Power from Below:
State-Society Relations and Intersectional Organizing in Montreal

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Abstract

In a province where the community sector has gained political recognition, yet where the government refuses to recognize the existence of systemic racism, this paper investigates how intersectional organizers in Montreal make sense of their institutional environment and strategize for emancipatory social change. Intersectional organizers are activists who adopt a systemic analysis of social inequality and its solutions and center the realities of intersectionally marginalized people in their organizing. Through thirteen in-depth interviews with Montreal-based intersectional organizers, this study identifies both the institutions that are salient to their work—the provincial funding regime for the community sector, the community sector's concertation model and culture, and the media ecosystem—and explores the theories of change that shape how they build and deploy power in this context. The study highlights the democratic and relational practices these organizers adopt to build the power of their communities and resist the threat of institutionalization. In addition, contrary to both dominant political science accounts of social movements that target the state, and normative arguments that prone "turning away" from the state as a vehicle for liberation, this paper reveals the pragmatic vision intersectional organizers adopt, resisting binary either/or theories of change in favor of deploying power in cultural and community interventions as well as in the political (government) sphere. Finally, this paper illustrates how intersectional people power can be hindered by overlapping individual, organizational, and policy-level exclusions, which result in tremendous strain on organizers and undermine democratic political equality.

Résumé

Dans une province où le secteur communautaire a acquis une reconnaissance politique, mais où le gouvernement refuse de reconnaître l'existence du racisme systémique, ce mémoire examine comment les militant.e.s et organisateur.rice.s intersectionnel.le.s à Montréal font sens de leur environnement institutionnel et élaborent des stratégies de transformation sociale émancipatrice. Les organisateur.trice.s intersectionnel.le.s sont des militant.e.s qui adoptent une analyse systémique des causes et des solutions aux inégalité sociales et qui mettent au centre de leur effort les réalités des personnes intersectionnellement marginalisées. Basé sur treize entretiens approfondis avec des organisateur.trice.s intersectionnel.le.s basé.e.s à Montréal, cette étude identifie les principales institutions qui influence leur militantisme, soit la politique provinciale de financement des organismes communautaires, le modèle de concertation et la culture du milieu communautaire, et l'écosystème médiatique québécois. Elle explore ensuite la façon dont ces militant.e.s pensent la transformation sociale, plus précisément comment il.elle.s bâtissent et déploient le pouvoir collectif de leur communauté dans ce contexte. L'étude souligne les pratiques démocratiques et relationnelles que ces organisateurs.trices adoptent pour renforcer le pouvoir de leurs communautés et résister à la menace de l'institutionnalisation. En outre, contrairement aux conceptions dominantes des études en sciences politiques sur les mouvements sociaux, qui identifient l'État comme l'unique cible des mouvements, et contrairement aux arguments normatifs qui préconisent de « tourner le dos » à l'État comme véhicule émancipateur, cet article révèle la vision pragmatique qu'adoptent les organisateur.trice.s intersectionnel.le.s, qui résistent aux théories binaires du changement, en faveur du déploiement du pouvoir citoyen via des interventions à la fois culturelles et communautaires, en plus de viser la sphère politique. Enfin, cet article illustre comment le pouvoir collectif des communautés intersectionnellement

marginalisées peut être entravé par l'accumulation d'exclusions individuelles, organisationnelles et politiques, qui entraîne une pression énorme sur les militant.e.s intersectionnel.le.s et mine l'égalité politique dans notre système démocratique.

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Contribution of Authors

This thesis is a single-author project. No co-authors are included or credited in this project. It is the sole work of the author, Kara Sheppard-Jones.

Introduction

During the summer of 2020, the streets of Montreal were flooded with protesters chanting "Black Lives Matter" (Banerjee 2020). Months later, in October 2020, protesters took to the streets again to demand justice for Joyce Echaquan, an Atikamekw woman who died shortly after filming staff at the hospital where she was receiving treatment uttering racist insults (CBC News 2020). These social mobilizations unfolded on the backdrop of the Premier's refusal to recognize the existence of systemic racism (Bruemmer 2021), heated public debates and contested policies banning religious symbols by representatives of the state (Tommy 2022), and the perpetual fight to preserve Québécois culture in North America (Girard-Bossé 2021), brought further to the fore with the election of the nationalist Coalition Avenir Quebec party. For organizers fighting for social justice, especially in racialized and intersectionally marginalized communities in Montreal, this context is complex and multilayered.

Historically, the Quebec community sector was the vessel through which working-class, marginalized francophones gained and exercised representation and voice in formal political institutions. To this day, the community sector has carved itself a place at the table in Quebec's neo-corporatist model. Yet, social indicators in Montreal now reveal that Indigenous and racialized communities are most disadvantaged on a slew of social indicators ranging from housing precarity to racial and social profiling, to unemployment (OCPM 2020). Indeed, demographic shifts in the Quebec population, and growth in not only immigration but racialized immigration since the 1970s (Piché 2019), raise a host of new questions, which scholars have yet to investigate. Does the Quebec environment enable racialized communities in making claims of the state? What about in building their collective power? This study sets out to understand how organizers fighting oppressive systems and centering the realities of intersectionally marginalized communities in

Montreal—their needs, their capacities, their dreams, and their demands—make sense of the Quebec context. It seeks to illuminate their understandings of how change happens, what a more liberatory society entails and, crucially, which pathways lead there. More specifically, the project asks: How do Montreal organizers, fighting for social justice through an intersectional lens, make sense of their institutional environment and strategize for change in this context? How do they conceive of their capacity for change? Which conduits and obstacles enable and constrain them?

To explore this question, I conducted thirteen in-depth interviews with Montreal-based community organizers, thought leaders, and activists who have decades of experience fighting for change in the Quebec context. The project focuses more specifically on intersectional organizers, that is organizers who either ground their activity within intersectionality marginalized communities and/or those who challenge the structures of oppression and fight for collective emancipation. To make sense of their theories of change and conceptions of power, the study leans on political sociology scholarship on people power, social movements, and grassroots organizing, as well as the contributions of critical scholars on the pathways to liberation.

This paper contributes to existing research on state-society relations in the unique Quebec context, building off of research that has explored Quebec's funding model and oppositional politics (Fontan et al. 2003), its concertation model (Savard and Proulx 2012), and the shift away from activist postures toward a service-delivery paradigm in the community sector (Orsini 2006). As Premier Legault refuses to recognize the existence of systemic racism while advancing an ethnic form of nationalism marked by France-style *laïcité* and anti-immigration stances (Boily 2018), this paper is a necessary foray into the world of intersectional organizers who are both striving to influence this context, while being influenced by it in return.

Few studies in the social movement literature blend both empirical and normative questions and literatures in analyzing people power. This thesis does so by distinguishing between building power and deploying power. Doing so enables a parallel analysis of two critical questions central to grassroots organizing: how can communities build the power to achieve their vision *and* where do they choose to direct this power on the journey to liberation? By centering both process and purpose in its analysis of people power, this paper helps make sense of the role and place of political power in social movements working towards collective liberation and expands the aperture of study on movements beyond the realm of the state.

Finally, this thesis offers one of the first accounts of people power in Canadian political science on social movements. Indeed, scholars have noted that the literature that does touch on people power— Canadian community organizing—remains undertheorized and largely technical (Shragge, Hanley, and Choudry 2012). Leaning on genealogies of scholarship in political science, sociology, Indigenous studies, feminist theory, and Black radical thought, this paper is a humble first step towards understanding empirically how intersectional organizers in Montreal strategize for change and think about power. It offers insight into the practical ways intersectional organizers think of building power and the importance of resisting institutionalization, an emphasis that is less drawn out in the existing literature. Heeding Miriam Smith's (2014) call, this thesis also contributes to advancing Canadian research on social movements that centers the structuring effect of race in organizing. In centering intersectional organizers, most of which organize in racialized communities and/or are racialized themselves, this study aims to center their experiences of

fighting oppression, while "simultaneously having to endure its consequences," in the words of one participant.[1]

i. Defining Intersectional Organizing

This study focuses on intersectional organizers in Montreal, Canada. Both because the term organizer is a broad one that merits a simple definition, and mostly because of the proliferation of the use of intersectionality in the academy and in activism (Collins 2019; Bilge 2020), it is necessary to start with a short definition of intersectional organizing as used in this paper. The term "organizing" is commonly used to refer to efforts to enact change by coordinating groups of people (Han et al. 2021). It is a vague and commonly used term in English. This is not the case in French, where the term "militer" is most often used in Quebec. In both cases, they refer to the act of taking action collectively to change public life.

I use the qualifier "intersectional" before "organizer" to denote a specific type of organizer. I define intersectional organizers as activists who emphasize the systemic nature of social inequality and who center the realities of intersectionally marginalized people in their organizing. Intersectional organizers strive to change the systems that perpetuate marginalization, while accounting for the complex way differences of class, language, gender, race, immigration status, (dis)ability, religion, sexuality, age, etc., produce social inequality.

Retracing the emergence of intersectionality provides context for its use in this study. The idea of intersectionality has likely existed around the world long before the term was coined (Collins and Bilge 2016). It certainly was expressed by African American feminist activists such as Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, and the Combahee River Collective, before Kimberlé Crenshaw

[1] For the interviews that were conducted in French, the quotations provided represent direct translations by the author from French to English. The translated quotes in English were sent to participants to validate that they remained faithful to the ideas expressed in French.

penned it into the academy in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Crenshaw 1989). The term "intersectionality" brought visibility to the exclusion African American women had been experiencing in white feminism, labor organizing, and anti-racist movement spaces (Collins and Bilge 2016; Crenshaw 1989). It illuminated the way understanding—and fighting—discrimination based on a single axis, for example, gender, race, or class—failed to account for the complex ways all three intersected to produce social inequality. Though critics of intersectionality often reduce it to a theory of identity, intersectionality is a structural theory of power, which helps "reveal how power works in diffuse and differentiated ways through the creation and deployment of overlapping identity categories." (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 797)

The contributions of Black women activists to conceptualizing intersectionality underscore its usefulness as an organizing praxis (Collins and Bilge 2016). With the proliferation of intersectionality in the academy, social movement scholars have increasingly studied its use and usefulness for grassroots organizing. Chun, Lipsitz, and Shin (2013) explore the various uses of intersectionality in grassroots community organizing by Asian immigrant women in Oakland, Tormos (2017) and Einwohner et al. (2019) explore practices of intersectional solidarity in movements, while Heany (2019) studies the use of intersectional activism as a collective action frame. Contributing to this line of research, the definition I adopt in this study draws on Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall's (2013) framing of "political intersectionality," and its dual concern for "resisting the systemic forces that significantly shape the differential life chances of intersectionality's subjects and for reshaping modes of resistance beyond allegedly universal, single-axis approaches." This dual concern shapes this study's choice of participants and analysis.

ii. Situating this Project

My own parallel journeys through academia and activism have shaped my approach to this project and my belief in the rich theorizing that occurs in movement organizing. Leaning on the feminist scholar Mary O'Brien's conception of theory as the organization of experience (O'Brien 1989), this project rejects the binary between theory and practice, situating the participants of the study as theory-making agents whose experiences offer critical insights on resisting domination, building people power, and advancing collective emancipation (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2011; hooks 2000). Building on the centrality of praxis in movement theorizing and in feminist research (Choudry 2015; Hesse-Biber 2011), I embrace the interpretivist turn away from studying objects, towards centering meaning-making agents who are most intimate with their context (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013). Accordingly, I adopt an inductive approach, grounded in the co-generation of knowledge. I center the voices and experiences of intersectional organizers—their analyses, experiences, feelings, and dreams—and strive to be reflexive throughout the interpretative journey. Finally, I ground this project in both normative and empirical literatures, which reflects my commitment, as a scholar, to produce research that is practical, explanatory, and which contributes to creating a world where all people live fulfilling and healthy lives in vibrant communities that respect the bounds of the planet.

To understand how intersectional organizers in Montreal make sense of their environment and strategize for social transformation in this context, the paper is divided in two. The first section explores insights from the literature. It reveals what research can tell us about the institutions that influence movement organizing and provides background on state-society relations in Canada and Quebec. I separate the following literature between building and deploying power, a theoretical distinction I draw, which permits an analysis of both the process of organizing and the pathways

organizers favor for fighting for collective emancipation. Accordingly, this section relates research insights in political sociology on how movements build power and addresses normative accounts from critical scholars on the route to deploy power for emancipation. The second section of the thesis delves into insights from the ground, interpreting what institutions are most salient to intersectional organizers in Montreal. It then presents how they conceive of building power given these enabling and constraining institutional factors. Finally, it addresses how they think of deploying power to challenge injustice and build a society where those most marginalized can live full, safe, and fulfilling lives.

Part I. Conceptual and Contextual Background: Insights from the Literature

I. How Institutions Matter

i. Movements, Organizations, and their Environment

Institutional theory, social movement literature, and scholarship on state-society relations in Canada and Quebec underscore the relationship between organizing for change and the institutional context in which the organizing occurs. In the social movement literature, the broader context outside the social movement features prominently. In particular, research on political opportunity structures reveals that the environment in which communities organize can play an important role in enabling or constraining movement emergence and success (Tilly 1978; Snow and Soule 2009; Meyer and Minkoff 2004). Political opportunities are "consistent–but not necessarily formal or permanent–dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure" (Tarrow 1994, 85). Social movement scholars have identified a host of elements in the

environment that can influence social movement mobilization: government openness, access to the party system, the state's policy implementation capacity, alliance structure, and conflict resolution mechanisms, no name a few (Meyer and Minkoff 2004).

Furthermore, the idea that the institutional environment affects organizational behavior has a long history in institutional theory (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). For instance, the legal environment, specific public policies, funding sources, and reporting stipulations, have all been found to shape how organizations behave and choose to organize themselves in a set environment. One of the foundational insights of this literature is that to access the necessary resources to survive, organizations tend to conform to dominant norms and practices to be perceived as legitimate (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). Research on the nonprofit sector underscores its vulnerability to this trend. For instance, a study by Milbourne and Cushman (2015) on the United Kingdom's voluntary sector found that funding and monitoring mechanisms, inter-agency relationships, professional standards, and dominant norms on the nature of legitimate action in the voluntary sector, have exerted coercive pressure to comply in the voluntary sector. In studying the history of Boston's nonprofit sector, Claire Dunning also traces how the government progressively offloaded its responsibility for urban poverty to nonprofit organizations by expanding federal assistance to urban neighborhoods through public-private partnerships and funding through decentralized, discreet, and often market-oriented mechanisms (Dunning 2018). This reorganization of resources available guided the nonprofit sector in a new direction with newfound, near-total responsibility for poverty alleviation in the city. Hence, in studying the nonprofit sector, organization scholars have noted the importance of contextual explanations that account for the way historical legacies, legal definitions, and cultural inheritances, notably, shape the functions, origins, and behaviors of nonprofit actors (DiMaggio and Anheier 1990). This

highlights the importance of tending to the historical, legal, and political legacies that shape state-society relations in Montreal, especially for intersectional organizers. I turn first to what we know about the influence of the Canadian institutional environment on movement organizing.

ii. Canada's Institutional Environment

In Canada, social movement scholars have underscored the influence of institutions on political mobilizations. For instance, Miriam Smith's research on the lesbian and gay rights movement highlights the differences in Canadian institutions, such as parliamentarism, government jurisdictions, and the role of the courts, compared to the U.S. context, which helps explain the faster policy change in support of gay rights in Canada (Smith 2009). Multiculturalism as a policy has also had a structuring effect on the political mobilization of racialized minority groups (Smith 2009; Kobayashi 2014). In the 1980s, the Charter and the Canadian Multiculturalism Act served as political opportunities to spur ethnocultural political mobilization. Today, however, Kobayashi (2014) argues the opportunity to leverage multiculturalism to fight racism, oppression, and discrimination, as was the goal in the 1980s, has passed. The neoliberalization of multiculturalism, which has diverted Canada's diversity into a brand to be sold globally, she asserts, stifles claims made by groups in Canada denouncing racism or other oppressions (Kobayashi 2014). Finally, more broadly, neoliberalism's structuring effect features prominently in recent Canadian literature on social movements and community organizing (Shragge, Hanley, and Choudry 2012; Smith 2005; Orsini 2006).

Canadian federalism makes provinces the most important actors in influencing the relationship between the state and the community sector, given they are responsible for health, education, welfare, and culture—key areas of contest and activity for the community sector (White 2012). Add to that Quebec's interventionist stance and unique governance model, and it becomes

an indispensable actor in studying intersectional organizing in Montreal. Indeed, the provincial government is responsible for approximately 61% of funding for the community sector, while federal, municipal, philanthropic, and revenue-generated funds make up the rest (Depelteau, Fortier, and Hébert 2013). The next section dives into what has been termed the "Quebec model" of governance (Montpetit 2007), for it plays a key role in shaping state-society relations in the province.

iii. The Quebec Model

Since the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, the Quebec model of governance has been characterized by state intervention and neo-corporatism (Rouillard 2011). More than any other government in North America, provincial Quebec policy is developed through concerted consultation and deliberation between the business community, unions, civil society actors, and the government (Laforest 2007). Scholars have argued that this neo-corporatist model is more inclusive, as it is designed to integrate key representatives of Quebec society in policy development (Montpetit 2007). As Montpetit (2007) claims, this model breeds trust through repeated interactions between groups that are experts in their subject areas, and policy development avoids being dominated by a single actor, as is often the case in clientelist networks.

The community sector has been a prominent representative of the most marginalized in interactions with the state. The sector gained a place at the policymaking table through its sustained organizing via local, regional, and sectoral groups that represent coalitions of community organizations ("regroupements" or "tables"). The Quebec "third sector" is characterized by a much higher density of community organizations than the rest of Canada, though the average size of each is smaller (Marron 2012, White 2014). They are organized in dense, well-established networks, which identify as social movements (White 2008). As early as the 1970s and 1980s,

organizations in the Quebec community sector started coming together to share information and expertise. Through interactions with the state, the sector recognized the importance of banding together to better represent itself to the state, maintain an adversarial yet productive relationship, and gain leverage and political influence (White 2014).

In 2001, following sustained pressure and organizing from the community sector, the Quebec government, under the Parti Québécois, passed a milestone law that has shaped the nature of state-society relations in the province. Indeed, the "politique de reconnaissance et de soutien de l'action communautaire" (PRSAC) not only legitimated the community sector but also officially recognized the distinct nature of *autonomous community action* ("action communautaire autonome" or ACA), a type of organization dedicated to advocacy and popular education, rooted in community, that is democratically governed and works to promote collective rights (Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale 2001). In other words, ACA organizations are the grassroots activist strand of the community sector, and this policy recognizes their mobilizing, popular education, and advocacy roles as crucial for a healthy society. For example, the policy funds groups representing the rights of tenants, the unemployed, the elderly, people with disabilities, women, and youth, to name only a few. They stand in contrast to organizations that enter into service-based contracts with the state, a model that has become dominant across Canada since the 1990s (Masson 2012). The implementation of the policy in the early 2000s is especially noteworthy, as New Public Management and the neoliberal doctrine were growing pervasive across the West, privileging markets and government outsourcing of service-delivery to non-profit organizations (Milbourne and Cushman 2015; Clarke, Gewirtz, and McLaughlin 2000).

Crucially, the policy also established funding parameters for ACA organizations. Indeed, it stipulates that the majority of government funding for community organizations be mission-

based funding, that is general operational funding, rather than project-based or contractual funding agreements (White 2012). In 2019-20, the last available data, mission-related funding represented approximately 55% of government funding to community organizations (SACAIS 2021a) while it was only 45% before 2001 (White 2014). After 2001, the Parti Quebecois had anticipated increasing the amount of funding allocated, but they lost the 2003 election, and their plans were cut short by the arrival of the Liberal Party of Quebec in power (Anonymous informant 1. 2022. Interview with former government bureaucrat by author. April 6). So, though the amounts allocated to mission-based funding have grown on average 5-10% annually over the past twenty years (SACAIS 2021a), community groups have decried that the absolute number remains too small. Median support per organization in 2019-2020 was $110,930 (SACAIS 2021a). As the population, and their needs, continue to grow, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic, community organizations are strained (Observatoire de l'ACA 2022). In a survey of community organizations, they expressed missing approximately $132,835 per organization to confront the increased demand for their work, inflation, hiring and retention challenges, burnout, and the continued cost of adapting to COVID-19 (Observatoire de l'ACA 2022).

Research on this unique funding model reveals strengths and risks. On the one hand, it enhances the capacity of community organizations by covering staff and overhead, despite the clawbacks of neoliberalism (White 2012). The shift towards project-based funding across Canada has increased reporting and accountability requirements for organizations, while providing only short-term funding, which makes hiring, training, and retaining workers difficult and strenuous (Gibson, O'Donnell, and Rideout 2007). In this sense, multi-year mission-based funding arrangements can help organizations plan for the long-term and keep their activities focused on their mission. On the other hand, it can make them more vulnerable to the state and its funding

requirements (Dufour and Montigny 2020). Indeed, certain studies have found that the state's funding criteria have undermined oppositional politics that push for structural or systemic change, in favor of a service-delivery paradigm (Fontan et al. 2003; Orsini 2006; Lavoie 2012). However, other scholars argue that the community sector has, since the 1990s, managed to fight cooptation and mission capture (White 2012), maintaining a capacity for resistance and protest (Dufour and Montigny 2020). This unique institutional context, characterized by a militant political culture in ACA organizations, the state's recognition and funding of this work, and associational groupings to represent the sector to the state, creates a complex environment in which intersectional organizing takes place. Yet, very little research has focused on race and its intersections in the Quebec model.

iv. Intersectionality and State-Society Relations in Canada/Quebec

The treatment of intersectionality—specifically race and other intersecting identities—in the literature on state-society relations and social movements in Canada, remains limited. Canadian research has been helpful in explaining the emergence and influence of social movements, though as Miriam Smith notes, Canadian politics has not paid nearly enough attention to "the structuring impact of colonialism and racialized power relations in Canadian society." (Smith 2014) Furthermore, though the literature on the neo-corporatist Quebec model and the province's unique approach to funding the community sector shines a light on a novel arrangement, intersectional organizers have not featured prominently in this scholarship. In his research on Quebec governance, Montpetit (2007) does note, however, that corporatist policy networks can be exclusive of actors at the margin, though he does not specify which actors are at the margin and how race and its intersection with other identities might factor into these exclusions.

Some scholars do point out that race, and the question of who belongs to the "we" the community sector claims to represent, has always been contested within community groups (Dufour and Montigny 2020). However, Dufour and Pagé (2020, 222) note that unlike in other provinces, "these contestations were mostly voiced by individuals instead of organizations." Community organizations have been accused of remaining homogenous, and tensions have erupted in recent years as racialized groups, especially feminists of color, reject this homogeneity in favor of intersectional claims (Dufour and Montigny 2020). In parallel, the history of North American cities is rife with instances of the state undermining, if not destroying, the social capital and community organizations that supported poor racialized residents (Cohen 2001). Montreal has not escaped this fate, as the case of the Negro Community Centre (NCC), undermined by municipal housing policies and the construction of the Ville-Marie Expressway, illustrates (High 2017). A rare study on race in the Montreal community sector by Lavoie (2012) finds a preponderance of racially blind discourse in white-led community organizations, a framing that is rewarded through government funding focused on residents of color as "different and needy" (Lavoie 2012, 245). Lavoie also notes the tendency to individualize differences instead of adopting a systemic analysis of race as power (Lavoie 2012). Overall, though the treatment of intersectionality, specifically with regards to race, in state-society relations in Canada, Quebec, and Montreal remains limited, existing scholarship suggests tension and exclusion. Before diving into the analysis from the ground, I turn to the literature on the second component of the research question: people power.

II. Power from below

Power is among the most complex concepts in political science and one of the most contested in the genealogy of Western thought. In the words of Talcott Parsons, there is "a notable lack of agreement about its specific definition" (Parsons 1963, 232). Weber described power as

the probability that an actor will be able to carry out their will despite resistance (Weber 1978) while Dahl (1957) conceived of power as getting someone to do something they would not otherwise do. Castells understood power as "the relational capacity that enables certain social actors to asymmetrically influence the decisions of other actors in ways that favor the empowered actors' will, interests, and values" (Castells 2016). While endorsing the view of power as overcoming resistance, Lukes (Lukes 1974) introduced the "three faces of power", which shifted the power debate from what power is to analyses of how it is exercised (Baaz, Lilja, and Vinthagen 2017). The first face of power is similar to Dahl's definition. It concerns getting someone to behave per one's interests. The second face of power leans on Bachrach and Baratz's (1962) theorizing and concerns the power to set the agenda and decide what is discussed. Third, he introduces "ideological power" or the capacity to set the norms or influence how people think of problems and solutions, thereby shaping their preferences. Foucault's later theorizing on disciplinary power moved the analysis even further beyond visible or behavioral impacts, agenda-setting or ideological power, locating power within systems, embedded in rules and procedures, that lead to self-regulation and compliance with social norms (Foucault 1978). These conceptions of power are useful in understanding "power-over"—power that exerts a force on other people's behaviors, preferences, and bodies.

But how then does this relate to the actions of people organizing from below? Some theories of power-over shine light on the aims movement organizers might adopt when another party or group controls resources the movement may need to achieve their vision of change (Ganz 2018). For instance, they may deploy power to set the agenda or influence social norms. Power-over theories also touch on the peculiar position of movements striving for liberation: they may be

aiming to exert power over certain actors, be it policymakers, the police, or the public, while simultaneously being constrained by structural forces.

However, conceptions of "power over" come short of accounting for the capacity of groups—in particular those most marginalized—to effect change. The power of social movements, activism, and the actions of people organizing from below is closer to "power-with." Feminist scholars like Nancy Hartsock (1983) and Amy Allen (1998) have suggested that while 'power over' echoes masculinist notions of domination, feminists should embrace power as constructive, communitarian, and empowering. Organizational scholar Mary-Parker-Follet (1942) has underscored the importance of power-with to implement changes in work, while in political theory, Hanna Arendt conceives of power as "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert" (Arendt 1970, 44). Combining accounts of power-with, while acknowledging the dual nature of power-over, Abizadeh puts forth this useful definition of power as the "capacity to effect outcomes, with the assistance of others, despite the resistance of yet others, within a given structural context." (Abizadeh 2021) These accounts of power in political, feminist, and organization theory provide grounds for conceiving of power as the capacity of groups to effect change.

Though the social movement literature has primarily studied social movement emergence, success, and failure rather than theorizing the power of movements per se, there are some exceptions. Sydney Tarrow does evoke power from below in his book *Power in Movement*. Although he does not offer a definition or theorization of power per say, he nonetheless states that "ordinary people have power because they challenge power holders, produce solidarities, and have meaning to particular populations, groups, situations, and national cultures." (Tarrow 1994, 8). More direct accounts of power from below, or people power also exist. In political sociology, the emphasis has tended to be on process, bridging the study of grassroots organizing and social

movements to study empirically how groups build people power. Meanwhile critical scholars who theorize on how to achieve collective liberation raise normative arguments about where to direct people power. Both are relevant for this project. For this reason, I separate the following section, as well as my empirical analysis, between building and deploying power. Drawing a distinction between building and deploying people power allows the separation of process-based research (how to build power) and purpose-based theorizing (what pathways to deploy power), which is not only critical to answering my research question but offers a new framework for social movement research on people power.

i. Building People Power

Traditional accounts of power in political science and social movement research emphasize the state's power-over citizens, conceptualized in Weberian terms as deriving from the monopoly over the legitimate use of violence (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). As such, the state has been the evident and inevitable target of social movement activity in much of the political process tradition of social movement scholarship (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). But if our understanding of power moves beyond merely power-over, and tends to the capacity of groups to effect change, then what enables collectives to do so?

The Roots of People Power

Groups, organizations, or collectives leverage different sources to build their power (Battilana and Casciaro 2021). Some may opt for expert power by positioning themselves publicly as knowledge bearers, an inherently elitist strategy, only accessible to those who can be recognized as experts by dominant institutions. Lobbying is one example of the ways groups leverage expert power to influence the state. Others may opt for positional power by applying to join working groups or obtaining jobs that might provide them a seat at the decision-making table. But the power

of the powerless, of those who are marginalized by power hierarchies and thus control fewer resources, is conceptualized differently. Indeed, what makes people power distinct is its overwhelming reliance on the inherent value of people banding together as its base of power. In *Prisms of the People*, Han, McKenna, and Oyakawa (2021) refer to this as an independent source of power, "one rooted in accountability to an authentic constituency" rather than power "that is dependent on access to decision-makers." (99). Frances Fox Piven (2008) offers a theory of power from below anchored in the interdependence between the oppressor and the oppressed. By virtue of their existence in the social system, people inherently have power. The marginalized, when banded together, can build electoral power as a voting bloc, they may also be workers whom organizations and society depend on for a functioning economy (labor power), they may be renters whom landlords depend on (tenant power), and at minimal they are residents of a community whose "acquiescence in the normal patterns of civic life" is necessary for order to be maintained (Piven 2008, 10). In other words, recognizing that those who are at the bottom of various social hierarchies determine "the shape, texture, and boundaries of the dominant order and its associated privileged communities," (Iton 2008, 3) entails that even the disadvantaged within a social system can have a measure of power over those who depend on their cooperation to sustain the status quo (Piven 2008, 5).

The scholar and renowned union organizer, Jane McAlevey, however, notes that the mere existence of interdependence does not guarantee it will be transformed into power (McAlevey 2016). She argues that what makes place-based organizing, say in faith centers or workplaces, promising is that it facilitates the coordination of people who otherwise might struggle to organize given the challenge of coordinating large groups of people. Similarly, the literature is quick to specify that the mere accumulation of resources is no guarantee of power (Ganz 2000; Han,

McKenna, and Oyakawa 2021; Rahman and Gilman 2019; McCarthy and Zald 1977). For instance, service-based organizations like shelters or soup kitchens are not automatically building power because they serve large quantities of people. To build people power, interdependence and organizing must intersect. Individual resources must be transformed into collective power. In that process, organizing practice, organizational structure, and leadership matter.

Organizing, not Merely Mobilizing

According to their research into American social movements of, by, and for low-income constituencies of color, Han, McKenna, and Oyakawa (2021) find that constituency-building practices are the cornerstone of building people power. Fostering strong relationships, generating bridging identities, and distributing strategic decision-making enables the membership to feel ownership over the movement, increasing the movement's capacity to deploy power when needed (Han, McKenna, and Oyakawa 2021). This relates directly to the distinction between mobilizing and organizing. Long before scholars put forth this distinction, the Black Power activist and pan-Africanist Stokely Carmichael (later Kwame Ture) spoke of it. Indeed, in expressing a sentiment he would reiterate many times in reflecting on the 1960s (The Black Scholar 1997), he said:

> *"We must come to know the difference between organization and mobilization because the enemy will use mobilization to demobilize us! Mobilization is easy. Very, very easy. […] Any time there's one little act of injustice, we can blow it up and we'll find people to come and make some mass demonstration around it […] And this is what mobilization does, it mobilizes people around issues. Those of us who are revolutionaries are not concerned about issues. We're concerned with the system […] one of the characteristics of mobilization is that it is temporary. Organization is permanent and eternal."* ("Kwame Ture on Mobilization & Organization - YouTube" n.d.)

According to McAlevey mobilizing and organizing have different theories of power, strategies, and people focus (McAlevey 2016). She casts the former as primarily elite-driven: nonprofit staff or activists set goals, prioritize campaigns, and galvanize grassroots activists who are already committed to the cause. On the other hand, organizing, in her view, is mass, inclusive, and collective. It prioritizes sustained and coordinated actions and targets organic leaders from within a constituency who are then constantly expanding the base of supporters among regular people who may never have been engaged before (McAlevey 2016). For Hahrie Han, the distinction boils down to how to use organizational resources (Han 2014). Mobilizers focus on single-issue, temporary, and often transactional participation, like attending a protest or casting a vote, while organizers build the capacity of members over time while strengthening their ties to each other. This builds a base of support, a constituency that is engaged over time (Han 2016). Tarrow (2009) also makes the point that a protest is not a social movement, social movements must be durable and organized. Sabeel Rahman and Hollie Russon Gilman call this "civic capacity," "a durable capacity for engaging in collective action, building coalitions, mobilizing resources, and exercising influence through organization building." (Rahman and Gilman 2019, 52) Such sustained organizing, they argue, is necessary to stand a chance at confronting dominant, powerful actors who are fighting to preserve the status quo.

Organizational Structure

For Marshall Ganz (2000), building people power requires developing what he terms "strategic capacity" (Ganz 2009, 54). Strategic capacity is the ability to transform the resources a movement has into the power it needs to reach the change it envisions. Concretely, it entails access to salient knowledge about a context, the capacity to learn and innovate, and levels of motivation. He identifies a host of criteria that influence an organization or group's strategic capacity. On the

leadership front, who the leaders are and what life experiences, networks, and repertoires of collective actions they bring to the table matter. Leadership composed of insiders from the community and outsiders, strong and weak ties, and knowledge of diverse action repertoires, he finds, are more likely to develop effective strategy. Organizationally, having regular, open, and authoritative deliberation, resource flows from multiple constituencies, and clear accountability structures towards a constituency also increase the likelihood of strategic capacity (Ganz 2009; 2000).

Cathy Cohen (2001) also sets out parameters for intervening institutions (community organizations) to build collective power. First, they must be put under the democratic control of the community. They must also be built into existing local networks and infrastructure. Finally, they must be attuned to the needs and realities of each community, looking beyond geographic boundaries by drawing specific attention to social identities like race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality (Cohen 2001). Overall, these scholars highlight critical elements that enable organizations to be vehicles of people power. They must develop their strategic capacity, through leadership that represents diverse theories of change, networks, and lived experience. Incorporating accountability mechanisms and democratic governance are key in addition to sustaining ties to their community and grounding their approach in their community's social identities.

The Risk of Institutionalization

That said, a stream of research also underscores the dangers of social movements coordinated through organizations. Indeed, they face the risk of becoming institutionalized and weakening their grassroots radical stances (Tarrow 1994; Snow and Soule 2009). Building on Robert Michels' "iron law of oligarchy," which predicts that over time, organizations tend to adopt

more moderate practices, as they shift from pursuing revolutionary action to protecting their interests and security (Michels 1915), Piven and Cloward (Piven and Cloward 1977), for instance, found that the American welfare rights' movement lost its power of disruption as it channeled most of its energy toward organization-building. Though there have been empirical studies supporting Michels' theory (Rucht 1999), today, scholars consider it a tendency rather than an inevitability (Walker and Martin 2018). Indeed, a subset of the literature has investigated the factors that prevent institutionalization, finding that organizational design, internal culture, member socialization, and empowerment practices can allow contestation to remain central and a movement's membership to keep the organization accountable to its radical roots (Osterman 2006). Hybrid models have emerged to balance the stability afforded by institutionalized organizations with the radical culture embodied by decentralized militant groups. For instance, umbrella organizations may provide general guidance and support, while decentralized, local groups decide how to translate the center's strategy into the local context, with the autonomy to adopt whichever tactics are deemed useful (Tarrow 1994). Overall, this literature helps highlight the organizational foundations of building people power as well as its risks.

ii. Deploying People Power

Once groups have consolidated their sources the power, another critical element factors into understanding their theories of change: how they opt to deploy their power. Though rarely addressed in the movement literature in political sociology, as it tends toward normative debates, the question of the purpose of people power is central to a project on the strategies organizers adopt to challenge oppressive systems. The political sociology literature on social movements has advanced our understanding of how movements mobilize participants, how they emerge and are sustained, how they interact with their environment, and what consequences, outcomes, or impacts

they generate (Snow and Soule 2009). For the most part, this literature has taken for granted that the goal of social movements is to influence the state (Armstrong and Bernstein 2008). Yet, this emphasis on process and outcome in social movement scholarship masks differences between organizers and scholars concerning the direction of people power.

Some research on people power deployed by right-wing formations and anti-democratic and fascist movements, nonetheless, exposes the various directions people power can take. For instance, the renowned community organizer, Saul Alinsky's book *Rules for Radicals* became a pillar of organizing for the Tea Party (McAlevey 2016). Additionally, the insights on building power can partly help explain the power of movements like the National Rifle Association (NRA), which boasts high levels of engagement in part because it fosters a strong sense of community and collective identity (Han and Barnett-Loro 2018) or the emergence of fascist regimes like the Nazis through community associations (Satyanath, Voigtländer, and Voth 2017). Since people power can and has been deployed to fortify or establish unjust power hierarchies, the debates about where to direct people power matter to the study of intersectional organizing.

Indeed, given this project's focus on intersectional organizers—organizers who challenge the structures of oppression, and fight for social justice and emancipation—it is necessary to explore what pathways are put forth for deploying power towards liberation. Hence, I lean on critical scholars who have tended to the normative implications of organizing for collective liberation. Scholars of Indigenous Studies and in the Black radical tradition provide particularly rich theorizing on the path to liberation. The following section turns to four pathways for deploying power that are recurrent in critical scholarship and social movement practice and addresses some of the key debates that surround each. They provide context for the ways the intersectional

organizers I interview conceive of the pathways to liberation. It is worth cautioning that though they are presented separately, they are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Political Power

The question of whether people power is inherently about political power or inclusion into the existing order is fundamental—and contentious. Beyond the classic question of whether "change from within" works, this debate evokes a deeper question: whether the state and its institutions should be the target of social movements striving for liberation.

Most accounts of people power and movement organizing center on political power. Indeed, much of the literature on movements in political sociology biases visible forms of power in the case selection for the movements under study. Prominent pioneers of the literature on social movements and contentious politics more broadly have certainly emphasized the government as the target of social movements. Tilly considered collective action as necessarily involving "politics in the sense that governments of one sort or another figure somehow in the claim making" (Tilly 2004, 3) while McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) use similar language to define contentious politics. The scholar of non-violence resistance, Erica Chenoweth, also defines nonviolent resistance as "a method of struggle in which unarmed people confront an adversary by using collective action—including protests, demonstrations, strikes, and noncooperation—to build power and achieve political goals." (Chenoweth 2020) Scholars of non-violent action typically count as successful campaigns that lead to a government falling or the gaining of territory, both of which are state facing. In their 2021 study on the power of grassroots organizing, Han et al. (2021) pick cases that have successfully deployed influence in interactions with the state (e.g., policymaking or elections), though they note that although political power is the visible metric for case selection, these movements have often built and deployed other types of power that are less

observable before. In other words, state-facing influence is the tip of the iceberg. Nonetheless, this tendency to study observable forms of power has long roots in political science (Fung 2020) and skews the study of people power towards measurable wins rather than less observable, or quantifiable changes that may be just as crucial for achieving liberation.

The dominance of the state in the literature on grassroots organizing, contentious politics, and social movements masks a debate both among social justice activists and certain scholars, especially critical scholars, concerning the normative implications of deploying power to obtain gains from the state. Scholars in the Black radical tradition have grappled with the question of inclusion into the state and the necessary conditions for true liberation. Juliet Hooker argues, for instance, that the aftermath of slavery has never provided meaningful emancipation or redress; hence Black people have been the perpetual losers in American democracy (Hooker 2015). More representation—Black cops, members of congress, or even a Black President—has not transformed the racialized character of the U.S. state (Hooker 2015). The Indigenous scholar Leanne Simpson similarly advocates against a politics of inclusion in the state. Rather, she centers the idea of generative refusal, a stark refusal of the colonial institutions and their solutions, and the creation of alternatives that meet Indigenous needs. She evokes the need to "do the alternatives over and over until we get it right." (Simpson 2017, 227) Only from a place of power, having spearheaded alternatives that work, can or should Indigenous groups engage with the colonial state. As for Taiaike Alfred, he recalls, "somewhere along the journey from the past to the future, we forgot that our goal was to reconnect with our lands and to preserve our harmonious cultures and respectful ways of life. It is these things that are the true guarantee of peace, health, strength, and happiness—of survival." (Alfred 2005, 31) Turning towards the government for political power, he argues, will never meet these needs.

Other scholars in the Black radical tradition nonetheless acknowledge the importance of interacting with the state, yet under specific conditions. Abolitionists have introduced the notion of non-reformist reforms (Cullors 2019), which "reduce the power of an oppressive system while illuminating the system's inability to solve the crises it creates" (Berger, Kaba, and Stein 2017). As such, non-reformist reforms allow an engagement with the state, but one that shifts control over valuable resources—such as budgets or oversight powers—to communities. Angela Davis (2011) urges creating new freedom dreams by envisioning new democratic arrangements: "future democracies, democracies grounded in socialism, democracies in which those social problems that have enabled the emergence of the prison-industrial-complex will be, if not completely solved, at least encountered and acknowledged'' (Davis 2011, 48). Overall, these accounts of political power refuse to rely on the state as the *sole* receptacle of people power, engaging with the state only as part of a broader emancipatory vision. These alternative visions highlight two pathways, in particular, for deploying power for liberation: towards cultural aims and to prefigure the types of alternatives that meet a community's needs.

Cultural Power

Influencing culture is central to many accounts of liberation. Empirical social movement scholars have also recognized the ability of movements to deploy power to challenge narratives, and influence ideals, values, and norms in society (Fung 2020). Indeed, though the dominant measure of movement success often remains influence over the state, political sociology scholarship has recognized the impact of movements on cultural norms, including in public opinion, language use, media, and popular culture (Amenta and Polletta 2019).

The importance of culture is central to some accounts of Indigenous freedom. Indigenous resurgence itself is a form of resistance to the settler-colonial logic of erasure and displacement

(Alfred and Corntassel 2005). In a context where the Canadian state's legitimacy is derived from conceiving of Indigenous issues as "settled" or of Indigenous people as artifacts of the past, the reassertion and practice of Indigenous cultures become acts of creative contention (Barker 2015). However, such an emphasis on cultural resurgence is not a mere endorsement of the politics of recognition, which scholars like Leanne Simpson argue can easily be co-opted by neoliberalism and multiculturalism and divorced from the radical assertion of Indigenous nationhoods and sovereignty (Simpson 2017). On the path toward decolonization, Alfred affirms that "there is great danger in attempting to negotiate structural changes to our relationships before our minds and hearts are cleansed of the stains of colonialism." (Alfred 2005, 180) He argues first for nothing short of a spiritual revolution that reaffirms Indigenous ways of being, knowing, Indigenous cultures, and languages (Alfred, 2005).

Scholars and activists in the Black radical tradition also affirm that culture is political, or, as Richard Iton puts it, "the intimacy…of the poetic and the politic." (Iton 2008, 91) Patrice Cullors, a co-instigator of #BlackLivesMatter, also writes in a Harvard Law Review article on the abolition of the police, that "abolition must be a cultural intervention," (Cullors 2019) while Mariame Kaba quotes abolitionist organizer Paula Rojas, who writes, "the cops are in our heads and hearts" (Kaba 2021, 169), meaning that to abolish the carceral state, we must rewire the carceral logic in our heads and hearts. That said, Black politics are not reduced merely to cultural practices. Rather, culture is embedded across forms of political intervention from the formal to the informal and beyond. In fact, in evoking the importance of culture, the abolitionist scholar Ruth Wilson Gilmore condemns the decoupling that has occurred of the cultural from the political, stripping cultural interventions of their radical political roots (Gilmore 2011). Overall, these

abolitionist scholars stress the necessity of changing how Black people are perceived, valued, and treated (Maynard 2018) as part and parcel of any strategy for achieving liberation.

Community Power

Another critical pathway for deploying people power for liberation is towards and for the community. This entails deploying power toward creating community-based alternatives to dominant systems. It consists of creating mutual aid networks and fostering relational links that build the communities resilience and survival. By organizing—not merely mobilizing—a community, groups can build people power, which can then be deployed to meet the community's own needs, through say, a community garden to fight food insecurity, or civilian response teams to serve as alternatives to the police. McLeod explains this theory of social transformation as it relates to law enforcement: "These efforts are small-scale attempts to prefigure different relationships between people, to develop meaningful and thick mutual support networks, to constitute real alternatives to police and jail intervention." (McLeod 2019, 1628) The emphasis here is on creating institutions that prefigure a new way of organizing society that better meets the community's needs.

The debate between directing people power towards cultural and community interventions or towards influencing the state is by no means settled. Many social movements continue to grapple with these questions, as are scholars. My aim in this section was not to adjudicate between, say turning away or engaging with the state, or argue for a normative stance on the most fruitful path to liberation. Rather, in laying out some of the arguments, I aim to provide fuel for the interpretive journey ahead. The choice of where to direct people power is often a collective, strategic decision, that has been influenced by genealogies of resistance, cultural norms about the way to effect change and local deliberations. Hence, the arguments put forth in this section, which point to

alternatives to state-facing political power and consider the importance of cultural and community power, are useful for interpreting how intersectional organizers in Montreal conceive of people power and the pathways to liberation. Before moving to the analysis though, I turn to the methodology of this project.

Part II - Insights from the Ground

I. Fieldwork Methodology

i. Researcher Access and Positionality

I am invested in a philosophy of research grounded in the belief in a dialogic exercise of inquiry, whereby the researcher is conscious and attuned to their impact on the research agent as they co-construct and co-generate data through purposive conversation (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2013; Bohman 2021). Thus, it was crucial for me not only to be able to interview participants but to be considered trustworthy. Thankfully, through my own organizing, I had either crossed paths or collaborated with nearly half of the participants. For the rest, I was grateful to receive introductions from colleagues and friends. I was nevertheless concerned that they may view me as an outsider and temper their views or self-censor. Despite my concerns, I encountered an openness and willingness to share ideas and insights. I believe the power dynamics, which cast me as the inquisitive student and them as experts, provided the space for them to defend their theories of change.

Furthermore, as a native bilingual in French and English, I was able to fluidly traverse both sides of this city's linguistic divide, which still structures the community sector. As the francophone or anglophone ecosystems can be siloed, have different organizing cultures, and

engage with the Quebec and Canadian institutional environments from different social positions, this access provided this project with additional interpretive texture.

However, not fitting into a clear box, linguistically, culturally, or racially to some extent, could influence how participants perceived me, as never fully an insider. Given the centrality of intersectionality and race-related questions in the interviews, I was well aware that, especially for racialized organizers, they may have adapted their language because they were not speaking with a peer. Despite our existing relationships or introductions through close mutual connections, which acted as conduits for trust, the pattern of race-of-interviewer effects is well established (Krysan and Couper 2003; Sanders 1999; Gunaratnam 2003). Being perceived as a white woman—when white women/people have too often been detractors of intersectionality—could have tamed some of the participant's stances. Yet, I have reason to believe this was not overly acute, as most of the women of color, for instance, felt comfortable enough to denounce whiteness or the behavior of certain white people in their interviews with me.

Finally, I was often perceived as someone who understood Quebec's cultural codes sufficiently to understand the subtext and the context, but a "new" person in the ecosystem, given my recent return to Montreal from living in the United States. This position allowed me the freedom to ask even basic contextual questions and put the participants in the position of explaining the nuances of this context to me, which helped further contextualize their experiences.

ii. Data Generation

Since the topic of this research is not usually discussed in daily activism, where organizers are typically tied up in execution tasks, and given the topic can be prone to groupthink or peer pressure, the one-on-one medium is well-suited to exploring conceptions of people power. Hence, the data for this research was generated through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. I conducted

fifteen interviews for this project, each of which lasted around one hour and a half and took place online (Microsoft Teams) and in person in Montreal between February and May 2022.

Two of these are outlier interviews, as they were with former government bureaucrats who worked in the government secretariat that oversees funding for ACA community organizations. One worked there until just after the 2001 policy was enacted, while the other continued long after and still works in the Ministry, though on a different portfolio. These two interviews were merely informational, hence were distinct in tone and duration. I will focus on the thirteen remaining interviews hereafter, as they are the core of the project's analytical focus.

My approach to interviewing was inspired by Joe Soss' (2014) account of in-depth interviews, which make space for customization and a tailored interviewing sequence that follows the train of the conversation. As such, though I had a similar set of questions for each interview, which I adapted slightly based on each person's organizing experience, I also followed the train of the conversation set by my interlocutor. In Appendix A, I have included the basic interview guide that served as a starting point for each interview.

I initially adopted a purposive sampling strategy, identifying people and organizations who were pertinent to my research question. I purposefully set out to interview people in both francophone and anglophone spaces, with different organizing approaches, and who organized in different communities. Leveraging my definition of intersectional organizers—activists who emphasize the systemic nature of social inequality and who center the realities of intersectionally marginalized subjects—I developed five loose criteria to help guide participant selection. Twelve of the thirteen people interviewed had at least two of the criteria. For the specific breakdown, I have included a summary table of the criteria in Appendix B. The criteria were: whether the person was racialized, a woman, worked in predominantly racialized communities, had intersectional

feminist organizing experience, and whether they adopted a systemic vision of change (i.e., challenging systems of oppression). I generated my list of participants through my review of the literature, my organizing experience, and through informational discussions about my thesis and intersectional organizing in Montreal (see list of these initial meetings in footnote below).[2] The thirteen people I had the opportunity to interview for the project are broadly recognized as leaders in their own movements. Each was provided with the option to remain fully identified, completely confidential, or disclose certain identifying elements. Nonetheless, I refrain from using any names and refer only to generic roles to describe the participants.

In keeping with the study's definition of intersectional organizing, twelve of the interview participants had a systemic analysis of change. Eleven participants worked in racialized communities (the other two organize across race and class groups), nine participants were racialized, eight identified as women, and six had specific intersectional feminist organizing experience. Eight of the thirteen were anchored in the French community, while five were embedded more strongly in the English community. Overall, the participants spanned the antiracist, feminist, climate justice, immigration, anti-poverty, and anti-islamophobia movements.

[2] While developing this project, I had the chance to connect with scholars and practitioners alike for informal informational chats that greatly inspired my research. I am indebted to them. Thank you Pascale Dufour, professor of political science at the University of Montreal, who specializes in collective action and social movement research in Quebec and comparatively; Laurence Bherer also in political science at the University of Montreal, who specializes in public governance and the relationship between citizens and the state in Quebec; Tatiana Garakani a professor à l'École nationale d'administration publique (ENAP) on her research on intersectional activists in Montréal; Elizabeth McKenna a post-doc at SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University and the P3 Lab as well as the co-author of *Prisms of the People: Power and Organizing in 21st Century America* (University of Chicago Press, 2021); Kimberley Manning, Associate Professor of political science at Concordia and former Principal of the Simone de Beauvoir Institute; Alejandra Bravo, the founder of the Power Lab and the Director of Leadership and Training at the Broadbent Institute, and Jon McPhedran Waitzer the national coordinator for Resource Movement.

iii. Data Analysis

My analysis of how the participants made sense of their theories of change in this institutional environment involved "reading" the data multiple times in different ways (Ann 2017). First, every interview was recorded and then transcribed. I then coded each transcript thematically line-by-line using the qualitative data analysis software, Nvivo. This analysis of patterns was the first layer of interpretation (Ann 2017). The most recurrent codes provided some indication as to the most salient elements of the institutional context for intersectional organizers and indicated recurrent strategies for building and deploying power. I used these codes and their frequency to support my analysis. Second, I returned to the notes I had taken during the interviews, which not only highlighted key thematic elements, but body language, pauses, and non-verbal gestures. Leaning on the codes as maps, I re-read each interview in conversation with my own notes. In this reading, I was especially attuned to words that were used repetitively, silences or omissions, and stories that conveyed meaning. This helped me create a succinct summary for each interview of the key elements, arguments, logics, phrases, and stories that appeared salient to answering my research question. The third step consisted first of reading the interviews intertextually to triangulate the information and to cross-validate key points. Second, I repeated this exercise in dialogue this time between the theory and the co-generated data to explore how they complemented each other or diverged. The final step of my data analysis consisted in conducting member checks (Schwartz-Shea 2014), whereby I shared my representations of the participant's words and arguments with them, to ensure I was properly conveying their perspectives. For interviews conducted in French, it was also the opportunity to validate that my translations were faithful to the ideas expressed in French.

These steps allowed me to interpret the experiential knowledge of intersectional organizers, which revealed significant insights in response to this study's question—how Montreal intersectional organizers make sense of their institutional environment and strategize for liberation in this context. To share the results of this interpretive method, I divide the following analysis section into two parts: i) institutional conduits and constraints, and ii) people power in action.

II. Institutional Conduits and Constraints

This study revealed three key institutions that were most salient to intersectional organizers in Montreal: the province's funding policy, the community sector, and the media ecosystem. The interview evidence reveals an environment of scarce government funding, which pushes intersectional organizers to seek out other funding streams, a concertation model in which they occupy outside-insider postures, and a media ecosystem that can be used as a tool, but with a sharp double-edged sword. Identifying these components of the institutional environment is critical to understanding what enables and constrains intersectional organizers in Montreal and how they adapt to this context.

i. Funding Policy

Intersectional organizers in Montreal must contend with important funding constraints, that have lasting implications for their ability to organize, build power, and fight for social justice. Though Quebec has a unique funding model in North America, providing unrestricted funds to support organizing, this type of funding remains out of grasp for many intersectional organizers. Only one of the organizations interviewed had received mission-related government funding—the oldest organization interviewed. Instead, many organizers mentioned "arriving too late for ACA" or that there was "a 10-year waiting list." A government bureaucrat who worked in the Secretariat that oversees funding for community groups, the *Secrétariat à l'Action Communautaire Autonome*

et aux Initiatives Sociales (SACAIS), explained that in the early 2000s when the fund was first created, it centralized funding to organizations that were already receiving government funding through other agencies. Their funding is renewed every three to five years, to lower the reporting requirements and provide long-term planning capacity to these organizations. In the words of the government bureaucrat, "except in the case of an organization closing or proven malfeasance, it is very rare that this funding is questioned or reduced." (Anonymous informant 2, 2022. Interview with government bureaucrat by author. May 30) The overall amount of funds dedicated to mission-based funding has grown on average 3.4% annually from 2010 to 2020, reaching $704,738,192, in total in 2019-2020 (SACAIS 2021b). Yet, the 3.4% average increase is coveted both by organizations that already obtain mission-based funding but that need more and by new organizations that have never qualified for mission-based funding. Hence, by design, timing plays a critical role in who obtains mission-based funding in Quebec. It is a novel funding program, but not only does it remain underfunded to meet the needs of the sector, it is accessible largely to "legacy" organizations. Hence, newer organizations, by default, are disadvantaged. Intersectional organizers are less likely to lead legacy organizations and rather have been at the forefront of building new groups that respond to the needs of their communities while striving to challenge oppressive systems.

Furthermore, on the ground, intersectional organizers noted inequalities in funding across racial lines. They related that white-led organizations were better funded than organizations led by Black and racialized organizers. Of course, many were quick to acknowledge that even white community organizations are chronically under-funded. To date, a systematic study of race and funding in Montreal's community sector has yet to be conducted, but multiple intersectional organizers interviewed, who combine decades of experience in the city's community sector, noted

the discrepancy. In analyzing the latest available data (2019-2020) on mission-based government funding, I found that only two organizations specifically targeting racialized populations received $119,553 each in mission-based funding that year, representing under 2% of total funds allocated (SACAIS 2021b). Organizers did acknowledge, nevertheless, that the assassination of George Floyd and subsequent Black Lives Matter protests, which some interviewees organized in Montreal, sent tremors of change through the Montreal ecosystem, and helped direct resources towards Black organizations. Government funding for the Black Coalition of Quebec, for instance, doubled from $52,430 in 2018-19 to $119,553 in 2019-2020 (SACAIS 2021b). Beyond government funding, multiple activists noted the importance of unions, which support leftist causes by providing social movements with access to jobs, space, funding, a platform, etc. Whereas certain pan-Canadian and Ontario unions have embedded intersectional analyses and issues in their work, in Quebec, the organizers shared that intersectional issues remain largely on the outside, only punctually included rather than recognized in deep solidarity.

Finally, ideational, and informational constraints also limit access to funding. One organizer mentioned having internalized the thinking that "they would never fund a group like us" both because they are a group comprised of immigrant youth and because they are challenging structures of oppression. These narratives about belonging acted as barriers to seeking funding in the first place. This was paired with a lack of knowledge about how to navigate the system and request funding. Finally, broader questions of affinity and identification also came up. The climate movement, or the labor union movement, could galvanize support because the white francophone majority could identify with the problem and join the mobilization. When it came to issues of racism, immigration, or Indigenous issues, I was told that they required more empathic stretching of the majority, which undermined support for the struggle.

Funding constraints undermine the capacity of intersectional organizers to build power because they prevent them from building stable organizations that survive in time. It undermines the longevity of their political actions. One example illustrates the pernicious consequence of relying solely on project-based funding when mission-based funding is not made available:

> *"The Table de Concertation sur le Racisme Systémique (TCRS) was finally shut down, in part because it lacked funding. The funding it did receive was linked to a specific project, that of holding a province-wide public consultation on systemic racism, which is complicated in a nascent organization that doesn't have general funding. Had unions or some other funder provided mission-based funding, simply to operate the TCRS, without requiring we run this massive project, we could have created a stable, lasting entity."*

On top of jeopardizing sustained organizing, the scarce funding environment creates competition between community organizations. Rather than showing a unified front to negotiate and demand more state funding, organizations individually lobby for their advancement, coming into competition with the rest, in a clientelist logic.

Faced with such an environment, organizers have developed strategies for overcoming these barriers. These range from applying for alternate sources of provincial funding, restraining their operating budget, and turning towards private foundations and the federal government. On one end of the spectrum, some organizers chose to decrease their budget as much as possible and be very selective with their funders to keep their mission first. An immigrant workers' organizer shared:

> *"Before, we used to rotate on employment insurance. There's a political question if the funding comes first, then the work comes second, and so for us, it's the work and then the funding."*

A climate justice organization was also very intentional with its choice of funders, agreeing to work only with those who are aligned with their mission to support climate activists pushing for a

transformation of society and its systems of oppression. Overall, the shift towards philanthropic and university funding was recurrent. Yet, in response to critiques on the left of philanthrocapitalist foundations and their intentions, one long-standing activist explained that, after so many years of unpaid work, the personal toll was significant. If a foundation wanted to fund them and provide good jobs to their community to address their needs, they would take the funds and do what they could to transform those resources into change.

One concern the move to philanthropy raises, however, is that philanthropic funding often requires organizations to register as charities with the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA). Despite a 2018 change in the law, allowing charities to conduct political advocacy in alignment with their mission, the prior restrictions on such activity can make charities hesitant to engage in political advocacy work. Hence, the CRA's position on civil society's role in politics stands in sharp contrast with the 2001 Quebec policy, which acknowledges the importance of funding groups that organize to hold the government accountable for the defense of collective rights (groups of women, youth, elderly, people with disabilities, tenants, etc.). The necessity of a CRA number can exert pressure on groups to appear apolitical, which can undermine their activist stance. One organizer summarized the tension well:

> *"You always have one foot in the wheel, because you're working in this system that's problematic, it's how you get out of it with what you get. That's the big question. It's a balancing act that you have to try to find."*

Finally, another group was clear, "we're just finding ways to do the model minority dance to an extent to get their [government] resources." They play the game, fit inside the box of "acceptability" just enough to be legitimated by the government and access funds.

ii. The Community Sector

During the interview process, I systematically asked organizers about their interactions with the community sector and its concertation model. A large proportion of organizers shared their experiences of exclusion when discussing whether they were part of a community or sectoral concertation table or coalition of groups ("regroupements"). A long-time organizer put it clearly:

> *"We actually had to force people to recognize us, to give us a seat at these tables, continually. We weren't just given this recognition, whereas other organizations receive it de facto."*

Yet another organizer in the feminist movement shared:

> *"They keep folks from the antiracist movement on the outside. They keep racialized folks on the outside…We may be ceremoniously invited to happy hour, but never to the main movement meetings."*

Echoing this sentiment, a Black feminist organizer explained that the experience of Black women in the feminist movement in Quebec is a cycle: they enter, they are traumatized, and they leave. As a result, it is like they were never there. White-led organizations, then, often lack a cultural, racial, and intersectional analysis. One organizer in a borough where nearly 50 percent of the population is racialized explained:

> *"We recently read through the action plan on intimate partner violence for our borough, and we were like shit. This is so white. Some angles, they just don't see. The whole intersectional reality does not exist. It is as if the reality of Black youth was not understood. If they can't even conceive of it, then how in the world are they supposed to develop appropriate services?"*

This organizer now serves on the consultative body developing the action plan, meaning she now has a seat at the table and can provide feedback on the action plan and other critical policy documents. This is an important step, but inclusion is not without its challenges. "We are often perceived as troublemakers on the concertation tables," shared another organizer. One organizer

is trying to gain admission on the board of the coalition of anglophone community centers, alongside the well-established legacy community centers in the Italian, Greek, and Jewish communities. She and the Board president have been framing the benefit to white organizations of including non-white communities as a way to increase their numeric weight and hopefully influence, as anglophone minorities in Quebec. Overall, many organizers noted the incoherence between the community sector's vocation to support marginalized populations and their treatment by the sector for doing just that.

Though in principle the concertation model provides a venue for community groups to build a concerted agenda and engage with the government from a place of power, on the ground, organizers raised concerns about the model's ability to lead to social transformation. First off, the Quebec model no longer seems to work the way it once may have. One organizer, who now consults with community groups across the province, shared that the concertation model no longer puts the community sector at a power advantage vis-à-vis the government. They observed that most organizations are now competing with their peers for public funds, rather than presenting a unified front. Echoing elements of Fontan et al. (2003) and Orsini (2006), the participant asked me, "Are you familiar with the expression, we do not bite the hand that feeds us? That's the community sector." Likewise, an organizer in the fight against police brutality attributed the silence of the borough's community sector following the murder of an unarmed youth of color to funding. "We used to say that funding acted, well it still does, like an anesthetic drug on community organizations." Here, the organizer's imagery of anesthesia speaks to the numbing effect of funding, that they felt induced community organizations to stay silent and resist solidarity. Hence, they could not publicly denounce the government and police. In describing the aftermath of the murder, they described:

"It was radio silence. It's as if all the institutionalized community sector actors closed their eyes to what had just occurred. They talked about other things when something huge had just happened. People poured into the streets, wreaked havoc. Did you not hear the anger? The message? Hello?!"

Another person I interviewed warned that when organizers spend more time on concertation tables or in meetings with funders, this is time they are not in the streets with people who are being racially profiled and beaten by the police. This can change the organization's direction and preoccupations.

Furthermore, the organizing norms in the Quebec community sector were mentioned by multiple organizers as a double-edged sword. Though they are critically democratic, they can also sap time and energy that would otherwise be directed towards action. In recounting their first experience working for an institution in the community sector, a concertation table, one organizer recalls having a poignant realization, "It was the first time I had found myself at the heart of a concertation process and I thought, shit, concertation is what we do so that we don't do revolution." They were taken aback by the time and energy expended on discussing, coming together, and consulting other actors. Yet another organizer shared their culture shock upon joining a legacy organization in the community sector:

"I was in total culture shock. I understood nothing. I was tired, so tired, the whole thing got on my nerves…board meetings that last a million hours, endless discussions, all the procedural elements. Ohh and consultation, consultation, consultation, to the point you lose track of what you are meant to do."

Though many emphasized the importance of democratic governance, the procedural heaviness and constant consultation are a far cry from the nimble organizing many have experience with, working outside the dominant leftist institutions in the city.

Finally, many organizers, especially intersectional feminists, mentioned that the political culture surrounding conflict made it difficult to work through differences, for instance on questions of intersectionality. Two strategies for dealing with conflict emerged from the interviews. The first is to try to discuss and reach a common accord. As the concertation model does at the societal level, they identified a political culture of consensus in the community space. The second, however, is conflict avoidance. "We have a hard time with conflict in Quebec." One organizer explained that disagreements were not aired in meetings, but passive aggression brewed nonetheless, creating tensions. Recalling her experience in a feminist group, another organizer shared, "women would resign on procedural questions to avoid substantive debates." Though some nuanced their analyses, mentioning that in France, where conflict is tackled head-on publicly, it makes for an at-times "violent political culture," they were unanimous in stating the importance of addressing conflict head-on. One organizer expressed, "I think fights are the best way to resolve conflicts. Let's confront one another." Conflict avoidance especially on questions of identity left unresolved and misunderstood the actual problem at hand, be it racism or islamophobia, for instance.

The experiential evidence from these interviews reveals just how embedded intersectional organizers are in the community sector. They necessarily engage with the concertation model and legacy institutions but doing so often comes with friction. Not only did they share instances of outright exclusion and discrimination, but their experiences in the institutionalized left also triggered a form of culture shock for some, as the procedural heaviness contrasted with their nimble organizing. Finally, the culture of conflict avoidance inhibited coalition work and left tensions unaddressed. Overall, then, they engaged with the community sector but always from an outsider-insider posture.

iii. The Media Ecosystem

Though not central to the literature on the institutional environment, many organizers identified the media as salient to their work. As with the other institutions, the organizers depicted their relationship with the media as one of co-dependence and critical engagement. On the one hand, the media emerged as an inevitable actor in the fight for social justice. One organizer framed it clearly: "The media speaks to the masses, and the masses are those whom we have to convince." Both anglophone and francophone organizations noted the use of the media as a tool in their activism. In fact, organizers on both sides found the media in Quebec more accessible than elsewhere. In comparing Montreal with Toronto, one organizer said, "[In Toronto] there's not people running around, radicals writing op-eds all the time in major newspapers." Though, others were quick to nuance this accessibility:

> "*I quickly noticed when activists are given the microphone, and especially racialized people, it is staged. You are pigeonholed. Our speech is repressed to the only posture that is legible to the media. If you wish to add complexity or nuance, forget it. Since it's scripted, they let us in. But will they listen? The question for me, at this point, is no longer 'Can the subaltern speak?' but rather, will society listen? And even more, are we willing to change?"*[3]

While racialized activists may have gained access to the media, they feel they cannot speak freely and frankly on these platforms. Alluding to the risk of speaking forthrightly, one organizer recounted:

> *"I remember hearing the Mayor of Toronto speak at the time, saying that we lived in a society where anti-black racism created by different governments exists. And I was like 'shit'. And this*

[3] The participant was referencing the seminal essay in postcolonial studies by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," originally published in 1988 in the edited collection by Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture.*

was five or six years ago, and he wasn't even an advocate for anti-racism! And I was like, in Quebec, if we say these things, we get taken down by white supremacists."

In addition to feeling instrumentalized, others brought up racist caricatures and full-blown smear campaigns. In discussing the media's coverage of the turmoil following the murder of an unarmed man of color, an organizer related:

> "*Rather than a riot, I prefer to call that turmoil a popular revolt, because the term riot erases the political dimension. When we look at the media, they were talking about riots, street gangs, people who came to wreak havoc. They eliminated the political dimension: It was people who were saying, enough with racial profiling, we knew one day the police would take one of ours. Enough. Now we go to the streets.*"

Subsequent actions the organizer and their group took—organizing protests or community events, for instance—were met with the same caricatures in the media. "The front page of the Journal de Montréal [the province's most-read daily paper] would say 'risk of violence.' They would be there, waiting for something to happen, disappointed when it didn't." The TVA and Journal de Montréal networks were mentioned frequently as fueling caricatures and smear campaigns. Their treatment of racialized activists acts as a disincentive for others to come forward and claim space in the media: "we see how they treat the two or three people who do [come forward], and the rest back out, not wanting to endure such treatment." In recounting a workshop organized specifically for women of color at a large feminist organization, one organizer shared, "the next day, it was on TVA: they were calling the [the organization] racist for holding an event for women of color only." Though most continue to utilize the media in their organizing, it is a double-edged sword. The constant need to deconstruct stereotypes and bias, while enduring harsh treatment by some media organizations, had many organizers feeling exasperated about doing the same dance over and over again.

Faced with these institutional conduits and constraints, my interviews revealed a rich portrait of the ways intersectional organizers conceive of building and deploying power to challenge the systems that perpetuate marginalization in Montreal. I turn to these in the following section.

III. Intersectional People Power in Action

i. *Building Power*

Both Piven's (2008) account of people power anchored in interdependence and Han et al.'s (2021) emphasis on constituency-building practices were reflected in the interviews. Nevertheless, the insights shared by the intersectional organizers draw attention to three critical themes: the necessity to resist the threat of institutionalization, the importance of democratized governance in movement organizing, and finally, the tremendous burden of organizing for power without adequate resources and support. This emphasis on health impacts draws out the human labor necessary for organizing social change, a critical contribution to the literature on organizing and power-building. It also helps explain why mobilizing endures, despite not necessarily building power over time.

First off, Frances Fox Piven's (2008) account of interdependence and noncooperation did figure in my interviews as conceptual roots of power. It was reflected most in the appeal to striking as a tactic, especially among participant organizers in the labor and student movements. In reference to their role as essential workers, an immigrant worker organizer explained:

> *"Thinking through the prisms of both class and migration, and race and gender, and that a lot of these are immigrant workers, what we saw in the pandemic is that they do have immense amounts of power. They do have extreme agency because of where they are in the economy."*

Similarly, a climate activist raised the legacy of the 2012 student movement as a source of inspiration in theorizing change in the student climate movement today. The student narrative

about 2012 is that the movement brought the education system to a standstill and forced the government to change course through massive striking. Hence, today, the student climate movement's "theory of change is to tip the balance of power with the state in our favor through an unlimited general strike". This perspective is also echoed in representations of the community sector and the effectiveness of a general strike: "if everyone for one week, or one day, we close. We completely shut down. It's gonna bloc the entire system and we'll get what we want." However, when theorizing on this base of power, Piven (2008) did so in considering numeric majorities—the poor. Hence, those intersectional organizers conducting place-based organizing, such as in universities or workplaces, more readily adopted this perspective. Those who organized in identity-based movements, such as the feminist, antiracist, and anti-islamophobia movements, did not refer to interdependence. Power, in their recounting, was not linked primarily to the structural place of these groups in the economy or society, as much as their ability to organize masses in support of a given change.

They were especially concerned with the danger of institutionalization, a form of cooptation by the state. Institutionalized organizations emerged as the antithesis of power-building. In decrying what happens when a movement organization becomes so institutionalized that it loses its militant stance, one organizer explained:

> *"You can tell an organization has fallen prey to institutionalization when they go from one grant to the next, no longer creating initiatives, the Board is not democratic, the membership is symbolic or non-existent, internally things are managed like in a private enterprise, and there is no longer any solidarity with larger social movements in society."*

Another used the metaphor of a puppet to describe institutionalized community organizations and their relation to the state. One abolitionist organizer framed it this way:

"I'm not saying let's abolish everything, but there need to be movements that are still on the ground, close to communities, accountable to communities that exist outside of this whole [institutionalized] framework."

Institutionalization was seen as renouncing the power struggle that is at the core of advancing an alternative to the status quo.

This aversion to institutionalization informed their vision of building power and resonated with Han et al.'s (2021) notion of people power rooted in accountability to a constituency. One organizer raised the importance of "centering the margins" while another emphasized ensuring that those most affected by the issue are leading and centered in the design of initiatives. One organizer recounted how being on the ground, acting with those most affected by an injustice, and from there calling out state institutions without mincing words in the media gave them power in their relationship with the state.

Second, and related, was the importance of democratized governance: "The stronger the governance bodies that control the top echelons of your organization, the more you can stay connected to the people you are supposed to defend." Though many advocated that the activist stance be embedded into the organization's structure, organizers cautioned against overly complicated procedures that produce barriers to participation. Finally, in echoing an anarchist viewpoint, one organizer even suggested that movement organizations should consider expiration dates so that they did not become overly invested in their own survival, which may distance them from the base they were created to represent.

Though intersectional organizers and existing research (Han, McKenna, and Oyakawa 2021; Ganz 2018; McAlevey 2016) underscore the importance of power-building practices, they require resources: training programs, opportunities to build deep connections, space to come together, human time, emotional labor, and energy to build connections, show up at every injustice,

facilitate convenings, institute governance practices, etc. Building power is even more challenging when the constituency to organize is overworked, underpaid, precarious, and struggling to simply stay above water, as is the case for many of the activists interviewed who organize in working-class communities. One organizer shared:

> *"The type of work that people are doing, especially in more marginalized communities, it burns people out…People are just profoundly going from one crisis to the next…their lives are precarious in every single way. So, it burns people out. It's extremely exhausting."*

Nearly every participant interviewed mentioned burnout. The causes were cumulative and diverse: from feeling like change was beyond reach, to the strain of supporting people through hardship, to dealing with the Quebec media ecosystem. Another organizer shared, "The context in Quebec is distinct—it's difficult to navigate…there's more potential for burnout here." Burnout was also amplified by the pandemic. One organizer described it as "ambient gloom," while another suggested simply surviving the pandemic was an achievement for many groups. Overall, their experiences highlight the health impacts of striving to build the power of communities that are marginalized by the system.

The toll of organizing without adequate support may help explain the appeal of mobilizing, which can be more accessible and require fewer resources. First off, though some organizers, especially community leaders, can access the traditional media, social media remains not only more accessible for the rest of the population but has become an important rallying tool. One organizer highlighted the accessibility and quasi-entrepreneurial nature of social media activism, which does not rely on being included in formal institutions:

> *"We create an initiative, we galvanize support, we don't have to worry about any of the so-called institutional left. And we don't need funding because we're doing communications work. And we're not paid—we're volunteers."*

In her study of the Arab Spring, scholar Zeynep Tufecki (2017) also notes the ease of mobilizing through social media but underscores the risk that masses of people are mobilized faster than any organizational capacity for shared decision-making, strategizing, or communication is implemented, threatening the movement's capacity to sustain its organizing over time. This echoes back to Stokely Carmichael's quote on the difference between issue-based mobilization and organizing to transform deeply entrenched systems. Organizers were aware of the trade-offs:

> *"It's a 'pick your poison' kind of situation…With spontaneous activism on social media, you depend on the algorithms, you're not paid, you don't necessarily vote a platform before organizing, I recognize that there are lots of issues with this model."*

Another element that two organizers raised that helps explain the appeal of mobilizing was the lack of political alignment. Indeed, coalitions can easily form around one specific issue, but beyond that issue, political alignment is challenging. This comment highlights a key question: must a constituency stay together? The political sociology literature argues that to sustain organizing, a constituency must be dedicated to staying together and learning together. Otherwise, at any instance of conflict, the group will dissolve, undermining its capacity to deploy power. Yet, one organizer was quick to note that even temporarily coming together had an impact on people's politics. They learn, grow, and are exposed to other realities, and that process has political ramifications that may be difficult to measure but that certainly exist. It is how each of the organizers interviewed developed their theories of change and power. This reckons back to a vision of coalition politics exposed by intersectional feminist scholars, wherein groups may come together to fight for an issue, like men and women of color on racism, or white women and women of color on violence against women (Crenshaw 1991). These coalitions are not necessarily permanent, and they may change configurations based on the issue at hand. Bringing the political sociology literature in conversation with this assessment of coalition politics raises important

questions about the power of coalitions, their duration, and the composition of the constituency that forms the backbone of organizing, avenues that are worthy of future research.

Overall, the intersectional organizers were aligned with much of the literature on building power, emphasizing "constituency-building practices" (Han et al. 2021) and democratized governance. Yet, the tendency towards mobilizing rather than organizing for power remained. The easy access to social media, occasional lack of political alignment within intersectionally marginalized communities, and crucially, the tremendous strain imposed on organizers who try to build power with very few resources and support, could help explain the appeal of temporary mobilization.

ii. Deploying Power

As for deploying power, the perspectives that emerge from this study are distinct from both the political sociology literature on social movements, which has tended to account only for political state-facing power and arguments by critical scholars that challenge the dominance of the state in theories of liberation, advocating instead for turning away from the state. The intersectional organizers in this project have deeply nuanced and pragmatic perspectives on deploying power. While some advocated for electoral strategies and others critiqued the idea that change from within was possible, across the spectrum the participants tend to both participate in the democratic process *and* value cultural and community power, as critical to deploying people power for liberation.

Diversity of Tactics

Numerous organizers, especially on the francophone side, brought up the importance of adopting a diversity of tactics. When asked how movements should deploy power, time and again, they underscored the importance of a broad array of actions, something that the literature on social movements does not center. On the contrary, in the quest to establish "what works" both empirical

scholars and critical theorists have often argued for or against specific theories of change. Yet, the intersectional organizers who raised the diversity of tactics perspective were adamant that power must be deployed "not through one channel, but through many": in community, in the cultural sphere, in politics, and even in business or the economy. One organizer offered the metaphor of a web:

> "*I see it all as a web. Each part needs to be tied to the other. We have to go get it and link it to the rest. It's like a war tactic…and it's a relay race. You tap in when you can, go as far as you can, and when you can't anymore, when you cannot believe the state of the world and you're in despair, you tap out of the race for a bit, and pass the baton. Do what speaks to you: block a bridge, do a spontaneous action, run incredible candidates for office.*"

Another organizer offered: "You really have to, in my opinion, choose a goal collectively and then explore every possible way to get there." This perspective was more prevalent in accounts by francophone intersectional organizers, yet even anglophone organizers, in practice, tended to deploy power across spheres.

Political Power

Among these diverse avenues for deploying power, many organizers not only emphasized the importance of changing public policies and targeting the state but pointed to the importance of movements being involved in elections. A climate activist related their disappointment after the September 27th, 2021, federal elections:

> *"I was frustrated because we could have channeled all our energy into the streets to try to exert pressure at a moment when there was a political opportunity that is rare, especially when we have but ten years to act [on climate]."*

Yet another organizer shared that movement organizations could play a big role in endorsing candidates that support their mission and values. Rather than constantly make demands of

politicians, why not take their job? Echoing the strategy of infiltrating the machine, another organizer shared being inspired by developments in France where third and fourth-generation children of immigrants became involved in municipal elections and infiltrated traditional parties like the Socialist Party in the last election cycle. Regarding the resistance by many grassroots movements in Montreal to dip their toes in the political arena, one organizer originally from a country in the Global South framed electoral participation as a privilege:

> *"Knowing that in the whole world, the proportion of the population that has the right to decide by voting is extremely low and that here people don't even try to leverage this right…"*

Hence, despite being aware that many activists are opposed to interacting with the state, many of those I interviewed reiterated the importance of political power, holding the state accountable, utilizing democratic levers to push for change, and even engaging in electoral strategies.

Nonetheless, some organizers were more critical of these views. Often, this perspective was the result of having engaged with the state or attempted change from within and experienced the limitations of such an approach. One organizer shared:

> *"I've seen it in my own student activism, when people think, 'yeah, we're going to take over the student union. We're going to have a radical student union.' And you do and it lasts for a year, and you just fight with a bunch of useless, conservative right-wing people and for what? You wasted all the time, everybody's time. You could have done a gazillion things. And so why replicate that process on a bigger scale?"*

In analyzing the results of Montreal's 2021 municipal election, one organizer suggested:

> *"I believe that none of the progressives won because we're not about the performative whiteness. We won't perform the model minority in order to get to the next level."*

Both these organizers expressed skepticism at focusing on inclusion within the state when their experiences suggested this was not a lasting solution to deep transformative change.

That said, in practice, the great majority of the organizers I interviewed, even those most critical of inclusion into the state, have made demands of the state, are involved in proposing policy, participate in government public consultations, and tend to position themselves publicly on public policy debates. They may be critical of the state, but none refused to engage with it entirely. Their reasoning is best described as pragmatic—they are receptive and adaptable based on the reality on the ground (Woodly 2022). Indeed, the same organizer who offered the example of their student union acknowledged the empowering effect on members of participating in the political process. Hence, they offered a practical and nuanced perspective:

> *"You make the demands [of the state] as a way to organize people and if you win, that's wonderful, if not, you show the limitations of the state. And that's what it is. If you go in naively, collectively, that's a mistake and that creates huge disappointment amongst communities."*

This view echoes some abolitionist perspectives on interacting with the state but only as part of a broader emancipatory vision, rather than conceiving of the state as the ultimate liberator (McLeod 2019). It ties into a perspective advanced by many who advocated for a diversity of tactics, not to be overly or uniquely invested in one avenue of change, but that the resilience and power of a movement come from deploying power across many spheres. These other spheres, crucially, included culture and community.

Cultural Power

Many organizers converged on the importance of leveraging the power of an organized base to alter the public's conception of or narrative on an issue. This terrain is what Archon Fung calls ethical power, or "the content and distribution of ideals, values, public narratives, and norms in society." (Fung 2020) As such, the intersectional organizers largely took for granted that culture was political, a stance several scholars in the Black radical tradition have adopted (Iton 2008; Cullors 2019; Maynard 2018). Importantly, despite experiences of stereotyping and smear

campaigns, the media remained a target for many intersectional organizers, a necessary battleground for social change. For instance, one organizer explained the necessity of "adding nuance and cognitive dissonance to media portrayals of racialized people." Another noted the role of the media as a critical tool for reaching and influencing the masses and public opinion. Some argued for activists to infiltrate media institutions and research teams for popular shows. As such, they conveyed the importance of influencing the public and mainstream culture, a view that contrasts with Indigenous accounts of resurgence that are internal-focused, which emphasize culture as a way of building Indigenous power, resisting settler-colonialism, and asserting Indigenous sovereignty. As such, the intersectional organizers interviewed aligned more closely with the abolitionist call to change the heads and hearts of a community, on the path towards liberation.

Nonetheless, many participants were clear to distinguish between deploying power through the media, while not depending on the media to build their power. Indeed, in recounting a smear campaign against them, one organizer recalled not being able to lean on the few racialized allies who had pierced through the media landscape, "because they were scared that they would face the same kind of backlash I was experiencing." This person realized that those who mobilized to support them in this vulnerable period were community members whose power was independent of media institutions. Similarly, another organizer explained that their ability to win every "media war" they waged derived from their organized base, their anchoring in the community, and their credibility on the ground. That said, time is a precious resource, and where movements choose to invest theirs can have ramifications. One organizer shared the risk of overly focusing on media and cultural power:

"At one point we were just exchanging with media. That was taking up all of our energy. And we stopped and asked ourselves, what are we doing for the community? So now we're retreating a bit to refocus our energy."

This organizer was not the only one to emphasize the importance of prioritizing community-focused action, despite deploying power towards influencing public culture and the state.

Community Power

Community power fueled many intersectional organizers' sense of hope and dreams. Drawing a contrast with more institutionalized service organizations, one participant cast organizers as builders, creating new systems of care, dismantling isolation, and building community. Rather than dedicating her energy to resistance, now her focus was on building "what I want to see in its [the system's] place." This, of course, echoes abolitionist visions, which emphasize prefiguring alternative systems and institutions. One organizer enumerated a long list of alternative podcasts, festivals, peer support spaces, conferences, and galas that have cropped up in their community:

> *"It's critical to target our own communities. They [society] want to push us aside; we will show them we are stronger. But it's also important to remember that this phenomenon isn't new, we have always done this. There's just more today, which I'm happy about because it's necessary."*

Another organizer put forth a vision for liberation grounded in building new community-based institutions:

> *"I think we have to build entirely new institutions. I don't think we can rely on the structures that exist anymore. And I think we need to build our own sort of mass-based democratic institutions that are grounded in marginalized communities and non-electoral."*

This view echoes Angela Davis' (2011) call for new grassroots democratic institutions. Another organizer also found hope in building new culturally enriching and culturally appropriate services

that can support the community while also serving as a home for activists in the community who need resources to organize. I could feel the participants' energy when discussing these alternative community interventions. They elicited hope and activated the imagination while responding to concrete needs. And yet, one organizer was quick to call me back to order:

> *"I see the weight on those who organize. Each one of us has to go look for funding, invest time, volunteer, connect with other groups with whom there may be differences. We can also end up reproducing the oppressive systems we wish to challenge in society…the reality is, we're fighting for a tiny part of the pie…"*

This comment re-emphasizes the connection between people power and the institutions that mediate the experiences of intersectional organizers. The lack of funding and community sector support, as well as the treatment in the media, affect how intersectional organizers can build and deploy power in practice. They may have ideal visions, but faced with important barriers, they constantly adapt.

No singular, unanimous perspective emerges from their accounts of deploying power. Rather, they resist binary either/or thinking and, in practice, confronted with significant barriers, they adopt a flexible approach that favors multiple sites for deploying power, including the cultural and community spheres, in addition to state-facing politics. Their experiences draw the contour of a nuanced and pragmatic perspective on building and deploying power for liberation.

IV. Limitations and Future Research Directions

Though this study offers a strong qualitative assessment of the disparities and gaps in funding for intersectional organizing in Montreal, further research would do well to analyze in detail government funding data, especially over time, to establish which groups receive funding, and how this compares to service-based contracts. The aim here is not to put groups in competition with one another; the entire community sector is underfunded particularly given the role it is

expected to play in providing services and sustaining democracy. Such an analysis, though, can shine light on the funding practices the government often takes for granted but that exclude intersectional organizations. Further on the institutional front, perhaps because of the community sector's recognition by the state and its embedded concertation networks, activists in Quebec have witnessed the dangers of institutionalization and hence are especially well-positioned to analyze the factors that can and have insulated civil society from institutionalization. As such, the Quebec community sector provides fertile ground for future in-depth research on how to resist institutionalization, a question that plagues the community sector in many countries (Dunning 2018; Milbourne and Cushman 2015).

Though this study interviews intersectional organizers who are community leaders and whose organizing was identified by many academics and practitioners as critical to advancing intersectional organizing in the city, the list of organizers interviewed is by no means exhaustive and the sample remains small (thirteen people). Further research might include a larger sample size, more anglophone organizers, and a focus on Indigenous organizing. Furthermore, as was clear in the life trajectories of the participants in this study, humans are not born with their political ideologies. They emerge from life experiences and are crafted over time in relation to the institutional environment. Hence, this study necessarily only captures a snapshot of intersectional organizer perspectives based on the current context and political climate. This may not be as concerning though since, fortunately for the study—though unfortunately for the world that sorely needs change—change is slow.

Movement scholars have often argued that confronting deeply entrenched systems requires a countermovement that is strong enough to withstand a sustained battle. That said, given the challenges racialized organizers encounter in predominantly white institutions and the lack of

political alignment that can exist among people of color on various issues, this study raises questions about how to define groups. Does sustained organizing around an issue necessarily mean that one group must stay together? If so, who comprises the unit of the group? Intersectional feminists have advanced a coalition strategy (Cole and Luna 2010; Fowlkes 1997), while Indigenous scholar Leanne Simpson speaks of "constellations of co-resistance" (Simpson 2017, 228). Future research should investigate the advantages of each form, especially in tackling conflict, group unity, and difference in organizing for power over time.

Conclusion

This study tended to both the institutions that are salient to intersectional organizers in Montreal—Quebec funding policy, community sector culture and practices, and the media—and to the practices and pathways intersectional organizers favor to build and deploy power. Analyzing both together draws out the ways that the collective power of intersectionally marginalized communities in Montreal is undermined and the creative strategies they adopt to fight for change despite these barriers.

Individual, organizational, and policy-level exclusions, combined, strain and constrain intersectional organizing. Integrating into existing community organizations is not necessarily feasible nor desirable for many intersectional organizers. These were not designed by nor for intersectionally marginalized communities; hence their needs are often marginalized in these organizations. In addition, intersectional organizers themselves have been excluded from mainstream community sector spaces—cast as troublemakers or outsiders. Though my interviews revealed that some intersectional organizers believe the tides have started to change, especially with mass protests following the murder of George Floyd, the death of Joyce Echaquan, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the governance procedures in the Quebec community space

are often seen as heavy and overly bureaucratic at best, and an impediment to agile, spontaneous, and responsive organizing at worst. As such, intersectional organizers adopt an outsider-insider posture: they engage with the institutions but remain (or are kept) at arm's length. Similarly, intersectional organizers engage critically and selectively with the media, despite their experiences of ill-treatment and slander, as, for many, it remains an indispensable tool for social change.

In parallel, organizers expressed the importance of building community alternatives—alternatives that are both culturally sensitive and grounded in local realities. Yet, new organizations are disadvantaged by the provincial government's funding policy for community organizations. The unique Quebec policy, which provides unrestricted, mission-based funding for organizing and advocacy is critical, yet difficult to access and highly exclusive. Organizations that have qualified in the past are readily requalified (Anonymous informant 2, 2022. Interview with government bureaucrat by author. May 30), and since past amounts are generally insufficient, they request additional funding. Hence, new organizations are effectively locked out of mission-based funding, which could assist them in building stability and longevity.

It is in this context that intersectional organizers strategize for change. It is through their interpretations of these institutions and their own communities, experiences, and visions of change, that they decide how to build and deploy power. At the core of building people power, for them, is the imperative of resisting institutionalization, an insidious and tempting force that obstructs risk-taking, silences organizations, and impedes solidarity. Echoing what Han et al. (2021, 129) call "base building" and bell hooks' (2000) appeal to center the margins, the organizers are invested in remaining connected to those whose lives they are fighting to make matter. Concretely, this means giving voice to those most affected by an issue, listening to their proposed solutions, and providing support to the community in times of crisis. It also means publicizing community

issues in the media, as well as deconstructing the shortcuts taken by the media, or analyses that are misleading or prejudicial. Democratized governance was also a recurrent theme—providing an important means to ensure a militant approach and to give those affected a voice in the organization.

As for deploying power, though intersectional organizers engage critically with community sector and state institutions, their actions suggest a pragmatic enactment of liberation, one grounded in multiple avenues for change—in complementarity—and one that resists single-minded binary dogmatism. As such, they reject the dichotomy between engaging with or turning away from the state. They are pragmatic in that they are responsive to their evolving context and tend towards acknowledging if not in theory, then in practice, a diversity of pathways to liberation from engaging in governmental politics and focusing on community change, to intervening in the cultural sphere.

Nevertheless, building and deploying power requires resources. Building new institutions, investing in base-building, responding to community crises, and interacting with the media or the state, demand time, energy, space, organizing skills, etc. As intersectional organizers build initiatives that diverge from universal, single-axis organizing that has dominated leftist spaces, they face challenges sustaining their organizing without the institutional support other leaders benefit from or the funding other movement organizations receive. As such, they may fall back onto short-term mobilizing—temporarily engaging people around specific actions—even though this may undermine their ability to build and deploy people power over time. Those intersectional organizers that have nevertheless persisted have paid a tremendous personal cost. The lack of funding, exclusion, or conflictual relations with mainstream community organizations and the media, have made organizing in Quebec especially burdensome. Every intersectional organizer

interviewed raised the specter of burnout and the tremendous personal cost of organizing to fight oppression in this context.

If marginalized communities are locked out of the channels of what Rosanvallon (2008) calls "civic vigilance" or simply not provided with the substantive resources to organize, like other civil society groups, then the vision of a just Quebec society is imperiled. Furthermore, given the critical role social movements play in sustaining and strengthening democracy (Woodly 2022; Tocqueville 1899), this raises concerns for democracy. Enabling communities to organize themselves, advocate for their needs, and participate in creating a better society is critical for a healthy democracy and the ideal of political equality (Woodly 2022; Rosanvallon 2008). In exposing barriers to intersectional organizing, however, this thesis also indicates possible solutions. Constraints to people power can become conduits for people power. Indeed, breaking down the barriers identified in this research can enable the collective power of intersectionally marginalized communities. In the meantime, though, in the words of one organizer who broke out in chant in the midst of the interview, there is no other choice: "we move forward, we move forward, we don't move back."

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Appendix

I. Appendix A: Interview Guide

*This guide served as a template, which I adapted based on the experiences of the interview participant, the length of the interview, and the natural direction of the conversation.

Their theory of power and change

- Can you tell me about your work, your mission? What has been your journey through activism?
- How do you think we can reach your vision of a better society? What are the pathways that lead there?
- Who do you look to for inspiration in your organizing? Why?
- Who do you strategize with?
- What are your biggest constraints in your work?
- Where would you say the most exciting intersectional organizing is taking place in the city? Why?

Analysis of institutional environment

- Can you map out – literally draw out here – where you stand in relation to the actors in your environment who are most important to your success? *Provide participant with pencil and paper and have them explain their drawing.*

Community sector:

- Are you part of any roundtables, coalitions, or groups that represent multiple social justice organizations? What do these alliances provide your organization?
- What about operating in Quebec, or Canada, makes your work easier or more challenging?
    - Has this always been the same, or have you noticed a change or evolution with time?

State:

- How do you interact with the Quebec government? Can you provide an example? What is the nature of your interaction?
    - What about the Canadian state?
- The Quebec neocorporatist governance model is quite unique in North America and has long created a seat at the table for the community sector, alongside unions, the social economy, and Quebec Inc (the business sector). This model has led the community sector to make significant gains, notably mission-related funding, which covers community organizations' overhead.
    - Has this governance model affected your work in any way?

- What is your perception of this model?
- How might it influence your strategies, activities, or orientations?

Closing

- Who else would you recommend I speak with about this research question?

II. Appendix B: Interview Characteristics

Participant	Works in racialized communities	Systemic analysis/demands	Intersectional feminist organizing experience	Racialized person	Woman
01	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
02	**x**				**x**
03		**x**		**x**	
04	**x**	**x**			
05	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
06	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
07	**x**	**x**		**x**	
08	**x**	**x**		**x**	
09	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
10		x			
11	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
12	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
13	**x**	**x**			