BEYOND RACISM: MAPPING RULING RELATIONS IN A CANADIAN UNIVERSITY FROM THE STANDPOINT OF RACIALIZED WOMEN STUDENT ACTIVISTS

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ABSTRACT:

This study is an institutional ethnography which employs a critical race feminist theoretical framework in order to explicate the social relations that coordinate the experiences of racialized female student activists at McGill University. Interviews with students, administrators, faculty and staff, along with observations about texts, institutional language and experiences around equity at McGill make up the data for conducting this anti-racist feminist analysis. In the first part of this study, knowledge produced through the experiences of racialized female student activists – who make up the entry point of this study – exposes a disjuncture between McGill's self-portrayal as equitable and diverse and how it is experienced by some racialized women. The next part of this study explores some challenges to doing anti-racist activist work at McGill and the lack of – yet need for – an institutional memory that encourages present and future organizing to document, refer to, and build on past initiatives (successful and otherwise) around race, racism and equity.

RÉSUMÉ:

Cette étude est une ethnographie institutionnelle qui emploie une cadre théorique féministe-critique afin d'expliquer les relations sociales qui coordonnent les expériences des étudiantes-organisatrice racialisées à l'Université McGill. Les entrevues avec les étudiantes, administrateurs, professeurs et employés, avec des observations sur les textes, la langue institutionelle et des expériences autour de l'équité à l'Université McGill constituent les données pour effectuer cette analyse anti-raciste féministe. Dans la première partie de cette étude, les connaissances produites par les expériences des étudiantes-organisatrice racialisées – qui constituent le point d'entrée de cette étude – expose une disjonction entre la façon dont l'Université se portrait comme équitable et diversifiée et comment elle est vécue par certains étudiantes racialisées. La prochaine partie de cette étude examine certains des défis au travail d'organisation anti-raciste à l'Université McGill et le manque (et le besoin) d'une mémoire institutionnelle qui encourage l'organisation actuelle et future de documenter, de consulter, et de s'appuyer sur les initiatives passées (réussie et autrement) autour de la race, le racisme et l'équité.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1. A SHORT NARRATIVE: JUSTIFICATION FOR THIS STUDY

Previous to my experience as a graduate student at McGill, the many aspects of my life were kept separate. I lived in a city different from the one in which I worked. I was passionate about the organizing work I was involved with, often more so than my career. My social network was one that consisted neither of co-workers nor activists: it was just fun and often uncritical. Often it was frustrating speaking out against racism, sexism, capitalism and so on within social circles. I would eventually feel silenced by those who disagreed, claiming that there was nothing wrong, that I should relax (or stop over-reacting) or stop worrying about things that are not in my power. I learned to keep the critical dialogue for my activist life rather than for my social life, while this dialogue continued to inform much of my choices, career and otherwise.

Almost immediately upon beginning graduate studies, I met people that I enjoyed socializing with AND with whom I could bring up class, race and gender critiques. I enjoyed, for the first time, mixing these social and activism realms. Not only was it emotionally fulfilling, but it also seemed to save time since organizing meant hanging out with friends. It did not take long for me to see many issues, some of which I faced myself and others which – having watched others face – I attempted to avoid. Among these racialized activists, there was burn out, and not finding time for the studies that supposedly brought us together in the first place. Sometimes, worst of all, there did not seem to be much patience for people of "the real world" – in other words, there seemed to be a reticence to engage with me or others who had not previously engaged with much of this work at our level. I tried hard to avoid the first pitfall, especially after facing health problems that forced me to reconsider my pace and priorities. But while I generally stayed on top of my studies it was tensions within my peer network that hit me perhaps the hardest. In a year where my research, the various other organizing work that I was involved with, and teaching all felt like

constant battles with a highly bureaucratic institution in which I did not easily or always find a place, my comfortable and supportive social/activist bubble burst when conflicts arose with friends and fellow organizers. I did not know what to do, so I withdrew as much as I could while attempting to stay true to some commitments. I regretted letting my social life mix with my organizing. I felt vulnerable to what I was previously happy to have achieved. At first I accepted that maybe I just did not understand things as well as others did, and then I decided to take the time to reflect on and figure out what went wrong. Simultaneously, my focus became first my health and then my research whilst accepting that I was not going to have the support I needed from friends.

In reflecting on myself as a racialized woman in a predominantly white university and on the organizing spaces in which I was involved, I accidently found an entry point into this study. I would begin this study from my own experience and the experiences of other racialized women and try to discover the barriers we face, both from the institution in which we find ourselves and from within our own organizing spaces.

1.2. RESEARCH OVERVIEW

1.2.1. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Through the use of institutional ethnography, this study explores racism experienced by young racialized female[1] student activists[2] at McGill University.

[1] In this study, *female*, and more broadly gender – being regarded as a social construct, as is race – means anyone who identifies as (cis or trans) female. Smith (1997) describes woman as an "open-ended" category allowing "a difference of experience" or "an experience of difference". She explains that it is speaking from experience which allows critique of "white and/or heterosexist hegemony from those it marginalizes and silences" (p. 394). Furthermore, in regards to not wanting to essentialize the experience of women of colour (and in having an intersectional understanding of oppression), Collins (1986) – in terms of Black women – argues that "Black women possess a unique standpoint on, perspective of, their experiences... [and]...while living as Black women may produce certain commonalities of outlook, the diversity of class, religion, age, and sexual orientation shaping Black women's lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes" (p. 15).

The process of racialization, as will be discussed later in this chapter, comes from the view that race is socially constructed through colonialism and white supremacy[3] in order to classify those "other" than the dominant white race, which is racialized as normative and unmarked. Through a critical race feminist[4] framework, this research broadly works to explicate how the social relations of race and gender together function, structure and construct women of colour's experiences at McGill. The lives and experiences of racialized women are positioned as the entry point for this anti-racist feminist analysis (Agnew, 1996; Brand, 1988; Dua, 1999) of examining ruling relations at McGill. Exploring "ruling relations" refers to locating one's lived experience of oppression within the greater structural and societal context that contributes to oppression (Smith, 2005). In order to connect the experience of these women to the larger institutional structure in which they are situated, this research asks: How do racialized female activist students at McGill resist the racism they experience?

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[2] In the context of this study, a (community) *activist* or organizer at McGill is any person who is involved with some form of anti-oppressive/anti-racist organizing on campus – for example, though not limited to, student government, student interest and/or research groups or other paid/unpaid involvement with equity operating through an anti-oppressive framework on campus. While some areas of McGill administration do not necessarily operate within an anti-oppressive framework, the participants from the standpoint of whom this study is conducted are in most cases involved in more than one organizing space, on and/or off campus, thus the work they do at McGill is informed by this understanding even if the office/group/organization for which they work might not be.

[3] While the term is generally not used in the Canadian context, White Supremacy is related to whiteness and is a term that fits well into the purpose, theory, and methodology of this study. "[W]hite supremacy may be understood as a logic of social organization that produces regimented, institutionalized, and militarized conceptions of hierarchized 'human' difference"(Rodriguez, 2006, p. 12).

[4] As part of the critical race feminist framework employed, some post-colonial ideas are used in this study, namely through exploring White/Western hegemony and in turn the marginalization of *others* (Levine-Rasky, 2002).

How do these women support other racialized women through anti-racist organizing? How does McGill support or stunt some of the anti-racist organizing that takes place on its campus?

1.2.2. PURPOSE OF STUDY

> *Within these spaces, largely controlled by the dominant White culture, there exists a constant moral tension: there are the everyday experiences and lived reality of racialized students and the faculty, and juxtaposed against this, are the perceptions and responses of those who have the power to redefine that reality, that is, White educators and administrators in the academy. (Henry &Tator, 2009, p. 32-33)*

This research is premised on the notion that policies, practices and procedures around equity[5] at McGill University are central to the experience of racialized persons at the University while the upper administration which makes the final decisions on these policies might end up overlooking or underestimating their impact. The purpose of this study is manifold. For one, on a personal level I have chosen to take my own experience – along with the experience of other racialized female student activists at McGill – as the starting point of this study in order to better understand and situate how I fit into, what Smith (2005) calls, the ruling relations which coordinate this institution. Secondly, this institutional ethnography aims to connect the personal experiences of racialized female activist students at McGill to other social

[5] It is difficult to come by one agreed upon definition of equity, unless we speak to "achieving equity" through Canada's Employment Equity Act whose purpose is to "achieve equality in the workplace so that no person shall be denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons unrelated to ability and [...] to correct the conditions of disadvantage in employment experienced by women, aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities by giving effect to the principle that employment equity means more than treating persons in the same way but also requires special measures and the accommodation of differences" (Statutes of Canada, 1985)

locations (such as staff and administration) of the institution in order to outline the disjuncture between the lived experience of racialized women at McGill and the way in which McGill portrays itself as diverse[6], equitable and thus inclusive of all peoples. Thirdly, McGill's ruling relations are mapped as being connected to or originating from the greater social and historical context of white settler colonialism, (neo)liberalism and liberal multiculturalism in the broader Canadian and Québec societies in which it is located. Lastly, this research aims to reveal and document stories of (individual and collective) anti-racist resistance, including the attempt to carve out a space that centres race and racialized peoples in a predominantly white institution. It is my hope that this study builds on past activist struggles, can promote change and critical questioning, and in turn influence and inform practices, policies and structures around equity at McGill.

1.2.3. APPROACH OF STUDY

This research is an institutional ethnography beginning from the standpoint of racialized female student activists' experience. It draws on interviews conducted with nine racialized female student activists, four faculty members, two administrators, four staff members, and two white students. These interviews help to supplement the theory and literature of this study as well as assist in the study's analysis. Personal narratives, field notes and

[6] While diversity, like equity, is difficult to define, it often gets taken up in terms of ethnic or religious diversity or as diversity of thought/perspectives. See footnote 33 for more.

observations about institutional texts and language, and numerous informal discussions with participants also contribute to the analysis in this study. The majority of the analysis for this research takes place during interviews and is expanded on with each subsequent interview and observation. The final analysis undergoes a limited hermeneutic process through which participants are given the opportunity (and encouraged to) make edits to the data and analysis based on interviews. With the premise that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, the totality of this project is produced through interaction with participants of this study along with observations and discussions about the language and practices around equity at this institution.

1.3. NAVIGATING THIS STUDY: CHAPTER SUMMARIES

In the Canadian context, there is an emerging body of research that begins with the experience of racialized students to discuss discrimination faced through the intersection of race and gender on a systemic and institutional level. In this work I draw primarily upon some of the Canadian literature, qualitative data collected – including interviews with racialized female student activists, staff, administration, faculty and other students, and reports written by McGill University in the last couple of years.

This thesis comprises five chapters. Chapter one is the *Introduction* of this research. It serves to give the reader an overview of the study through a short justification for doing this work, the purpose of this study, the research questions, and a summary of what to find in each chapter. It concludes with a

brief section which introduces some theory and terminology necessary in order to understand and engage with this study.

In chapter two, *Theory and Context*, through a critical race feminist lens and an anti-oppressive framework, Canada's dominant national narrative and liberal multiculturalism are confronted. This discussion seeks to elaborate the context for this study and uncover the white hegemony embedded in historical and present-day Canadian society and educational institutions. Race and gender equity in the context of Canadian universities is explored here in order to outline the challenge but necessity of having an understanding of intersectionality when discussing oppressions and to position the entry point of this study as the everyday experiences of racialized female student activists at McGill University.

Chapter three, *Methodology*, clarifies the distinction between feminist standpoint theory and the use of standpoint in institutional ethnography and explains how social relations at McGill will be mapped from the standpoint of racialized women student activists. This chapter explores the importance of reflexivity in research especially when the researcher's social location is similar to that of the participants, as is the case with this study. The remainder of chapter three discusses the ethics and methods of this study.

In chapter four, *Data and Analysis*, the knowledge produced through interviews with students, faculty, administrators and staff and observations made about institutional language and texts around equity issues at McGill are all used to understand the ruling relations at McGill. A disjuncture is exposed

between McGill's diverse and equitable image and the experience of racialized female activist students at the University. Furthermore, the challenge of speaking about race and racism and of doing anti-racist organizing is explored and documented in order to draw on past activism and to potentially inform future anti-racist activist and administrative efforts around equity issues at McGill.

The final chapter of this study, the *Conclusion*, gives an overview of some key ideas that were uncovered in this research. Furthermore, this chapter expresses the limitations and implications of this study and suggests further research that could build on the findings explored here.

1.4. SOME THEORY AND TERMINOLOGY AS BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR THIS STUDY

1.4.1. ON RACIALIZATION AND WHITENESS

Before proceeding, I will briefly outline some key terminology and theoretical insights which are employed in my research. Many scholars discuss race and racism by speaking about the process of racialization (Agnew, 2009; Anthias, 1993; Henry & Tator, 2009; Walker, 2008). By this term, they mean that race is socially constructed and deeply rooted in who does (or does not) hold power, rather than viewing race as a natural or biologically fixed[7] identity. One situation where the process of racialization occurs, as will be discussed in the next chapter, is colonialism which has historically constructed, differentiated, stigmatized and excluded racialized "others".

[7] For more information on scientific justifications of racism see Calliste & Dei (2000).

The term "people of colour,"[8] often used to describe people who are non-white and non-indigenous, is a term that I personally do not identify with. Marking someone as "of colour", in my opinion, fixes "white" as normative and non-coloured, a benchmark to which we can compare "others". When white is constructed as the "normative and natural; [it becomes] the standard against which all other[s] are measured and usually found to be inferior; whiteness comes to mean normality, knowledge, superiority, merit, motivation, knowledge, truth, neutrality, and objectivity" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 25). I have noticed, through personal experience, my own shifting privilege and perceived race when I move through various social locations. For example, through telephone or email interactions that do not require someone to see my face or hear/read my name, I often pass for white (and sometimes in the case of email, male). Conversely, a shift in the dynamics of the interaction occurs when I am in person with an individual or when they are aware of my name (which marks me as non-white) while communicating with me. Henry and Tator (2009) remark upon the way in which the privilege of whiteness is not fixed when they explain that "[w]hiteness is not a monolithic status; rather it is fluid, situational, and sometimes related to its local geographical context" (p. 26).

Viewing "whiteness [as] an affect of racialization" (Ahmed, 2007a, p. 151) means recognizing that when a racialized subject (of colour) is produced, the

[8] The term "women of colour" could be viewed as homogenizing the experience of racism amongst women and hiding class struggles experienced by racialized women. For more on some epistemological differences and debates around the term "women of colour" amongst anti-racist feminists, see Dua (1999).

privilege of whiteness is also produced as normative, unmarked or neutral. In other words, the process of racialization occurs for people who are white, but the difference is that white people are dominantly seen to be the unmarked or invisible race (Delgado & Stefanic, 1997; Giroux, 1994, 1997; McIntosh, 1990; Roman, 1993) instead of being racialized as privileged. Understanding whiteness in this way makes it possible to hold accountable the construction, power and privilege of being white to constructing and reproducing racial injustices. In turn, holding the power of whiteness accountable ensures that racism is addressed without resorting to individualization (while ignoring its systemic structure), to white guilt, denial, colour-blindness and reverse racism (Bishop, 2005; Coulthard, 2011; Fine, Weiss, Powell, & Mung Wong, 1997; Henry & Tator, 2009; Kobayashi, 2009).

In order to acknowledge the ways in which racial identities are socially constructed and shifting, I choose to refer to myself as a (light-skinned) racialized woman[9] and feel that this process of racialization is not something I chose; instead, it has been imposed upon me on many levels, from the individual to the institutional. For the purpose of this research, however, I will refer to racialized (non-white) people as either racialized or of colour, in order to respect how other racialized women may self-identify.

1.4.2. Racism: Overt, Everyday, Individual, Systemic, and Institutional

[9]Though it is not within the scope of this research to extensively describe the social construction of gender, I want to mention that gender, similar to race, is socially constructed.

While I choose to employ the term racialized (or of colour) in speaking of non-white students, I employ racism to describe some of the experiences of racialized persons within Canada and in turn within Canadian universities. In doing this I am speaking about acts, omissions, structures and events in an institution as being perpetuated through systemic/institutionalized racism in order to hold the institution accountable for these actions and their impact, rather than individualizing racist acts or focussing on their intent.

There are many forms in which racism presents itself. Everyday racism can be difficult to quantify because the proof is in the way that the victim feels, which is both difficult to notice and to measure. Yon (2000) explains that racialized people experience everyday racism often and consistently enough to recognize it. However, white people do not always see it because of a tendency to focus on the intent of the racism rather than its impact. Racism is experienced through power, agency, knowledge, culture, imperialism and capitalism (Donald & Rattansi, 1992; Hall, 1997) and the experience often varies depending on a person's structural location (Hall, 1980).

Perhaps most difficult to recognize are systemic, structural and institutional forms of racism, because they are less overt in the way that they operate. Henry and Tator (2009) explain that institutional racism presents itself through the policies and practices of an institution that, whether knowingly or unknowingly, promote and sustain different advantages for people of certain races.

> Institutional racism generally encompasses overt individual acts of racism to which there is no serious organizational response, such as discriminatory hiring decisions based on the generalized bias of a department. It also includes organizational policies and practices that, regardless of intent, are directly or indirectly disadvantageous to racial minorities, such as the lack of recognition of foreign credentials or the imposition of inflated educational requirements for a position. Institutional racism can be defined as those established laws, customs, practices which systemically reflect and produce racial inequalities in Canadian society. (p. 29-30)

Similarly, systemic racism refers "to the laws, rules, and norms woven into the social system that result in unequal distribution of economic, political, and social resources and rewards among various racial groups" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 30).

In the next chapter, I now turn to discuss the theoretical framework for my research, and to locate this study within the broader picture, firstly, that of Canada and Québec, and secondly, of Canadian universities, before addressing the McGill context.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORY AND CONTEXT

This chapter begins by uncovering the white hegemony that is masked by dominant Canadian accounts of white settler colonialism and liberal notions of multiculturalism, through a critical race feminist analysis. Exploring racialization in Québec and Canadian society is necessary to provide a context to understanding the racialization of people of colour in Canadian institutions. Furthermore, this chapter describes how through presenting a harmonious image of a multicultural Canada, white Canadians are able to be critical of others while being absolved of self-critique. The confrontation and eventual unmasking of white hegemony in Canada is a process similar to the uncovering of institutional racism that occurs later in this study. As part of looking through an anti-racist and critical race feminist lens, this study works with an understanding of the intersectional nature of social relations around gender and race. The second part of this chapter looks at Canadian universities as sites of racism and describes ways in which – through increased privatization and corporate sponsorship, for example – certain knowledges are privileged and white hegemony is maintained. Furthermore I briefly discuss some ways in which gender equity has trumped racial equity in order to look at the challenge of critically addressing race and gender relations at the same time.

2.1. CANADA AND QUEBEC AS WHITE SETTLER SOCIETIES: WHITE HEGEMONY AND THE MAKING OF RACE AND REAL CANADIANS

> *"Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person. [I]f you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story, and to start with,*

> *'secondly'. Start the story with the arrows of the Native Americans, and not with the arrival of the British, and you have an entirely different story. Start the story with the failure of the African state, and not with the colonial creation of the African state, and you have an entirely different story."*
>
> *-Chimamanda Adichie (drawing on Mourid Barghouti)*

Adichie (2009) contends that people are constructed and represented based on who has the power to tell and re-tell their story. Before looking at the experience of racialized female students at McGill and how those experiences are constructed, this chapter begins by recounting a story: the colonial history of Canada and Québec. Through this narrative, we reflect upon how racialized people (including and starting with Indigenous Peoples) were historically and are presently constructed in Canada.

The intention behind giving an historical account of Canada is not to conflate the experiences of Indigenous Peoples with that of other racialized people in Canada. Indigenous Peoples have been dispossessed by (white/European) settlers while most other racialized peoples are themselves settlers who arrived after European colonization. While there is an important distinction between people of colour and Indigenous Peoples, both have in some ways been similarly constructed by the white settler (Dua, 1999; Lawrence & Dua, 2005; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007). In the Canadian context, because bodies that are not white end up being named and treated in a similar vein, for the purposes of this study, I want to (while acknowledging that people of colour along with their white settler counterparts contribute to the oppression of

Indigenous Peoples[10] (Lawrence & Dua, 2005)) extend the construction of the racialized person to include Indigenous Peoples and their struggles both historically and presently. In other words, while this study over-represents the experience of non-white non-Indigenous Peoples, by racialized I mean any person that does not visibly fit into Canada's and Québec's and, eventually the Canadian University's normative definition of Canadian, which we will explore here.

2.1.1. OH CANADA: THE DOMINANT NARRATIVE OF NATION-BUILDING

The dominant Canadian narrative of exploration and conquest teaches us to view Canada as a "land, once empty and later populated by hardy settlers, [then] besieged and crowded by Third World refugees and migrants who are drawn to Canada by the legendary niceness of European Canadians [and] their commitment to democracy" (Razack, 2002, p. 4). Even if Canada is not viewed as having been empty until the arrival of European settlers, white settlers were still able "to justify the genocidal violence unleashed against [Indigenous Peoples]"

[10] The Indian Act, land entitlement, and the residential school systems (Goldberg, 1993; Mackey, 1999; Razack, 2002; Smith, 1999) are part of unresolved struggles faced by Indigenous Peoples today. Meanwhile, many racialized persons, arriving after white settlers' conquest of Indigenous Peoples and their land, have been exploited, devalued, and subordinately constructed. For example, the Chinese who built the railway, the Sikhs who worked in the lumber mills (Razack, 2002), Trans Atlantic Slavery under the British and French (Austin, 2010; Cooper, 2006; Elgersman, 1999; Nelson, 2010; Trudel, 1960), WWII Japanese Internment camps (Nelson, 2010) and present day laws and immigration policies, such as increasing policing of borders (Austin, 2010; Razack, 2002). While Indigenous Peoples and people of colour have both been subordinated historically and presently, people of colour have also contributed to the oppression of Indigenous Peoples – having settled on stolen Indigenous land and (if citizens) having the right to vote on Aboriginal issues such as land entitlement (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). While I define racialized people – to be any person who is non-white, I want to be clear on the differentiation of racialized people indigenous to this land and other racialized people who are settlers on this land.

by constructing them as “barbaric savages” (Thobani, 2007, p. 238). In short, the dominant narrative tends to go like this: Indigenous Peoples, barbaric savages, lived in this vast land known as Canada. White Francophone settlers came and got along quite well with the kind and inviting Indigenous Peoples (Austin, 2010). White Anglophone settlers arrived, “civilized men” (Smith, 1999), who were justified in conquering the ‘lesser beings’ that were already there (Razack, 2002). However, the British settlers had a harder time fully eradicating the French of their culture and language – than they had done with the Indigenous Peoples. Thus through symbols and ideals of liberalism they found ways to carefully control French-speaking settlers and their descendants, Indigenous Peoples, and then other racialized peoples who arrived later (Das Gupta, 1999).

2.1.2. Consequences and corrections to Canada’s dominant narrative

The dominant narrative of Canada glamorizes exploration, conquest, and victory over Indigenous Peoples and nature. In critically confronting this history, Razack (2002) defines Canada as a white settler society, meaning:

> one established by Europeans on non-European soil [based on] the dispossession and near extermination of Indigenous populations by the conquering Europeans. European settlers thus [are constructed as] the original inhabitants and the group most entitled to [...] citizenship [whereby] the disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour [occurs]. (p. 1-2)

Shedding light on Canada's history as one of white settler colonialism shows that conquest was not achieved as peacefully as we might have thought. It took genocide, slavery, exploitation and an entire liberal system of assumed "colour-blindness" (Delgado, 1995) which constructs racialized others in contrast to the normative, unmarked white settler Canadian (Carty, 1999; Lawrence, 2002; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007; Schick, 2002; Stevenson, 1999). Through the creation and repetition of the (racially charged) romanticized nation-building story of white settler colonialism, white hegemony is constructed as it "saturates our very consciousness" and becomes the "only [neutral] world" (Apple, 2004, p. 4) we see and know. It is easy to forget parts of Canada's founding story when the more glamorous tale of exploration and of settlers and Indigenous Peoples living in peace and harmony is widely told, repeated and accepted. Furthermore, in this way it is assumed that Canada's history is "a totalizing discourse" that "can be told in *one* [and only one] coherent narrative" (Smith, 1999, p. 30, emphasis added). Wirth (1936) once suggested that "the most elemental and important facts about a society are those that are seldom debated and generally regarded as settled" (p. xxii-xxiii). For this reason, many scholars have critiqued and confronted the "one coherent narrative" of Canada's founding story in order to expose the hidden white hegemony that succeeds in constructing whiteness as normative and dominant and racialized persons as subordinate (Carty, 1999; Lawrence, 2002; Razack, 2002; Thobani, 2007; Stevenson, 1999).

Austin (2010) critiques the "master-narrative of benign conquest and peaceful co-existence [of the French] with Indigenous Peoples prior to British conquest" (p. 24) by acknowledging the omission of "sordid details of the period prior to British conquest, in particular the French colonization of Indigenous Peoples and the practices of slavery in New France" (p. 25) that is conveniently erased. Austin brings up an important example of a part of Canadian history that has been erased from the dominant narrative: slavery. Through the systematic denial of large portions of Canadian history – such as slavery – Francophone Québécois are able to focus on their role as victims of colonization at the hands of Anglophone settlers without acknowledging their own implication in the oppression of Indigenous (and other racialized) Peoples. Shadd (2011) points out that in the way we have come to hear and understand Canadian history, Black people enter the story and the country through the Underground Railroad when escaping slavery in the United States. Not only is Canada described historically and presently as a safe haven for slaves and other refugees (Mackey, 2004; Shadd, 2011), but often rare success stories that tokenize and publicize the positive experience of people of colour in Canada (Stewart, 2009) are told. By adding in non-white and/or non-male experiences, for example, whether in a tokenized, essentialized or inaccurate fashion, Canada is able to construct itself as a multicultural space where Indigenous, white and racialized peoples all are included. Through masked white hegemony and liberal multiculturalism, Canadian institutions (of governance and education) structure themselves such

that values of the (white, hosting) national citizen are centred and displayed as in need of defence from the "non-citizen, 'Indian', immigrant and refugee who threatens their collective welfare and prosperity" (Thobani, 2007, p. 4). Therefore, it is in understanding the power and privilege of white settler Canada and uncovering white hegemony that we expose the facade of multiculturalism that centres whiteness and subordinates people of colour while appearing not to differentiate among people.

2.1.3. A UNITED AND MULTICULTURAL FRONT: SOCIAL RELATIONS, REDEMPTION AND WHITE GUILT

The Canadian government insists that today Canada is a country with a united front[11], with "*three founding peoples*— Aboriginal, French, and British" (Ministry of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2011, emphasis added). Constructing Canada as having three founding groups, and including Indigenous Peoples as one of the three, acknowledges the presence of Indigenous Peoples but does not acknowledge the historical and present day subordination experienced by Indigenous Peoples at the hands of white settlers. Coulthard (2011), in a conference presentation critiquing Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology to Indigenous Peoples for the devastation they faced from residential schools, draws on Fanon's (1967) critique of recognition within colonial contexts to discuss the ways in which the Canadian government feels

[11] While this claim can be found in the Canadian book for new citizens entitled "Discover Canada", I suggest looking at Jafri (2011) for an interesting critique of white supremacy in Canada through the examination of this book.

that through recognizing its colonial *past*, it is redeemed of its white guilt. Roman (1997) reminds us, "it is difficult to discern the difference between ritual enactments of confession and genuine self-/social criticism" (p. 278). Recognition of a colonial *past* does nothing to acknowledge ongoing colonialism in Canada (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Furthermore, apologizing for the past can clear the wrong-doer's (in this case the Canadian government's) guilty conscience and legitimize its power and authority.

The perceived, or (in the aftermath of an apology) the forgiven, united front of Canada denies the ways in which the nation was built upon the doctrine of white supremacy. This is something described through what Fanon (1967) calls the "colonial encounter" (p. 176) and Thobani (2007) explains as the "exaltation process" (p. 10). In both cases, white settlers (or 'hosts') are given privilege, access and are constructed and normalized as civilized national subjects while others are constructed as subordinate uncivilized lawless guests who are "an impediment to modernity and economic process"(Ibid, p. 96). This racial dynamic still plays out today as Mackey (1999) suggests when she draws on widely accepted narratives of liberal multiculturalism[12] to explain the ways in

[12] For more on liberal multiculturalism, see Kymlicka's (1997) discussion on 'national minorities' and 'immigrant minorities' which explains who has the priority and right to resist assimilation and to be autonomous within the nation. In the Québec context, the self-claimed victimhood of white Francophone Canadians, in addition to the inability of the British to fully eradicate them of their culture, language and livelihood (during times of initial conquest) is what led to the formation of many liberal Canadian symbols and ideals – such as bilingualism – in order to regulate and manage relations with historic minorities and to incorporate immigrants (Myes & Arnaud, 2006). This might be what Goldberg (1993) suggests when saying that racism is often articulated through a variety of expressions and representations, including a nation's history and cultural representations in the form of recorded national narratives, symbols and images.

which white (settler) Canadians are constructed in order to limit racialized others who "threaten the project of nation-building and the making of national identity" (p. 153). Further, she explains that "'multiculturalism' constructs a dominant and supposedly unified, white, unmarked core culture through the proliferation of forms of limited difference" (Ibid). Canada's "unified, white, unmarked core culture" is in a position of ruling such that it can make criticisms of others without having to be self-critical. Razack (1998) suggests here that it is not enough to simply be informed of past and present day struggles; instead, it is essential to mark the masked complicity of white supremacy and evaluate how we are all implicated in hierarchical social relations:

> [P]luralistic models of inclusion assume that we have long ago banished the stereotypes from our heads. These models suggest that with a little practice and the right information, we can all be innocent subjects, standing outside hierarchical social relations, who are not accountable for the past or implicated in the present. It is not our ableism, racism, sexism, or heterosexism that gets in the way of communicating across differences, but *their* disability, *their* culture, *their* biology, or *their* lifestyle... the cultural differences approach reinforces an important epistemological cornerstone of imperialism: the colonized possess a series of knowable characteristics and can be studied, known, and managed accordingly by the colonizers whose own complicity remains masked. (emphasis in original, p. 10)

Razack astutely critiques liberal notions of multiculturalism and inclusion by describing one way in which white Canadians are able to avoid being critical of themselves and their feelings toward non-white Canadians. She explains that what is emphasized is not the ways in which the (white) Canadian hosts are racist toward non-white guests, but instead the focus is on the way in which the non-white Canadians do not measure up to the standards and values of their (white) host. Thanks to the historical construction of non-white peoples and the present notions of liberal multiculturalism, today's white Canadians are able to hold their position of power and privilege.

2.2. BEYOND RACISM: INTERSECTIONALITY AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

People experience oppression in numerous ways on the basis of class, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ability, age, and race. This means that racism and the process of racialization – which have been a large focus of this study so far – do not occur in isolation from other forms of oppression. For this reason, this study draws on the idea of anti-oppression[13], meaning the idea of intersectionality or interlocking oppressions[14] (Crenshaw, 1991; Henry & Tator,

[13] Understanding intersectionality and interlocking oppressions is important for working within an anti-oppressive (activist) framework. One needs to understand that while being mindful of how oppressions can/do overlap, doing work to abolish one type of oppression should not contribute to another type. For example, anti-racist organizing in an anti-oppressive framework is careful not to be heterosexist, colonial, islamophobic, etc... at the same time as fighting racism.

[14] Crenshaw (1991) describes intersectionality to mean that while there are many different ways in which one can experience oppression – on the basis of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion and age – these experiences do not necessarily occur within isolation from one another. Razack (1998), in a description that goes a bit further than intersectionality, describes that systems of oppression – such as capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, etc... are "interlocking", meaning not only can they often occur simultaneously but they also depend on one another in order to exist.

2009; Razack, 1998) needs to be understood[15]. Canada's nation-building story of the racialization of Indigenous Peoples and people of colour is a gendered story of conquest as well[16]. The experience of women of colour in Canada is racialized and concurrently gendered. Amongst people of colour patriarchy is still at play, amongst women racism and colonialism are still at play, and amongst racialized women there are still tensions over ability, religion, age, sexual orientation and, perhaps most globally recognizable, class, capital, and increased militarization and privatization (Mohanty, 2003). For this reason, in Canadian society, women of colour experience both sexism and racism from white Canadians, while also experiencing sexism within their own communities (Carty, 1999; Dua, 1999; Razack, 2002; Stevenson, 1999; Thobani, 2007). Throughout the process of mapping social relations through institutional ethnography, it is possible to

[15] In establishing the importance of recognizing intersectionality, I want to mention that in critiquing whiteness I am not critiquing white people per se. The deconstruction of whiteness and the positioning of white privilege is something that many white people succeed in doing; an extensive discussion of this process can be understood as the process of "becoming an ally" (Bishop, 2002). Equally important is what Lawrence and Dua (2005) refer to as "decolonizing anti-racism". As a person of colour doing anti-racist research within an anti-oppressive framework, I acknowledge that I too contribute to the colonization of indigenous Peoples. I have the power and privilege, for example through my ability to vote as a citizen of this country, to acknowledge or deny Aboriginal struggles over self-government, autonomy, as well as land and language rights (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p. 135).

[16] For an historical look at the construction of gender amongst Aboriginal and other racialized women in Canada see Bannerji (1995), Bristow, 1994, Carty (1999), Carty & Brand (1993), CCNC (1992), Dua & Robertson (1999), Lawrence (2002) and Stevenson (1999). Furthermore, Dua (1999) gives a succinct account of the political resistance of Indigenous women during settler colonial times and other women of colour in the early 1900s to show anti-racist feminists' resistance of the institutionalization of race and gender relations. For an understanding of some ways in which the construction of women of colour in Canada has been and can be damaging, look at Bannerji (1995), Douglas (1989), Hoodfar (1993), James & Shadd (1994).
White settler colonial Canada has differentiated between people on the basis of class, religion, ability, and so on, though this research is limited to race and gender with a strategic focus on race before gender.

understand that the social position of the racialized woman is constructed through relations of race and of gender at the same time.

While race and gender are linked, it is necessary to think of each on its own (while they might influence or happen simultaneously with the other) so that a trumping of oppressions does not occur. Dei and Calliste (2000) suggest that:

> [a] genuine anti-racist project demands space for race to be analyzed outside of class and gender – so that race is reduced to neither class or gender. Distinguishing race, class and gender as separate analytical categories (albeit interconnected) is an important step in unravelling the ideological effects of specific racialized material processes and structures. (p.15)

In terms of equity and diversity at Canadian universities, one problem with speaking about oppression (or discrimination) as an umbrella for all individual forms of oppression is that while it can appear that there is an understanding that these oppressions overlap, in reality an erasure of race occurs (Dua, 2009; Monture, 2010). In order to remedy this challenge, while this study acknowledges that race and gender relations socially organize the lives of racialized women, a greater focus is put on race.

2.3. CANADIAN UNIVERSITIES: A SITE FOR RACISM

"While being on the margins of the world has had dire consequences, being incorporated within the world's marketplace has different implications and

in turn requires the mounting of new forms of resistance" (Smith, 1999, p.24).The mapping of social relations in this study, if not limited, can go beyond the University, beyond Canadian universities, and beyond Canada to larger trends of globalization – a new form of imperialism as Smith (1999) suggests – that has given rise to new struggles against neoliberalism (Campbell, 2006; Smith, 2006). Such a mapping is not easy – nor feasible – to do within a small study like this one. For this reason, and in keeping with my research questions, I am limiting my focus to the educational system as a key site for institutionalized whiteness and thus in turn racialization and racism.

As Apple (2004) explains in regards to white hegemony, "institutions of cultural preservation and distribution like *schools* create and recreate forms of consciousness that *enable social control to be maintained without the necessity of dominant groups having to resort to overt mechanisms of domination*" (p. 2, emphasis added). Similar to the Canadian context, Canadian universities are institutional sites where whiteness is able to gain and maintain its unmarked status. One way in which the unnoticed white hegemony of Canadian universities exists is in what knowledge is often privileged over others. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the context of Canadian universities and some ways power dynamics and white privilege may contribute to racialized peoples' experiences.

2.3.1. CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP: GENDERED AND "E-RACED" KNOWLEDGE

With government cuts to public funding, many institutions (such as educational ones) across Canada have been forced to become increasingly dependent on private corporate or foundation funding. This reliance has a great influence on what is researched and studied (Chan & Fisher, 2009; Henry & Tator, 2009; Turk, 2000). With research being funded by private corporations comes the pressure to fulfill corporate interests. Turk (2000) gives numerous examples, especially within the medical field, of academic research that is swayed by corporate interests or findings that are suppressed or hidden when they could be detrimental to the corporation's reputation and revenue. Naturally, this provokes questions about whose knowledge is represented, funded and accepted in the academy. As Henry and Tator (2009) suggest, the "production of knowledge contributions, curricular decision making, and allocation of funds within the academy are always related to power and who holds it" (p. 30).

Universities were not originally created for those who are not white and not male (Monture, 2009). Thus, neoliberal white (heterosexual, able bodied) male epistemologies are what historically determined – and today, thanks to corporate interests, might still determine – the majority of research, curriculum and funding in Canadian universities. Apple (2006) describes how neoliberalism has structured US educational institutions to become about marketization, privatization and increasingly for-profit. He explains that through this increased privatization, education is more and more structured by racist practices and class

differentials that tend to leave out poor people of colour (p. 115). In an educational context that is increasingly like that of the United States, the increased privatization and corporate sponsorship of knowledge production is one way in which systemic racism is manifested in Canadian universities (Henry & Tator, 2009). Dominant (white) knowledges are unquestioned and unmarked in such a way that they seem neutral and often even inclusive of those who are being subordinated. Schick (2008), in looking at multicultural education at a Canadian university, explores the way that the university space and its curriculum functions to "privilege whiteness, so that whiteness persists as what is worth knowing and as an identification worth performing" (p. 101). Centring whiteness renders power relations invisible (Apple, 2006) and relegates the possible wealth of knowledge and research to the margins of the normative white walls of the "ivory tower" of many Canadian universities.

2.3.2. GENDER AND RACE IN THE ACADEMY: POSITIONING RACIALIZED WOMEN

While research, curriculum, and funding choices primarily depend on (white male) corporate interests and centre whiteness (Agnew, 2007; Daniel, 2005; Das Gupta, 2007; Calliste & Dei, 2000), there are areas of study and moments within courses that attempt to add on and include other interests. Albeit, these add-ons are often tokenized, essentialized and/or misinformed. For example, many women's studies courses, which predominantly take up a white feminist perspective can claim inclusivity of other perspectives by reserving one (out of 13, for example) class to focus on Indigenous Peoples, people of colour,

Muslim, non-able bodied, transgendered, gender non-conforming or other others (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983; Collins, 1990; hooks, 1984). In other words, for the most part, many women's studies programs have failed to incorporate (and really weave in) race in both their theory and their methodology (Henry &Tator, 2009; Smith, 2010). Even when concerned faculty are able to carve out academic space such as Black studies or Indigenous studies departments, some fear that these departments will be further marginalized within the greater academic community which continues to fund and centre whiteness. Monture (2010) comments on this very concern here:

> Although I recognize the importance of creating spaces such as departments of Indigenous, Women's, or Black studies, their existence does not necessarily create a revolution. Often, they create only marginalized spaces and organizations that are chronically underfunded, and sometimes even massage the guilt of white administrators. (p. 33)

Rather than adding on these important knowledges and perspectives to make universities look equitable and feel less guilty – one way in which "window dressing" (Nelson, 2010, p. 110) is done or "cosmetic changes" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 14) are made – it is important to question why it is that certain (normalized) forms of knowledge make up the core of what we are teaching, funding and researching (Monture, 2009). Incorporating equity and diversity in the intellectual life of the university can be about enriching the university

experience (Monture, 2010) rather than appearing equitable while masking white hegemony.

2.3.3. Trumping Oppressions: What about the 'other Other'?

"Beyond sisterhood there is still racism, colonialism and imperialism."
-Chandra Talpade Mohanty

Responding to pressures from feminist movements, Canadian universities have seen some significant progress for (white) women and for gender equity in general, yet unfortunately addressing race and racism has lagged behind (Dua, 2009; Kobayashi, 2009). In fact, many of the equity initiatives taken in the academy began through gender equity (Dua, 2009; Bannerji, 1991; Henry & Tator, 2009; Kobayashi, 2009; Monture, 2010, Smith, 2010) and "early equity policies within the academy assumed white women would be the first, if not exclusive beneficiaries of the institutional quest for equity" (Smith, 2010, p. 37). Following the positive response to gender equity, other equity needs were brought forward by students and faculty in the academy (Smith, 2010). But in some cases discussing race ended up being viewed as a threat to gender equity (Kobayashi, 2009), oppressions were pitted against one another and finally everything took the back seat to gender. Exploring the social relations of race and gender equity together, rather than informing an intersectional approach, can end up putting them in competition with one another, making it easy to ignore race while appearing to be equitable (through an apparent commitment to gender equity). Thus, merely discussing women in the academy can make it

difficult to discuss race, while discussing race exclusively in the academy can make it challenging to position racialized women. In order to give space to the often subjugated experience of racialized women (activists) in Canadian universities, this study starts from their everyday worlds in order to map their experience in conjunction with explicit or implicit claims of supposedly achieving racial equity.

Ahmed (2002) refers to the construction of (white) women by men as the "other" while the doubly marginalized racialized (or Indigenous) woman is constructed as the "other other". Ahmed suggests that one way to work towards a unified feminism is to struggle with "other others" while being cognizant of their past that cannot be separated from their present day construction. In other words, historical losses have present day consequences. Starting from the past construction of Indigenous Peoples and then people of colour, as briefly explored in this chapter, and its present day implications is an essential part of decolonizing anti-racism (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Somewhat related to Ahmed's explanation of other others, Razack (2008) discusses the dynamics of race and gender between women of colour, men of colour and white men. She contrasts the white (male) saviour with the non-white male other who is portrayed as violent towards the abused racialized female or "other other".

2.4. FROM THEORY TO METHODOLOGY

The struggles taking place inside a Canadian (educational) institution are linked to the ways in which knowledge of Canadian society was created. Bannerji (1995) discusses the ways – some of which have been explored in this chapter – in which racism is deeply embedded in white settler society. Ng (1989) points out that due to the white/Eurocentric lens of Canadian history and society there has been an erasure of race. She explains that, generally, anyone non-white has been constructed as an *immigrant* or *outsider* while those considered *native* to the land are white immigrants or white Canadian citizens. It is for this reason that challenging racism and sexism in the Canadian university and in Canada means challenging a foundation of Canadian society: whiteness.

The juxtaposition between the experiences of racialized women at McGill and the supposed equitable and diverse image of the University is an initial part of this research. It is through beginning this institutional ethnography from the standpoint of racialized women's experiences, that unmarked and unquestioned white hegemony may be exposed and we begin to understand how we are implicated in the ruling relations of a university.

A critical race feminist lens gives this study an anti-oppressive framework which understands the ways in which oppressions are connected while being critical of liberalism and the essentialized, tokenized and misrepresented experiences of racialized women. Critical race feminism allows the racialized female participants in this study to tell their own stories in their own words, while through institutional ethnography these women and I are able to construct

knowledge and make connections between our experiences of racism and oppression and the ruling relations of the institution in which we find ourselves.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, building upon my earlier discussion of a critical race feminist theoretical framework, ideas around the socially constructed nature of knowledge production through sharing one's experiences are explored as foundational to conducting an institutional ethnography. A distinction is made between feminist standpoint theory and the use of standpoint in institutional ethnography and thus this study. Taking the standpoint of racialized female activists at McGill means using their experiences as a starting point for this study – a starting point from which to begin mapping social relations at McGill. Furthermore, this chapter explores the researcher's insider knowledge and the need for reflexivity in this research in order to constantly remain aware of this dynamic. The second half of this chapter, in considering how racialized women's experiences are a starting point for this study, discusses the process of consent, as well as the ethics and methods of this research. The majority of the analysis for this study was done during interviews so that knowledge could be produced socially through interacting with participants, while each interview tended to add to the knowledge produced in previous interviews. The choice of participants, beyond the first few interviews, was determined by following leads based on gaps that I noticed – or concerns that came up – in each interview. Some administrators, faculty, staff and other students were interviewed during which institutional language, texts, policies and practices were discussed, questioned and analyzed.

3.1. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION THROUGH SOCIAL INTERACTION

"[K]nowledge is not the purely intellectual product of a detached spectator but instead is produced collectively through practical human involvement in changing the world; this involvement also changes humans themselves" (Jaggar, 2008, p. 303). In other words knowledge is socially constructed through interaction, and learning and knowledge production often occur incidentally (Foley, 1999). It is through reflection after an experience occurs that one realizes what was learned. Thus, due to the belief that knowledge is socially constructed, this research rejects a traditional positivist paradigm that insists on objectivity and truth. Dominant knowledge often reflects the interests and values of the dominant class rather than being value-free and objective. Ladson-Billings (2000) explains that:

> How one views the world is influenced by what knowledges one possesses and what knowledge one is capable of possessing is influenced deeply by one's world view... The process of developing a world view that differs from the dominant world view requires active intellectual work on the part of the knower, because schools, society, and the structures and production of knowledge are designed to create individuals who internalize the dominant world view and knowledge production and acquisition. (p. 258)

Therefore, those who are in a position of power – whether through class, gender, sexual orientation or race – work to determine and control what

knowledge and ideas are dominant. In the case of this research, it is left to racialized female activists at McGill to challenge the dominant views of an institution by engaging in the critical knowledge production that takes place through their interactions with anti-racist activism on campus.

3.1.1. EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE FROM THE MARGINS: A PARTIAL VIEW, AN ENTRY POINT

In understanding that power and social location have an effect on knowledge production, some scholars suggest that taking the standpoint of those who are not in positions of privilege – not white, not heterosexual, not gender conforming, and so on – can lead to understanding oppression because of having an experience of it (Collins, 2000; Essed 1990, Haraway, 1988); this is often referred to as feminist standpoint theory. However, drawing on a Marxist understanding of class struggles and mobilization, Bannerji (1995) warns us that:

> Since political subjectivities are articulated within a given political and ideological environment, and self-identities are fraught with contradictory possibilities... then there is no guarantee that there is only one form of politics of identity which will emerge, or that it will avoid the formulation of 'identity and community versus structures and class'. Victims and subjects of capital do not automatically become socialists. Misery does not automatically produce communism, and desire for change born of suffering does not spontaneously know 'what is to be done?' to end oppression. (p. 35)

Hence experiencing racism does not make one automatically anti-racist. More generally, within an institution there are many social locations – one of them being that of racialized women engaged in forms of anti-racist activism[17] – and in turn many different perspectives or ways of knowing. Taking the standpoint of these racialized women means starting with their everyday experiences as an entry point from which to understand how these women, other students, staff, faculty and administration experience the social structure of the institution that is McGill. Institutional ethnography elaborates on the idea that people are interconnected through the dynamics of social structures. It looks at:

> the concept of social relations, which, as in Marx, refers to the coordinating of people's activities on a large scale, as this occurs in and across multiple sites, involving the activities of people who are not known to each other and who do not meet face-to-face. (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 17)

While the women whose positions I am starting from in this study, and I, have an understanding of McGill, based on insider experiences, we are unable on our own to map together the whole institution from every angle. Our experiences make up a partial view of the institution. Through interviews, observations and analyses this research attempts to connect our experiences to

[17] The group "racialized female anti-racist activists at McGill" is broad; this research is not attempting to flatten or essentialize these broad and varied experiences.

administrative decisions, policies and language used which socially organize the greater social structures in which my participants and I are situated at McGill.

3.1.2. EXPERIENCE AS KNOWLEDGE: UNCOVERING THE UNQUESTIONED

> *Where are we to turn? Where are we to find interpretive frameworks and methods that are more than 'alternative' and would go beyond 'inclusion'? How can we gain insight into social relations and culture of advanced capitalism which allows for direct representation and a revolutionary political agency?*
> *(Bannerji, 1991, p. 74)*

In asking the above, Bannerji (1991) notes the importance of beginning from what one knows, from one's own experience, in order to understand ruling relations. Smith (1997) explains that experience "is a method of speaking that is not pre-appointed by the discourses of the relations of ruling" (p. 394) and that when experiences are spoken they become knowledge.

Through speaking for ourselves about what we do and experience, we come to produce knowledge – and by no means does this imply a claim to advancing this as an objective truth. "Taking women's standpoint and beginning in experience", as Smith (1997) points out, "gives access to a knowledge of what is known in the doing [...] and often seen as uninteresting, unimportant, and routine" (p. 395).

This study does not make a claim to put forward an objective 'truth', but instead it seeks to map the ruling relations at McGill starting from the standpoint of those racialized female student activists at the university who participated in my research. Beginning from the experience of racialized women at McGill is not necessarily meant to *challenge* that which is seen as unmarked, normalized, routine or dominant in an institution as much as it is meant to *uncover* or expose

it. Kinsman (2006) suggests that until explicated and critically analyzed through institutional ethnography, the social organization of an institution goes unnoticed. Since knowledge is socially constructed, sharing stories with others in order to construct knowledge together is a powerful tool for contesting power. The perspective of that which is unmarked and dominant has the power to tell our story on our behalf, while through uncovering the social organization of an institution we are able to share our experiences in order to define ourselves in our own words and through our own stories. Fontaine (1998) suggests that lived experiences of racism are found in our everyday lives rather than being perpetuated overtly and in isolation by individuals, as is widely believed:

> Canada's cherished image as a tolerant society leads even progressive Canadians to the view that racism means only *overt* acts by some nasty individuals against other individuals. I do not see it that way. *No* Aboriginal person in Canada sees it that way. *What we see, experience, and understand on a daily basis, is racism interwoven in the very fabric of the social system in Canada.* (p. 130, emphasis added)

The racism that is woven into our educational system and our society can be exposed through the sharing of our experiences. Along with exposing racism as going beyond overt acts by individuals, sharing our stories reveals aspects of the social world, as Fontaine describes above, that are often hidden or silenced by more supposedly objective methods of social science (Delgado 1995; Crenshaw, Gotanda & Thomas, 1995). As Razack (1998) suggests below, the stories of

racialized women point out contradictions that are often unnoticed rather than staking claim to constitute an 'objective truth'.

> Stories of experience on the margins should not be seen as presenting the truth that counters the dominant story, but as windows into the contradictions that we face every day between what we are told is reality, and what we experience. We should pay as much attention to *how* we know, as we do to *what* we know. (p. 55)

These stories can outline a disjuncture between how McGill presents itself in terms of racial equity and how racialized women experience McGill. Furthermore, by sharing our experiences, we are recounting and recording stories in order to build an institutional memory that could help inform anti-racist activism and potentially take equity at McGill beyond its mere image of diversity and inclusivity.

3.2. POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER: EPISTEMIC PRIVILEGE, INSIDER KNOWLEDGE, AND REFLEXIVITY

> *"It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness." - Karl Marx*

As a racialized woman involved in some anti-oppressive/anti-racist activism that takes place at McGill, I, along with my participants and the greater institution to which we are all connected and by which we are affected, am part of what is being observed in this study. I work alongside the women I am speaking to for this study, and I am implicated in the very educational institution in which these women are also situated. Through my own experiences while

pursuing graduate studies at McGill I have been impacted by barriers that I feel can be attributed to how I experience the relations of race and gender. Some barriers have been on an administrative level (through the policy and structure of the academic space that I have observed and experienced), while, as noted in chapter one, others have come from within the supposedly safe and (theoretically) critical activist bubble in which I sought refuge[18]. Based on my understanding and interest in situating myself within a predominantly white university like McGill – which, as discussed with reference to Canadian universities in general, can be viewed as a site for racism – my choice of research topic is largely informed by my own interests and personal experiences.

I draw on other institutional ethnography studies and especially the work of some academics who have chosen research rooted in and emerging out of their position in community organizing (Campbell 2006; Kinsman, 2006; Pence, 1996; Smith, 1989). Others have chosen research that is done in collaboration with community organizers (Campbell, 1998; Mykhalovskiy & McCoy, 2002; Ng, 1999), and some have looked at ways in which they might be implicated in and contributing to ruling relations (de Montigny 1995; Parada, 2002). Furthermore, I look to other academics for examples of how one can situate oneself in one's research, through narrative inquiry (Bell, 2003; Bourdieu, 1999; hooks, 1990;

[18] While I do give an explanation in the introduction for how this study benefits me personally, I do not go into much detail about instances of racism that I have personally observed and experienced. During the data collection of this study many challenges faced by the racialized female activists that I interviewed were things I could relate to. For this reason, while I am surely part of this study, I have chosen not to explicitly input my own thoughts unless they are substantiated by literature, observations or interviews that are explored here.

Razack, 1998) or auto-ethnography (Church, 1995; Fine, 1992; Campbell & Gregor, 2002; Naples, 2003). Together these many approaches inform how I approach and situate myself in my research.

Marx described the working class as inhabiting a social location with epistemic privilege when it comes to understanding the social structure of capitalism (Lukács, 1971). Similarly, I can be viewed as being in a position of epistemic privilege within this study. Collins (1986) describes how Black female domestic workers possess a social location such that they are forced to negotiate the world of the privileged person for whom they work and they are likely to understand things that their employer might not due to social location and interests that are systemically made invisible. I do not want to conflate the experiences of Black female domestic workers with those of racialized female activists at McGill, but I have the insider privilege of sharing experiences similar to the women whose experiences serve as an entry point into this study. At the same time I am able to distance myself as an outsider or academic researcher. George Smith contends that "[i]n beginning from the local historical setting of people's experiences, the ethnographer must start in a reflexive fashion from inside the social organization of not only his/her own world, but by extension the social world he/she intends to investigate" (1990,p. 26). While I am cognizant of my insider privilege, in this group (of racialized female student activists) my view is still partial and thus various (other) interviews, observations, and much self-reflection took place in order to better situate myself and understand the

disjuncture between the experience of racialized female activists at McGill and the way in which McGill presents itself as equitable. In other words through an understanding that reflexivity is essential in this study (de Montigny, 1998; Smith, 1995; Smith, 1999) I documented my own experiences and reflections in a personal journal which greatly assisted me in analyzing and piecing together the data for this research.

3.3. THE ETHICS OF RESEARCH: RECRUITMENT

The subject population of this research is young (19-36 years of age) racialized women who are current (or former) students of McGill involved in some form of anti-oppressive/anti-racist social movement or activism at McGill. The subject population has been limited in this way due to feasibility and time constraints. Student participants are women with whom I have contact through activism in which I am involved at McGill.

My purpose for taking up the standpoint of racialized female student activists in this study is because an understanding of institutional racism at McGill, and more broadly Canadian universities, starting from the experience of racialized female activists contributes to recently emerging literature. In the Canadian university context, as discussed in the previous chapter, gender equity has progressed while racial equity has lagged behind. For this reason, in taking the perspective of racialized female student activists at McGill, this study is firstly centred on race before other social relations, such as gender, experienced by the participants.

Although it is beyond the scope of this research, there are accounts from the perspective of racialized professors at leading Canadian universities that look at their tokenization as one of very few faculty of colour, the tenure process, and other instances of racism they experience– such as being in a place of needing to support and/or supervise racialized students, needing to be the expert on equity, or having to teach the one non-compulsory course that looks at issues of race (Kobayashi, 2002, 2009; Henry, 2003; Mahtani, 2006; Monture, 2009; Nakhaie, 2004; Nelson, 2011; Smith, 2010; Stewart, 2009). There is also an emerging body of literature on racialized students' experiences with racism in Canadian universities (Austin, 2009; LaFlamme, 2003; Hernandez-Ramdwar, 2009; McIntyre, 2000; Ornstein, 2005), and white/Eurocentric curriculum (Calliste, 2000; LaFlamme, 2003; Samuel, 2005; Wagner, 2005).

For the remainder of this chapter, the methods, ethical issues and concerns of this research are outlined.

3.3.1. CONSENT, CONFIDENTIALITY, OWNERSHIP

Attached (Appendix A) is a copy of the email sent as an invitation to potential participants for the structured interview component of this study. All participants were encouraged to take the time to discuss concerns and/or questions with me by telephone, email or in person prior to making the decision to participate in this research and signing the consent form (Appendix C). In an institutional ethnography it is difficult to predetermine the exact focus and direction of a study. For example each interview may lead to new knowledge

production and in turn new choices about what to inquire about and who to talk to next (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). Thus, as anticipated, some changes were made to the research questions and the intended direction of this study that are not outlined in the Appendices. Rather than outlining these changes in writing prior to each interview – since the overall theme of the study did not change – all student participants were verbally told of changes, and together we made edits to each individual consent form prior to signing.

Interviews scheduled with participants took place in a public space or any space deemed more convenient through suggestion or preference, and began with a brief verbal description of the research and discussion about the consent form (Appendix C). Participation in this research was purely voluntary. Participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time and were given ownership of their contributions. This being said, no participant withdrew from the study. No compensation was offered for this study. However, participants were made aware of how this study might inform the organizing work that they do and might give them a unique chance to discuss and reflect on their experiences as racialized female student activists at McGill.

All participants were asked to participate at their own will as individuals who identify with the set parameters of my study (female, racialized, and involved in activism at McGill). Because at times information about their respective activist spaces, groups or organizations might have been disclosed, in my analysis I do not mention the names of groups or organizations discussed –

unless the group or organization no longer exists[19] or all current members of the group agree to have their group named in the research. Each participant is referred to by their location within the institutional work process, for example: student, faculty, staff, administrator, and so on. All student participants were given pseudonyms while all other identifying information was omitted during transcription of the interviews. Other people involved in this study, such as faculty, staff and administrators, are referred to by their title and/or role at McGill. All data is stored in a locked space that only I have access to and will be destroyed after the submission of my thesis.

3.4. Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

3.4.1. Narrative Inquiry and Interviews: Entry-Data Collection, Starting from experience/ Setting up the problematic

Bourdieu (1999) suggests that writing personal narratives can help link one's personal experiences to larger societal systemic patterns. While this might be the case, personal narratives and field notes were kept in order to practice reflexivity in this study. Originally, as part of the initial data collection, I intended to run a focus group with other racialized women activists to discuss a common narrative around issues discussed in formal and informal interviews and locate a starting point. However, it soon became apparent that coordinating such a focus group was difficult and unfeasible and thus it did not happen. In total, nine 30 to 60 minute audio-recorded in-depth unstructured individual interviews took place

[19] This is the case with FEDEC and MARC, as will be discussed in the data and analysis chapter.

with racialized female activists at McGill, Bianca, Claire, Diana, Eunice, Helene, Michelle, Rana, Zelda, and Zena. Of these nine participants, five – namely Bianca, Claire, Diana, Michelle, and Zena – are current McGill students[20]. These interviews were a dialogic process of communication where the participant and I jointly constructed and verbally made connections between our perspectives, knowledges, experiences, intentions and interpretations as racialized female student activists at McGill.

For this study I follow the idea of work laid out by many who practice institutional ethnography (De Vault & McCoy 2006, Campbell & Gregor, 2002) as paid or unpaid work and part of the everyday things that people do. In the context of the racialized female student activist, this work could be (amongst other things) their day-to-day presence as a student and as an activist on campus. For fear of swaying participants' responses by the way that I formulated questions, I attempted to tell participants what topics I wanted to hear about rather than asking them specific questions. Some points of discussion I considered for interviews are: tell me what you do (for work); tell me about a situation which made your work difficult; tell me some ways in which McGill has assisted or made it difficult for you to do your work. Generally, I started each interview by talking about the research and letting the participant know that I wanted to hear about their experience at McGill, as a student and as an activist.

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[20] Some current (or former) students interviewed are also staff at McGill.
Claire and Michelle are graduate students while Bianca, Diana, and Zena are undergraduate students.

In the initial stage, during the first few interviews, the point was to learn about what the participant does and what she experiences. Discussions that went beyond what the participant does or experiences, for example discussions about resisting one's experiences of racism and/or supporting other racialized students, were still invited. These inform the latter part of this study which looks at possible ways in which racialized women attempt to resist racism through anti-racist organizing.

3.4.2. Entry-Data Analysis

All interviews were fully or partially transcribed so that the experiences described could be referred to during subsequent interviews, during the analysis and finally during the limited hermeneutic approach (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Moses & Knutsen, 2007) taken in this study. Transcriptions of interviews were not meant to privilege the text (the transcription) over the embodied experience of my participants, for this reason I attempted to do the majority of my analysis through discussion with the participant rather than through listening or reading the transcriptions of the interviews. The transcribed text was meant to assist me and my participant through a hermeneutic approach, where each participant and I constructed knowledge about, and got to the intended meaning of our discussion during and after the interviews took place. Mykhalovskiy (as cited in DeVault & McCoy, 2006) explains that "analytic thinking begins in the interview. [...] I'm checking my understanding as it develops; I offer it up to the informant for confirmation or correction" (p. 23). In this way each individual interview

builds on the knowledge constructed in previous interviews. Kinsman and Gentile (1998) saw that since "people were affected differently, the narratives took different shapes, and the researchers found that their providing some historical context often helped informants remember and reconstruct their experiences" (p. 58). They describe the interview process as "a fully reflexive process in which both the participant and the interviewer construct knowledge together" (Ibid). During interviews, along with checking my understanding of a participant's experience, I was able to draw on previous interviews and observations and bring in what I have learned through literature as well as through my own experiences.

Each interview was used to locate and trace the points of connection among individuals implicated within an institutional structure. My purpose as researcher was "not to generalize about the group of people interviewed, but to find and describe social processes that have generalizing effects" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 18). When verbalizing my analysis during interviews with participants, my point was not to categorize the experiences of my participants. Instead it was to analyse how these women under different circumstances are all part of the same organizational structure being explored in this study. Furthermore, based on what my participants discussed, I discovered who else to speak to for my research and which texts and documents I needed to consult.

3.4.3. Field Observations and interviews: Data Collection, Identifying and investigating institutional processes that are shaping our experience

The majority of the data collection in this research took place at a time when, as I discuss in chapter four, the McGill principal's task force on *Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement* was nearing senate approval and thus there were two town hall meetings which took place to give McGill faculty, staff and students a chance to question and comment. At the start of the data collection of this study, it was clear when interviewing racialized female activist students that I needed to meet with and interview more people – namely administrators, faculty members and staff – and attend the town hall for the task force, in order to better understand some of the experiences students were telling me about. This understanding took me beyond the initial entry data to further explore the web of race and gender relations at McGill.

I chose to start from the experiences of racialized female student activists before moving to the institution so that throughout my research I can refer back to these experiences and ensure that I begin from the standpoint of the racialized female students rather than the normalized and dominant views of the institution. Interviews beyond the entry level data were most commonly conducted on the spot – by going to a faculty member's office hours, tracking down an administrator at his/her office or through meeting and talking to people at the town hall – rather than scheduled and recorded. Observations made before, during and since embarking on this study contributed to my personal narratives and assisted my field notes which inform some of the analysis made with respect to the literature, observations and interviews in this study.

The precise choice of participants, beyond the first few racialized female activists initially interviewed, was determined by the course of the inquiry – by following leads based on concerns and comments that unfolded with each interview. The manager at the Social Equity and Diversity Education (SEDE) office, the Post Graduate Student Society (PGSS) and Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) equity commissioners, and the Associate Provost (Policies, Procedures and Equity) were amongst the interviews conducted. Overall, four faculty members (of whom one was part of the task force), two administrators (of whom one was on the task force), four staff members, and two white students (Olga and Denise) were interviewed in addition to the nine racialized female student activists. Subsequently, many people were contacted through email – such as past student members of the task force and former employees of the McGill Equity Office – in order to clarify information that came up during data collection. The overarching purpose of these interviews was to understand each one's role at McGill in terms of racial equity. Some guiding questions that I had for administrators and staff were: what do you do; what purpose does this space/policy serve at McGill; how, why and when did this policy/space emerge; what is the procedure that one would follow to make an equity complaint; (how) does this change depending on who is making the complaint and who the complaint is against[21]; how effective/ineffective/limited is this procedure?

[21] This question was discussed during some administrator, staff, faculty and student interviews yet it is not within the scope of this research to elaborate on these discussions.

One thing that was interesting and crucial to pay attention to in this process was the use of institutional language. There were times where certain terms or phrases, such as “perceived discrimination” or “equity”, were used with the assumption that we both agreed on their meaning. As Devault and McCoy (2006) observe, “[an] institutional ethnographer encountering institutional language has thus a twofold objective: to obtain a description of the actuality that is assumed by, but not revealed in, the institutional terms, and, at the same time, to learn how such terms and the discourses they carry operate in the institutional setting” (p. 38). For this reason, language that came up through discussions around the task force and about equity in interviews with administrators and staff was noted and has been further explored in chapter four of this study.

At times – during interviews – reference was made to data collected by the university (such as surveys) or to policies and procedures that are in place to mandate how issues of equity are discussed and dealt with (such as the Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy). In most cases, I sought out these texts that came up in discussion and, where possible, discussed these texts with those who created them or referred to them. In all cases, every attempt is made to reference only texts that are readily accessible – for example through the internet – in order to simplify the process for others who might want to access and refer to these texts in the future.

3.4.4. DATA ANALYSIS

DeVault and McCoy (2006) contend that: “Interviews continue to play an important role [throughout the research], whether as the primary form of investigation or as a way of filling in the gaps of what the researcher can learn through observation and document analysis” (p. 21). I agree with the authors here, and add that reflective narrative inquiry – specifically my own narratives – for similar reasons, played an important role in this process.

As with the entry-data for this study, the point of this research is not to generalize findings; instead it is about attempting to gain an understanding of ways in which the experiences of racialized female activists at McGill are coordinated through race and gender relations. In mapping these social relations, we find they can be mediated through texts, policies, procedures and upper administration in McGill and so an attempt is made to explicate how it is that these women’s lives are socially organized at McGill.

In summary, the research proceeded as follows: Data collected through the initial interviews with racialized female activists at McGill and my personal experience was used to raise questions and acted as an entry point into understanding and describing institutional processes around equity at McGill. This initial data worked to expose a disjuncture between the equitable and diverse image of McGill which is projected and the experience of racialized female student activists with racism at McGill. Subsequent data collection, as well as interrogating texts and language when speaking to administrators, staff and faculty in the larger institutional and political context, contributed to an

understanding of how the institution works and how the initial experiences fit into it. Once the write-up of this study was completed, student participants were given a copy of the data and analysis chapter and encouraged to make edits/changes to ensure that my interpretation of each participant's knowledge and experience was consistent with what they meant to convey. This process was part of the limited hermeneutic approach which gave each participant the chance to add in or take out parts of what they said in their interview after reflection and discussion. Finally, in putting together and analyzing the data for this study, the experience of racialized female student activists helped to map the relations of race and gender in terms of how equity issues are discussed and dealt with by staff and administration at McGill. Beyond explicating a disjuncture between the experiences of racialized female student activists at McGill and the dominant image which the university projects of a diverse and equitable institution which makes all people feel included, this institutional ethnography, informed by a critical race feminist lens was able to discuss and document resistance through anti-racist organizing so that future organizing efforts at McGill may be informed by the successes and challenges of past and current anti-racist activism.

3.5. CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

Dominant narratives, such as Canada's founding story and McGill's global and public image as being diverse and equitable, seek to define people, through the way in which they are subtly unmarked and thus accepted. Apple (2006)

explains that "who we are and how we think about our institutions is closely connected to who has the power to produce and circulate new ways of understanding our identities" (p. 9). In other words, our identities and knowledges have been subordinated by those who rule in the institution in which we are found. McGill, as an institution, has defined its student body, its faculty, staff and administration as it chooses through its power to do so. This study is providing an alternate story, an alternate way of knowing McGill – from the standpoint of racialized female student activists – and in turn mapping their experience to the uncovered greater institutional structures, policies and practices that make up the social structure of McGill.

The analysis in this study is not meant to be a critique of McGill or McGill's approach to equity. As Smith (1990) explains, blame is not a useful tool politically speaking. However, through inquiry rather than blame we can expose how it is that things happen the way that they do and produce the outcomes that they have (p. 23). Thus rather than blaming McGill for the institutional racism that some students might experience, this study is meant to give an account of the social organization of equity at McGill and to explicate that what is known and discussed by McGill's administration in terms of racial equity is not the same as what is actually experienced by some racialized women students. The next chapter will begin the process of exploring the data and the analysis of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA AND ANALYSIS

Following on from my theoretical and contextual discussion in chapter two, this chapter begins by situating McGill University in relation to Canada and Quebec's colonial history, I then argue that the experience of racialized female activist students at McGill University demonstrates the extent to which McGill mirrors Canada's white settler society and (neo)liberal multicultural democratic ideals of equity, diversity and inclusivity. The analysis in this chapter draws upon the knowledge produced through interviews where racialized women shared their experiences of being students and/or activists at McGill and administrators, faculty, staff, and other students shared their experience in working with equity on campus. This chapter also builds upon observations about McGill's past colonial history, its atmosphere, and its underrepresentation of people of colour. Further, it attends to the institutional language of the University in regards to race, racism, diversity and equity and asks whether McGill accepts responsibility and is accountable for its choices. In the second half of this chapter, interviews with racialized women activists help to explore the challenges of talking about race – and often, just being – in a predominantly white space like McGill. The difficulty of creating spaces on campus that centre racialized people is explored through the documentation of one anti-racist group that no longer exists. Furthermore, the fear of having activist groups and activist work co-opted by the administration, for other purposes, is explored through documentation of a faculty equity committee that also no longer exists. This chapter works to give

the research participants a chance to recount their experiences and stories in their own words in order to make sense of ruling relations at McGill and then in order to document and build on McGill's institutional memory which could potentially inform current and future anti-racist activism at McGill and beyond.

4.1 . McGill: Microcosm of Canadian White Settler Society

> *[U]niversities in Canada were founded in and were integrated with the ruling apparatus of imperial powers that were implicated in the genocidal treatment of the peoples native to the territory we call Canada, institutions of slavery, the subjugation of other civilizations...The taken-for-granted white dominance of everyday life is a present deposited by Canada's history of colonialism. Skin colour becomes the present trace of membership in a formerly subjugated people in the context of intellectual and cultural traditions founded in imperialism. (Smith, 2002, p. 151)*

McGill University was founded by and named after James McGill, who is described in his biography "as courageous, hard working, shrewd, warmly benevolent in personal relationships, strongly endowed with gifts of leadership and public spirited to a truly remarkable degree" (Frost, 1995, p. xii). McGill University honours its founder and refers to him as "an immigrant pioneer"[22] whose philanthropy and vision led to the educational institution in which we study and research today. James McGill could equally be described as a white settler who, in the 18th and 19th centuries, partook in the fur trade, where systemic exploitation of Indigenous Peoples and their knowledge took place, as well as owning slaves prior to the Slavery Abolition Act (Mackey, 2010; Twatio,

[22] "Founded by an immigrant pioneer, and situated at the crossroads of Canada's linguistic and cultural communities in a great metropolitan city, McGill is a research-intensive, student-centred, publicly purposed University, with broad international reach and impact." (from introduction to task force on *Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement* website: http://www.mcgill.ca/principal/diversityexcellenceandcommunity/)

2005). While McGill holds an admirable global reputation as one of the oldest and best universities in Canada, it is also founded on land taken from Indigenous People, with money from a man who is deeply implicated in their dispossession. Like the province and country in which it is situated, the university is built on the legacy of white settler colonialism. Monture (2010) describes the colonial structure of Canadian institutions, such as universities, as follows:

> Much of the colonial oppression that Aboriginal people survived is embedded in the institutions Canada has created. Some of those institutions, such as residential schools, were created solely for that purpose. When people wonder why Aboriginal people just can't let the past be the past, they don't understand the present day impacts of institutional oppression, including the continued suppression of our own ways and social systems that we have survived. (p. 25)

What are the present day impacts of colonialism at McGill? Some of the ways in which McGill, like Canadian universities in general, mirror greater societal structures – both historically and presently – will be explored in this chapter. As discussed in terms of recognizing Canada's founding colonial story, it is important to recognize McGill's colonial past in order to situate racialized women at McGill and uncover the ruling relations that coordinate this institution. As Coulthard (2011) explained in terms of the ease with which Canada is able to admit to implication in racist practices as long as it remains in the past, looking to historical ways in which McGill (as well as Canadian

universities and society) *was* racist is easier to do than to admit and make public today's racism. Historical examples of racism often seem overt at McGill, because their impact and intent are clear. Today, as my research will show, racism at McGill occurs in ways more hidden than ever before (Bannerji, 1991; Calliste, 2000; Henry & Tator, 2009; Monture, 2010; Smith 2010), such as through policies, practices, procedures and the overall atmosphere of McGill notwithstanding its projected appearance as a diverse and equitable institution. In general, racism in the university can manifest itself:

> through the formal and 'hidden' curricula (such as climate and tone of the campus, university calendars and recruitment materials); through racial/ethnic slurs, jokes and stereotyping; and through the exclusion of these groups from positive representation; and through the so-called 'objective' interpretations and explanations that actually represent the dominant racial/ethnic groups' interests. (Calliste 2000, p. 149)

While the background of McGill's founder, the slave owning settler James McGill, points to a colonial history and could implicate the University in an instance of overt racism *in the past*, in this chapter we attempt to locate and uncover less overt ways in which racism might be operating through the ruling relations at this University.

4.2. McGill's Global Reputation, McGill's local reality

According to the 2006 census, 26% of Montréal's population identify as belonging to a visible minority[23]. Amidst this predominantly francophone and increasingly racially and ethnically diverse population, McGill, according to official documents, at first glance appears to be fairly representative of its surroundings. McGill claims that it:

> welcomes students from 160 countries to our campuses in any given year, and [counts] alumni in 180. Over the last nine years, [McGill] recruited nearly 900 new faculty members, of whom 500 came to McGill from leading institutions outside of Canada.[24]

In making the claim of being a diverse institution, McGill is able to follow liberal notions of interculturalism from Québec and of multiculturalism from Canada to claim that it is by default an equitable institution because of its diverse make-up. While McGill boasts an ethnically diverse population and in terms of its student population – 22% of whom are non-white[25] (Mendelson, 2011, p. 22) – is fairly representative of the surrounding city, in the most privileged and permanent

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[23] This is the term used to describe "persons other than the Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race and non-white in colour" (Employment Equity Act, 2002). In this study such persons are referred to as racialized or of colour.

[24] Taken from: http://www.mcgill.ca/principal/diversityexcellenceandcommunity/; this is the introduction to the Principal's task force on *Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement*. See Ahmed (2007) to nuance the claim that diversity exists by virtue of the make-up of a campus, rather than it being something to achieve in looking at what people are over/under-represented.

[25] Of 2076 students who responded to a question asking "Which of the following are you?" followed by racial/ethnic categories such as White, Black, Chinese, Arab, etc., 459 students checked off something either than "White" – however is it important to note that students were asked to "check all that apply" meaning that there are instances – for example a student who identifies as mixed-race – where students could have checked more than one category. Thus the percentage I have given might be inaccurate. In a question asking students if they are Aboriginal, of 2010 students who responded 15 identified as Aboriginal – that is far less than one percent of the McGill population. See footnote 37 for more on the validity of this survey's data.

positions such as that of tenured faculty and senior administration, people of colour are under-represented. A survey[26] spanning four years (April 2008 to April 2011) administered by the Associate Provost (Policies, Procedures and Equity) shows that of 656 tenured associate professors who responded to the survey, 69 identify as visible minorities[27], while of 25 senior administration who responded, one identifies as a visible minority[28] (White, 2011). Comparing this 10.5% of tenured associate professors who identify as visible minorities to the 26% of the broader population who identify as such within Montréal raises questions about the extent to which McGill can claim to be an institution which reflects and values diversity.

Nelson (2010a) questions the poor recruitment and retention of racialized and aboriginal faculty at McGill, given the University prides itself in its global reputation and insists that it recruits internationally. In an interview, one student commented: "Personally, I am used to not seeing myself represented in faculties" (FEDEC, Recruitment/Retention Survey, p. 2)[29], while another student remarked that "the only place we see teachers of colour is when we take an

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[26] This survey was meant to measure McGill's success in administering the Employment Equity Act for Faculty and Staff and is likely the first survey of its kind. The non-response rate for the first two years was 40% while that dropped to 20% the previous two years. A non-response was counted as being a faculty or staff who is a "white able-bodied male" – in other words the default or unmarked status is white. Also, it is important to note that a large number of people refused to fill out the survey due to the inability to identify as someone of a particular gender, ability, race, and so on simultaneously. For these reasons the reliability of this data is suspect.

[27] Two of 656 tenured associate professors who responded identify as Aboriginal (White, 2011).

[28] Of the 25 senior administrators that responded, none identified as Aboriginal (White, 2011).

[29] FEDEC is the Faculty of Education Diversity and Equity Committee, which no longer exists and will be discussed later in this chapter. It conducted a large qualitative study including comments from students in the Faculty of education which I refer to from time to time in this study.

intercultural or multicultural course" (FEDEC, Climate Survey, p. 3). Although it is not within the scope of this research to discuss and explore the under-representation of faculty of colour at McGill in great detail, this is a problem that has been discussed broadly in the context of Canadian universities. There is an emerging scholarly literature which attends to the tokenisation of racialized faculty in academic institutions and attendant claims that concerns about equity are thus addressed. This literature highlights the extra tasks such as supervising and supporting racialized students and teaching courses such as multicultural education as part of the experience of many (under-represented) racialized faculty across Canada (Monture, 2010; Nelson, 2011; Smith, 2010; Stewart, 2009).

Several students with whom I spoke talked about the experience of asking their heads of department, faculty members, the dean, etc.: "How come there are [few racialized] professors here?" Claire and Olga spoke of various responses that came up in reply to this question, such as: "They don't work hard enough"; "It's in your head"; "We don't have those problems here in Canada" and "We put a call out for them but they don't come". Another student remarked:

> When I first bring up the discussion [of race, racism, racialized faculty], the response is that this is Canada and we don't have those problems. Also, there is a motif that people just need to stop complaining and work hard and they can be ok. (FEDEC, Climate Survey, p. 5)

One important trend that comes out of this question and these responses, which fits with the dominant claims in the broader liberal multicultural context of Canadian society, is that racism does not exist in Canada, or if it does, it must have been imported from elsewhere or must comprise very few individual cases. This is especially clear when international students pose such questions as why there are few racialized faculty; it is inferred that since they came from outside of Canada they must be importing concerns related to race and racism. Mackey (1999) describes that "operating under a national myth of racial tolerance and inclusivity, [Canada] has been constructed as a victim of racism that originates elsewhere" (p. 119). As discussed in chapter two, some white French Canadians constructed themselves as oppressed at the hands of British Canadians without acknowledging their own implication in the oppression of Indigenous Peoples (Austin, 2010). In other words, for French Canadians it seemed to be easy to regard racism and oppression as imported by the British settlers rather than being produced within their own society prior to the arrival of the British. Thus for some faculty and administration at McGill, it can be easy to claim that racism did not exist until international students brought it there by questioning its facade of diversity. Claire, who is an international student, explained that the responses she heard made her feel like she was "importing racism where it didn't exist" and that when it came to talking about race in general in Canada, "de-historical discussions [...] tend to be the most dominant".

A second trend that related to the responses to why there are not many faculty of colour at McGill has to do with denial of racism through assumptions of merit and justice for all. Henry (2006) explains that Canadians are very attached to the assumption that in a democratic liberal society, such as Canada, individuals are rewarded solely based on merit and thus no one group is singled out through discrimination. To insist that McGill's under-representation of racialized faculty has solely to do with merit denies systemic discrimination towards people of colour. So, if McGill appears to make the effort to be equitable and recruit internationally, how is it that there are not enough qualified faculty members of colour in the entire world who choose to come to McGill? One faculty member that I interviewed in regards to the task force on *Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement*, which will be discussed later in this chapter, asked: "How can you be sure that you're achieving excellence if you're excluding people?" He suggested that before even attempting to recruit and retain faculty of colour, McGill needed to figure out why either it does not attract or does not appear welcoming to people of colour.

4.3. A Tough Place To Be: Setting up the problematic

As one graduate student (and member of student government) at McGill remarked: "[It] may seem trivial but I can think of no other way to get an idea of the climate of an institution than by talking to a variety of people" (FEDEC, 2007, Climate Survey, p. 1). This is precisely why this research, along with much of the analysis, started with talking to people – more specifically, discussions with

racialized female student activists at McGill. After all, as explored in chapters two and three, knowledge is produced through social interaction (Foley, 1999; Jaggar, 2008; Smith, 2002).

When considering whether or not racialized female students felt included at McGill, some common concerns arose from the participants interviewed for this study. As one student remarks:

> I must say that before coming to McGill, I was expressly told that I should reconsider studying here. I was warned that the environment was nice on the surface but there was a lot of 'issues' just below the surface. Once I came, I had a chance meeting with several students of various backgrounds, sexual orientations and religions and the majority of these students said that they wanted to leave McGill. They felt alienated and isolated and just wanted to finish so that they could get out. I asked them about them getting involved in student governments and other groups and they responded by saying what's the point. Nothing will change. Several students commented about wanting to learn in more diverse settings (more faculty of color, opportunities to engage with diverse ways of seeing the world). But they followed up by saying that that wouldn't happen at McGill. Only at Concordia. (FEDEC, Climate Survey, p. 2)

Many of the concerns brought up by this student's comment were shared by other racialized female students with whom I spoke. More of this student's thoughts will be discussed in detail throughout this chapter. Some comments

about the overall atmosphere of McGill and how students felt about being there, while similar to the above, and some even spoke to larger trends within Canadian society. Diana, for example, explained that whether it was at McGill or elsewhere she was used to experiencing what she called "micro-aggressions" such as being asked "where are you from?"[30] too often to count. Bianca felt very out of place at McGill and explained that "I don't feel the institution cares about me," and that from the start of her degree she felt "thrust into white society". "You know there's something wrong with McGill when you love your school not knowing it and get to know it and hate it", she exclaimed. Zelda felt that she was "floundering" throughout a large part of her time at McGill, because she "lacked academic confidence" compared to the "well off white women" in her classes. She said that for some reason it seemed that while they had "gone to the same classes, [...] they had a handle on [them, while she did not]".

In all cases, the racialized female students interviewed felt that McGill was an institution that was "not created" for them – meaning the institution was not created with women or people of colour in mind. They felt under-represented as people of colour and in some cases ill-prepared in comparison to the other upper-middle class [31](predominantly white) students. Time and again through a number of interviews with racialized female students, an overarching

[30] If this comment is not self explanatory, it is in reference to the assumption that as a person of colour you are not necessarily Canadian because you don't "look" Canadian (read: white). Many people of colour, even those born and raised in Canada, are all too familiar with this question (Calliste & Dei, 2000; Dua, 1999)

[31] While it is not within the scope of this thesis, class played an important role in the experience of the racialized women that I interviewed.

challenge came up: was it worth staying and fighting to challenge the exclusion felt at McGill or was it best to just leave? A disjuncture had already been uncovered in this study: while McGill appeared to be an institution that valued diversity and strived for equity, some experiences of racialized female students at McGill illustrated that they did not feel included, valued or able to succeed at this institution. For the racialized women who stayed, as a student or beyond, resisting the racism they experience takes place through anti-racist/anti-oppressive activism on campus. As Smith (2006) suggests, "the ethnographer can take up the orientation of the activist and focus his or her enquiry on just that organization of power with which the activist engages and knows as practice" (p. 20).

4.4. CHOICE WORDS: LIBERAL LANGUAGE, NEO-LIBERAL ACTIONS

At the time of data collection for this study, the principal's task force on *Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement* was nearing approval by Senate. McGill's principal held two town hall meetings in March 2011 – one at each campus – to give students, faculty and staff the chance to ask questions about the task force's goals for addressing equity issues. This study refers to observations of both meetings based on participation at one, and video recordings of both. I pay particular attention to the use of language in and around the task force document. Specifically, that meeting with numerous administrative members of the task force meant questioning the choice of

language and the silencing of the audience from the start of the town hall[32]. As expected with institutional texts and language, the task force document proved to be a text that mediates much of the language around racism and the experience of racialized female activists at McGill.

4.4.1. Defining Equity and Implementing The Employment equity act

Nearly every interview with McGill administrators or staff started with a question about how the term "equity"[33] is defined within the context of their position or role at the University. In all cases but two, there was no clear or unified definition, even when the term was in the title of the person's position or the office in which they worked. In one case an administrator involved in the task force accepted my critique that it seemed strange to meet and discuss equity without having a definition that all the members can agree on and/or refer to. The administrator made note of my suggestion and said it would be brought up with the group. Rana, who is a staff member that works with equity on campus, noted that not having defined equity was "particularly strange because we had the project of putting together fact sheets about these terms" and "[we give talks] on these issues and have never presented our definition of equity,

[32] The discussion period at the first town hall began with the Deputy Provost (Student Life and learning) explaining that the document is about *goals* and *not* their *implementation.* See Ahmed (2007) about the disconnect between creating policy documents and implementing them.

[33] While it is not being discussed here in this study, it is important to remark – as many scholars including Ahmed (2007), Razack (2008) and Smith (2010) have – that there has been a shift in talking about *diversity* rather than *equity* which contributes to a gap between the creation of documents around equity and their actual implementation. For example here at McGill, the task force that is essentially about equity is entitled "Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement" – with little to no trace of the word equity in it. This allows for a university to focus on ways in which it is already diverse – for example through the ethnic diversity of its students and faculty rather than being committed to achieving diversity *through* equity.

diversity, social justice...or whatever it is". Rana further remarked that language changed depending on what people wanted to evoke or convey. For example, a McGill office dealing with education around equity and diversity used to be referred to as a Human Rights office but now it is not because the former title seemed to imply that the office does conflict resolution (Dua, 2009), which it has never done.

In the cases where equity was clearly defined, it was with reference to "employment equity". More specifically, McGill's Associate Provost explained that because McGill employs over 100 employees and receives federal funding, it is required to follow the "Employment Equity Act" which "requires employers to engage in proactive employment practices to increase the representation of four designated groups: women, people with disabilities, Aboriginal peoples and visible minorities" (Statutes of Canada, 1995). What do "proactive employment practices" look like at McGill? There does not seem to be a clear answer. One faculty member contrasted employment equity in Canada with affirmative action in the United States and explained how frustrating this act was and believed that in practice it could not be implemented. In the United States "everything is on the table", she explained; equity is legally mandated and you are required to self-identify no matter what you do. "I've been on a hiring committee at McGill", she said, and "I asked an administrator how can I implement [the employment equity act] if I can't ask about the person's race or ethnicity?" The administrator

did not know and thus the final decision was based on the discretion of those on the committee.

The language of equity, federally and at McGill, is limiting – and difficult to put into practice. Equity in the Canadian federal context does not include language or religion, and does not take an intersectional approach to oppression. When faculty and staff, in a recent survey administered by McGill, were asked to self-identify, they could not identify as both disabled *and* female, for example – they had to choose one or the other (White, 2011). Equity at McGill and within the larger context of Canadian universities is about lumping together race, gender, disability, religion, sexual orientation, for example, without recognizing that these relations are not mutually exclusive. This approach not only de-emphasizes race, but it also puts these relations in competition with one another and does not respect that the social coordination of the social relations of gender and race (for example) can occur simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1991; Monture, 2010; Smith, 2010). Dua (2009), with respect to the hiring of faculty at Canadian universities, explains that often gender trumps race. For example, when there are two persons remaining in the candidate pool, a man of colour and a white woman, the white woman is likely to get the position and the university can show that the equity employment act helped achieve (gender) equity[34]. I asked McGill's Associate Provost (Policies, Procedures and Equity)

[34] Another challenge to employing the equity employment act is that often one's self-identification – such as disability, sexual orientation, gender non-conforming – is not visible.

what would happen in the case of two fictitious candidates who fit into the employment equity description and she responded that there would not be a trumping of oppressions, contrary to Dua's claim. While this might sound promising, the faculty member who was given little idea of how to implement the act seems to indicate otherwise.

While the University might have the best intentions to not privilege certain oppressions or identities over others, the lack of coherence and unified understanding of the language around equity and the employment equity policy counteracts these efforts.

4.4.2. (NEO) LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND MULTICULTURALISM

The language of (neo)liberal democracy and multiculturalism, as employed in the academy and within the larger Canadian context, talks about tolerance, equality, freedom of expression, colour-blindness, and valourizes individual over collective rights. Emphasizing these ideals makes the "categorical denial that racism exists" and makes it so that "demands for inclusion, representation, and equity are deflected, resisted, and dismissed as authoritarian, repressive and a threat to academic freedom" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 34). In a similar vein, the language and actions of the academy have shifted in recent years to mirror the larger picture of a globalized and neo-liberal Canada and to mask white hegemony and cover up the organizational power of institutions (Apple, 2006; Turk, 2000). There is the facade of the (educational) institution – in this case McGill – holding limited power while responsibility and

response to issues such as discrimination and oppression are left to individuals. This is apparent in both language choice and the deflection of criticism and responsibility at the principal's town hall which took place on Friday March 11, 2011.

During the second of two town hall meetings held in March 2011 to discuss the principal's task force on *Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement,* many constructive critiques were brought up by McGill students, faculty and staff. One student, the equity commissioner of the Students' Society of McGill University (SSMU) , asked why it is that in a task force document that speaks to equity and diversity, there is no mention of the terms "discrimination, racism, [and] anti-oppression" (SSMU equity commissioner, 2011). The principal responded: "In fact we tried to use language in the report that would engage everybody and not create defensiveness [...] we really wanted to use a language that was not accusatory" (Munroe-Blum, 2011). The principal's own apparent defensiveness in response to this query, and claim that talking about race and oppression (and ultimately whiteness) creates defensiveness outlines a few important points. On the one hand, as a number of scholars note, it is often difficult – especially for white people – to engage with and to talk about race and whiteness (Roman, 1993; James & Shadd, 2001). Roman (1993) explains that white defensiveness contributes to "white misrecognition of the effects of our own racially privileged locations, that is, the ways in which institutionalized whiteness confers upon whites (both individually and collectively) cultural,

political, and economic power" (p. 72). At the same time, avoiding defensiveness – in other words, not talking about race, racialization and whiteness – is a powerful silencing tactic. Olga[35] recalls a graduate course in which the professor continuously silenced students with her own defensiveness and white guilt. The students often heard this professor say things along the lines of "this [reading] makes me feel guilty" or "this is too radical", when they encountered works by Canadian critical race feminists such as Sherene Razack and Sunera Thobani. She "dismissed [the readings and race related ideas] and closed the door for discussion", explains Olga disappointedly. In the case of this graduate course, as well as the principal's remarks in response to avoiding defensiveness, is it important to ask who feels guilty or defensive when faced with discussing race and racism? Whose interests are being served when McGill shuts down or silences these difficult discussions? In both cases – as it is more apparent through the analysis of interview data and observations for this study – whiteness (collectively and individually) is being protected[36] and left unquestioned and unmarked at the expense of the racialized others who experience discrimination and oppression at the hands of the (white) institution.

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[35] I want to note here that Olga explained that much of her experience has been unmarked in the sense that certain things might be said in her presence that would not be said in the presence of a racialized student. While she has not personally experienced racism at McGill, she is able to see subtle ways in which it is present.

[36] This study discusses how whiteness is protected by and reflected in the policies of Canadian institutions, yet the same could be said for an institution's economic interests. See Abu-Laden & Gabriel (2002) for more on this within the Canadian context, as it is not within the scope of this research to discuss.

4.4.3. PERCEIVED DISCRIMINATION: IS THIS REALLY HAPPENING OR AM I GOING CRAZY?

In February 2011, McGill's Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) presented the results from a survey of undergraduate and graduate students at McGill[37] that is meant to act as data to inform the implementation of the principal's task force on *Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement*. In this survey – as well as in discussion with an administrator that is part of the task force – the discrimination experienced by racialized persons at McGill is referred to as "perceived discrimination". According to a Statistics Canada study (2003), on a national level the discrimination experienced by racialized persons is also referred to as "perceived discrimination". Montgomery (2005) suggests that much of the way we talk about racism in Canada implies that it is imagined (rather than real) and *perceived* by an irrational (rather than rational) person. In most of my interviews, the idea of perceived discrimination came up, and every racialized woman interviewed agreed that being told that they *perceive* discrimination rather than *experience* it felt like they were being told it was in their imagination and that it did not actually exist. One faculty member with whom I discussed the term "perceived discrimination" had the immediate response of "What? Are they calling people crazy?" implying that talking about

[37] For this survey, 9000 students (of McGill's 30,586 total student population) were contacted, of which 2076 students replied. The survey claims that the response rate was a high one, 23% in fact. It is important to understand that 23% of the 9000 contacted means 6.8% of the entire McGill student population – making the results of this survey difficult to extrapolate to the experience of all students at McGill. At the same time this survey, along with another one conducted by a McGill law student, are good points of discussion since beyond these studies there is not much in terms of quantitative or qualitative data collection at McGill.

perceived experiences calls into question the sanity of those experiencing the discrimination – in other words, it is all in their heads. Here, Rana remarks how sometimes one can feel abused and/or limited by the language of an institution:

> Language can in itself be like an institution; it can be the walls, and the bricks and the foundations of the institution. So a lot of time we feel like we're running into walls and hitting ourselves over the heads with bricks because even the language is not friendly to us and even the language is not inclusive of what we actually want to do and is not reflective of what we think needs to happen.

While Rana described the limit to the language of the institution and felt it was an institution in and of itself, it was apparent that she felt hurt and upset. What does it say about McGill if it frames the experiences of racialized women as being perceived or imagined rather than actually occurring? The way in which language is used to alter the reality of our experiences as racialized women outlines the importance of sharing and recording what we have come to know tacitly (Smith, 2006) so that we can understand, resist and document that which is both a real and a common experience.

4.5. INSTITUTIONAL DEFLECTION, INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

Neoliberalism operates to liberate states from responsibility for social outcomes and places an increased personal responsibility on individuals (Apple, 2006). Similarly, looking at issues of equity on a case-by-case basis – as many university equity administrators and offices do – does not allow for greater

systemic or structural changes to occur within the academy (Dua, 2009; Kobayashi, 2009; Monture, 2010; Smith, 2010). Instead, the focus becomes the individual who received this mistreatment and the perpetrator of the act rather than the greater institution and its structures that foster these situations at a systemic level. Furthermore, as was seen in terms of implementing employment equity at McGill and as both equity commissioners describe later in this chapter, even if a staff member or administrator wants to deal with equity complaints at a greater level, they are not given the resources or the procedures to do so.

4.5.1. INDIVIDUALIZING SYSTEMIC FAILURES AND REDIRECTING RESPONSIBILITY

At the second of the two town hall meetings, the principal – in response to the questions of the new cost (of previously free) English and French language classes, tuition increases in the near future, and students with children not being accommodated (Munroe-Blum, 2011) – seemed to deflect issues, redirect blame, and place an onus on the individual who raised the concern to take action. For example, a woman at the town hall urged the principal to observe that cutting the language program was not in line with the task force's goal of ensuring that francophone and international students can more readily access McGill through improving their English. The principal first reminded the audience that this was another example of McGill's limited resources and the tough choices they are forced to make in where to cut funding, and then urged the woman who made the comment to bring this up with the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). The principal was able to redirect the blame to MELS for charging

for language courses and encourage the individual to take it upon herself to challenge the decision, rather than acknowledging how this decision was in fact not in line with the goals of the task force. Yet McGill benefits financially from charging tuition where it was previously not charged.

In the previously mentioned survey conducted by the Deputy Provost (Student Life and Learning) to collect data for the principal's task force, students were asked to comment on perceived discrimination coming from other students or "people who work at McGill" (Mendelson, 2011). The category "people who work at McGill" does not differentiate between professors, course lecturers, administration, and staff, all of whom have very different roles and varying relationships with students. Furthermore, to give the option of other students and employees as the two sources of *perceived* discrimination experienced by students does not acknowledge the discrimination that students might experience elsewhere, for example within the curriculum of their courses. In this way, McGill's administration was able to show that in most cases the discrimination perceived by students originated from other students. The response to these results was to urge students individually to work towards ensuring that McGill is a discrimination free zone (Mendelson, 2011). In an interview with an administrator involved in the task force, I asked how the task force's goals expect to be implemented. She too responded that it was up to individuals to do what they can to ensure they are not discriminatory towards others and are following the goals of the task force. One student, Michelle,

described “in terms of challenges” she observes at McGill, “is this separation between collective and individual action” which is particularly important to note in the case of how the survey results are discussed. Rather than recognizing systemic and structural racism in the institution, the McGill’s administration is able to view isolated and individual acts of discrimination by students as the main concern worth addressing and leave it up to the individuals to address it. Michelle discussed how the idea of taking ownership in the academy is particularly tough. She went on to say that as a counter narrative to the individualization that is encouraged, “it’s important to find ways for collective action and working together”. How is it that an institution with the power and money to make systemic changes in order to benefit its student body can claim to lack the power and funding to make certain changes, while placing the responsibility to take action upon individuals?

4.7. Race and Gender: Isolation and Negotiation

At McGill there is a Joint Senate Board Committee on Equity (JSBCE) which takes recommendations from the following five senate subcommittees: Queer People, Women, persons with a Disability, First Peoples, and Race and Ethnic Relations. At the time of writing there has not been a chair for two years for the subcommittee on race and ethnic relations, meaning that in theory the committee exists, but in reality it is inactive. Based on interviews with the Associate Provost (Policies, Procedures and Equity) and a number of students, including the Student Society of McGill University (SSMU) and the Post-Graduate

Student Society (PGSS) equity commissioners, the subcommittee on women has been the most active, followed by the subcommittees on disability and on queer people. While no person I interviewed was sure as to why the race and ethnic relations committee was least active of the subcommittees, some students remarked that it followed the greater Canadian trend of having other equity issues – such as gender equity – take precedence over racial equity (Dua, 2009; Kobayashi, 2009) or that the broad discussion of equity "e-raced" the discussion about race (Monture, 2010). Rana remarked that the neglect could quite possibly be due to the small number of tenured racialized faculty leading to the unlikelihood that one would take an interest in (or have the time for) the large task of chairing a subcommittee. Another possibility for the few racialized faculty at McGill not wanting to chair a subcommittee on race is that perhaps as Monture (2010a) explains, such committees are often "marginalized spaces [that] address white guilt [rather than] address the issues" they were developed to deal with. In terms of addressing white guilt, Diana brings up her experience working on equity issues in a committee at McGill. She explained that on a number of occasions when the committee was dealing with a complaint about racism, a (white) person on the committee would respond that: "It's not really [racist]. I'm not [racist]." and it would be up to the whole committee to "have to affirm that one person isn't racist because they feel bad now". According to Diana, it can be difficult to get anything done and address issues of equity when you "constantly have to validate white people's guilt – it's not fair – there's no

one to validate people of colour feeling discriminated against!". Furthermore there is also the common disconnect between policies being created and then actually being implemented (Ahmed, 2007; Henry & Tator, 2009) that could potentially keep critical racialized people away from such roles.

4.7.1. FEELING ALONE

Rana, through her involvement in anti-racist work, remarked on the lack of community around race on campus. We talked about how frustrating it was that the most inactive of the five senate subcommittees on equity was the one that deals with race. Rana explained that without a race and ethnic relations committee, and without student groups that deal in particular with race and more importantly do anti-racist work, there is no support to do anti-racist work. Interviews with the PGSS and the SSMU equity commissioners, as well as the Associate Provost (Policies, Procedures and Equity) suggested that without a senate subcommittee on race and ethnic relations there is not much of a push for policy changes nor is there someone to whom the equity commissioners can report or make recommendations. Rana contrasted the lack of a community focusing on work being done on race within McGill with the community around the issue of gender. For example, there is the Institute of Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist (IGSF) Studies department, the Union for Gender Empowerment (UGE), Queer McGill, and other community initiatives that provide support for work around gender. "There's no one else," explained Rana, "I feel like a person of colour who's crazy, because there's no one else to talk to about this stuff". Zelda

explained that what helped her through her studies and kept her from isolation was when she finally "realized through reflection the importance of connecting with other women of colour" and talking about things they had in common.

As Zena remarked, in regards to also feeling isolated, activist organizing in the McGill community "is mostly white" and "in predominantly white spaces, you just don't talk about race and then when you bring it up you're the [angry] person of colour talking about race!" Zena's off-campus activist experience is very different. For example, in one anti-racist group with which she is involved there is a people-of-colour-only board, which Zelda might call a case of "shareholder activism", meaning that those involved in the work are vested in the outcome, rather than having "white people speak on your behalf". Helene explained that while she was involved in a predominantly white organizing space at McGill, she could see that bringing up race and racism was extremely difficult and often met with resistance. To remedy this, she and another co-organizer decided to "repackage race in a way that people felt that they could still get involved". In other words, they made sure it informed their work but they were careful about when they brought it up.

Here Zena describes the challenges and frustrations of trying to prove herself to McGill, which she describes as a predominantly affluent and white school in which she does not always feel welcome:

> Being a person of colour on a white campus feels like you have to prove yourself more. Especially since my relationship with McGill has always

> been really frustrating because I always feel like I'm not smart enough and can't formulate the words the way that my classmates can... I went to a really poor high school and got here not too long ago. I'm an immigrant. Most of my classmates went to private schools and got this special training and I didn't. It's this feeling of dealing with this crowd of mostly white students who are better at articulating what they believe in than I am and it translates to [the work I do] in a way that when I have to interact with those people I just get really frustrated and try to find a way to prove myself and knowing that I have more radical politics than most people makes it even harder.

Zena and I spoke at length about the difficulty of asserting oneself as a woman of colour, and even more so, the challenge and hesitation racialized women feel when talking about race. When they attempt to bring up race and racism in their classrooms, in their activist spaces, and sometimes even with their families and friends, the racialized women I spoke to agreed on having been dubbed "angry woman of colour". In response to talking about race, these women had heard that they are being "irrational, aggressive, angry, too political and/or over-reacting". In mapping social relations in a (predominantly) white institution, and beginning from the experiences of racialized women, there is a challenge in calling out racism and critiquing whiteness and white hegemony in the institution. In this case, there is the fear of being silenced as an irrational or over-reacting "angry woman of colour" or there is the uncomfortable situation – like

the one Diana mentions above – where racialized women constantly have to insist that they are not calling white people racist when they are talking about racism. Some of these women felt silenced from these experiences, while others continued to speak up again and again and not back down. In either case, these women (for the most part) have noticed or experienced a sense of isolation that seems common for the non-white, non-male minority of McGill – especially when attempting to bring up race and racism.

4.7.2. I HAVE AN EQUITY COMPLAINT: WHERE SHOULD I GO AND WHAT SHOULD I DO?

At McGill there is no equity office or office of race relations or human rights. The only office that has equity (and diversity) in its title and thus gets treated or approached as an equity office is the Social Equity and Diversity Education (SEDE) office. SEDE was set up in 2005 with one staff member (the manager) and has since expanded to include one managerial assistant, one outreach coordinator, two education coordinators, with another managerial position soon to be added. According to its website, The SEDE office "can provide useful information and resources to McGill Community members about harassment and discrimination, but does not deal with specific cases" (SEDE, 2011). From speaking to students, such as Rana and Helene, who had either dealt with the office personally or through other organizing spaces, it appears that SEDE "plays it safe", is unwilling to "educate up" to administrators about good practices and does little about structural/institutional change. Through numerous interviews, including with the Associate Provost who oversees the

work done at SEDE and with the manager of SEDE, it is still unclear to me what the office's role is and who in fact it does educate. Rana felt that SEDE's education about multiculturalism was "very superficial," such as descriptions and images of dance and food, while generally their approach seemed to be about externalizing things and "treating diversity like something that's outside of community". Bianca spoke about much of the research she had come by at McGill to be this way, where often racialized people are objects of knowledge rather than its subject. Similarly, as Rana explained, SEDE took an approach common to that of international development which is to look elsewhere to find problems with other off-campus communities (of the poor, racialized, disabled, immigrant, etc.) rather than work on the very problems that exist within the institution of McGill. Eunice, another racialized female activist I spoke to, remarked that it seemed that the only time most students hear about SEDE is in relation to its annual calendar on diversity. It is small yet visible gestures such as creating a calendar, displaying superficial images of diversity such as food and dance, and looking to other communities to show that there is a concern for equity, that leads to a sense that offices such as SEDE specialize in "cosmetic changes" (Henry & Tator, 2009, p. 14) or "window dressings" (Nelson, 2010, p. 110). In other words, these are minor changes and tokens that make it look like equity concerns are being addressed when in reality they mask that very little substantive, systemic work is being done in terms of equity.

So if the office that appears to deal with equity does not handle actual cases of discrimination, where do students go to get support or to file a complaint about racism? I asked the manager at SEDE this question who responded that they would go through one of McGill's "harassment assessors" or to the SSMU or PGSS equity commissioners. The Associate Provost explained that the process was going to be changed in the near future. However, as it stands now, the harassment assessors at McGill comprise 12 people elected by senate, six of whom are administrators and six of whom are faculty members. Students can contact one of 12 assessors listed online for a private meeting to discuss their experience of harassment. Once the student has met with an assessor, the assessor creates a report that is passed on to the Associate Provost who oversees this process. I did not meet anyone who had gone through this process[38] but, as Rana and Eunice suggested, for a student, the idea of going to a faculty member or administrator with a complaint, especially if it involves one of their colleagues, can be very daunting[39]. Section 5.5.6 of McGill's Harassment, Sexual Harassment, and Discrimination Policy (first approved in late 2005) states that, "The Provost is not required to meet with the Complainant or the Respondent before or after rendering his or her decision" (2009). So, while the final decision is made by the Associate Provost based on the assessors' report,

[38] During the hermeneutic process of this study, a participant told me her experience of reporting an instance of harassment to the chair of her department. In brief, through this traumatizing and difficult situation the dealings from upper administration escalated the difficulty and frustration of the student rather than making her feel like she had options and was supported.

[39] For an example of how difficult and discouraging the process of going through the harassment assessors of McGill can be, with respect to sexual harassment, refer to Kimball (2010).

the student who filed the complaint is not able to appeal the case or meet with the Associate Provost about it. One McGill staff member who does not deal directly with complaints but deals with equity issues explained to me that often informal resolutions are made through harassment assessors "because a lot of times [discriminations] are unintentional". Having even one staff member at McGill to view discrimination as often being "unintentional," makes it hard to know if a decision made by the assessors or the Provost will benefit the person who *perceived* discrimination when perhaps the discrimination was unintended – especially when there is no appeal process.

If going through the harassment assessors is not a favourable option for students then what can they do when discriminated against? Here is how one student responded when asked what sort of recommendations they have for improving the awareness and understanding of diversity:

> No idea. I feel that when I've encountered discriminatory situations with faculty I have felt extremely reluctant to do anything about it. Why... because I have seen that in the past students went to the chair and the chair did not act, or 'slap on the wrist' made little difference anyway, or made the situation worse by further complicating relations between the student & professor. (FEDEC, Climate Survey, p. 5)

Doing nothing is one possibility when faced with discrimination, especially when there is the feeling that nothing will change if you make a complaint. And sometimes, if you are willing to be coined the "native informant" (Calliste & Dei,

2000)[40] or the "angry woman of colour" you can speak up, especially in the case of discrimination in the classroom. However, as Zelda remarked, it can be tiring "calling other people out and defending me and mine all the time" which might be a reason why some racialized women decide to do nothing when faced with discrimination. Bianca recalls a class where the professor often calls people out, even for just being a little late, but did not call out a student who made what she felt to be a "racist and insensitive" remark:

> We were talking about Fanon's humanism ideology in comparison to Gandhi's non-violence method and a student - white male - had said: "I think Fanon's ideology is stupid because wouldn't it be better for the colonisers and the colonised to sit down and have a *rational* discussion about the situation [colonialism]".

In this case, Bianca did not speak up in class to how hurtful this comment was – especially for racialized students who have had the very real and traumatic experience of colonialism (LaFlamme, 2003). Bianca felt disappointed in the professor who not only did not respond but did not encourage others to challenge this comment or to challenge the student who made the comment.

The final option of dealing with discrimination that was brought up through interviews is to file an equity complaint with the PGSS equity

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[40] A common experience that came up in interviews was about the often essentializing and uncomfortable situation of being called on as the "native informant" – for more about this see Calliste & Dei (2000). While this is an occurrence that is common and thus important to document, this brings up another instance of needing to impose self-limitations on this thesis – it is simply not within the scope of this paper to discuss every example of the everyday racism that racialized women experience at McGill.

commissioner (graduate students) or the SSMU equity commissioner (undergraduate students). In speaking to the PGSS equity commissioner I learned that the position does not require that he/she report the incident to anyone who is able to make policy changes, for example the PGSS VP Academic. This lack of accountability makes it difficult to move beyond the individual, and look at and work on greater structural/institutional discrimination that might be operating. Because there is no clear procedure or process mandated to the person in this role, it is up to the discretion of the commissioner to decide if he/she wants and cares enough about the issue to try and take it further, for example to the Associate Provost (Policies, Procedures and Equity). Once again, all equity decisions that are handled through the procedures in place go through the Associate Provost, a role that had Equity added to its title in Fall 2010 and is given the overwhelming task of overseeing all the equity subcommittees, the SEDE office, the equity commissioners, and harassment assessors.

4.8. YOU CAN'T DO THAT: WHITE PEOPLE FEEL LEFT OUT

Michelle and I spoke at great length about an important anti-racist organization that she was involved with which no longer exists. In 2005, the McGill Anti-Racist Coalition (MARC) for undergraduate students was formed by two racialized female students who wanted to support one another and to better situate themselves as racialized women at McGill. Others became interested, and it became clear that there was a need for such a collective to exist in a predominantly white institution like McGill. Membership increased and

the collective was often called upon by other student groups and the Montréal community to do anti-racism workshops. Eventually MARC decided to apply for SSMU Service Status, which ultimately meant "getting funding and getting [their] name out so that other racialized students could know that [they're] around and could get support – but also being able to make changes in a way that affected classrooms". Michelle explains the process to me in detail:

> After about a year of preparing for service status, [MARC] went to council, who was predominantly white, and council basically told us that we could not get service status even though we had done everything we needed to do and their reasoning for this was that we're not supporting the entire McGill population. In this case, what is this saying? What is the entire McGill population? The entire McGill population is a white population, so because we wanted a space that was specifically for people of colour to talk about these issues we were not given service status. This goes along with the idea of white supremacy on the campus and how it is embedded in the institutions.

Multiculturalism is a declared national policy which states that "whereas Canada has two official languages, there is no official culture, nor does any ethnic group take precedence over any other" (Multiculturalism and Citizenship Canada, 1985, p. 15). Yet as Henry and Tator (2009) suggest, Canadians appear to be deeply hesitant about publicly recognizing non-white cultures, and allowing non-white racial and cultural groups to maintain their racial identity visibly and in this case

claim spaces of their own. As Mackey (1999) suggests, it is fine for Canadians to be who they are – no matter what ethnicity or race that might be – as long as in public they are (white) Canadian first and foremost. This larger liberal multicultural trend is relevant to Michelle's account of MARC's experience at McGill because as long as the race-centred space is not in the public eye – through service status, for example – it can exist. It is as soon as it wants to publicly claim a space that centres racialized people that it is not encouraged nor allowed. Through denying MARC public space to support and centre racialized people, McGill's (and Canada's) "insidious" culture of whiteness, as Rana put it, is maintained in an unmarked fashion.

Early in the 2010-2011 school year a McGill law student, Michael Shortt, published the results of a 2010 survey evaluating the quality of undergraduate education at McGill University. Of the University's 21 494 undergraduate students, 1193 responded to the survey questions. In a question about students' experiences with discrimination, Shortt was surprised that nine percent of white males (compared to 36 percent of non-whites) felt that they were often discriminated against. Here is an account of what he found out:

> Follow-up emails were sent to students who reported gender or racial discrimination despite being male or white, respectively (and who consented to receive such emails). Only a very small number of students replied to these emails, but their responses demonstrated a clear pattern. *White students indicated that they felt excluded from groups*

> *which focussed on a specific ethnic group or nationality, while male students reported a similar feeling with respect to gender empowerment organizations.* (Shortt, 2011, p. 22, emphasis added)

I explained this survey to a faculty member during an interview. His immediate response was laughter, after which he explained that this is precisely a "way that people [of colour] are silenced" by dominant groups – in this case white males – "responding to equity concerns by claiming that *they* are being discriminated against". Rana explained, out of the frustration of finding it difficult to create race-centred spaces, that "we're not allowed to segregate ourselves as people of colour; it's threatening [to white people and white institutions]". Having helped organize a conference which centred racialized people at McGill and in Montréal, Rana observed that: "White people not being centred and white people not being included are conflated". As Smith (1999) explains in terms of decolonization and the importance of being able to centre (in her case) Indigenous knowledges, "centring our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes" (p. 39) is essential to decolonization (and anti-racism). While there is much resistance against it, claiming spaces centred around racialized people is important.

4.9. WHAT CAN WHITE PEOPLE DO?

Zena explained to me the difficulty of working in an anti-oppressive campus group where it often feels like there are "a lot of white people who take

up a lot of space" and create difficult "power dynamics". Along with these racial tensions within the activist group, this group has had a difficult time with other campus groups because it is viewed as having politics that are too left-wing. Zena describes here how difficult it is for her to engage with the right-wing campus politics that her group is often up against at McGill:

> for me it's really hard, I can't handle it well, because it feels really personal. You see all these power dynamics playing out and the other person is so completely unaware of them or doesn't get it or is using them in full force against you... it's just really overwhelming

The power dynamics she is referring to here have to do with the challenge of a racialized female activist to engage with right-wing – predominantly white upper class male – students. Zena expressed how draining and unproductive interacting with right-wing groups and people can be. She decided that it was helpful when white people – men in particular – who might not feel personally attacked (the way that racialized women might) by potentially racist and sexist right-wing campus politics engage with these challenges. Zena added that:

> there are other things that [racialized women] can do... working on our own communities, and building ourselves and building our movement rather than defending ourselves and justifying our existence to people who would never even listen to us – I don't see the point of doing that. It's a waste of resources, and a waste of our capacity; it just brings you down.

As many of the interviewees stated, it is difficult as a racialized women doing anti-racist work to have to constantly remain on the defensive, assert yourself and claim your space. It is not only challenging to centre race on a predominantly white campus like McGill, but it is equally challenging to speak up when the issue feels close to home. As Zena remarked, there are better things we can do with that energy – for example we can invest it in ourselves and our communities. As Diana remarks, in regards to recent mobilizing efforts across Canada in response to the *Maclean's Too Asian*[41] article, "it's tough to take an issue and personalize it because we're Asian". When I asked Diana how she felt about white people doing anti-racist work – by bringing up Tim Wise[42] as an example – she responded that "we need people like him, but we need to actively criticize him and the fact that it's taking a white guy for people to listen". Bianca agreed and added that as long as white people doing this sort of work understand that "alongside accepting oppression is accepting privilege" their efforts are fine and in fact very helpful.

4.10. APPROPRIATION OF RADICAL EFFORTS, LACKING INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY AND RE-INVENTING THE WHEEL

[41] In November 2010, Maclean's published an article entitled *Too Asian* which took the perspective of white students considering which universities in Canada they want to attend. The article showed that least preferable was the University of Toronto and University of British Columbia, because apparently both are not fun and are too competitive academically because of their large Asian population. At the same time McGill was one of the most popular choices because of its reputation as being predominantly white.

[42] I mentioned Tim Wise in a few interviews as an example of a white man doing very critical anti-racist work. He often positions himself and acknowledges that what he has to say is not necessarily different from what people of colour are saying but it is likely that people listen to him because of his race and gender.

In initiating the principal's task force on *Diversity, Excellence and Community Engagement*, McGill is about 20 years behind many other Canadian universities which in the late 1980s and early 1990s created and implemented similar goals around equity (Dua, 2009). Each faculty member and administrator that I met with was asked why they thought this issue of equity is being taken up now. The most common response to "why now?" was "I don't know". However, the Associate Provost told me that the Harassment, Sexual Harassment and Discrimination Policy for McGill was not finalized until 2009 which added to my sense that McGill may be lagging in all cases of equity work by comparison with many other Canadian universities.

During the course of my research, I found some important documentation that shows that discussions about equity have been happening at McGill at least since the early 1990s. One such document is entitled "Accessing Equality: Moving towards the implementation of a policy on Discrimination and Harassment at McGill University", a research project funded by the Quebec Public Interest Research Group (QPIRG) of McGill and carried out by two McGill students. This document includes the McGill University Federal Contractors Program Compliance Review Report (Employment Equity Office, 1993), the JSBCE Annual Reports of 1993/1994 and 1998/1999, the Anti-Racism and Race Relations Report (McGill Equity Office, 1994), as well as SSMU council meeting minutes, university senate meeting minutes, and numerous articles from various McGill campus newspapers. All of these documents individually and

as a whole give an extensive account of many pivotal moments in campus-wide discussions around equity and discrimination. I started to ask people about this document during interviews. The Associate Provost (Policies, Procedures and Equity) as well as a staff member that deals with equity at McGill were not aware of this document nor were they aware that an Equity Office at McGill[43] ever existed. While this document gives an extensive account of discussions around equity, occurring at McGill since at least 1993, it being unknown or forgotten all together shows – as Ahmed (2007) describes within a different university context – McGill's lack of institutional memory or unwillingness to draw on past research that could potentially inform the present equity related decisions it is making – for example, through the task force.

A second discovery, found during discussion with Claire, Denise and Rana, as well as a faculty member, is that quite an extensive amount of qualitative research came out of a committee in the Faculty of Education that no longer exists, the Faculty of Education Diversity and Equity Committee (FEDEC). I spoke to a faculty member, as well as Claire, Denise and Rana, who were at some point involved, to learn more about what FEDEC was and did and why it no longer exists.

FEDEC began in 2007 when Claire observed that the Faculty of Education had done nothing to recognize or celebrate Black History Month. This

[43] McGill did indeed have an Equity Office. The former Director of Equity assured me that in 1989 the Equity Office was established following a recommendation set forward by the Senate Committee on Equity. The office existed for about 6 years, until 1995.

observation came with others, such as there being very few racialized faculty (as discussed above). The dean at the time seemed receptive to these questions and concerns and suggested that Claire present her concerns to the Faculty Council (made up of all four departments in Education), as one faculty member involved in FEDEC explains. Claire felt too busy with school and hesitant at first, but then thought: "If not now, when? If not me, who?" and felt pushed to go ahead with the presentation. There was a mixture of responses. For example, one faculty member involved in FEDEC recalls that one audience member exclaimed "well I'm [European], I'm diverse, what about me?", and so a larger discussion about diversity and those who are diverse but lack representation in the faculty ensued. The presentation was well received overall. At that time an "ad-hoc committee" called the Faculty Committee on Diversity formed, made up of faculty and students. FEDEC (as it was eventually called) conducted an extensive qualitative survey across the faculty, staff and students (both graduate and undergraduate) to figure out how curricula (including field experiences) address issues of diversity, and learn about the recommendations that people might have for improving awareness around diversity issues. To define diversity for the study, FEDEC referred to the 2007 McGill Senate approved Employee Equity Policy which states:

> McGill University is committed to developing policies, programs and traditions that facilitate the full participation and advancement of members of historically disadvantaged groups in Canada (indigenous

> peoples, visible minorities, ethnic minorities whose mother tongue is neither English nor French, persons with disabilities, women, and persons of minority sexual orientations and gender identities) (hereafter, "designated groups") by eliminating direct, indirect and systemic discrimination. (FEDEC, 2007)

Some of the issues raised by students through FEDEC's efforts have been referred to throughout this chapter, as FEDEC's research remains an unpublished but extensive body of work, an asset to finding out what the real experience of faculty, staff and students might be (in Education) at McGill.

Claire explained that, for her, the work of FEDEC "became overwhelming" and a challenge to keep up with. Eventually the committee, both faculty and students, decided that they needed more faculty members and maybe even some administrators to join. By this time, the dean had changed and there was a clear divide in the committee. Some felt that bringing in administrators was a great idea because they could have some power from the inside, but others feared that the work they had done thus far would be appropriated by the university administration. Administration did get involved, the new dean joined, and what happened then is a little unclear. The faculty member whom I interviewed remarked that there was tension between visions that led to a divide between the administrator who had recently joined and one other faculty member, and everyone else. Claire explained that some group members noticed a lull in the work and they realized that a couple of the committee members had

taken up the work and things were continuing, while the others thought the group had disbanded. Denise and Rana, both students on FEDEC as it neared its end remember something about the new administrator member and another faculty member assuring the rest of the group that they had taken into consideration the suggestions of the group and that they would no longer need the committee. Claire felt, as some group members had feared, that in "one way or another [FEDEC] got appropriated" since a few people had taken up the work without the whole group being aware or agreeing to it. FEDEC is no longer and there has not been any equity initiative of the size in that Faculty since.

4.11. Moving forward, Learning from what has passed

Claire and Denise both explained that while FEDEC disbanded, a group of racialized students started their own network to support one another and discuss race and equity issues on their own terms. Researchers and Academics of Colour for Equality/Equity (RACE) held its ninth annual Critical Race and Anti-Colonial Studies Conference at McGill and Concordia Universities in 2009 where many racialized faculty, administrators and students of colour from McGill and Concordia were able to meet and connect over common struggles and experiences. At this conference, supported by the Faculty of Education at McGill, some racialized students from McGill were able to connect and find ways to support one another. That supportive network of racialized students, coming out of FEDEC and being expanded on through the RACE conference has since evolved into the Graduate Collective Against Racism and for Equity (GCARE). It may be

four years since FEDEC was disbanded, and a great deal of struggle, but these activist students can look to the success of having thus far claimed and maintained a space that centres racialized students at McGill and has prevented appropriation. In learning from, documenting and building on the past and present challenges of doing anti-racist work at McGill, this collective is attempting to challenge institutional racism and support racialized students at the same time.

George Smith (1990), discovered through activism and institutional ethnography that he could not take "the concept of homophobia as adequate to understand and grapple with the issues of gay harassment in Toronto" (p. 21) that he was researching. Naming individual police officers' homophobia as the problem would have created a political "dead end" (Smith, 2006, p. 23) for understanding and mapping social relations underpinning the criminalization and arrest of gay men by the Toronto police. I bring this up because, similarly, as my research suggests, focussing on individual acts of racism as racialized women at McGill is not enough to adequately understand our experiences and how they are connected to the greater institution – or as George Smith would have called it "politico-administrative regime" (1990, p. 31) – in which we are located. We need to go beyond an individualized understanding of racism, beyond the individual acts and experiences in our day-to-day lives at McGill. Going beyond racism means mapping our experiences to the way in which the McGill administration talks about race, racism and equity. Going beyond racism means

exposing the unmarked whiteness and white defensiveness of the McGill administration and how it makes it difficult for us to talk about race and racism as racialized female student activists and to claim a race-centred space on a (predominantly) white campus. Going beyond racism allows starting from the standpoint of racialized women's experiences at McGill to tell stories of resistance, and to record these stories here such that they can build an institutional memory and inform us and others who wish to partake in anti-racist organizing at this university. In the next and final chapter we will look at some of the conclusions drawn from this study as well as limitations of the study.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

5.1. THE INDIVIDUALS, THE CONCLUSION

> *[F]rom the standpoint of experience in and of the everyday/everynight actualities of our lives, it is the oppressively routine organization, the persistence, the repetition, of capitalist forms of exploitation, of patriarchy, of racial subordination, of the forms of dominance Foucault (1980) has characterized as 'power/knowledge,' as the local contouring of people's lives that constitute a sociological problematic.*
> *(Smith, 1997, p. 397)*

Beginning this institutional ethnography from the standpoint of racialized female student activists at McGill meant starting from my experience and that of friends and colleagues. While I worked hard to maintain reflexivity in this study and constantly evaluated my position as researcher and as activist, the personal struggle through this study has been difficult. From the first of nine interviews at this university it was clear that it is a site for struggle for some racialized women and that there is a disjuncture between McGill's projected image as a diverse and equitable institution and the experience of racialized female student activists. Henry (2006) remarks that the negative experiences of racialized students across Canada reflect the failure of administrative programs, policies and practices to address racism, create an equitable learning environment and to challenge the "culture of whiteness" that is common to Canadian universities (p. 23). Furthermore, George Smith (1990) described politico-administrative regimes – such as Canadian universities – as administering and coordinating social relations in ways that often seem neutral or unmarked.

From the amount of institutional texts and language, policies, practices and procedures around issues of equity, it seems as though there are a lot of administrative structures at McGill that might address the experiences of racialized women. A diverse image yet an under-representation of racialized faculty and administrators, an unclear equity complaint process, as well as defensiveness and a lack of accountability[44] of McGill's upper administration are some ways in which this institution has made some racialized women feel unwelcome. Bannerji (1991) suggests that by tracing women of colour's position within Canadian society – and here I would emphasize Canadian institutions such as those of higher learning – we are at the same time tracing how gender and race have been constructed in Canadian history.

> For this reason, an adequate description of the smallest racist incident leaves room for reference or contextualization to slavery, colonization, imperialism; exploitation of surplus value and construction of the labour market through gender, 'race' and ethnicity; nation-states to organize and facilitate these processes and practices; and concomitant reifying forms of consciousness. (p. 94)

[44] In regards to administrative accountability one student who responded to the qualitative survey conducted by FEDEC – which I have been referring to through this research – gave advice on what they felt needed to happen: "I think once the conversation starts, we need to keep it going, but make it part of the fabric of the Faculty experience, and not an add-on. ... The first thing would be to address the discrepancy between the university's stated policies and the lived experiences of the students. What recourse do students have if policy is not being followed? How can we move beyond mere lip service to a genuine commitment to diversity?" (FEDEC, Climate Survey, p. 6)

While the focus of this study, due to limitations of time and space, has not been as wide as some of the connections that Bannerji (1991) is making above, it is essential to consider not only how the experience of women of colour at McGill is mapped to the institution in which they are situated but also how it is connected to greater Canadian society both historically and presently.

5.2. THE ACTIVISM, THE EQUITY, THE CONCLUSION

> *What the activist learns in the course of his or her engagement with contemporary practices of power is knowledge of the same phenomena that the institutional ethnographer explores. (Smith, 2006, p. 20)*

In numerous interviews, discussions occurred around ways in which racialized women activists at McGill resist – or try to resist – racism through the organizing in which they are involved. The accounts given by the racialized women in this study went well beyond instances of everyday racism; their involvement with anti-racist organizing meant some of the seemingly neutral workings of McGill's politico-administrative regime were uncovered and explored.

One challenge to anti-racist organizing on campus, which was felt both individually as well as collectively, is isolation. While there are groups – both initiated by the university and by students – centred around issues such as gender, there are very few if any spaces that centre race and racism at McGill. When groups were successful in claiming and creating spaces that centred race and racism, they were often met with much resistance from the McGill administration, council or even other students. This was the case with MARC.

Centring discussions about race and racism seemed to be conflated with leaving white people out. Standing up against oppression faced in the academy constructed racialized anti-racist female activists as oppressing the (predominantly white) University or its (predominantly white) students. Another barrier to creating spaces that discuss racial equity and can potentially affect change is that – as was the case with FEDEC – there is the fear of the group being appropriated by the administration of McGill which has the power to potentially use and contain critical work and create documents that are never implemented – as we saw with the lack of recollection around past equity initiatives, discussions and even offices.

While these challenges have made it difficult to do anti-racist organizing at McGill, documenting them is incredibly important. Through the course of this research it became apparent that McGill lacks an institutional memory when it comes to initiatives about equity. With the exception of a few faculty or staff that have been at the institution for many years, the general sense that I got in talking to students and administrators both is that there is often little or no awareness of earlier initiatives or struggles over equity. This might be one reason why equity appears not to have been taken up at McGill until recently through the latest principal's task force. Creating new equity documents that are not implemented (Ahmed, 2007) leads to cosmetic changes that *appear* to respond to concerns while the institution is not challenged to meet its equity goals. Creating documents informed by research/work that has already been

done and discussions that have already been had can allow us to learn from what did and did not work in the past and make substantive changes to reach equity goals. One racialized woman brought up the idea of an "echo" in our interview as she explained that anti-racist efforts "keep coming through. If they don't acknowledge and specifically and strategically identify and address [equity issues] then it's just going to keep repeating itself." While it has been poorly – if at all – documented, there have been student-led struggles against racism within McGill in the past (Austin, 2009). Rather than having anti-racist efforts – or administrative efforts around equity for that matter – continually repeat themselves, it could be advisable to learn from and build on – both theoretically and in practice – what has been done in the past; the success of future anti-racist struggles depends on this.

5.3. CREDIBILITY

At some point through this study I was asked "How can you know that what you're showing in this study is the truth?" I found this question both important and frustrating. As I suggest in chapter three, knowledge is constructed through social interaction and so I am in no way staking claim that having racialized women construct knowledge through sharing their experiences with me constitutes some absolute truth. Rather, starting with everyday experiences, this study can provide counter-examples which challenge the way in which McGill perpetuates a dominant narrative and image that looks diverse, equitable and a good place to be for everyone. I take up the standpoint of

racialized female students active in anti-racist work, those who do not feel welcome at McGill, who feel that this institution was not made for them, and who experience oppression every day in some shape or form – from peers, professors, and other parts of the institution.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

Early in the interview process with some racialized female students at McGill, many barriers came up and conversations revolved mostly around mere survival at an institution which, in ways of excluding racialized women, mirrored the greater Québec and Canadian context. This query turned into figuring out what sort of challenges racialized women faced when attempting to create their own supportive network or space and in attempting to affect institutional and systemic change through anti-racist organizing. There were clearly barriers occurring on so many levels yet, since this is an MA thesis, the more urgent focus needed to be the Institution (before the organizing spaces) because it was perhaps most difficult to escape (as opposed to activist spaces that essentially people could walk away from). This outlines one of the major limitations to this research as it does not explore the challenges my participants faced within their own organizing spaces – as I had originally set out to do. Having discussed some challenges faced in the institution, my hope is to see more research that looks at limitations and struggles within our own organizing spaces and the challenges we face with one another when doing anti-racist work.

Another limitation in this study is that it looks solely at racialized women's experiences in regards to the relations of gender and race. Firstly this is not to say that other people at McGill – for example, racialized professors, faculty, staff, and students (who are not involved in community organizing, for example) do not experience racism. This study is not meant to make generalizations about the entire student population at the University. For the purpose of this research, this study was limited to the experience of female students of colour who are involved in anti-racist/anti-oppressive activism at McGill. Furthermore, while the focus of this study is race and gender, there are other relations – such as class, which came up in a few interviews – that make up the experience of my participants (and others in the University) that were not explored here.

Another limitation to this study, along with having to make it manageable for MA thesis research, is that there are likely many official texts and documents from McGill that I could have yet did not refer to for the analysis of this research. While I attempted to ensure that I picked texts that are accessible to anyone interested in accessing them – such as different policies accessible through the internet – a number of texts that I came across, such as the FEDEC qualitative study and the compilation of documents around equity, were found in the course of my interviews and thus are likely not easily accessible. Hence, there might be more documentation relevant to this study that I could access given more time.

Drawing from an observation by Kinsman (2006), the latter part of this study, where we move beyond the individual experiences of racialized women to mapping the struggles of resisting the institution, is an area that could use more research. He writes:

> Central to the mapping out of relations of struggle there also needs to be an analysis of the social organization of opposition, resistance and transformation – of the sources of agency that can bring about social transformation. This aspect of political activist ethnography, however, remains underdeveloped. (p. 136)

He explains that this mapping is important to do, yet underdeveloped, as we have noticed through the recently emerging literature starting from the experience of racialized female activist students in Canadian universities. While GCARE is briefly mentioned at the end of chapter four as being an example of a successful anti-racist organizing space that supports some racialized students and confronts institutional racism, this study does not expand on the opposition, resistance and transformation of an institution that groups such as GCARE potentially contribute to.

It is my expectation that this study will be expanded and added to by myself, by other anti-racist organizers, and by other racialized students who wish to further the research in the field of mapping social relations starting from our experiences of struggle and more importantly the under-developed area that starts from our experiences of successful resistance. I hope that – along with

other research that looks within (rather than outside) our institutions of learning – this study will be read, referred to and built upon by many so that it does more than collect dust along with other anti-racist and equity initiatives at the University that are little known or forgotten all together.

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Appendix A – Recruitment Email

Dear Potential Participant,

I am contacting you in regards to my research for my M.A. thesis for the Department of Integrated Studies in Education (with a focus in Gender and Women studies) under the supervision of Dr. Aziz Choudry. I would like to invite you to participate in a focus group, an individual interview and an overall process of sharing and reflecting that I assure you will be transparent and with on-going feedback and approval asked of you.

The reason I am contacting you is because I believe that you are a self-identified racialized woman who is in some capacity involved in admirable activist work on the McGill campus. I am interested in knowing in what ways you choose to participate in community organizing on the McGill campus. Furthermore, I would like to know if you have encountered barriers within or outside of the community organizing space(s) of which you are a part.

You own the rights to your own story/experience. For this reason, if you choose to participate in this research I would ask that you be willing to meet with me personally at least one time after the focus group, so that we can discuss your personal reflections since the time of the focus group and I can make every attempt to transcribe, analyze and understand your story as you see fit. You can choose to withdraw from this research at any point before, during or after the focus group and/or individual meeting(s). You are also able (and encouraged) to make additions or deletions to any transcription of all the experiences you share during the focus group. I will make every attempt possible to keep your contribution to this research in line with how you would like it to look.

All names will be changed and the name of the organization of which you are a part need not and will not be disclosed. This research is meant to act as a glimpse into a few racialized women's involvement in campus activism (in general) at McGill so there is no need to make reference to specific groups in which you are involved.

It is important, for the sake of fellow participants, you, and the ethics of this research that you keep the content of the focus group in the strictest of confidentiality. This is to ensure that we all feel free to share our experiences with one another knowing that the personal things we choose to disclose do not go beyond those participating in the study.

The anticipated time commitment asked of you for this study is as follows:

- Focus group: 75 minutes (with questions/themes sent to you prior to the meeting)
- Individual meeting/interview: 30 minutes

Optional additional time could be taken to reflect on the focus group before the individual meeting, to edit and/or make changes to the transcription of what you shared in the focus group, and to allow me to consult with you throughout the write-up of my research and beyond to ensure that I am interpreting your experiences in a way that you see fit.

I hope that you will choose to participate in this reflective process. I feel that you will gain a lot from this experience on a personal as well as professional level. I am certain that I will. Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns or if you would like any clarification on what I am proposing for my research. If you are interested in participating in this study, it is required that you read and sign the consent form provided to you.

Sincerely,

Mahtab Nazemi

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Dear Participant,

The following is a brief summary (to accompany a discussion) of the research in which you are being asked to participate. Please read through carefully and sign to consent to your participation in this study.

Principal Investigator:
Mahtab Nazemi, M.A. Student
Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University
mahtab.nazemi@mcgill.ca, xxx.xxx.xxxx

Research Supervisor:
Dr. Aziz Choudry, Professor
Department of Integrated Studies in Education, McGill University
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Title of Research:
From oppressed to organized: young racialized women's informal learning within activism on campus

Summary of proposed research:
To explore ways in which young racialized female students at McGill choose to participate in community organizing. This research asks: are there constraints that make it difficult for racialized women to participate in community organizing on campus, and do community organizing spaces exclude young racialized women through the structuring of policy and social practice? The results of this research will be disseminated through my master's thesis as well as through presentations and publications in relation to this study. In all cases of dissemination pseudonyms will be used and all other identifying information will be changed.

Participation in this research:
The required commitment for this study is one 75 minute focus group with up to six participants, and at least one 30 minute extensive individual non-structured interview. The themes/questions to be discussed during the focus group and interview will be sent to you in writing prior to participation so that you can reflect on them. It is necessary that the focus group and interviews be audio-recorded so that they can be transcribed and analyzed by the principal investigator. After the focus group, each participant will receive a copy of the full transcription though they will be asked to pay attention mainly to what they had said at the focus group. The main purpose of the individual

interview(s) is so that you can make additions or deletions to anything that you said in the focus group.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any point before, during or after the study takes place. All names of participants will be changed, names of organizations will be withheld, and information will be shared such that it is nearly impossible to trace statements back to the participant and/or the organization of which they are a part. For the duration of this study and beyond, even if at any point you decide to withdraw, you must not discuss the specific content of this research (particularly the experiences of other participants) with anyone except the principal investigator. The documents and recordings of this research will not be accessible to anyone but the principal investigator and will be stored with password protection at all times.

Consent:
Your signature below signifies that you agree to participate and be audio-recorded in this study and you are aware of potential risks as they have been explained to you by the principal investigator. Furthermore, you understand that what you say in the focus group will be heard, and read after transcription, by all other research participants present at the focus group. You are free to withdraw from this study at any point and can encouraged to direct any questions or concerns you may have to the principal investigator and/or the research supervisor.

If there are concerns with the nature of this study, please contact Lynda McNeil, Ethics Officer at the Research Ethics Board, at 514.398.6831.

I have read the above information and have discussed this study with the principal investigator. I understand that my confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed because I will be sharing my experiences with other participants in the focus group. I am informed about the study and its potential risks, and agree to participate and to be audio-recorded while participating.

Name of participant: **Signature of participant:**

_____ _____

Date:

_____

Name of principal investigator: **Signature of principal investigator:**

_____ _____