'austérité. Ça n'a pas un impact direct sur la population mais ça a un impact indirect. Nous, en ayant beaucoup plus de personnes qui utilisent nos ressources, les besoins augmentent mais pas nos ressources.

In the above quote, Martine explains that the CLSC is referring more women to their centre because they are undergoing budgetary cuts, so the centre's workers have more work to do but at the same time they are not seeing their funding increased to meet the needs.

Austerity education. Martine explained that the centre did not offer workshops that have the austerity term in the title anymore. They offered these workshops a few years before, when the term austerity was at its most popular phase. However, they still offer workshops on subjects that are related to austerity without naming austerity.

À force d'utiliser sans cesse ces beaux termes, les gens se disent « il me semble que ça fait longtemps qu'on en parle et le problème n'est pas réglé ». Donc on se dit comment, d'un autre angle, traiter de ces problèmes-là et en parler mais sans utiliser. Il n'y a jamais personne qui va nous dire qu'il y a trop d'ateliers sur les enjeux qui touchent le logement, il n'y a pas personne qui va nous dire il y a trop d'ateliers qui nous parlent des

changements des politiques sociales, non. Mais par contre, on peut se faire dire que l'austérité ça revient tellement souvent.

In the quote above, Martine explains that the danger of always using austerity is that people will wonder why it has not been solved yet, whereas for workshops on housing or other social policies, no one will say there are too many workshops about it. Martine shared that when there is a campaign and upcoming protests, the centre organizes “preparatory workshops,” which are not featured in their seasonal activity programs. These workshops have two parts: the first is a discussion on the issue at hand, and the second is a creative session where the women take ownership of the issues through artistic expression.

Avant de prendre part à une manifestation, depuis deux ans, on crée un atelier préparatoire à cette manif. L'atelier préparatoire ça permet à celles qui prévoient ne pas venir à la marche ou à la manif d'être quand même au courant des enjeux. Ça permet à celles qui vont y aller d'être bien préparées. Ces ateliers préparatoires c'est toujours en deux parties, dans la première partie on discute des enjeux, pourquoi on va manifester, à quoi ça va servir, le contexte dans lequel cette manif-là s'inscrit, le contexte social, économique, et politique, historique, et dire par le passé il est arrivé telle chose. Et la deuxième partie de l'atelier c'est plus d'ordre créatif, parce qu'on parle d'éducation populaire aussi, il faut vraiment aussi être dans l'approche pédagogique dans l'éducation populaire.

Martine explained that the creative component reflects the pedagogical approach of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that it encouraged participation at all levels, especially “from the base” (“de la base”). The women draw, colour, make signs and banners, and write

slogans. This part is very popular. She adds : “Cette partie-là c’est à elles-mêmes de s’approprier de façon créative les revendications. Ça, ça fonctionne beaucoup.”

Martine added that the preparatory workshops are not only a creative outlet, but they are better prepared, through the discussion, to be informed about the issues and defend the issues when they are exchanging with other members of their community.

Les femmes qui ont été à l’atelier préparatoire, même si elles n’ont pas été à la manif, elles deviennent des agentes multiplicatrices. Elles informent leurs voisines, leurs cousines et sœurs, « ah moi j’ai été à un atelier qui expliquait justement que la manif, voilà les enjeux »

Austerity actions. The Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges Winter 2018 Activities Program has a page dedicated to Collective Actions. On this page, they wrote: “We continue our commitment and our action on several subjects: privatisation of health services, public transportation, abortion, poverty, violence towards women and the financing of community groups.” (Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges, 2018, p. 8) Martine explained that they take part in action organized by their umbrella organization, Le Regroupement des centres de femmes du Québec (L’R), which consist of more national actions. They also partake in actions and activities organized by le Front régional d’action communautaire autonome (FRACA) de Montréal that organizes regional actions in Montreal. FRACA is behind the campaign *Engagez-vous pour le communautaire*. Sometimes, Martine explained, the centre organizes local actions in their neighbourhood in partnership with other community organizations of Côte-des-Neiges. One of these actions was to visit the minister responsible for welfare so women could share testimonials.

Justement les changements qu'il y avait eu au programme d'aide sociale, il y a un an et demi on avait été rencontrer le ministère de l'emploi et de la solidarité avec le quartier et on avait amené des femmes pour qu'elles puissent témoigner de comment est-ce que ça va avoir des conséquences pour elles.

Barriers to centre's participation. Martine shared a challenge the centre is facing when it comes to partaking in actions against austerity. She expressed that there were so many actions, with reason, but that they cannot participate in all the actions because they have too much work. The centre is forced to make choices and skip some actions.

Mais j'ai mentionné un peu plus tôt qu'on a un problème en termes de l'engagement. Le problème c'est qu'il y a tellement d'actions. Le filet social est tellement en train d'avoir des trous qu'on est sensées se mobiliser. Par exemple, demain il y a une action pour supporter les organismes communautaires, on n'y va pas. Ça fait à peine un mois qu'on était à une autre action, et les femmes commencent à être épuisées. Maintenant il faut être bien stratégique de choisir les actions collectives qu'on prend part. Elles sont épuisées—oui il y a la question de la santé physique, mais il y a aussi la question que si le centre prenait part à toutes les actions, on serait tout le temps fermé et on serait tout le temps dans la rue tellement qu'il y a d'enjeux. Donc il a fallu qu'on fasse des choix.

Martine expressed that the workers, including herself, already have a lot of overtime that they cannot accumulate any more.

Women's engagement in the actions. Martine explained that some of the women who come to the centre are very engaged in the movement against austerity. This core of women, she

explains, were mobilized in their native countries in Latin America against government disengagement there.

On avait un noyau de femmes qui viennent de ces pays, du Chili, de l'Argentine, où elles étaient mobilisées dans leurs pays. Donc ce sont les premières à dire « on va en grève! On ne se pose pas de question! Pourquoi on se pose la question? » Et ce qui est tellement riche c'est qu'elles parlent de leur pays à quel point les problématiques sont grandes et elles disent « ici on est en train de devenir comme dans mon pays que j'ai fui ». Tout le désengagement au niveau des politiques sociales, le filet social, qui est train d'avoir de gros, gros trous, ce n'est plus un filet, elles sont les premières à dire « non je ne veux pas que ça devienne comme dans mon pays, donc il faut se mobiliser ».

Additionally, Martine shared issues that women are facing that prohibits their engagement in protests, for example physical ability and health. Another barrier to mobilizing women of the centre is when they have so much adversity in their life that marching in streets is the least of their concerns.

C'est aussi notre réalité, quand je mentionnais plus tôt qu'on a de la difficulté à mobiliser : quand tu galères pour finir tes fins de mois, tu ne dors pas parce que t'a un enfant à bas âge, tu as une adolescente, qu'au travail tu vis des problèmes, te mobiliser c'est la dernière de tes préoccupations, aller marcher dans la rue c'est la dernière de tes préoccupations (...) celles qui ne peuvent pas venir on dit c'est correct, il y en a d'autres qui vont y aller pour vous, il y en a d'autres qui vont transmettre votre parole.

What Is the Role of Lived Experience?

Collectivizing the individual experiences. Martine explained that women who come to the centre often express their personal problems, their lived experience of poverty for example. However, Martine expressed that it is in the role of the centre's workers to move away the blame from the individual woman to collective problems. The approach of popular education, she said, plays a crucial role in this process.

Dans le travail d'éducation populaire c'est ça aussi, c'est de dire OK ton expérience, les mots que tu utilises, comment ce sont des conséquences qui ne sont pas individuelles. Ce n'est pas de ta faute si tu es dans cette situation. C'est pour ça aussi l'approche d'éducation populaire, l'approche du centre de femmes est d'intervention de groupe et communautaire. C'est-à-dire, une qui est à l'accueil qui parle de son problème « j'ai du mal à finir mes fins de mois, je vais dans les banques alimentaires, j'habite chez un tel parce que mon coût de loyer me coute trop cher ». Donc elle le mentionne, et une autre le mentionne, et bien là en collectivisant ces problématiques-là, c'est là qu'elles voient « ce n'est pas juste moi qui gère mal mon budget, c'est vraiment un problème collectif. » Là c'est ce qui se passe dans le centre. Mais voyez-le à plus grande échelle.

Martine ends the above quote with an important message: that what happens at her centre is happening on a wider scale. Indeed, she added that as part of the approach that seeks to collectivize individual struggles, they are deconstructing the government message that finances are the responsibility of the individual, and that if you cannot make ends meet, it is your fault, and not the fault of government policies.

C'est aussi toute cette approche, en déresponsabilisant, qui est le contraire de ce que le gouvernement fait, de dire que c'est la faute des individus, il faut se serrer la ceinture.

Mais non. C'est tout remettre la faute à l'individu. Au centre c'est de déconstruire ça, de dire que « ce n'est pas de ta faute ». On a toutes une part de responsabilité dans tout, mais c'est de se dire qu'il y a des problèmes qui sont vraiment d'ordre collectif et d'ordre social.

Summary

To summarize, Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges is a women's centre that welcomes a diverse group of women and prioritizes collective intervention with the women. They are always listening to the women's needs, and pay attention to the issues women are facing in order to develop a program that responds to their needs. Martine defined their popular education approach as one that recognizes the knowledge that comes from life experience, especially the knowledge that comes from living as a woman. They develop workshops that intentionally engage the women to share their knowledge about an issue. Popular education also happens informally, in the collective areas of their centre, where the women educate one another on life problems. Collective spaces allows for this type of peer education to happen in the centre.

Popular education is central to feminism, as Martine explained, since feminism must take into consideration the lived experience of women. When asked about austerity, Martine challenged the terminology, which she found to be a term that comes from the government, a trendy term that signifies policies of government disengagement that have existed since the 80s. However, the centre is engaged in the movement against austerity measures and educates the women of the centre about austerity policies. They are engaged because they witness firsthand what how these measures impact the women who come to the centre, as well as how the policies impact the community sector as a whole, including Femmes du monde. Cuts to public services

entailed the centre playing a greater role to compensate. This resulted in a lot of overtime hours for the workers that are difficult to recuperate.

The centre strategically decides which actions to participate in. Before the actions, they hold preparatory workshops that have an artistic component as well as a discussion that educates about the issues. These workshops are successful at the centre, even if they are not included in the seasonal program and planned around emerging actions. Attendance to actions by the centre's women can be challenging when women have more pressing issues going on in their lives, such as struggling to pay their rent. Finally, the sharing of lived experience holds an important role in the centre. Through the sharing of lived struggles in a communal space that is the centre, women can realize that they are not struggling with the same problem alone, but that many are facing the same issue, therefore realizing that many problems are of the social order. The workers can thus deconstruct the government discourse that seeks to blame the individual for problems that emanate from policy decisions.

South Asian Women's Community Centre

The South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) is a women's centre based in Montreal's Plateau Mont-Royal neighbourhood, servicing South Asian families from Greater Montreal. The centre was founded in 1981 by a group of diverse South Asian women, who found that the needs of their community were not being met by other organizations in the city. As their website describes:

The guiding principles of SAWCC from the start have been feminism and sisterhood.

And it has straddled the worlds of services, advocacy and activism. From its beginnings SAWCC was unique in that it brought together women from all parts and communities of South Asia. SAWCC has evolved and changed in response to the changing demographic

and needs of the community, but its core values have stayed the same. (South Asian Women's Community Centre, n.d.)

How Do They Explain Their Work, Individually and Organizationally?

Organization. The bilingual website of SAWCC provides a description of the mission of the organization and the services it offers. The mission of SAWCC is detailed as follows:

The South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) dedicated to the empowerment of women of South Asian origin. [...] The organization develops programming to facilitate women of South Asian origin gaining autonomy, working collectively, making inroads into Canadian and Quebecois society and seeking redress against discrimination. (South Asian Women's Community Centre, 2018)

The centre offers a wide variety of services: language classes, to job search help, parenting workshops, youth programming, legal aid, citizenship test preparation, education on individual rights, among others.

Individual. At this centre, I interviewed two workers: Ghazala Munawar and Juvaria Yasser. Therefore, I will share how they each described their roles in the centre. Ghazala is the Centre Coordinator, although she expressed that she does not view her role in a hierarchical way. She explained that at the centre, they try to make consensus decisions as a team. Ghazala viewed her individual role as being one of working with and for the community, and advocating for the community. She also works on government grants for the centre.

Juvaria sees her role as a community worker, on top of her more official role of Centre Manager. She describes her role as follows:

My role asks me to be responsible of all the internal working of the centre. To be a liaison between the team and our executive board, to be there for the team to help them, to guide them, and to make working within the centre more efficient.

Both Ghazala and Juvaria expressed that their two roles in the organization often overlap, which they saw as a way of being more horizontal.

How Do They Use Popular Education?

Definition. As mentioned above, education is part of the services the centre offers. On their website, they described the service “Education on Individual Rights” as follows: “As a strong advocate for women's rights, we offer many opportunities for education on social justice and on basic human rights. This includes educating on individual legal rights, as well as advocacy and activism.” (South Asian Women’s Community Centre, 2018)

When asked during the interview how they use popular education in their centre, Ghazala and Juvaria shared concrete examples. Ghazala discussed how popular education, through the forum-theatre technique, was a useful approach to sensitize the centre’s women about family violence.

We started a small project to bring sensitization amongst women that this is a problem, and this is a problem not be kept private. We understand they don’t want to talk about it, so how do we bring them in a room to talk about it? We used forum-theater. Forum-theater is a play done without actors talking, so they played a small skit, and we saw that the women who did not want to talk about it talked, they are identifying in that small skit what is happening, what is right, and they are giving the solutions. During that program they are learning about the resources. So, if by chance this bystander is standing in the

scene, what can this bystander do? So they see themselves as a bystander also. They see themselves as a person who is going through this. How this thing helped them, is that we saw women who were not ready to talk taking part, and by just taking part they are expressing themselves, they are telling what is happening and what they want.

In the quote above, Ghazala explains how forum-theater, a technique used by many popular educators, allowed for the women of the centre to experience different roles in a situation of family violence. Most importantly, it provided a form of expression to women who would not usually talk about this issue. Juvaria added that when dealing with an immigrant population, popular education has to “come in.”

The basis of our center has been, from the very beginning I can say, educating our people. Giving them the tools to become better a fit. Over the years, as SAWCC has evolved, I think our method has evolved. From very informal ways of helping or supporting women individually, to, depending on the needs of the community, to arranging and organizing formal groups.

Juvaria explained that popular education workshops promoted finding solutions as a community, instead of an individual organization.

Emergence of popular education themes. Juvaria explained that the popular education programs they developed stemmed from the needs of the community. She referred to the family violence forum-theater workshop as being developed in response to stories about the issue being shared frequently.

We take care of confidentiality, but we do share stories, amongst us. We don't take names, but we share issues because we need to train each other, and we need to keep each

other aware of what's happening. When certain stories they start accumulating, we know it's an issue in our community, and then whatever we can do to resolve that issue, it could be us making a program just to bring women, as she said, about violence, conjugal violence. Or to bring these issues to all the umbrella organizations that we belong to, to say look this is an issue happening we need to do something.

Juvaria described a program that they developed based on a needs analysis with women from the South Asian community in two Montreal neighbourhoods, Côte-des-Neiges and Park Extension. They asked the women what they needed, and they expressed that they could not go to the doctor on their own, and that they were scared of taking public transit. This is when SAWCC developed its transit workshops. In the quote below, Juvaria explains what the transit workshops are, and the impacts they have on the women.

This project has been running for the last 10 years, and part of that project was needs analysis. The moment a woman met them, they will do an informal needs analysis, because this is the way to get women in the project also, to ask them what their needs are and to meet these needs. A few of those needs, and they still are the same needs by the way, if we find a new woman the needs remain the same: we can't go to a doctor on our own, we can't talk to a doctor, we've never taken the metro on our own, we're very scared of taking the bus. So now these very simple needs which will not come across a person who lives in Montreal at all, were mentioned to us by these women who were suffering. What we did was arranging, we call them transit workshops, they were supposed to be fun workshops, so we created a route which covered a hospital downtown, and in another area, and we gave them bus tickets and we said let's do it together. And then those women who couldn't read, because the majority of our women cannot read,

and we showed them the way how to go to the metro and then count and have significant hallmarks for let's say different places so that a person who does not know how to read does not feel scared to be alone. And it went on-and-on until a woman memorizes, so at least we can go to a hospital for example by yourself. These are all examples of popular education that we have been consciously or unconsciously using as tools to help or guide or support our people.

How Do They Use a Feminist Approach?

Definition. Ghazala explained that compared to other women's centres that are feminist and service only women, their centre serves the family. SAWCC welcomes men into their centre to better serve the women from their community who live in households led by men, as Juvaria explains in the quote below.

We call ourselves a women's organization, but we have understood a long time ago that when we are dealing with South Asian women we can't deal with them alone. Though we're called a South Asian women's community organization, we serve men all the time, because we understand that sometimes it's just the men who are the voice of the family, and if we want to serve the family we have to serve the men.

Ghavarina and Juvaria both expressed that feminism, to them, meant equal rights and opportunities among men and women. Below is a quote from Ghazala's answer.

For us feminism means equality between men and women, having the same rights, the same opportunities, and this is what I see, and this is our popular education, we try to bring an understanding in women. Because women have been raised in a very patriarchal society and an environment where men, no matter who the man is, even if it's your

brother who is younger than you, he has more rights than you, he can control you, he can put limits to your movement. For me, feminism means equality.

As she explains in the quote above, popular education is used to educate women who may have internalized patriarchy.

What Does Their Engagement with the Austerity Movement Entail?

Rationale. Both Juvaria and Ghazala insisted on the importance of SAWCC being engaged in the movement against austerity measures, because the women they work with are impacted by such measures. Ghazala explains in the quote below how austerity touches the women from the community.

When initially it was brought, because we are a member of the Table des centres de femmes de Montréal, and we are with l’R and we are with the FFQ, so being part of those umbrella organizations, when this was brought that these are the austerity measures that the government was bringing, touching the lives of women, we identified ourselves. We were identifying yes our women, because the immigrant population is already living in poverty, and many immigrant families there is only one bread earner. And the familyhood depends on only one person’s salary, so that person wants to control how. (...) Every time the life becomes so expensive that they are not able to provide the same things for their children. So, it touches the lives of the community we serve, so for us it was very important to be part of that movement, to show our faces.

Juvaria described further the challenges that community faces, how members of the South Asian community live in poverty since their immigration to Canada. She explained that they have been

fighting against measures that impoverish members of their community since the foundation of the centre, before the emergence of new campaigns like the one against austerity.

So, all these things, women and families tell their stories to us, about each small thing that their family is suffering, and our fight has been throughout for these small things. Fifteen dollars an hour as a minimum wage in Quebec is a very recent thing, but we've been fighting for a very long time because we know immigrants are exploited. When the minimum wage is 10\$ an hour and something, immigrants are exploited by being given 6\$ cash. And because they have no options [sic]. But if the government policies are right, then nobody will have to accept a 6\$ an hour. And nobody will be offering it, because there will be no need. So, these small things have been part of our history from the very beginning and now we know the name, austerity measures, cuts, we are fighting against that.

Juvaria added that the privatization of public transit, through its pricing, is a significant barrier to women from the South Asian community coming to their centre and getting the support they need. She shared a concrete example that demonstrates the difficult choices some women have to make.

To come here, it's 6.50\$. If a woman has 4 children, it costs 1.50\$ for each child at the school to be supervised during his or her lunch hour. The family provides the lunch. You do the math. If the woman has to spend those 6.50\$ just to come to SAWCC for her depression, would she spend that money, or would she rather save that money for her four children, 1.50\$ each time. These are the real decisions that women and families have to take. If a woman has to really urgently see a doctor, would she make her husband to a

take day off and lose a day's wages? Or she would say go to work and I'm OK, I'll take Tylenol and I'm fine. These are simple stories.

Regarding the terminology of austerity, Ghazala and Juvaria also had some criticisms. Ghazala shared that austerity is a “fancy word” we started to use that describes something they have been fighting against for a while. Another “fancy word” she named was intersectionality.

Austerity education. When asked about austerity workshops, Ghazala and Juvaria explained that they did not have any of these workshops planned in the winter program, but they will probably have one in the fall. Ghazala explained that they are currently engaged with the campaign *Engagez-vous pour le communautaire* (Get engaged for the community sector).

When the centre offered workshops about themes related to austerity in the past, prior to the interview, it was the workers themselves who facilitated the workshops. They did not invite external people to facilitate workshops because, as Ghazala explained: “we have a very unique group, and if we bring somebody from outside, they may not be able to respond the way they respond to us.” Ghazala and Juvaria speak multiple South Asian languages, so they can facilitate their workshops in many languages, and translate for participants. They are also more relatable to the women who are more comfortable with them because they share the same culture, Ghazala shared.

Juvaria explained that to prepare their austerity workshops, they attend sessions in other organizations and bring information that they can sift through and adapt the content to make it understandable for women from their centre.

Using simple examples. For example, if there's a funding cut in a hospital or a CLSC it's not going to affect a woman if you look at her, “oh, it's nothing to me”. But next time

when you need a doctor and out of ten doctors now only there are two, you might not even get that place. So, it becomes a real problem which is personal, and I need to work on it right now and raise voice, because now it's personal. That's what we do. And simplify, because many of the campaigns, in English certain words are very easy (...) The word austerity itself, we have no word in Urdu. And we have not used it even. We have to use other terms to explain what it means.

Juvaria added that some of the other examples she uses to explain what austerity means to the women who attend her workshops include: "less pools for the children, less community places to go and gather, and more expensive courses for children if they want to do extra hobbies." Both Ghazala and Juvaria explained that women feel more implicated by austerity cuts when they give examples about how it affects their children.

Austerity actions. Like other women's centres, Ghazala expressed that when the centre's staff is available to join actions against austerity measures, they do, but it is not always possible.

Anything that touches the lives of women, or families, we know that we need to take part in it. Sometimes, even sharing the same feelings and same sentiments, sometimes it's not possible for us. Why? Because few of us are full time, few of us are part time, and sometimes there's something important happening here. So even if we don't participate physically, spiritually we are in favour of those, so we send our messages of solidarity.

She explained that she feels it is important for them to be present, because they consider themselves the voice of their communities and of the marginalized communities they are serving.

Women's engagement in the actions. When it comes to the engagement of the centre's women in action against austerity, Juvaria explained that there are some barriers to getting them to attend protests.

The problem with immigrants, this is very common, not only the South Asians, they come from countries where they've witnessed or have been victims of police brutality, civil wars, difficult political situations. When they come here to Canada, in spite of the reassurance from the government and the people around that "you are safe" and the police is not just going to come into your homes and take you away, that fear that they have is already there. We've found in our experience that immigration to Canada doesn't secure the South Asian population a lot. Especially women who are already kept back in their homes, when they come here we invite them to come and join us for a fight, for their own fight, what we find is that women ask us please can you go on my behalf, if I don't show up is it ok? Because first of all they are very scared to join a demonstration or a march, they're really scared, they're afraid their photo will be published in a newspaper and tomorrow somebody will come to their home and take them away. Secondly, it's again that patriarchal society where they have to get the permission of their husbands which they often don't get. So often as Ghazala was saying we cannot bring a big group of South Asian women to these programs, it doesn't mean that they don't care or that they're not part of this, that they're not suffering the consequences of those decisions, they are very much in those people who will be suffering a lot. All of these things really came up. And we are already fighting cuts everywhere. We've gotten some of our projects cut recently. But unfortunately, we are their only representatives. They tell us their stories, that's why it's doubly important for us to be there, not only for us, for

SAWCC's sake, but for the sake of all the users who come to us and tell their stories to us. To bring those out and fight on their behalf too.

In the quote above, Juvaria emphasizes two barriers to the women's engagement in actions: the fear of police brutality and other forms of repressive tactics, and the other barrier is their husbands not allowing them to join actions.

When women from the centre do attend actions with the workers', they do so to support the workers. Ghazala recalls going to an action in Trois-Rivières with some women from the centre in the quote below.

For example, we were supposed to go out for this austerity measure, there was a big group going to Trois-Rivières, so we explained to a few of our women who come to me for the service, I said look we are going, and this is something really important and women from our services are going. And so one woman said I can go, it's on a weekend, I can go with you. So, this is how. It's not that we have a committee who looks into that, it's just our word of mouth that we give to them, and if it touches somewhere in this field, they say I would like to go. (...) For the women, I talk to them, they say it's because you do so much for us. You do so much for us and you don't even see that it's evening time, beyond your working hours you're helping us and because the centre is there and we got the help, so why can't we do something if we can. So this was their rationale.

In the above quote, Ghazala explains that the women who join are doing it to return the favour to the workers who are always helping them; therefore, they see it as a way of helping back the workers.

However, even though women face barriers and do not join the centre in marches and other actions, Juvaria and Ghazala attend actions on their behalf, as their spokespeople. As Ghazala explained: “even if we cannot take a group of 100 women, we ourselves represent, we are going there, we are not missing anything that yes our voice should be there.” Ghazala further added: “we are their voices, we are their representatives”.

What Is the Role of Lived Experience?

As seen in the quotes shared previously, the sharing of lived experience increases the impetus for the workers of centre, Ghazala and Juvaria, to themselves get more engaged with actions and the movement against austerity measures to fight for the rights of the women and families their centre services and represents.

Additionally, Ghazala expressed that lived experience takes a central role in their workshops. To facilitate the process of sharing lived experiences, Ghazala shares her own first.

We always make sure that if look I am sharing my experience, for example I always start with me, so I am sharing my experience. Let’s say I shared with them my process of immigration, and how I came, and how I felt. Right away I say if anybody would like to share. So, I say oh yes this is another experience, so we give value to their experience, if we give value to one, we take the opportunity and take the courage. I also want to share! I also! This shows that these hands are coming and that means that the message is going around [sic].

Juvaria added that the workers of the centre intentionally create a space that allows for sharing without fear of judgment and starting with their own personal examples is a way for them to do so.

Summary

To summarize, the South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) has been using popular education since its foundation. Popular education was defined as educating the people, and some examples Ghazala and Juvaria provided demonstrated that they based their educational offerings on the needs of their community. For example, after noticing that intimate partner violence was present in the community but silenced, the centre used the forum-theater technique, which is based on silent theater, to get the women of the centre to learn about the issue and speak up. The workers interviewed explained that to them, being a feminist organization also meant offering services to men and including them in the centre, because men often lead the household that the women are part of, so it is to the women's benefit to provide support to the men of their households. SAWCC is engaged in the movement against austerity measures through its participation in multiple umbrella organizations. Working with a marginalized population that lives the impacts of austerity measures, there is a strong rationale for being engaged in the movement. This engagement also entails offering workshops about austerity measures, which are developed completely by the workers of the centre because they know the women of their centre better than external resource people. As with other women's centres, there can be barriers to attending actions, such as marches, against austerity measures, for the workers and for the women. For the workers, it is difficult to find the availability to attend all actions. For the women, there is fear of reprisal from immigrant women when it comes to attending protests, especially when it comes to police brutality. Some immigrant women have fled repressive regimes and believe that they will get in similar danger if protesting in Canada. Another barrier the centre's women face is not being able to get permission from their husbands. Due in part to these factors, the centre's workers attend actions as representatives of the women of their centre.

Finally, the sharing of lived experience in the workshops plays an important role at the centre. By hearing the stories of the women in the centre, the workers are more motivated to fight for the women's rights.

Centre des Femmes de Verdun

Le Centre des femmes de Verdun is a women's centre in the Montreal neighbourhood of Verdun. It was founded in 1980 by a group of women who crossed paths at a community daycare and shared a mutual feeling of isolation. They decided to come together and create a centre that would break the isolation and improve the lives of women in Verdun (Centre des femmes de Verdun, n.d.).

How Do They Explain Their Work, Individually and Organizationally?

Organization. On the French unilingual website of the centre, the mission is described as follows: "Le Centre des femmes de Verdun est un lieu accueillant, sécuritaire, inclusif et féministe où l'on défend les droits et intérêts des femmes, dans une perspective de changement social." (Centre des femmes de Verdun, n.d.) Some of the objectives of the centre including breaking isolation, fight against discrimination, and to raise individual and collective awareness (Centre des femmes de Verdun, n.d.).

Individual. When I asked Camille Benny Perron about her role within the centre, she explained that she is responsible for collective action, but that the workers' mandates change. She explained that there is also a worker who is primarily responsible for popular education. Camille explained that they can switch mandates when they are less interested.

On est vraiment en cogestion les quatre ensembles à prendre des décisions. Puis souvent ça va se faire comme « moi je suis un peu tannée de faire telle affaire ou j'aimerais

changer », donc on va faire des switch dans les mandats. Mais généralement on y va avec nos forces, ce avec quoi on est plus à l'aise.

Camille also added that the organization has recently reflected a lot on its mission during a strategic planning process, and that inclusivity stood out as a priority.

J'ai l'impression que la question de l'inclusivité a été vraiment présente parce qu'on se rendait compte qu'on avait un membership plutôt homogène dans le type de femmes qui venaient, donc de vraiment aller chercher d'autres femmes. Mais aussi c'est de se questionner pourquoi ces femmes-là ne viennent pas? Donc qu'est-ce qu'on peut faire pour les amener, qu'est-ce qui les intéresserait, c'est quoi leurs besoins, pourquoi elles viendraient ici?

Camille explained that in order to increase the diversity of their membership, the centre is developing partnerships with other organizations, such as le Conseil LGBT, to review their practices and offer workshops. Because the neighbourhood of Verdun is undergoing significant change, and more immigrant women are now living there, they are reflecting on how to attract these women to the centre.

How Do They Use Popular Education?

Definition. The Centre des femmes de Verdun website provides a description of popular education. Their website includes a tab “Féminisme et éducation populaire”, where popular education is defined as follows:

L'ÉDUCATION POPULAIRE, c'est la mise en valeur du savoir, des connaissances et des expériences de chacune et elle se retrouve dans chacun de nos volets, dans toutes les activités, dans chaque comité et instance démocratique du Centre ainsi que dans notre

milieu de vie. Elle vise aussi à une prise de conscience individuelle et collective des conditions de vie et ce dans une perspective de transformation sociale. (Centre des femmes de Verdun, 2018)

As explained in the quote above, popular education is included in each aspect of the centre's work. Popular education aims individual and collective awareness of living conditions with the goal of social transformation.

Camille described popular education in her own words as starting from the women to reflect on certain issues. It also entails not presenting ready made answers, but allowing for the women to reflect on the issues.

La façon qu'on le voit beaucoup c'est vraiment partir des femmes, des membres, elles-mêmes, pour les amener à réfléchir sur des questions. Donc vraiment partir de la base avec beaucoup des questions ouvertes, sur « comment vous voyez ça telle affaire? » ou « ah c'est intéressant... » Puis d'amener, dans le fond, vraiment comme en tant que travailleuse admettons on va avoir des connaissances mais, de vraiment partir des femmes pour qu'elles-mêmes s'alimentent entre elles puis s'amènent à réfléchir. Puis c'est super important d'utiliser un langage accessible, le vocabulaire, simplifier les concepts, pas d'arriver non plus avec « non ça c'est comme ça » mais vraiment beaucoup de questions ouvertes.

Camille explained the part of the definition on the website that mentions individual and collective awareness as something that happens naturally when women from the centre come together in a same space and share their problems. They come to realize, at that point, that they

are not alone to live that same problem and that the issue is more of a systemic one. At that point, the workers invite the women to join committees that organize actions.

Ce qu'on voit beaucoup, puis ce qu'on essaie de créer, c'est que souvent les femmes à la base viennent pour des choses personnelles, individuelles, elles vivent beaucoup d'isolement, ou elles vivent une situation de violence conjugale, donc on va les recevoir en intervention individuelle, ou elles veulent juste rencontrer du monde, donc elles parlent de leur besoin pour finalement se rendre compte que « mais il y a aussi telle personne qui vit une situation vraiment similaire à la mienne » autour de la table finalement toutes les femmes ont vécu une situation qui se ressemble. Donc là ça part de l'individu puis « ah mais il y en a plein d'autres qui vivent des choses semblables » pour se rendre compte que finalement c'est quelque chose d'oppressif ou de systémique qu'elles ont vécu. Fait que là on va les amener à « regarde on a nouvellement un comité mob (qui existait avant), on parle de ça au comité mob ça t'intéresserait tu de venir? » Là elles vont arriver dans le comité mob, et elles vont agir, elles vont être une agente de changement social pour elle-même et pour les femmes. Donc on le voit beaucoup, des personnes qui aussi à la base « le féminisme ça ne m'intéresse pas vraiment », elles cherchaient à trouver un lieu d'appartenance, puis que finalement après quelques mois elles sont rendues partout, elles vont à des manifestations.

Camille added that the workers aim less introspection but more of “la conscientisation des personnes.”

Emergence of popular education themes. When it comes to deciding on themes for the popular education workshops the centre offers, Camille explained that the centre has different ways of assessing the needs of the women. She explained that they try as much as possible to go

from the needs of the women, and some of the ways women express these needs are through a suggestion box, by speaking to a worker, or at the annual review of the centre.

On essaie le plus possible de partir de la base, donc de partir des besoins qui sont là, donc il y a plusieurs façons de pouvoir s'exprimer au centre : on a une boîte à suggestions, parler à une travailleuse, on a le bilan des membres à chaque année. Donc le bilan c'est pour faire le bilan de l'année, qu'est-ce qu'on a aimé, qu'est-ce qu'on n'a pas aimé, qu'est-ce qu'on aimerait qui se passe dans le centre prochainement, donc ça c'est vraiment l'espace plus démocratique, où les femmes peuvent s'exprimer, dire ce qu'elles ont vraiment envie. Donc on prend toutes les suggestions.

She added that needs are identified through observation. The workers are on duty at the welcoming area of the centre at least once a week, and they listen to the issues that women discuss, in order to bring them to their team meeting. In the quote below, Camille explains the process behind developing workshops.

Il y a aussi juste l'observation. On est toutes une fois par semaine à l'accueil, donc on entend les enjeux, on entend ce qui ressort, ou j'aimerais vraiment ça que ça parle de tel sujet », on le prend en note, et en réunion d'équipe « j'ai entendu telle affaire, ça pourrait être pertinent. » Il y a beaucoup la question de la santé qui ressort, la santé des femmes, les problèmes de l'accessibilité, là on réfléchit peut-être à faire un projet en lien avec ça. C'est beaucoup de l'observation, il n'y a pas tant un processus quand c'est en lien avec ça. Donc après ça on en parle en réunion d'équipe, on réfléchit sur le sujet, puis là ça se fait par discussion. Ensuite la personne qui s'occupe de la programmation va faire des suggestions. Donc là pour la série d'ateliers, on a toujours des séries d'ateliers, donc elle va proposer des séries d'ateliers qui sont venues des suggestions, qui sont venues des

observations des travailleuses, puis on choisit dans le fond selon ce qu'on pense puis selon ce qu'on a observé.

Camille shared an example of a series of workshops that was developed directly in response to the needs of the women. The series is titled *Outils de guérison* (Tools for healing) and is about sexual assaults. Camille explained that after the #metoo movement, women shared a lot of their experiences and feelings with sexual assault, so the need for a workshop series became evident.

Comme là il y a aussi Outils de guérison et groupe de soutien, ça c'est en lien avec les agressions sexuelles, avec toute la vague de #moiaussi et de #etmaintenant, ça a vraiment ressorti au centre tellement d'émotions, ça a ressorti beaucoup de vécu pour les femmes, donc là on en a entendu parler régulièrement à l'intervention, à l'accueil, dans les sujets qu'il y avait aux déjeuners, on a des déjeuners à chaque semaine. Puis là on s'est dit on doit offrir des services. C'est une série de 10 ateliers, c'est un groupe fermé, donc c'est les mêmes femmes pour les 10 ateliers en lien avec les agressions sexuelles.

Content development. Camille explained that the development of the workshops was the responsibility of the worker who plans the centre's programming, but that decisions were made collectively through their team meetings. In terms of the facilitation of the workshops, it can be done by the workers depending on their expertise, but they mostly reach out to external resources in order to have people from different backgrounds come to their centre.

Ça peut être nous, selon nos expertises, nos connaissances, mais on essaie aussi de beaucoup faire appel à des ressources externes parce que c'est le fun d'avoir d'autres personnes de différents milieux qui viennent. On reçoit énormément de suggestions d'ateliers, suggestions de café-rencontres par courriel, par téléphone aussi. Elle passe à

travers ça quand elle va faire la programmation pour ressortir ce qui va avec les valeurs du centre.

As mentioned in the quote above, the centre receives many proposals for workshops from external sources, but there is a selection made based on whether the offers meet the centre's values. The workers also ensure that the facilitator knows what popular education is and can facilitate in a feminist and popular education approach.

Généralement les personnes qui viennent vont avoir déjà été informées de comment ça fonctionne au centre. Généralement c'est quoi l'éducation populaire. Il y a des ressources qu'on connaît, il y a des ressources qui sont utilisées dans plusieurs centre de femmes, donc là on sait que l'approche féministe, l'éducation populaire, c'est déjà connu. Ou d'autres travailleuses de d'autres centres de femmes qui vont venir donc on sait que ça c'est déjà su. Généralement si c'est une personne qu'on ne connaît pas du tout il va vraiment y avoir une conversation au téléphone avec la personne pour savoir c'est quoi sa vision, comment elle pense animer, comment on fonctionne ici.

Camille shared a story about a time where a facilitator had a more academic approach and a worker intervened during the break to ask the facilitator to adapt their workshop, which the facilitator did.

C'est déjà arrivé par exemple une fois où il y avait une approche vraiment plus académique et universitaire, donc là, c'était une fois où la travailleuse en charge est venue au début de l'atelier présenter puis elle est restée juste un petit peu puis elle s'est rendue compte que ce n'était pas du tout dans l'éducation populaire puis c'était des termes super universitaires, puis là à la pause la travailleuse l'a rencontrée puis elle a dit

ce serait bien d'y aller plus avec le vécu des femmes parce que pour ressortir comment elles se sentent parce qu'on sentait la tension des femmes aussi parce qu'elles ne sont pas habituées les membres à avoir ce genre d'atelier-là. Il y a différents niveaux aussi d'attention, de connaissances. Puis là elle a vraiment adapté à ce moment-là son atelier, puis le reste s'est super bien passé. Ça c'était une personne qui n'était jamais venue au centre.

Camille further explained that the workers realized, following this incident, that it is important for them to be present at workshops facilitated by external people to make sure the approach of popular education is used.

Informal popular education. Like other women's centres, the welcoming area of the Centre des femmes de Verdun is also a space where popular education takes place, informally. Camille shared that the centre wants to further acknowledge this by training the volunteers who mind the welcoming area on popular education for the volunteers to become additional "deconstruction agents."

How Do They Use a Feminist Approach?

Definition. As mentioned previously, the website of the centre offers a definition of feminism: "ÊTRE FÉMINISTE, c'est d'abord être femme, vouloir un changement pour soi et pour toutes les femmes dans un but d'égalité sociale, politique et économique, et agir pour y arriver!" (Centre des femmes de Verdun, 2018). I asked Camille to define feminism further during the interview, and she explained that for the centre, feminism meant making women become aware of their oppression and bring them to become agents of the change they want to see in their life. As well, feminism entails moving from the individual to the collective.

Le féminisme c'est super large. On part du principe que les femmes vivent des oppressions, et que les femmes même entre elles vont vivre des oppressions, donc on essaie d'avoir une approche plus intersectionnelle à travers ça. On vit dans une société patriarcale qui génère des oppressions, et les femmes vivent ces oppressions-là, donc c'est de les amener à se conscientiser sur ces oppressions-là, puis de les amener à elles-mêmes être les agentes de ce changement-là qu'elles veulent dans leur vie. Donc ça je le disais un peu tantôt, de partir de l'individuel pour aller vers le collectif, pour se rendre compte que beaucoup d'autres femmes vont vivre les mêmes choses, vont vivre le même genre d'oppression, pour les amener à se conscientiser et à agir vers le changement social.

Camille added that their feminist approach also meant to put themselves and one another on an equal footing, through communicating in accessible language, valuing the expertise of the women who come to the centre, and by adopting a co-management structure.

Dans l'approche il y a aussi, on l'a nommé aussi tantôt, mais toute la question du langage, de rendre ça accessible pour toutes. D'être le plus égalitaires aussi, juste le fait qu'on soit en cogestion, ça fait partie aussi de l'approche féministe, on se situe sur le même pied d'égalité et on essaie de créer ça aussi avec les membres, de « moi aussi je suis une femme, moi aussi je l'ai vécu », dans le partage du vécu. Donc on n'est pas des expertes comme travailleuses, on va les accompagner, mais on a juste d'autres connaissances pour être ici, mais on ne se situe jamais comme expertes.

Camille mentioned that the centre embraced an intersectional approach to feminism. Below, Camille defines what this approach entails.

C'est de reconnaître qu'entre femmes on a différents privilèges, puis qu'on n'a pas toutes les mêmes privilèges, donc qu'on ne va pas vivre toutes les mêmes oppressions, reconnaître ça puis de visibiliser les autres oppressions que vont vivre les femmes en situation d'handicap, les femmes racisées, les femmes en situation de pauvreté, donc de visibiliser et de reconnaître qu'on ne vit pas toutes les mêmes oppressions, et de lutter aussi contre ces oppressions là en soutien avec les femmes.

Link between popular education and feminism. Camille insisted that popular education and feminism are “super” related and that she finds that feminism includes popular education. She shared an example of how popular education, by creating a space where each person can share and speak, achieves the feminist objective of deconstructing a social construct that a woman does not usually speak out.

Il y a un truc qui m'est venu en tête en pensant à ça, c'est par exemple de partir des femmes pour qu'elles définissent elles-mêmes aussi c'est quoi les enjeux puis c'est quoi leurs besoins, on le voit juste dans la prise de parole par exemple, on essaie d'amener les femmes à déconstruire les construits sociaux qu'on a, admettons une femme ça ne parle trop fort, une femme est douce (...) on n'apprend pas nécessairement à prendre la parole en tant que femme, ça va rejoindre le fait que c'est dans l'éducation populaire d'être capable de prendre la parole, d'être capable d'affirmer son opinion dans un milieu sécuritaire et inclusif. Donc ça je trouve, je le vois énormément des personnes qui jamais parlaient devant un groupe, ou jamais n'allaient affirmer leur opinion, mais là d'être dans ce milieu-là, féministe, où on crée de l'inclusion et de la sécurité, vont arriver à prendre la parole et vont même finir par animer un atelier.

She added that feminist popular education helps remove the feeling of guilt to realize that it is a system that has created the problems the women are undergoing: “Déculpabiliser de beaucoup de choses, pour se rendre compte que c’est un système qui a créé beaucoup de problématiques qu’elles peuvent vivre.”

What Does Their Engagement with the Austerity Movement Entail?

Rationale. Camille justified the centre’s engagement in the movement against austerity measures because the latter impacts women the most.

Puis on le sait que les mesures d’austérité c’est des mesures qui sont généralement aussi mises en place par des hommes en majorité, puis elles vont avantager les hommes, puis que la partie la plus touchée c’est les femmes qui sont souvent plus à faible revenu, en charge des familles, donc c’est sûr que ça a un immense impacte sur les femmes. Puis on le voit beaucoup, beaucoup ici, toutes les femmes qui en parlent. On part vraiment du vécu des femmes pour dire de quelles façons tu penses que ça te touche? Juste dans les services qu’elles reçoivent pour le logement, pour la sécurité alimentaire, juste pour sentir s’il y a des impacts qu’elles ont vu avec toutes les mesures d’austérité. Donc c’est sûr que ça touche directement.

As Camille explains in the quote above, austerity measures have been put in place by men and benefit men. She noticed the impact on the women who come to the centre, that the services they receive, in housing, in food security, these aspects are impacted.

Camille further detailed the impact of austerity that they have seen in the women’s lives, regarding health services for example. She insists that there are much less resources.

Il y a clairement, dans les services qu'elles reçoivent dans le réseau, dans les groupes communautaires dans le réseau, ça on le voit énormément. Vraiment moins de suivi, beaucoup de demandes au CLSC justement qu'il n'y a pas de suivi, il y en a qui sont en état de détresse et qu'il n'y a juste pas de ressources, ça on l'entend beaucoup, de découragements. Ça m'amène à réfléchir, sur l'importance que ça a dans leur vie, le réseau de la santé, mais pas dans ce qu'elles n'ont plus dans ça. Ça m'amène à ce qui peut être fait aussi avec elles. (...) Il y a vraiment beaucoup dans le manque de ressources, il y a beaucoup de manque de ressources. Il y a aussi les personnes sur l'aide sociale qui vont sentir qu'elles ont moins de sécurité alimentaire, ça a été affecté, on l'entend ça.

Camille also shared that her centre was impacted by austerity measures, that they had to cut one worker and that they feel like they are in a race with fewer resources.

Austerity education. When asked about how they educate their members about austerity, Camille answered that they often use the time of the Wednesday breakfast to mobilize their members. Most of their engagement with the movement is in relation to the campaign *Engagez-vous pour le communautaire*, and they facilitate small workshops about the issues the campaign is tackling.

On utilise beaucoup le déjeuner du mercredi pour parler de sujets, soit faire des annonces, soit informer sur différents sujets. Là il y a beaucoup en lien avec Engagez-vous pour le communautaire, des petits ateliers. Moi j'en ai fait un, c'était quand même bref, c'est quoi que ça représente pour vous les organismes communautaires, ou quel impact ça a, s'il n'y avait plus d'organismes communautaires, ce serait quoi l'impact dans votre vie? Là on a ressorti plein de points sur ce que ça leur ramenait, c'était comme une façon des

conscientiser de l'importance de la reconnaissance des groupes communautaires et de la reconnaissance de tous les impacts aussi de l'austérité et qu'est ce que ça pourrait amener, parce qu'il y a des groupes communautaires qui ferment. J'ai fait ça pendant un déjeuner. Sinon ça va se faire avec le comité mob, on va réfléchir ensemble comment on va en parler, il va y avoir des tracts qui vont être diffusés, des affiches dans le centre aussi. On a fait venir une membre du FRACA qui est venue présenter lors d'un déjeuner, c'était à peu près une heure, une heure et demie, sur l'austérité et la campagne, sous forme de quiz, c'était super dynamique. Là il y a des étudiantes qui s'en viennent lundi pour faire un atelier là-dessus.

In the above quote, Camille discusses how they have educated their members about the campaign, for example, she facilitated informal workshops about the importance of the community sector. A member of the FRACA (*Front régional de l'action communautaire autonome*), a group spearheading the campaign for the viability of the community sector, facilitated a workshop during a breakfast with a quiz. Finally, she shared that a group of university students were going to facilitate a workshop the following Monday about austerity as well. In sum, the centre offers regularly educates its members about austerity.

Austerity actions. Camille explained that the “comité mob” (mobilization committee) organizes locally the participation of the centre in regional or national actions. She explained that the centre is joining actions but lacks the resources to organize its own local actions.

Donc là c'était plus se joindre à des actions que d'en organiser. On a été à Québec en septembre, il y a eu le 7 février toute la journée avec le tribunal populaire donc on a participé. On a quand même une bonne participation, d'une dizaine, douzaine de membres.

The centre was also on strike for two days that year, they closed to join other community organizations in a Quebec-wide strike to demand better recognition and financing from the provincial government.

Women's engagement in the actions. As other women's centres interviewed mentioned, although women join actions as Camille mentioned, it is nonetheless challenging to mobilize the women to join actions. She explained that her centre is still at the step of raising awareness among the women. Another barrier to joining action is age: the average age of the women who come to the centre is around 60 or 65 years old.

Ça c'est quand même, c'est toujours dur la mobilisation, c'est une réalité dans beaucoup de groupes, un peu partout, amener les gens à se mobiliser. Il y a une douzaine de participantes qui étaient venues, fait que c'était bien. Ici au centre ça va être plus dans la conscientisation, on a encore à conscientiser puis d'essayer de créer le sentiment d'indignation pour amener les femmes à se mobiliser. Ce qui ressort beaucoup c'est que les femmes vieillissent aussi, la moyenne d'âge est quand même en haut de 60 ans, 65 ans, il y en a beaucoup qui parlent de perte d'autonomie, donc « moi je ne peux plus aller marcher, moi je ne peux plus aller dans la rue. » Trouver des façons de les impliquer d'une autre manière.

As Camille concludes in the quote above, they are seeking other ways of engaging women in the movement that do not involve only marching in the streets.

What Is the Role of Lived Experience?

When asked whether lived experience played a role in the engagement of the centre's women in the movement against austerity measures, Camille readily answered "clairement!" As

she explains in the quote below, she found that lived experience is the tool that works the most in terms making them want to change things. Furthermore, it creates more solidarity among the women.

J'ai trouvé que c'est un des outils qui fonctionne le mieux, quand elles partent de leur vécu c'est là que tu les amènes à vouloir changer les choses. Je trouve que c'est ce qui soulève le plus d'indignation pour elles. Et ça crée des liens, justement quand je disais une dit « moi aussi j'ai vécu ça » ou « je comprends tellement ce que tu as vécu » ça crée des liens, ça crée plus de solidarité, de sentiment d'appartenance, c'est ça qui les amène aussi à vouloir se mobiliser, parce qu'elles sentent la solidarité.

However, when a woman shares the problems she is facing with less accessible health services, or other consequences of austerity measures, without realizing that it is related to austerity policies, Camille explained that she does not make the link with austerity too fast. Doing so would be like instrumentalizing the distress the woman is feeling for political purposes.

J'ai remarqué aussi, souvent quand tu vas tout de suite, quand une femme elle partage son vécu et elle vit quelque chose de difficile, il y a comme un état un peu de détresse ou peu importe, puis que tu amènes le côté politique tout de suite, j'ai remarqué que ça enlève du vécu à la personne, c'est ça que j'ai remarqué. Que c'est comme de lui prendre de son histoire pour le rendre politique. (...) Fait que j'essaie de ne pas faire ça, même si des fois j'ai envie de la soulever puis de l'indigner et dire on va agir! Mais ça ne fait pas le chemin nécessairement, ça commence par la femme toujours.

She added that the link between their lived experiences with austerity and the policies is made in other spaces, such as awareness raising workshops.

Donc là le lien va plus être fait quand il va y avoir des ateliers de conscientisation pour les amener à elles-mêmes se rendre compte de leur vécu et elles-mêmes faire les liens, « il se passe telle, telle, telle affaire » puis dire « c'est vrai, moi je suis allée chez le médecin l'autre fois puis... » ou « j'ai été hospitalisée puis j'ai été toute la journée sans que personne ne vienne me voir » Puis là on le sait qu'il y a un lien avec l'austérité, elle-même elle va trouver le lien, donc c'est vraiment de partir de son vécu mais pas nécessairement quand ça se passe, quand elle est en détresse par rapport à ça, parce que ce n'est peut-être pas le bon moment, mais ça va se faire après.

Summary

To summarize, the Centre des femmes de Verdun embraces feminist popular education approaches. They have also integrated their feminist approach in how the centre is run, by adopting a co-management horizontal structure. Popular education and feminism is so instrumental to their centre that they have created a separate page on their website that provides their definition of both approaches. Popular education means, to the centre, valuing the knowledge and experience of the women who come to the centre. The centre's feminist popular education also favours going from the individual to the collective, as women take conscience of the similarities in their lived problems and realize that the issues they are facing are systemic and not personal. The workers actively listen to, and observe, the interactions among the women at their centre to identify their needs and develop educational programming that responds to their needs. The welcoming area is an important space for this listening work to happen. When the needs are identified, either workers facilitate a workshop, or, in most cases, an external resource is invited to facilitate a workshop. Like other centres, the Centre des femmes de Verdun is actively engaged in the movement against austerity measures because austerity has had a

significant impact on the lives of the women who come to the centre, and on the centre itself due to the reduction of staff. The centre offers a variety of popular education on austerity and in relation to the campaign *Engagez-vous pour le communautaire*. They also participate in actions such as marches and strikes, but they face a challenge of mobilizing more women from their centre, either because they are older women or they are not aware of all of the issues yet. Camille emphasized how much the sharing of lived experience plays a positive role in the engagement of women with the issues. It helps women realize that their problems are of a systemic nature and not their individual fault, which leads them to want to engage in collective change.

Chapter 4: Discussion of Findings

In this chapter, I will analyze the data presented in Chapter 3 based on the research questions. I will address the way each interviewed organization answers the following research questions:

1. What does an application of feminist popular education in a community organization look like?
2. Does the effort of relating political issues to personal lived experiences make these issues more accessible to marginalized women?
3. Do women served by, and involved in, community organizations in Montreal who are members of the social movement against austerity measures in Quebec get engaged with the social movement against austerity?
4. What are their reasons for joining the social movement?
 - a. Feminist popular education approach?
 - b. Other reasons?

As well, I will consider some implications that these findings have for future research.

Data Analysis

I will now present the analysis of the data for each question, based on the interviews and other data provided by the four organizations studied in this research project: Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs, Femmes du monde à Côte-des-Neiges, South Asian Women's Community Centre (SAWCC) and Centre des femmes de Verdun.

Question 1: What Does an Application of Feminist Popular Education in a Community Organization Look Like?

The first research question poses some challenges with the data available. The data collected cannot answer for all community organizations, as they differ greatly from one another. The research aimed at women's centres in Montreal, which consist of a specific type of community organization. Therefore, the analysis that follows can only speak to a sample of women's centres in Montreal.

The data collected for this research demonstrate that there are some differences in how feminist popular education is applied in the women's centres, as well as some similarities. One difference among the women's centres is the practice of inviting external resources in their workshops. Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs, Femmes du monde Côte-des-Neiges and Centre des femmes de Verdun invite external resources to facilitate workshops for their centre's women. SAWCC, however, expressed that they rarely invited external people for their workshops because they have a unique group of participants who speak diverse South Asian languages and live unique realities that external people may not understand. The women may also not be as inclined to respond to outsiders, as Ghazala explained: "we have a very unique group, and if we bring somebody from outside, they may not be able to respond the way they respond to us." Yet, though the three other women's centres invite external resources to their workshops, the role the workers play in the workshops is different. For example, Femmes du monde's workers stay involved during the workshop to facilitate their approach and the women's participation.

Another observed difference is the presence of informal spaces for popular education. Femmes du monde and the Centre de femmes de Verdun put more emphasis on the presence of

this informal space, their welcome area, as a place where popular education takes place. Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs mentioned solidarity breakfasts where issues can be discussed more informally. SAWCC did not mention such a space in their centre, but this does not mean they do not value having such an area.

Despite some of the foreseeable differences, the data examined show some similarities in the application of their approach. One of them is the way workshops are planned in their program. All of the organizations interviewed plan their popular education workshops in advance to include them in their seasonal program. Although for some centres, the emergence of a new campaign or action may require some unplanned education and mobilization, these cases are exceptional since most campaigns and actions are also planned in advance.

Another similarity among all the centres studied is the importance of basing the planning on the needs of the women when developing workshops. SAWCC, Femmes du monde, Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs et Centre des femmes de Verdun's workers all communicate closely with the women of the centres and listen to the needs they express. The workers discuss the issues the women say they are facing and attempt to respond to them through varying means that always include popular education programming. Examples from data include SAWCC's transit workshops, Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs's programming on women's mental health, Femmes du monde's workshops on women and retirement, and Centre des femmes de Verdun's Antidote closed workshops on sexual assault, all of which were developed in response to the needs expressed by the women of their centres.

Finally, as the data presented show, all the organizations studied centre the women's experience in their popular education workshops. Their lived reality is valued and invited to be

shared in the workshops; the personal takes a dominant role. This is in line with the characteristics of feminist popular education, as reviewed in the literature review section.

Question 2: Does the Effort of Relating Political Issues to Personal Lived Experiences Make These Issues More Accessible to Marginalized Women?

Based on the data collected for this research, the effort of relating political issues to personal lived experience does render these issues more accessible to the women who access all the centres studied. First, it is important to explain whether the data collected can answer to the part of this research question that addresses marginalized women. As explained in the research methodology, the women centres studied for this research work with a marginalized population of women. Therefore, the women that are mentioned in the interviews and other data are marginalized women.

Each of the organizations interviewed explained the role of lived experience in educating about the political issue of austerity. For many centres interviewed, the personal lived experiences would be shared by the women, and a link would be made to a political issue, either by the women themselves through discussion or a worker would facilitate the link to be made. At the Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs, Kavitha pointed to an example of how sharing lived experience made the issue of the regularization of women without status. Women who had never heard of the issue were moved by the testimonies of the women without status, and even joined an action. At SAWCC, Ghazala and Juvaria shared that they related the issue of austerity to the women's children in order to make it more accessible. Martine from Femmes du monde explained that it is the role of the organization to make the link. Women who would share their lived experience of poverty may not see how it is influenced by austerity, but as Martine said: "c'est le travail aussi des organismes communautaires, des intervenantes, de mettre les termes

sociaux dessus.” At the Centre de femmes de Verdun, Camille explained that women share their challenges with public services, and the link with austerity is often made by the woman, because the sharing of lived experience can bring about this realization.

Question 3: Do Women Served by, and Involved in, Community Organizations in Montreal Who Are Members of the Social Movement against Austerity Measures in Quebec Get Engaged with the Social Movement against Austerity?

Regarding the engagement of the women who come to the centres to the movement against austerity, the longer answer to this question is different from one centre to other, although some trends can be identified. The general answer for the four women’s centres of this research’s sample to the above question would be: yes. But the degree of engagement varies from one centre to another.

As the data show in the previous chapter, women served by, and involved in, the Centre des femmes d’ici et d’ailleurs are engaged with the movement against austerity. They prepare campaign materials and attend protests. Although there is a core group of women who attend the protests, the centre still faces challenges with accessibility, mostly physical accessibility. Moreover, there is a smaller proportion of racialized women attending the protests.

For Femmes de monde Côte-des-Neiges, women who are involved in the centre also attend actions initiated by the movement against austerity measures. As Martine explained, they have a core group of women who are very much involved in the movement, through the centre and other organizations. Outside of this core, she added that some women faced barriers to joining the movement, such as not having the physical ability of marching for long periods of time or having too many problems in their personal lives to get engaged in the movement.

For SAWCC, the workers try to attend as many actions as possible. When it comes to women served by the centre, it can happen, but it seems to be exceptional. The centre's workers are viewed as the spokespeople of the women and are delegates at actions organized against austerity. Ghazala did share a recent action in Trois-Rivières where some women from the centre joined.

Camille from the Centre des femmes de Verdun was proud to share that they have good groups of women from their centre joining in the actions against austerity, such as strikes and protests.

Question 4: What Are Their Reasons for Joining the Social Movement?

a. Feminist Popular Education Approach?

b. Other Reasons?

There is more than one reason why the women served by, and involved in, the women's centres studied in this research join the social movement against austerity. As the data show, for many centres, feminist popular education leads the women to want to take action and thus participate in the social movement against austerity. However, data have also shown that there can be other interesting reasons that motivate the women.

In the cases of the Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs and the Centre des femmes de Verdun, the role that feminist popular education, described as an approach that sees learning as participatory and horizontal, which takes root in the lived experience of the women, is crucial in mobilizing the centres' women. Kavitha from the Centre des femmes d'ici et d'ailleurs explained that the sharing of lived experiences enables greater solidarity among women and this mobilizes women who would not get mobilized otherwise.

Camille also explained that “clairement” (clearly) lived experience plays a role in the engagement of the women of the centre with the movement: “J’ai trouvé que c’est un des outils qui fonctionne le mieux, quand elles partent de leur vécu c’est là que tu les amènes à vouloir changer les choses. Je trouve que c’est ce qui soulève le plus d’indignation pour elles.” Sharing a personal experience with austerity creates a sense of indignation that sparks a willingness to act.

The interview with Martine from Femmes du monde brought to light, as well, the way aspects of feminist popular education, such as the sharing of lived experience and collectivizing individual challenges, can play a role in the mobilization of the women from their centre. Yet, she also shared that another reason women have joined the centre in actions against austerity, in protests and marches for example, is the knowledge that other community organizations of the neighbourhood would be there as well.

Parce qu’on a des femmes qui fréquentent des organismes, on leur dit tel autre groupe qu’elles fréquentent va être de la partie, donc là le sentiment d’appartenance est énorme. (...) Mais le sentiment d’appartenance à des problématiques spécifiques et à leur quartier, ces problématiques-là sont revendiquées et critiquées, et que les groupes qu’elles aiment sont mobilisés et font quelque chose, elles disent « ah oui Projet Genèse? Oui je vais être là » C’est pour ça aussi qu’on essaie de faire du travail en collaboration et qu’on veut même encore plus augmenter pour l’année 2018. Parce que c’est ce qu’on réalise, tu parlais de sentiment d’appartenance, c’est vraiment intéressant ce qu’on réalise, que ça fait une différence quand elles voient que les groupes qu’elles aiment.

In the quote above, Martine explains that the women from their centre have a great sense of belonging to their neighbourhood and are more inclined to join actions where other groups from their neighbourhood are going to participate. It is even an objective of the centre to work more in

partnership to increase participation of the women of the centre. Therefore, for Femmes du monde, it is both feminist popular education and the reason just explained that lead women to join the movement.

Finally, the data from SAWCC demonstrates that it is not feminist popular education that lead the women of the centre to get engaged with the movement. Rather, when the centre joined a protest in Trois-Rivières, the women from the centre who joined the centre's workers did so out of support for the workers. They wanted to give back to the workers by reinforcing their numbers at the protest. It is a different reason, but one that demonstrates the great value put on solidarity.

Implications for Theory and Practice

Although the data have not provided the clearest answers to the research questions, some interesting themes have emerged from them that would be pertinent for future research. I have identified three important ones that I will discuss in this chapter: 1) the role of organizational structure in the application of feminist popular education, 2) the issues of accessibility of social movements and 3) the role of informal spaces for social movement learning and popular education.

The first theme that emerged from the data and that could be researched more is the role of the organizational structure in how popular education is approached. Three of the four organizations studied in this research have horizontal organizational structures, which they referred to as “co-gestion féministe,” and the fourth organization, although in the titles of the positions there is a hierarchy, the workers interviewed indicated that their centre is working towards a more horizontal structure. When I asked the people interviewed about their role in the organization, the structure always came up. The centres that had an official horizontal feminist

co-management structure were the centres where the workers spoke the most about the centre's women's expertise and knowledge stemming from their lived experience. The way they viewed themselves as equals to the women, or at least not as experts, and how it was similar to how they viewed their role within the organization and among other workers, make me reflect on whether there is a correlation.

A question for further research could be whether an organization that does popular education work but has hierarchical structures and more top-down decision-making processes can really fulfil the potential of popular education work. Is there an influence on how workers view themselves in an organization and how they view the people they are "educating"? It was not an aim of my research to look into organizational structures, but it seems to be an interesting question for further research as this could influence the contexts in which popular educators practice. During the interviews, it was striking to me how the language used to talk about the workers roles in the organization was similar to the one used to talk about the popular education. An alignment may be found there.

Another theme that emerged that I would like to discuss is the accessibility to actions. As the data show, there are many barriers to the women from the centre attending actions, such as protests or workshops. The workers interviewed shared a few of them: physical barriers such as the metro not being accessible, but also physical disabilities; having other issues in the women's lives that are more of a priority, such as looking for a roof, feeding themselves and their families, etc. Another interesting information that was shared by Kavitha was the discrepancy between the engagement of racialized women in the preparation of actions versus their participation in the actions (i.e., protests). She shared that more of them participate in the preparation work, which is a work that is usually done inside, and less visible. Although this

work is very important, one can wonder who protests are really for. Further research could study this discrepancy, and further study issues of accessibility of the social movement against austerity in Quebec.

Finally, another theme that emerged from the data is the importance of popular education work in informal spaces. When I designed this research, I had imagined centres where popular education about austerity, and in general, happened in a designated space at a planned time, with chosen facilitators. My interview questions reflected this idea; I asked the workers about the rooms in which their popular education workshops happened, about who designed the workshops, their frequency, and their facilitators. Although the centres were able to provide me with this information, I have realized that there is a lot of popular education work happening outside of formally-defined spaces. A lot of their popular education work, on the topic of austerity or other social and political issues that have an impact on the women who come to the centre, happens outside of a classroom setting, and is not featured in their program. The conversations around a cup of coffee, in the welcoming area, or while making banners for an upcoming protest, are where the storytelling happens; where the reflection, the deconstruction, and the indignation happen. It is through informal exchange among the women where problems are shared, and realizations about the systemic nature of these problems occur—often without the help of a staff member. This can have a significant implication for practice: as popular educators, we should seek to create these informal spaces, where learners can exchange. This space does not have to be physical, although another implication is that physical spaces are still important for organizations to fulfil their mission.

Conclusion

To conclude, this research allowed me first and foremost to witness the crucial role that women's centres play in their neighbourhoods. Women's centres provide a wide range of services. These services are greatly impacted by the government's austerity measures. As frontline services, women's centres should be immune to political agendas, but that is far from the current reality. Although I did not have much knowledge to the extent of popular education practice in these centres, I was pleasantly surprised to find that women's centres are strong practitioners of popular education, despite not being officially viewed as popular education organizations. I conclude this research with hopes for the funding of these essential organizations. The government has changed since October 1st, 2018, with the first ever Coalition Avenir du Québec (CAQ) government. While the CAQ is not a party that advocates for greater state funding, one needs to remain hopeful as this is a new chapter.

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