It still matters that we feel more properly recognized by some people than we do by others.
— Judith Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself*, 33

You have to accept that we are here, and you have to love us. Otherwise it’s not gonna work. You cannot just tolerate us!
— Mani, South Asian feminist activist, Montreal

When feminist discourses are dissociated from feminist whiteness, what kind of feminist identities, political ideals, and moral dispositions do they regulate? And how do they contribute to a critique of femonationalism? The sexularism debates that have reconfigured white feminists’ political subjectivations in many European countries have also impacted and shaped the organizing of racialized feminists and their political subjectivations in those contexts. While I described in the previous chapter the various discursive repertoires and moral dispositions mobilized by white feminists to produce a form of political subjectivation that I have called feminist whiteness, I turn in this chapter to racialized feminists and their modes of political subjectivation in relation to white feminists as they have unfolded in the same period of debates and conflicts among feminists. I argue that racialized feminists’ discourses constitute forms of moral address vis-à-vis white feminists, and that racialized feminists elaborate a critical discourse that resists the dominant assumptions that fuel femonationalism, and thereby provides alternative feminist visions, anchored in different moral dispositions and emotions. Of course, racialized feminists’ discourses about the sexularism debate and their feminist ideals are not solely directed at white feminists. They are also focused on racialized women, in order to create the
constituency they aim to represent. However, I am interested here in analyzing specifically how feminist whiteness is resisted.

My intention in this chapter is not to retrace the history of racialized women's groups and movement in France and Quebec in the past decade, or to explain why they have emerged and perpetuated themselves or didn't survive. While this chapter certainly contributes to documenting racialized women's movements in both contexts—an important task given the fact that very few studies exist and that there is a socially organized lack and loss of memory of those movements—my main aim is different. Indeed, I analyze how secularism debates have shaped different forms of feminist political subjectivities for racialized feminist groups, and in particular how racialized feminists have forged specific political vocabularies to name and politicize their relationships with white feminists in this heated context. I also argue that these political vocabularies are articulated with a set of emotions and moral dispositions that fashion specific forms of feminist political subjectivation. I propose in this chapter to capture the formation of (collectively produced) moral, political, and ethical dispositions that are intimately linked to and shaped by the context of postcolonialism and postsecularism in France and Quebec. In particular, I ask: How do nonwhite feminists consider their political and moral relationship to the mainly white feminist movement in both contexts? What are the moral dispositions and emotions that the encounters, conflicts, or alliances with white feminists elicit for racialized feminists? How do they resist racism and the exclusions from white feminist spaces it performs?

I argue that by calling themselves feminists, racialized feminists in both contexts enter—among other processes—in relation with white feminists, a relation that they attempt to fashion with their own vocabulary, concepts, and discourses. Since their emergence as organized social movements in different contexts, racialized feminists have produced analyses of their raison d'être and relationships with white feminist organizations. In the United States, Black and Chicana organizations that emerged at the same time as their white counterparts, at the end of the 1960s, produced writings reflecting on their identities, goals, and strategies in order to organize and survive as independent movements. In the contemporary context of secularism debates and divisions on these issues within feminist movements, racialized feminists have elaborated specific discourses and counterdiscourses to empower themselves and resist the political ideals and identities imposed on them by hegemonic and secular feminist whiteness. Since they occupy a
minority position, in the Deleuzian sense—that is, not an identity or a sociological “object,” but a position of endogenous conflictuality within a hegemonic normative system—racialized feminists seek to create a new language, a new position, from within a dominant discourse.

I insisted in the previous chapter that feminist whiteness is a relational process of political subjectivation. Likewise, racialized feminists’ forms of political subjectivation are relational. They are relationally connected to white/mainstream/hegemonic forms of feminist discourse. This relationship is both political and moral. Indeed, I posit that calling oneself an Afro-feminist, a feminist of color, a Muslim feminist, or a South Asian feminist is not only a political choice in a given context. It is also a claim to be recognized as such, by other fellow feminists; it is, to borrow Judith Butler’s words, to give an account of oneself as a racialized feminist; it is to enter a scene of address and therefore relations with others, relations that delineate a specific moral horizon and specific ethical responsibilities. In particular, I explore in this chapter the political emotions, such as indignation, frustration, pain, unease, anger, or lassitude, that sustain racialized feminists’ relationship to white feminists, and the forms of moral address they convey. I argue that racialized feminists’ political subjectivities are articulated through both resistance and resentment.

In her analysis of theories and practices of French lesbians of color, Paola Bacchetta contends that resistance can be transgressive, transformative, or oppositional, and that these various forms of resistance allow for the creation of subjectivities and imaginaries thanks to the creation of a collective “we” formed by intersubjective relations. Hence, she insists that queer-of-color subjectivities are coconstituted by various power relations that they resist, leading to the production of new subjectivities and to disidentification processes. I document such forms of resistance through discourses that are opposed to the hegemony of feminist whiteness.

I also document forms of resentment, which I interpret as moral and political addresses that racialized feminists direct to white feminists. There is a philosophical tradition that interprets resentment as a negative political passion. For example, Wendy Brown suggests that resentment fixates wounded identities on their injuries, preventing them from unfolding politically in more positive and productive ways. Resentment tends to orient political action toward the claiming of rights—rights to protection, which reinstate the status of victim. Sara Ahmed insists that feminists of color are assigned the position of a feminist killjoy within feminist spaces: as they raise the
subject of racism, they are perceived as the problem, because they threaten the preservation of “white fragility” by their very presence. Racialized women's resentment may be described as the product of being a feminist-of-color killjoy, that is, a feminist who “does not make the happiness of others [here white feminists] her cause.” However, resentment, like the figure of the killjoy, exceeds negativity. It also bears the mark of a will. Indeed, like the willful subject described by Ahmed, resentment also creates the possibility for a we, at the same time as it interrupts the “flow of a conversation.”

Indeed, following Audre Lorde and bell hooks, Ahmed underlines that bringing up the question of racism within feminism, that is, politicizing race in the context of feminism, means interrupting the flow of the conversation of white feminists. Resentment is therefore a form of willfulness.

In this vein, I argue that resentment is not a way of adopting and safeguarding an identity as a victim, but rather a way to attempt to fashion new relations. It is both a moral disposition and a political action directed at white feminists. Resentment can thus be interpreted as a moral address, as Margaret Walker has argued, directed toward those who have wronged others. Thomas Brudholm has shown that, in the dramatic aftermath of World War II, Jean Améry’s writings as a Holocaust survivor had no other aim than to posit resentment as a positive moral demand expressed to his German contemporaries. Harboring resentment may therefore be a political and moral action that is not limited to the foreclosure of political subjectivation on the figure of the victim but rather an action that is principally oriented toward others. While analyses of racialized women’s movements often rightly focus on their claim to their own identity and their difference from white feminist movements, I suggest in this chapter that resentment is, among other emotions and moral dispositions, a way to recognize what Hannah Arendt calls “the world between us.”

I first explore the contexts of racialized feminists’ activism in France and Quebec to underline the difference in their dynamics of self-organization and politicization of their racial identities. I show that they share, across the Atlantic, similar repertoires of collective self-organizing, but also that they approach religious and racial identities in contrasting ways, and that they hold a diversity of positions with respect to sexularism debates, depending in part on the type of organization they are part of, that is, organizations devoted to providing services to women in their communities or consciousness-raising groups. Then I analyze what intersectionality means for racialized feminists, that is, both a lived experience that is conducive to developing a
form of feminist subjectivity, and a tool to resist whiteness and claim more and better representation among feminist movements. Finally, exploring further the political subjectivations of racialized feminists, I investigate the range of political and moral emotions that they express with respect to white women. I argue that these feelings nourish both resistance to whiteness and resentment toward white feminists as a form of moral and political appeal to refashion feminist relations.

The Politics of Racialized Feminists “Organizing One’s Own”

In most countries where feminism experienced a second wave, during that period racialized women self-organized and produced theoretical reflections on their relationship to the white feminist movement. However, it took quite some time before their dynamics as social movements became the object of scholarship that interrogates and revisits central themes of social movement theories such as identity formation, movement’s success, or coalition building. Today there is a developing field of social movement studies that analyzes racialized women’s movements and their relationships with white women’s movements, and that also investigates the extent to which racialized feminists’ claims and identities have been discursively or practically integrated in the political agenda of white/mainstream feminist organizations, through intersectionality discourses and practices. However, these developments are of uneven nature depending on the case under scrutiny. In particular, while there have been several important studies on racialized women’s movements in the United States and the United Kingdom, there is a dearth of studies on other European countries and Canada, and the history of Black French women’s movements has only recently begun to burgeon. The timing and scope of these processes of self-organizing differ depending on the historical and social context. It is important to understand these differences because they delineate the backdrop against which racialized feminists’ political subjectivation unfolds.

In the United States, Black and Chicana feminists organized early on at the end of the sixties and produced an important legacy of writings that formed the foundations of Black feminism and intersectionality as a field of studies, thereby cementing a lasting impact on feminism as a field of protest and as a field of theory. Studies on racialized women’s movements in the
United States have brought important insights on the dynamics of formation and dissolution or fading of these organizations. They have in particular underscored that Black and Chicana women’s organizations are not the “natural” product of race relations in a given context. As Benita Roth suggests, “Selecting the label ‘feminist’ was not a simple or automatic act but a political choice among other political choices,” and Black and Chicana women in the United States could have opted at the end of the 1960s to participate in their respective racial groups’ social and revolutionary movements rather than create their own organizations. Kimberly Springer also points out the risk of homogenizing these groups, erasing their internal class and sexual diversity. As she outlines in her history of Black women organizing in the United States between 1968 and 1980, the desire to center organizations around Black women’s identity, rather than Black women’s identities, created new margins in these movements. Equally important, Chicana and Black feminists in the United States decided to create their own organizations following two impulses of different nature. First, in a crowded social movement field, they felt the need to “organize one’s own,” an activist ethos that was typical of that time, as Benita Roth has argued. Second, white women’s desire to preserve their class and racial privileges made alliances difficult or impossible, despite existing relationships between Black, Chicana, and white women’s movements.

France and Quebec provides contrasting pictures to the US history of racialized women’s organizing. Racialized feminist’s organizations have emerged in France and Quebec at different times and places, and with different political logics and genealogies. In France, despite the existence of racialized feminist activism in overseas territories during the same period and the emergence of migrant women’s activism in the 1980s, no such process occurred. Rather, each generation of racialized feminists has strived to achieve visibility, recognition, and influence within the feminist movement. In Quebec, indigenous women’s activism and migrant women’s activism not only emerged in the 1980s but also were partially institutionalized and funded by the government, thereby impacting the organizational landscape of Quebecois feminist activism.

Differences between France and Quebec, and between these two contexts and the United States, are in great part due to the different histories of the politics of race and immigration that provide the backdrop for racialized feminists to organize. Indeed, Quebec and France offer two contrasting models of citizenship, immigrant integration, and race politics. Quebec, as a Canadian
province and despite its official claims to the contrary—including the use of another label, that of *interculturalism*—has, since the 1980s, implemented a close variant of the Canadian policy of multiculturalism, which has become well entrenched legally and institutionally, especially at the federal level but also in the bureaucratic structures of the Quebec state. In Quebec, mobilization around ethnic and immigrant identity is common and encouraged by public authorities as an important dimension of multicultural and immigrant integration politics, and the use of ethnic categories, as well as claims based on ethnic identities, do not raise public debates in Canada. Logically, racialized women’s organizations in Quebec take for granted that cultural and ethnic identities are important elements to consider when counseling a woman, thereby following the precepts of multiculturalist policies. Most organizations self-identify on the basis of an ethnic and/or regional origin (South Asian, Philippine), on the basis of a religious identity (i.e., Muslim), or on a shared identity as immigrant women. All these organizations provide services (i.e., counseling, shelter, language classes) to women and are part of Quebecois feminist networks (such as l’R des centres de femmes, a network that asks its members to sign a feminist charter), which enables them to get funding from the Quebecois government as women’s rights organizations. However, most of the funding of the self-identified ethnic/religious women’s organizations I interviewed came primarily from the then-called Ministry of Cultural Communities and Immigration in Quebec. Finally, these organizations also actively engage in advocacy in the name of their community, lobbying the government on issues of immigration reform, secularism bills, women’s rights, and welfare policies.

Conversely, what has been labeled the French “republican model” promotes a contrasting philosophy of integration, which emphasizes a common, national, civic culture instead of pluralism, an abstract concept of citizenship, color-blindness, and civic and cultural assimilation on the part of migrants as well as religious minorities. In this context, ethnic categories are deemed suspicious in public debates and often controversial, which has made mobilization around ethnic identity difficult. Hence, while in Quebec the ministry for immigration and cultural communities funds organizations that organize on an ethnic basis, in France the administrative agencies in charge of immigrant integration have mostly used territorial categories (such as housing projects or banlieues defined by urban planning policies) or economic categories (such as poverty) to define their beneficiaries, rather than ethnic categories. In this context, while in
France, too, racialized women’s organizations sometimes receive funding from governmental agencies dedicated to immigrant integration, these agencies encourage organizations to present themselves as defined territorially (an identity bounded by the quartier, i.e., neighborhood) rather than ethnically. Often, women’s centers’ funding comes from local political and administrative bodies (at the municipal or regional level) in charge of social welfare. What legitimizes their funding is the social work they do—language classes, literacy classes, afterschool programs for children, support for administrative procedures, shelter, counseling—in specific deprived neighborhoods, not their self-organizing within an ethnic community. Hence, in the Parisian region where I conducted interviews, the few racialized women’s organizations that provide services in their communities often have names that do not refer to a specific ethnic origin or to racial identity, but rather stress their local roots in the neighborhood, or adopt a mix of both that underlines their immigrant identity (such as “Franco-African women in Paris”). Finally, a handful of organizations that operate as consciousness-raising and activist groups—which do not provide services to women in their communities—put forth feminist of color identities that politicize both their racial and gender (and sometimes sexual) identities, but not specific ties to ethnic communities.

The contexts and timing of the emergence of racialized women’s organizations in Quebec and France are therefore quite different. In Quebec, women from immigrant communities were encouraged as early as the beginning of the 1980s to self-organize on an ethnic basis to provide services that would foster immigrant integration (language classes in particular) and simultaneously empower women (screening for domestic violence, temporary free day care for young immigrant mothers, etc.). These women’s rights organizations have adopted the vocabulary and political project of multiculturalism, promoting their ethnic and religious difference.\(^{31}\) However, their involvement in the multiculturalist project is often also a critical one: they tend to question the culturalization of difference at the expense of a class analysis, contest many Quebec policies for immigrant integration as reproducing inequalities and power asymmetries, and often actively lobby against racism (instead of promoting multiculturalism per se).\(^{32}\) Many immigrant women’s organizations based in francophone Quebec are run by anglophone immigrants and have also developed a critical stance toward Quebecois nationalism. Some organizations operated by migrant women and women of migrant descent have also developed ties of solidarity with native women’s organizations, as a
way to recognize their own participation in the Canadian settlement project and its ongoing colonial legacy for indigenous peoples.\textsuperscript{33}

In France, several groups of immigrant women were created at the beginning of the 1970s, but they mostly assembled women from Latin American and North African countries who were in political exile in Paris.\textsuperscript{34} Their political activism was geared toward their country of origin or toward international organizations. In 1976, a Black Women’s Coordination (Coordination des femmes noires) was created to voice the concerns of racialized and immigrant women; however, it was short-lived and was disbanded in 1980.\textsuperscript{35} At the beginning of the 1980s, women of migrant descent started to be politically active, but mostly in organizations devoted to fighting racism or to fostering immigrant solidarity. Only in the mid-1980s did specific migrant women’s organizations start to form.\textsuperscript{36} The first organizations were generally short-lived, but new organizations quickly formed to replace them. These groups constitute nowadays a much more heterogeneous and less visible activist field than in Quebec, with some organizations based on national origin and politically active with respect to their home country’s politics, while others are much more grassroots and cater to a specific neighborhood’s diverse population of migrant women and women of migrant descent, and with a few organizations doing critical political lobbying in the name of racialized women and with a postcolonial perspective, which emerged a few years after the turn of the century. This late emergence and singular weakness of an activist field of racialized women within the French feminist field of protest is striking in a country with such a long colonial history and resulting postcolonial migration policies, and which still comprises overseas territories that are legacies from its colonial project. As Françoise Vergès notes, it reflects a French ideology of “decolonization” that has excluded the French overseas territories from French modernity and performs an erasure of colonial history.\textsuperscript{37} In this context, the politicization of race and racial identities has been stalled and obscured.

Politicizing Intersectional Identities: Culture, Race, Postcoloniality

This short overview of migrant and racialized women’s activism in both contexts indicates that there is a wide variety of organizations in this field, with various forms of politicization of racial and postcolonial identities. How
are these different contexts shaping the political subjectivations of racialized feminists? How do legitimate discourses about race and racial identities impact the politics of intersectionality that racialized feminists promote? In each context, different processes of politicization of racial, immigrant, and religious identities provide the backdrop against which the political subjectivation of racialized feminists is set. The politics of intersectionality displayed by racialized feminists is thus variegated. It is shaped by the context in which they organize as feminists, and by the political legitimacy of categories such as culture, race, or religion. It is also shaped by their own trajectory and the generation they belong to. With respect to race, three main types of narratives define intersectional identities. A first one, used by many organizations that deliver services to migrant and racialized women, tends to insist on the *cultural* dimension of racial and migrant differences. Contrastingly, several organizations that provide services to racialized women tend to downplay or suspend the role of race or culture as an important factor in their intervention work. Finally, both in Quebec and in France, some racialized feminists propose an elaborated social critique of racism and postcolonialism that informs their feminist practice. With respect to religion, and more specifically Islam, racialized feminists elaborate also a variety of discourses, marked by ambivalence, tolerance, and rejection. The intersection between religion, race, and gender is thus perceived and politicized differently by racialized feminists, depending on their context and their own trajectory of becoming a feminist. These variations underline how each context—France and Quebec—and its hegemonic politics of race and secularism contribute to shape the political subjectivations of racialized feminists.

Many organizations in Montreal that provide services to racialized/migrant women insist on the specific needs that *cultural* difference generates for the women they seek to help. They underscore that in other organizations that are not run by racialized/migrant women, the women in their community will not find adequate help, because their cultural needs will not be understood or taken into consideration. Nandita, a woman in her fifties from South Asia who works in a center for South Asian women in Montreal, explains her organization’s approach:

> We want to make sure her rights are respected, because in some place, in shelters, they try to enforce certain things. They say: you don’t have to be in that situation, you can divorce, . . . But we don’t do that. It’s her decision. She
has to understand and take it. . . . What I feel is the social workers who work there, they are not from South Asia. They don’t know our culture, they don’t know the family values . . . so if they don’t know, they will make a decision by thinking about their side. . . . Maybe they don’t want to see the culture and the family values. They think the woman is here and she has to adapt to the Quebec society, to live like that. I don’t agree with that.

A common discourse among racialized immigrant feminists in Quebec stresses the fact that women from their communities are not adequately served by mainstream feminist shelters because these tend to be insensitive to the cultural dimensions that structure immigrant women’s situations of domestic violence. Shelter officers who are not immigrant women themselves are perceived as pushing immigrant women to separate and divorce, while in fact this may not be what these women really want, or it may come at a cost that is not suspected by nonimmigrant women. Naima, an officer in a center for Muslim women in Montreal who is from the Middle East, tells a similar story:

For newcomers, I find that if the person is from the same culture, it will be easier. They trust you more easily, they are more open. Often they will feel like they don’t have to explain themselves . . . in some ways, women who are in a relationship, who are married, and they’re being abused. . . . To understand why they’re not leaving, in the sense of what are the stakes. . . . And I don’t say this is specific in our culture. This happens in all cultural communities, but the idea of losing faith, of bringing dishonor to the family . . . how important it is to keep the family together. All these things. Because I realize how important it is. If I feel like the woman is not ready to take certain steps, I won’t force her. I will let her know if I feel she is in a dangerous situation.

What is noticeable is that these discourses share to a large extent the feminist motto that women should make their choice on their own terms and that feminist intervention is about respecting a woman’s choice, whatever it is. However, immigrant feminists argue that white feminist organizations tend not to respect this feminist tenet because they are insensitive and unaware of the importance of culture and cultural differences. Hence, self-organization on the basis of shared culture and cultural experience is necessary to provide an adequate feminist response to migrant women’s needs.
These discourses echo the narrative of interculturalism and benevolent care expressed by white women working in multicultural organizations. However, while for white feminists interculturalism was a tool that had to be learned, for racialized/immigrant feminists the emphasis on cultural difference is based on lived experience. Of course, the idea that there is a commonality of experience between immigrant women who work or volunteer in immigrant women’s organizations and their public, a commonality that guarantees a form of authenticity, is partly fictional. Migration trajectories, class background, and education are often very different between volunteers or managers and beneficiaries. Nonetheless, in Quebec this idea is central to migrant women’s self-organizing and their emphasis on cultural difference. Hence culture, rather than race, is politicized and operates as a ground for identification and feminist practice.

In a French context in which race talk is politically risky, some racialized/immigrant women refute the idea that a common racial or cultural identity is necessary to perform a good feminist intervention with racialized/immigrant women. Samira, whose parents are from Algeria and who now manages her own organization in a Parisian suburb, and who argues in her interview for the necessity to self-organize on the basis of a shared immigrant experience and a shared experience of racism, rejects the idea that one must be of a similar cultural background to perform the right intervention:

I think that when somebody suffers or was victim of violence, etc., it’s international. She is here with her suffering. . . . You just have to be yourself and to be open. Suffering is universal. What’s good here is that we have a lot of volunteers from very different cultural origins, different ethnic origins.

Samira’s opinion at the same time contests the idea that a shared cultural background enables the right intervention, and, simultaneously, promotes the variety of cultures that are represented through her volunteers, thereby implicitly endorsing the idea that this variety allows the organization to address the cultural and ethnic variety that is found among its beneficiaries. Recognizing that immigration and cultural difference shape women’s experiences and their needs, and therefore should be taken into account—in part through the experiences and identities of the volunteers themselves—and believing that a woman’s suffering is universal reflect two competing narratives that orient Samira’s and other racialized feminist activists’ practices. On the one hand, her own experience of racism and exclusion
from other types of social services underlines the structural and political nature of racism and justifies self-organization on the basis of immigrant or racialized identity. On the other hand, the feminist ethos of intervention that advocates helping women on their own terms suggests that the identity of the listener does not matter; rather professional and activist experience do. Underlying this discourse is the idea that “suffering is universal,” that is, that the women who seek help and support from her organization are victims primarily as women. The forms of violence they experience are culturally defined—Samira evokes forced marriage among other cases her organization deals with—but mostly, they fall on the spectrum of violence against women. They are rarely presented as the product of institutional racism or discrimination. In that sense, gender identity comes first in Samira’s analysis.

Mariam, a woman from Mali who heads Women Mediators in a northern Parisian suburb, also argues that a common racial or cultural identity is not necessary to perform well in one’s job of helping immigrant and racialized women. Mariam gives the example of one of her white French employees who can perform the same job as Mariam does once she establishes trust with the woman with whom she is working, and as long as she abides by the principle of not making decisions in the name of the woman she is helping. Mariam further explains:

Among our officers now there are a lot of French women. All nationalities . . . French, Greeks . . . some are recognized because they speak several languages. I have Maghrebi women, also South Africans in the team. I don’t look at immigration; I look at the person’s experience, her ability to listen to people. It’s important. At the start, we said we would be immigrant women to help and support immigrant women. That was at the start, but it changed a lot. Even the French, they can intervene with these populations. You just need to listen, to have empathy, to be trained, just to be human, that’s all.

As in Samira’s discourse, there is both a valorization of ethnic and cultural diversity within the organization, and the clear refusal of the idea that one must share the same culture or immigrant background to provide the right service and support to immigrant women. However, this principled position that rejects the idea of a community-based feminist organization reflects a larger constraint that is specific to the French context. Indeed, asked whether she would prefer to have an organization only for women from Mali, Mariam replies:
Mariam: No, no, no. If we do that . . . I am against this also. I don’t want to be trapped in my culture. And if you do that the state will say: now these associations are based on ethnicity, and well . . .

Question: You might not get funding from institutions then?
Mariam: No, certainly not.

Hence Mariam’s refusal to organize only within her own immigrant and cultural community reflects both the primacy of gender as the basis for her organization’s identity, and a political constraint specific to the French context that makes organizing on the basis of racial identity suspicious and unlikely to be funded. In France, a deep tension is perceptible between the claim that a shared cultural or immigrant experience is a necessity and justifies self-organization, and the claim that the cultural or racial identity of the volunteers does not matter in providing immigrant and racialized women with the support they need. This tension means that sometimes, in racialized feminists’ discourse, the centrality of race is interrupted, suspended.

In contrast to this repertoire, a handful of organizations in Quebec and France politicize racial identity as an important dimension of their identity. For them, fighting against racial discrimination is as important as empowering women in their community. These groups generally are oriented toward advocacy or consciousness-raising, with no institutional funding and often no office space, and do not provide services to women. These organizations articulate a discourse that politicizes race and colonialism as a social relationship of domination that is as important as gender in understanding racialized/immigrant women’s position in society.

Representing a network of racialized and migrant women in Quebec, Karima, an immigrant woman from Algeria in her early fifties and an activist in Montreal, provides a related analysis that centers on colonialism and on the intersectionality that characterizes migrant women’s situation in Quebec:

We consider that our priority is to fight against the neocolonial oppression we are experiencing, because the majority of immigrant and racialized women. . . we come, especially in the past ten years, we come from former colonized countries, [colonized] by the same colonizers, France and Great Britain. And today, when you look closely . . . you realize that there is almost a colonial relationship that is imposed on immigrants.
Immigration and race are politicized within a post and neocolonial framework of analysis. Immigrant women are not presented as defined by their culture and as having specific needs related to their situation as immigrants. Rather, they are presented as oppressed by an interlocking set of cultural and economic relations of domination, which form a system that is defined and denounced as perpetuating under a new guise the former colonial domination. While Quebec was not a colonial power in the usual sense, the comparison with indigenous women allows Karima to draw a parallel between Quebec’s settler and colonial policy vis-à-vis indigenous people and the European colonial powers that colonized, among others, her country of birth. Doing so, she draws a historical and political line between colonization and the contemporary politics of immigration in Quebec.

In a similar vein, in France some racialized feminist organizations politicize race and the legacy of colonialism in their discourse and identity as an organization. Maleiha, a woman in her mid-thirties originally from North Africa, who founded a group of lesbians who define themselves as lesbians of color, explains her reasons for creating a group based on a double separation from men and from white women:

We say “of color,” as in the United States. I will answer you like Aimé Césaire when he was asked about Negritude. . . . It’s a movement of analysis, of resistance. So I will tell you maybe “of color” is not totally satisfying. But we chose the term because . . . it seemed full of the meaning and analysis of our American predecessors. When you say “of color,” there is this recognition of all the work of intersectional analysis. And also, it seemed a broad enough term to encompass all the lesbians who have a history linked to colonization and slavery, to memory, exile, immigration, be they of immigrant origin or migrant themselves, etc. Because if you use “racialized,” I don’t like that term that much, it reduces women of color to only one oppression, that of racism. “Of color” is more open. It is more political.

For Maleiha, her organization must tackle the various oppressions that lesbians of color experience at once, without introducing a hierarchy between them. The politicization of racial identity is evidenced in the importance of the separation from white women and white lesbians—which was one of the reason to create the organization, after Maleiha experienced unproductive collaborations with white lesbians in a former group. In a similar vein, Sandra, a young woman in her twenties originally from central Africa,
who founded an Afro-feminist group in Paris with other women of African
descent, explains the reasons for the creation of her association:

Well, whatever the type of feminism, it always comes from your experi-
ence as a woman, and that’s the start, starting from your experience as a
woman in a given context, and for us, we are Black women who live in a
white and patriarchal society. . . . Clearly we live in a white and heteronor-
mative patriarchy, so it’s becoming aware that our position exposes us to
several oppressions that are interlocked because of sexism and racism, and
that many other oppressions can be added; the idea is not to create a hier-
archy between these oppressions; they are an integral part of our trajectory,
our experience.

Sandra’s and Maleiha’s analyses echo the discourses of Black American
feminists in the 1970s as analyzed by Kimberly Springer,40 as well as the anal-
ysis of intersectionality proposed by Kimberlé Crenshaw.41 A specific posi-
tion at the intersection of several relations of oppression shapes a specific
social experience. To politically represent and address this experience cor-
rectly, one must not, as is usually the case in social movements, introduce a
hierarchy between oppressions but, on the contrary, one must consider si-
multaneously their effects. This intersectional analysis clearly politicizes race
and posits that race is as important as gender for political action.

Intersectionality with Religion: Ambivalence, Tensions,
and Redefining the Feminist Subject

Given the various ways in which racialized feminists conceptualize racial
and immigrant identities, it is not surprising that they also have different
discourses regarding Islamic veiling practices and the sexularism debates
that have unfolded both in Quebec and in France. For a vast majority of
racialized feminists, race and religion do not raise the same issues: religious
identities cannot be subsumed under racial categorizations, and intersec-
tional identities that concern Islam differ from those that concern immigrant
and racialized women. While race raised the question of culture, racism,
and systemic discrimination, religion is mainly understood as a question of
choice—from the women who decide to wear the veil—rather than as prima-
arily a practice linked to culture or as a ground for systemic discrimination.
Because of the centrality of the idea of choice and freedom, racialized feminists’ discourses on religion differ from those they elaborate on race.

Indeed, religious beliefs raise the question of the relationship between feminism and emancipation. When discussing Islamic veiling, racialized feminists redefine the contours of the good and the bad feminist subjects. While some racialized feminists insist on the notion of choice and therefore the duty to respect religious identities and practices, others condemn the display of religious beliefs, and some express tensions and ambivalence in their discourses between their feminist commitments that condemn what they perceive as oppressive religious practices, and their awareness of Islamophobia. Others wish to recuperate discursively veiled women in the feminist project or propose to place the needs and experiences of these women at the center of their feminist analysis.

In Quebec, the majority of women activists share an accommodating position, be it on the niqab or on the hijab, and reject the government’s attempts to regulate these religious practices. Adhering to a multicultural framework that protects religious freedom and legitimizes the expression of cultural difference, they favor solutions that place the decision in the hands of the women who would be targeted by the possible regulations, be it at a collective or individual level. Nandita places the issue of the hijab within the broader framework of multiculturalism and cultural difference:

When you see a woman’s point of view, how she sees that . . . for example, the hijab, if she’s comfortable with that, what is the problem? All these years it never came out as an issue. Why is it coming now? The whole process of reasonable accommodation—I feel it has to be in two ways. When you respect every culture and all values, there won’t be a problem. What I feel is we shouldn’t mix the values of the cultures with abuse and control. That’s two different things. A woman who is wearing a hijab or who is not wearing a hijab, that has nothing to do with the family and control. That’s her own way to define herself. Not all the women wear hijabs. That’s her own wish. and I think it should be respected. . . . Before they get in the issue of going into seeing that, they should have consulted these women first, how they feel about that.

Paola, one of the founding members of the same center for South Asian women in Montreal, recalls that her organization took a stand against the project of restriction of reasonable accommodation and against the position
of the FFQ, which was to authorize hijabs but to forbid niqabs (in public service, for employees and also possibly for clients). Paola summarizes the position of her organization saying, “Any kind of interference, like telling women what to do, is a problem.” Kahina, a young woman in her twenties of Algerian descent who works in a Muslim women’s center in Montreal, holds a slightly different position. While Paola and Nandita defend veiled women’s right to choose for themselves, whatever the religious garment they decide to wear, in the name of women’s agency and the respect for culture and religion that is typical of Canadian multiculturalism, Kahina denounces the bill project for more pragmatic reasons:

Will interdiction of the niqab in public institutions eradicate niqabs? I don’t think so. Did the interdiction of the veil in France eradicate the veil? Did we free these women? I don’t think so. For women who are forced, it did not change a thing. And today, in the West, are there really women who are forced to wear the veil? I did not see any.

Kahina also draws a line between the veil and the full-face veil, however, and here again she privileges a pragmatic approach that places women’s needs at the center of her analysis

Personally, it’s clear that [with] the niqab, there is a security question, the question of interpersonal relations also. It’s clear it has an impact. However, I am against the bill project in Quebec because it would prevent women from consulting social workers or from going to learn French. . . . You will keep them isolated, that’s what bothers me.

Despite some uneasiness, most immigrant and racialized women’s activists in Quebec are critical of the desire to regulate forms of Islamic veiling and denounce the racist discourse that the sexularism debates have encouraged in the public sphere and popular culture. Their analysis draws both on the Canadian multiculturalist discourse that promotes respect for cultural difference and on a feminist analysis that considers that women are able to choose for themselves. Even those who might disapprove of the practice of veiling assert that these regulations will in fact not benefit the women they are supposed to “protect.” Hence, what is being elaborated in these discourse is an alternative definition of the feminist project, one in which the goal of feminism is not to endorse and enforce abstract feminist principles (emancipation,
gender equality), but rather, in a more pragmatic fashion, to place racialized women, perceived as already vulnerable to racism, at the center of attention and care. Rather than defining what is the right feminist politics by measuring it up to ideals such as emancipation, racialized feminists suggest that the concrete consequences of veiling ban policies should be scrutinized. Feminism therefore becomes a project of caring what will happen to these vulnerable subjects, rather than deciding how they should be emancipated.

In France, racialized feminists hold a wider range of opinions on politics regulating Islamic veiling practices. Several of them express tensions and uneasiness about the issue of the Islamic veil, especially, but not only, those who are Muslim themselves. While they also denounce the practical negative effects that the 2004 and 2010 laws have had, they are also often critical of girls who decide to veil. Mariam, who migrated from Mali and is now in her fifties, explains about the 2004 law forbidding religious symbols in public schools:

> Everybody agreed in our organization. Me I am against this law. . . . In the public space it depends where you wear it. At our offices, a lot of women come for French classes and they wear a veil, because there are some Turks, Maghrebi women, African women who veil. What bothers me are the young girls who were born in France, are French, our children who veil. . . . This bothers me, it bothers me a lot, because they are just children. . . . I am tolerant, I tolerate everybody. . . . My interns, I have one who is an educator. She is in her third year, she wears a veil. She is from Mali like me. She came with her CV. We were a little bit surprised, but well, I said to myself, a future educator who wears the veil? But I looked at her CV; she started her internship. And she does a very good job. As long as you do your job well and you are not telling the others what they should do . . . but here everybody agreed that there was no reason to pass a law. It’s like saying to nuns they cannot wear their head covers.

Mariam both mildly disapproves of young women wearing the veil, and denounces a law that was useless and unfair because it targeted only Muslim women. Her decision to hire a veiled woman as an intern is not presented as a political act of resistance, and she does not hide that she was surprised when she received the application. However, she advocates for a neutral and fair approach based on abilities rather than religious identity. Samira, who is originally from Algeria and runs a grassroots organization for migrant/
racialized women in a northern Parisian suburb, is much more critical than Mariam of veil-wearing girls and women:

Some girls wear it naturally because they grew up in societies where you wear it at the youngest age. These women, I know very well it might be very hard for them to take it off, but it’s not compulsory to wear it. But many girls wear it as a provocation. They consider themselves victims and they add something on top. You just have to take it off to find a job. They are a pain, you see. So it’s something I really don’t understand. I am full of prejudices on this. . . . The ones I have met, most of them, they don’t really know why they wear it. Some could not find jobs before while they were not wearing it . . . and it’s like they tell themselves, well, I will lock myself up with some social recognition. They switch from unemployed to good practicing Muslim. . . . I met women who are active in organizations and did a conference on Muslim women’s volunteering in civil society; there was a lot of veiled women. . . . I told myself, it’s not possible, all these feminists with veils, what is happening?

Samira’s own trajectory is important in understanding her position. She is old enough to have witnessed as an adult, from France, the Algerian civil war in the early 1990s, and the terrorism of the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) in Algeria. In fact, at the time (1992–1993), she even founded an organization to support democratic and feminist activists from Algeria. She associates veiling with “regression” for women’s rights, as has been the case in her home country. While she interprets young Muslim women’s decision to veil also as the result of a legitimate “anger,” especially against colonization—an anger she admits that she shares—she rejects their strategy of resisting through veiling. Not only does she question the motivation—and religious knowledge—of young Muslim women who veil, she also affirms that she cannot ally with veiled women’s associations or allow a veiled woman to sit on the board of her own organization because she is convinced that these women are “antidemocratic” and are not truly in favor of women’s emancipation. What is more, she interprets white feminists’ position against the 2004 ban on the veil in public schools as a mistake due to their privileged location, as women from the bourgeoisie:

They came here to put us back on the right track, to explain. They were against the ban and we were in favor of the ban. . . . I told them: “You are in
your nice little bourgeois neighborhoods in Paris and you want to think in our place.” I think that law is crucial, because otherwise a majority of young girls will wear the veil. It will be a catastrophe.

For Samira, class differences are as important as race when it comes to understanding the complexity of the politics of veiling and its regulation by authorities. In this case, and because of her own trajectory, she positioned herself within a common class background with the girls who are targeted by the law (rather than a common racial or religious identity). Her common class position authorizes her both to know what’s best for veiled girls in public schools and to refute white bourgeois feminists’ analysis objecting to the ban in the name of choice.

In both Mariam’s and Samira’s accounts of their relationship to Islamic veiling practices and veiled women, one recognizes, in a minor mode, a discourse prevalent in the French sexualism debates and following which girls born in France should not veil because this practice denotes a refusal to assimilate and to be fully French. However, this does not mean that they are not critical of racism or that they euphemize the importance of colonial legacies and neocolonial policies in France.

Maleiha, who heads an organization of lesbians of color in Paris, illustrates this paradoxical position, that is, one that strongly rejects Islamic veiling and, at the same time, clearly politicizes the veil bans as racist laws.

The problem I have is that I am totally against the veil. And I say this while I claim my own Muslim spirituality. . . . I have the chance to know Islam and to critique it from within, and from a Muslim point of view I am against the veil. . . . I am upset, upset. It upsets me because once again these girls . . . claim the right to wear the veil or the niqab, and then they fuel policies that are racist, xenophobic, etc. So our thinking is not settled. . . . I don’t think that in the name of fighting racism I will support the demand for segregated swimming pools for veiled women. . . . It’s complicated, because I fight against a racist government, and against some feminists . . . because it’s true some white feminists are Islamophobic. . . . We denounced the 2004 and 2010 laws, which are xenophobic and racist, not republican and secular. That’s very clear. But for the reasons I mentioned, I think feminists of color are trapped. . . . It’s very unhealthy because they are against the veil but at the same time they feel obligated to support veiled girls. The line is thin. That’s why I haven’t yet settled my thinking.
Maleiha's complex position is torn between her understanding of veiling as a form of traditional practice that is not religiously founded and is oppressive to women, and her reading of veil bans as fundamentally racist laws. Her commitment to French secularism clashes with her critique of institutional racism. Interestingly, however, she does not position veiled women at the center of her analysis, contrary to Quebecois racialized feminists. While Mariam is mostly benevolently indifferent to young women who veil, despite her admitted lack of understanding of their motivations, Samira presents them at best as driven by false consciousness and at worst as antifeminist enemies, and Maleiha only reluctantly supports them. In all these instances, veiled women are not presented as active agents or possible feminists. Despite the fact that the three interviewees disapprove of the 2004 and 2010 bans, the needs and rights of veiled women are not put at the center of their critical analysis of the law. These discourses testify to the strength of hegemonic discourses in the French public sphere about secularism as necessary to emancipate women, and about the veil as a sign of oppression.

Sandra, who is younger than the three previous interviewees, offers a different discourse that does not oppose feminism to Islamic veiling. She shares the analysis of veil bans as racist policies and criticizes feminists who oppose veiling. However, while other racialized feminists admit their apprehension or refusal to work with veiled Muslim women or Muslim feminists, Sandra, on the contrary, welcomes such an opportunity, drawing a connection and a political alliance between her own fight against racism and the fight against Islamophobia:

In our group, on the question of the veil, at the last March 8 women's march we clearly positioned ourselves: we are not at all against the veil and if there are possible events or alliances to do with groups of Muslim women, it will be discussed collectively, but we share the same perspective: it will not be a problem. At the moment, there is so much Islamophobia, including in many [feminist] groups, it seems really difficult to work with these groups. . . . As far as we are concerned, we would really like to welcome veiled Black women in our group, clearly, to support them.

The variety of positions that racialized women activists hold is produced both by the different politics of race and secularism that characterize France and Quebec, and by their individual backgrounds as feminist activists. The Canadian multiculturalist discourse provides racialized feminists in Quebec
with a legitimate narrative to critique the government’s attempts to regulate and/or partially ban veils or niqabs. By contrast, in France racialized feminists sometimes adhere to some of the hegemonic republican and secular rationale that presents veiling as an oppressive practice incompatible with true belonging to the French nation and its modernity. They therefore sit uneasily between their commitment to feminist emancipation and their critique of the veil bans as racist and neocolonial policies. In this perspective, one can argue, following Françoise Vergès’s insight that an important dimension of the coloniality of power is its ability to fragment the subalterns, that veil bans—along with the hegemonic discourses they have produced in the French public sphere—fragment the possible solidarity of racialized populations and racialized feminists. Pitting feminism against religion, in a context in which Islam is heavily racialized, produces a fragmentation of racialized feminists over the veil. It may also produce alliances, as Sandra’s case shows, but they have remained, so far, marginal.

Differences in activists’ trajectories and their belonging to different microcohorts also matter to understand these various discourses on Islamic veiling. Activists who are older, especially those with ties to Algeria or Iran, tend to remain very critical of veiling practices. For young activists coming of age as feminists in France in the 1980s or early 1990s, veiling was not really a desirable or possible option. The practice was much less prevalent, and their route toward feminism, given the scarcity of racialized feminists organizations at that time, often was through participation in white feminist groups, as I detail below. In this context of relative absence of Black or Islamic feminism, their “sense of social location”—to borrow Jo Reger’s expression—is marked by a dominant white feminist discourse, inherited from the 1970s, that presents religion as incompatible with women’s rights. The situation of younger racialized feminists such as Sandra, who came of age as feminists in the 2010s—that is, at a moment in which the ideological discourse of Black feminism and the critique of Islamophobia were much more available in the French public sphere—is that of a different micro-cohort who, “although sharing a set of experiences that largely aligns with the overall ethos of the generation, experience some significant differences in ideology, identity, or goals.” In Quebec, activists from Algeria also tend to be more critical of the veil than their South Asian counterparts, suggesting here again that their political subjectivation as feminists did not happen in similar ways. In this case, the politics of language matters. Indeed, South Asian feminists are mostly anglophone and therefore endorse the multiculturalist Canadian discourse,
contrary to francophone feminists from the Maghreb (often educated in French schools in their home countries) who identify more easily with Quebec’s nationalist discourse and its corollary critique of multiculturalism.

As for white feminists, debates over Islamic veiling have thus produced new forms of political subjectivations among racialized feminists. As those debates have transformed the political vocabulary about race and postcoloniality in both contexts, opening up avenues for new forms of injurious racist and nationalist discourses, they have provided racialized feminists with new issues to address, new realities to contest. They have led, as the case of Sandra shows, to new forms of politicization of the articulation of race and religion and to a displacement of the boundaries of the good and bad feminist subjects. While for some racialized feminists, the Islamic veil remains the marker of an impossible authentic feminist subject, for the vast majority of others, especially in younger generations, the Islamic veil reveals the problematic boundaries of the feminist subject, its foreclosure around whiteness and its ignorance of its own postcolonial legacy. The desire to include veiled women in Sandra’s collective thus expresses not only a political will for inclusion, but also a desire for relationality with those supposedly abject feminist subjects, a will and a wish to expand the boundaries of feminism’s moral universe and its promise of treating equally its members. Such a moral desire strikes at the heart of the feminist project of emancipation, a project it proposes to dismantle, or at least to critically question. Indeed, Sandra reflects in those terms on the feminist promise of emancipation.

What is emancipation? . . . It goes back to a simple question: well, is a woman free to choose how she dresses, what she wears? . . . There is this paternalist impulse. We want to save them, but to save them from what exactly? That questions us, to save them from what? From big bearded machos? So . . . the problem behind this is, what type of feminism do we want? . . . A paternalist feminism, or maternalism, that is moralizing but is not mindful of the trajectories, the histories of those persons, those women’s histories? . . . It puzzles me.

Sandra’s puzzlement manifests her radical questioning of feminism’s ambition to emancipate female subjects. Her practice of questioning, which leaves the answer open, expresses her ability to remain critical of the feminist project, all the while she defines herself a feminist. This questioning enables a nonclosure of the feminist subject that becomes hospitable to “bad” subjects
such as veiled Muslim women and prostitutes. Importantly, this critical return on feminism’s ideals is made possible by a distinction Sandra makes between moral principles, and a form of moral pragmatism, one attentive to singular stories and histories. This opposition opens up a moral space to think the who of the feminist subject in different terms. I return to this issue in the next chapter.

Racialized and immigrant feminists both strongly adhere to feminist principles that are shared by white feminists—such as the idea that women should choose for themselves and that a proper feminist intervention should not impose specific choices on women, even if they are in a vulnerable situation—and, at the same time, they often argue that a common cultural or immigrant background is necessary to rightly perform this feminist intervention with other racialized/immigrant women. This discourse clearly positions them both within the ambit of feminism, a term and an approach they claim for themselves, and in a position to resist and contest the domination of white feminists in this field. However, differences are also perceptible in the ways in which racialized and immigrant feminists politicize their racial and immigrant identities. These differences show that the context of each country’s politics of race deeply impacts feminist discourses and identities. What is more, belonging to different micro-cohorts and working in an organization that is more oriented toward service provision or consciousness raising also impact how they conceptualize the intersection of gender and race. However, and despite these variations, racialized feminists also develop similar narratives, accounts of themselves as racialized feminists, narratives in which they resist and challenge feminist whiteness.

**Becoming Feminist in a White Space**

Racialized feminists in France and Quebec have come to call themselves feminists through various paths depending on their immigrant or native background, their generation, and the context in which they became politically active. However, they all have encountered the whiteness of mainstream and dominant feminist movements. These encounters shape their activism as racialized feminists and the ways in which they politicize their racial or immigrant identities as feminists. What is more, they develop counterdiscourses and practices to contest and resist the whiteness that characterizes dominant feminist discourses—especially those feminist
discourses that aim at regulating their identity. They challenge in particular their marginalization in terms of representation, using intersectionality to claim visibility and representation as racialized feminists; they challenge the collusion between feminism and nationalism; and, finally, they resist white feminists’ attempts to fetishize their racial difference. All these processes, which constitute, following Paola Bacchetta’s insights, circuits of resistance, shape racialized feminists’ identities, as well as their active disidentification with white feminists. In that perspective, the political subjectifications of racialized feminists attest to the importance of collective action as an avenue toward challenging subordination.

As Amy Allen notes in her discussion of Judith Butler’s account of psychic subjection, an account that insists on the idea that subjection implies the attachment of the subordinated subject to its own subordination: “What is missing is the realization that a possible way out of this attachment to subjection lies in collective social experimentation and political transformation.” Racialized feminists’ narratives precisely illustrate how giving an account of oneself as a racialized feminist, rather than as a feminist, constitutes a collective political experimentation that challenges feminist whiteness and the subordination it perpetuates.

Racialized/immigrant activists have come to call themselves feminists through different paths. Giving an account of oneself as a feminist is the product of a process of political subjectivation; that is, the elaboration of a specific relationship to oneself, made possible in a given context that provides discourses that sustain, and norms that constrain, this identity. The practice of calling oneself a feminist is, by definition and like other ethical practices, also an exercise in social critique that exposes the limits of norms historically produced. As Judith Butler argues, following Foucault, any practice of subjectivation is a creative practice of self-constitution because “To make oneself in such a way that one exposes those limits is precisely to engage in an aesthetics of the self that maintains a critical relation to existing norms.” The process of political subjectivation as a feminist is both the elaboration of a specific relationship to oneself that politicizes one’s gender identity, and a relationship to the world that becomes critical of social/gender norms. For racialized/immigrant feminists, this process of subjectivation as a feminist is intimately tied to their racialized identity and their position as a minority subject within feminist discourse.

Three different generations of French racialized feminists describe quite a similar story of exclusion and invisibility in white feminist spaces as they
came of age as feminists, and their need to organize among racialized women to counter this invisibility. However, each of these women belongs to a different micro-cohort, and therefore the discourses and possibilities to self-organize varied for each of them. Samira, the oldest, is in her late forties. Born in France of Algerian descent, she was socialized and politicized as a feminist through her encounter in the early 1990s with radical feminists who had been part of the Mouvement de libération des femmes (Women’s Liberation Movement, MLF) and often of the Communist Revolutionary League as well. While she praises the women she encountered as true radical feminists, she questions their sense of solidarity and their heavily Marxist ideological framework. Hence, despite participating in meetings at the Maison des femmes, the iconic feminist space inherited from the MLF in Paris, she felt a great gap between her own trajectory and the socialization within this group. While Samira recalls she had already read Simone de Beauvoir and Benoîte Groult, and that she found some themes really interesting, she felt unease and a sense of violence during these meetings.

There was such a gap between my desire to become involved in some feminist activity. . . . If you like, these women from the Maison des femmes, they scared me. They are feminist and reject everything that is feminine. . . . They were so negative about heterosexuality. They were so very politicized. Honestly, I did not know what the Communist Revolutionary League was. When you don’t know and you want to discover, you really feel a great violence in words, expressions. It freezes you. I found their opinion like a sword that did not leave any place for exchange. . . . I think they were open to all women, except that all women did not find their place in this organization, did not feel welcome. But well, they are political activists, after all.

Samira’s reaction to the politicized and radical feminist discourses directly inherited from the 1970s struggles shows how generation and the “sense of location” matter: the set of experiences that have socialized these activists and Samira are radically different. In this context, she feels alienated; and what is for the MLF activists a common and obvious feminist vocabulary is received by Samira as a form of violence. In the early 1990s, while MLF feminists were still active (mostly in their forties and fifties), there were not many feminist organizations run by younger women who had not been part of the MLF. Samira’s choice was therefore limited. However, this feeling of a generational and political gap was reinforced by an experience that framed
Samira’s understanding of the limits of feminist solidarity across class and racial boundaries. Indeed, she recalls:

At the time, I lived in the Parisian suburbs, and I had to commute through all Paris [to come to meetings]. I had more than an hour on public transport, and one night I stayed late, and at half past midnight I did not have any public transport, nothing. And that’s when I thought: it’s funny because they talk about solidarity, but none of them was concerned that I had to commute back, and that I had no public transport. . . . And that’s when I thought, you political activists, you really are bitches. You talk about international solidarity with women who suffer in the world and you did not even notice that I had a problem.

Samira contrasts MLF feminists’ abstract desire to care for remote others, “women in the world,” and their inability to care about a concrete other, because they actively ignore the complex class and racial difference that lies between them and shapes their relation. In Samira’s story MLF feminists appear unable to take into account this difference in their practice of solidarity. This experience explains why, when Samira encountered a woman from Morocco who had founded an organization for women of immigrant descent, she suddenly felt the desire to get involved.

In the mid-2000s, Maleiha encounters a different situation in the radical lesbian feminist movement in Paris. Maleiha characterizes her position, and that of other lesbians of color, at the time as a “contradictory experience of exclusion and inclusion in the LGBT milieu and the feminist milieu,” an experience that encouraged her to develop a strategy of separation from white lesbians. Indeed, in the early 2000s Maleiha had first founded a group with white lesbians and lesbians of color to fight against discrimination. However, this group proved limited in its ability to provide a space in which lesbians of color could recognize themselves without having to decide on a hierarchy between the oppressions they wanted to address.

First, it was not based on an intersectional approach because there were white members, obviously. And whites who were part of the organization said that they were aware of racism from white women, which they wanted to fight. But where it got complicated is that as soon as we wanted to dig deeper to analyze racism and its consequences . . . discriminations, lack of interest for the memory of people of color, etc., well, we could not discuss
in a coherent way with white women. I don’t mean it was impossible, but we could not deepen our analysis with people who were not concerned. We were concerned as [women] of color because we suffer these oppressions. They don’t. So, I thought, we cannot continue to think about racism together with this logic. We need a more specific group.

Maleiha’s experience was shaped by a new context in the French feminist movement. New organizations appeared at the end of the 1990s and a group of lesbians of color, the Groupe du 6 novembre, had already produced its own analyses and translated some work from American Black feminists. Moreover, starting a few years into the twenty-first century, translations in French of seminal works on intersectionality and feminism of color started to appear, as well as the diffusion of French research adopting an intersectional perspective. The context was therefore more favorable to an analysis based on a conception of intersectionality that encouraged a separation from white feminists as an important step. While Maleiha did not denounce feminist whiteness as an active form of racism or complete exclusion in the LGBT milieu, she felt that feminist whiteness meant a form of indifference and distance from white feminist lesbians vis-à-vis issues that were, for her and other lesbians of color, crucial to their understanding of their experience and their identity as feminists and lesbians.

A decade after Maleiha, Sandra encountered yet another context, and she constitutes with other fellow Afro-feminists another micro-cohort of racialized feminists in Paris. Here again, her feminist identity as a racialized feminist who politicizes race and gender is not a given or the natural product of her experience, but the result of a process by which she has come to politicize, as interrelated, experiences of racism and sexism, and through which she has encountered a collective identity and feminist discourses that can sustain this account of herself as an Afro-feminist. In her twenties in the 2010s, Sandra encountered feminist discourses and Black feminism at university during her work toward a master’s degree. This encounter with feminism not through activism first but through academic knowledge testifies to the transformation of French academia after the turn of the century and the incorporation of gender studies in academic programs, fueling a new generation of feminist identifications. What is more, that same year the law enabling gay marriage in France was discussed and intensely contested by the Catholic right wing, prompting intense politicization not only of LGBT rights but also of gender politics.
In this context Sandra became aware of many feminist and LGBT organizations. However:

Rapidly, as I got involved in these spaces, I became aware that there were very few nonwhite or racialized persons, and it's true I found it intriguing. . . . And still issues of gender matter for us, issues of sexuality as well, so from then on I started asking myself questions, and rapidly in feminist spaces I realized that when it was time to address issues of racism, the question of race, there was a blockage, as in movements that are really leftist, that give a priority to class struggle that will liberate us all.

Sandra’s experience in a way joins that of Samira, as she also encountered a strong leftist ideological framework and discourse that did not leave room to analyze racism, testifying to the ability of this political trend to sustain itself over time in the French political space. What is more, Sandra’s account also suggests that Marxist-oriented leftist organizations are particularly inimical political settings for racialized women. In this context, Sandra felt literally voiceless:

I did not question them because, truth be told, in these spaces I did not talk; that is, I observed a lot. I was starting to get involved and it felt complicated to express myself and take the floor.

Sandra’s voicelessness manifests how, in those white spaces, she could not find an adequate expression for her own political subjectivity. The language of feminism as it is elaborated and conveyed in those spaces does not provide her with the possibility of finding her voice through this language, to participate in this community of locutors. Here, we are reminded of Stanley Cavell’s and Sandra Laugier’s analysis of language and voice: we are in agreement in language, that is, our agreement in language makes a we possible and, at the same time, makes my own voice possible. In order for my voice to exist, to be found, it must be recognized and spoken by others, and my words accepted by them. For Sandra to find her voice, as she later describes in her interview, she needed to share a language with others, a collective voice and a collective identity: Afro-feminism.

The unease and ethical violence Sandra felt is similar to that described by Samira, of getting involved but still feeling that one does not fit, that one’s voice finds no place in the language that is shared by the feminist community.
A specific incident marked, for Sandra, the necessity to organize collectively as racialized feminists without white feminists:

Once I had the chance to participate in a consciousness-raising group [groupe de parole] on intersectionality in a lesbian and trans bar in Paris where nonwhite, racialized persons had made the choice to organize a group in which white persons could not talk. . . . I was struck by the fact that despite the guidelines that were given, white people expressed themselves with discourse like, “I feel uneasy about this talk about race and racism. I don’t understand why you are so . . . with your hair. Why you don’t like it when we comment on the fact we like your hair?” . . . I told myself, this is really a serious problem, and I was impressed by racialized persons who took the floor and said they were fed up with explaining again and like, “First, you cannot talk because these are the guidelines, and beyond these, exoticization, you see, does not come from nowhere. Touching our hair, there is a history, and how come you have the guts to say this here when we are trying to do something interesting”—in a space where we deconstruct, a space that presents itself as willing to fight any form of racism, LGBTphobia. . . . That was the most memorable experience for me and I realized that in the end the issue of race, whiteness, was not at all questioned. . . . And that’s when I started to have this feminist consciousness, and I wanted to affirm myself as a feminist, and rapidly I discovered blogs by Black women, like Mrs Roots, miss Dreadfull.

Sandra admits that it took her some time to call herself a feminist, in part because this form of political subjectivation is not recognized in her cultural community, and for her feminism remained “something white.” While she admits she could have used another word than “feminism,” she thinks the word should not be left to others and claims it as hers. Her coming of age as a feminist happens in a context in which consciousness-raising groups of feminists of color are a recognized (although still contested by white feminists) form of feminist practice, texts are available through academic training and, more importantly, blogs; and a first feminist documentary film on the experience of Afro-descendant women in France is being shot by an Afro-feminist activist and artist, Amandine Gay, giving visibility to the experience of women like Sandra. In this context, Sandra does not invest primarily in feminist spaces with white feminists, like Maleiha did for several years. She observes the absence of racialized persons in these groups and rapidly
decides to organize collectively with other Afro-feminists. Contrary to two decades earlier, this mode of organizing is self-evident; it has become an available repertoire of organization for racialized feminists, in part through the diffusion of texts from American feminists of color, and through the production of blogs and texts from French Afro-feminists.

These three trajectories of becoming a racialized feminist in a white space show how different contexts shape different micro-cohorts of racialized feminists who do not politicize race in the exact same ways. However, they do share the experience of exclusion from white feminist discourses and spaces, an exclusion that is felt as a silencing or a feeling of not being welcomed and recognized, of not “fitting” into the preexisting white feminist discourse.

**Claiming Representation and Challenging Whiteness**

An important way in which racialized feminists resist feminist whiteness is by claiming self-representation and visibility within the feminist movement. This means both privileging self-organizing to self-represent and using intersectionality discourse to claim adequate visibility and representation within the broader feminist movement. Sandra insists that separation from both men in the African diaspora community and white women was a very important principle in forming her organization, in order to “claim back [their] own voices.” Maleiha describes a similar process in which the members of her organization wanted to come together “without self-justification, to decide our actions, our reflections, our analyses, our struggles, with organizational autonomy from a political point of view, and a better consistency with our lives and claims with respect to intersecting oppressions.” The need and desire to self-organize seems to operate along the same lines throughout the decades represented by these women. Soraya, a Muslim feminist activist in her thirties who emigrated from the Middle East to Montreal as a child, was part of a committee of racialized women in a mainstream Quebecois feminist organization. She explains why she now desires to create her own group with only racialized feminists after having experienced on several occasions how white feminists she knew personally “forgot” to invite Muslim feminists to events regarding the Charter of Quebecois Values promoted by the government, which is a primary concern for Muslim feminists because of its secular, anti-religious-symbols approach:
We don’t pretend to create something that will compete with mainstream organizations, but what has been important in this experience, even if it was painful, is to realize, as many racialized women before us, many Black women that (sigh) there is this idea that if you don’t participate in recognized, institutional white spaces, you don’t work. But it’s not true. . . . In big mainstream organizations your work is short term, in damage control mode, reacting to crisis, as always when it comes to Muslim activists. . . . But instead of working against something, we will start working for something, and that something is us.

Sandra’s words, in Paris, echo Soraya’s in Montreal. Assessing the changes that the creation of her Afro-feminist organization brought, she insists on the ability to self-represent collectively to articulate her own feminist discourse that she can now voice:

Now we take the floor, we voice, and I think that is the power of this kind of project. . . . Until then you did not talk. . . . The fact of having a collective group, to do things together—in fact, our organization is about giving each other power. I think that is what feminism is about, giving each other power, and when you don’t have it anymore, another sister can give it to you, and that’s good.

Here again, the voice appears in Sandra’s discourse, not so much as a metaphor but as the material embodiment of her political subjectivation as an Afro-feminist, a political subjectivation that is made possible through the constitution of a collective subject. This collective subject enacts a form of care, giving to one another, which is lived as powerful and is a materialization of feminism as a form of life.61 This will to self-organize and self-represent is also presented as a way to ensure the representation of racialized women’s voice within the women’s movement, forcing white feminists to acknowledge their presence and their discourse. Liz, who runs an organization of Filipina women in Montreal, explains why she created this organization:

The idea is to have . . . to be visible, for our groups to be visible. For example, the issue of domestic workers, the issue of the minimum wage, was not supported by the main feminist organizations. And then, on the International Women’s Day, we were kind of invited. . . . So you sit on the
chair and you never hear us. The idea was to be out and to present what our problems are because nobody else will talk about them except us.

Not only did she create her own organization, starting in the 2000s she organized with other racialized women’s groups their own demonstration for International Women’s Day. Her colleague Mary recalls:

There was one year that we really became disillusioned with the women’s movement in Quebec. We were ignored as immigrant women, ethnic community women . . . and besides, we want to represent ourselves, not a white woman representing us, because you know it’s like being a system of patriarchy. It’s the authority who has the voice, not us. It will remain like that if we don’t bring up our voice.

Mary’s explanation of how racialized women’s groups came together to organize their own march shows how self-representation also means visibility inside the women’s movement, which is understood as a place of power relations that needs to be challenged collectively. Similarly, in France, Maleiha recalls the motivation to create her own group of lesbians of color in Paris:

The objective was for lesbians of color . . . to reinforce our visibility in terms of analysis, of struggle, in terms of the specificities in the LGBT milieu and in the feminist milieu, to enable a space of expression and autonomous struggle for lesbians of color, to fight against racism and invisibilization.

For racialized/immigrant feminists, the claim to self-represent is intimately linked with a challenge to the whiteness of the movement. Self-organizing is a way to challenge white hegemony in feminist discourses and feminist practices. Paola, who runs a South Asian women’s organization in Montreal, explains why she allied with other racialized women’s groups in Montreal such as Liz’s to organize their own march of racialized and immigrant women on International Women’s Day. Interestingly, this march was later on recognized as the official event for International Women’s Day by the Quebecois Women’s Federation.

For many years, there was a women’s March 8 event [organized by mainstream women’s rights organizations] and then that stopped, but the unions, the big unions often had something and would bring their members from
the region and big trucks and balloons. But it was very white; we said, we need to have a women's event that represents, you know, all kind of women, and that's why we chose the name “diverse origins,” class, race, age, etc.

For racialized/immigrant feminists, the concept of intersectionality is used to combine the struggle against patriarchy with the struggle against racism and to unveil whiteness and privileges. While for white feminists it was a tool for intercultural feminist intervention and a tool to try to account for differences between women and to attempt inclusion in practice, for racialized feminists it is a claim for the representation of their interests and analyses, a means to challenge whiteness and its privileges. Maleiha explains:

The LGBT milieu and the feminist milieu in general as well, it's really a milieu which is very white. As long as they haven't elaborated a solid reflection, and acknowledged that they have privileges as whites, they won't understand the intersectional approach and intersectional claim. That's what we bring.

Challenging whiteness in the feminist movement means also redefining some of its principles and priorities, first and foremost refuting the idea that gender oppression can be tackled on its own, independently from other relations of power. Mary, a Filipina activist in Montreal, explains how her organization understands its feminist commitment as articulated with other struggles rather than independent:

Our goal is to push for workers. That's the majority of our constituents. Class first . . . our members need their class conditions to change, but they are feminists. It's another idea about feminism. Their condition as women . . . we fight to change it. This condition comes from exploitation based on gender, but also exploitation from social condition, race, class. But we also struggle . . . We want the men from the same social condition to support us, because if we divide we cannot go forward.

In Quebec, the majority of racialized/immigrant women's grassroots organizations stress the fact that they do not exclude men from their struggle and practice. They often accept that men accompany their spouses to their offices for consultation, a practice that is not tolerated by mainstream Quebecois feminist organizations and has raised tensions between racialized feminists
and white feminists. Indeed, in Quebec most feminist community centers are part of a network, l’R des femmes, which has a common charter of principles (called a basis of political unity) that all organizations have to adopt. In return, they are granted the status of member and can benefit from government funding. In the charter the presence of men in women’s centers is forbidden. Mani, an activist at a South Asian women’s center in her late fifties who is Indian-Canadian and grew up in Montreal, recalls the discussion on this issue with white feminist organizations:

Yes, [the basis of unity] has three things that you need to do: you have to lobby the government, you have to educate your members, and the last thing . . . . I used to know it by heart, I would be like, “Yes, we do all those things!” And they would always say, “Don’t let the men in,” and I would always, like me and the Italian women and the Greek women, we would all go, “We serve women and their families. We don’t see a woman outside her family context because the culture does not allow it.” But they [men] are not allowed to vote, they’re not allowed to be members and are not allowed to speak at meetings, which is very hard for them. They have to sit at the edge and just shut up, and wait until their wives are finished. They mostly don’t come.

Not only does Mani refute the idea that what white Quebecois feminists define as proper feminist intervention is applicable to her organization and her community, she also challenges the idea that white feminists “invented” feminist practice. She explains that her organization had been doing what is prescribed in the basis of political unity long before it was formalized for white feminist organizations in Quebec: “lobby the government, which we did anyways, . . . provide front-line services to women in abusive relationships and help them get out, and educate their members. We were always doing all those things. We could have written that basis of political unity even before they thought of it. We did all those things in the mid-1980s!” This statement challenges the pervasive tale of the white origins of feminism that always presents white organizations as the precursors and pioneers of the movement. Mani also challenges the idea implicitly promoted by the white Quebecois feminist discourse that whiteness is the norm and that white women represent all women, contrary to racialized women who are not perceived as representing all women. In the end, Mani managed to convince her interlocutors to accept her organization in the network so it
could access provincial funding. However, she continuously challenged their whiteness. Similarly, when Mani was sent as a representative of her organization to assemblies and boards of the Quebecois federation of women’s rights (FFQ), she fought to unveil the fake universalism of white Quebecois feminist claims.

So a big part of this was me arguing at meetings all the time that groups like ours should be considered mainstream, right? Like if you have a South Asian women’s center and it has a feminist mandate and does political lobbying and helps women in sometimes very difficult situations, in their language it’s not marginal. . . . Everybody would always say we are an ethno-specific center. It was the same with the network of community centers. That was tricky because they would say you have to be accessible to all women, and they would always say, “You are only for women from South Asia.”

During meetings with the FFQ in the 1990s, as she constantly confronted unacknowledged privileges and white women posing as the norm and as owners of Quebecois feminism, Mani invented a term, forged after the term “WASP,” to challenge their assumptions frontally:

When they would say, *notre pays* [our country] or *nous autres pis vous autres* [you people and us people], whenever they were really unaware of that, I would say, “When you say, ‘us people,’ you mean CFCB?” And they would say, “What is CFCB?” [I’d answer,] “Canadiennes Françaises Catholiques Blanches [White French-Canadian Catholic Women].” They really hated it (*laughs*). They would be really insulted, but I think these women got the point: if you have a label for us, you just gonna have to accept we have a label for you. Why don’t we stop using labels at all, but you have to stop first cause you started first!

By self-organizing and by challenging assumptions about feminist principles, racialized feminists unveil whiteness, and resist its various manifestations. However, the ability to challenge whiteness within a mainstream setting varies in Quebec and France. Indeed, in Quebec, racialized/immigrant feminist organizations have been organized on an ethnic/immigrant basis for decades and are recognized as such by the government. They have always engaged critically with the mainstream white
organization that associates all women’s rights organizations in the province, the FFQ, both by participating on its board, as Mani did for years, and by setting up their own march for International Women’s Day, which means having a network for racialized/immigrant women’s organizations. This strategy of both inclusion and separation has sometimes proved exhausting and disappointing because the FFQ has not always reacted promptly to racialized feminists’ demands. However, it testifies to a possibility for punctual—and sometimes more lasting—alliances. This strategy is in part made possible by the fact that the FFQ itself allows racialized women to caucus during its meeting to elaborate their own propositions. This alliance with mainstream white women’s organizations is perceived as demanding by Paola, but also necessary to promote her organization’s political agenda:

When we are trying to confront the government position on honor crime or forced marriage, it’s very significant that the FFQ takes a position because they’re speaking for all the women of Quebec, so for us I see that as very significant.

Hence, despite disappointments regarding the pace of change in the FFQ, racialized women’s organizations manage to have alliances that are seen as productive. In France, by contrast, resisting whiteness and challenging white feminist organizations’ agenda means mostly voicing an external critique and organizing among racialized feminists, for example, in the context of the alternate International Women’s Day march, which is held in another part of Paris than the “official” march organized by the World March of Women. The organization of separate marches testifies to the very limited possibilities for alliances between white feminist organizations and racialized feminists who voice a critique of whiteness in the feminist movement. This critique is often articulated by advocacy or consciousness-raising groups rather than by organizations that provide services to racialized/migrant women. Indeed, for the latter the situation is different: they are often part of networks or federations (of shelters or community centers) and therefore engaged in practical collaborations with white feminists. For them, confronting white feminists about their privileges seems almost impossible, as Mariam testifies about a recent event at which the head of a white women’s organization was rewarded with a medal of honor by the regional council:
We have been around for more than twenty years. We had to get by, volunteering. . . . When I see this medal of honor thing . . . it hurts. You work like a dog, you work, you go to demonstrations . . . flyers, you are active. You fight, you get insulted, and they get the medal. The federation gets the medal, and the federation, it’s white women. . . . When I started I did not believe it, but it’s been twenty years I work in this field. I noticed it’s always the domination of white women over Black women. We were colonized in Africa and this colonization continues here, even if it’s veiled. . . . Nobody talks about it. The person who talks gets excluded.

Mariam’s analysis reflects the pervasiveness of racism within French feminism and the power of whiteness in a context in which it is not legitimate to politicize race. The privileges attached to whiteness are impossible to challenge, and voicing critique means being sidelined, from organizational networks and related funding. While Mani could confront her white feminist peers in the context of collaboration in a coalition, Mariam cannot voice her concerns and critiques to the white feminists she works with and who run bigger and better-funded women’s rights organizations in her city and region. Here again, the difference between Quebec and France highlights the ways in which the politics of race in each context shapes racialized feminists’ opportunities and constraints in their attempt to challenge and resist whiteness within the feminist movement.

Challenging Nationalism, Resisting Fetishization

In Quebec, challenging the whiteness of the Quebecois women’s movement means also challenging its nationalism. Indeed, many grassroots women’s rights organizations that have been institutionalized through government-funded networks, as well as the Quebecois umbrella organization (the FFQ), have tended to define themselves through their francophone identity and as partners or allies of the Quebecois nationalist movement. In particular, since the 1990s the FFQ has deepened its links with the Parti Québécois,\textsuperscript{63} the Quebecois sovereigntist party, and has advocated for Quebec’s sovereignty as a means to realize the feminist society it is fighting for. Racialized Quebecois feminist activists, who are often of migrant background and do not all have French as their mother tongue, have been critical of the nationalism that is implicit in many women’s rights organizations’ discourses and
practices. They have criticized the dominance of French inside women’s rights organizations when most immigrant women speak another language as their mother tongue, sometimes English. For years, racialized/migrant women’s organizations have asked that all the documents produced by the FFQ be produced in French and in English, without much success. Mary, who volunteers in a Filipina domestic workers organization, recalls how, in the 1990s, her organization fought with the FFQ about language in the context of the organization of a broad movement against women’s poverty throughout Quebec:

We worked so hard, but nothing was being put forward of our issues. We had meetings. . . . The thing was the language barrier, you know. They were so strict in the meetings not to, to do the meeting in French, so how can we, the minority, understand what is being said?

Of course, language is one of the vehicles of Quebecois nationalism. Mani, a colleague of Paola, recalls her meetings at the FFQ board in the 1990s and their position on this issue. She explained to white Quebecois feminists her organization’s position in these terms:

You need to realize that the centers you have built, which are great, cannot serve these women because these women don’t speak French! And you guys don’t even speak English. How can you help them? It was a huge battle. I got so tired cause I had to say the same thing at the same meetings. . . . The FFQ is a clique kind of organization. It’s very political and nationalist, and because we are not at all nationalist in the Quebecois sense—we are federalist—so each time they would say something nationalist, I would say something, I would be a dissenting voice. But I was not speaking for me, I was speaking for my group, I was always representing my group. I would always have to say, “On est pas d’accord. Je veux que ça soit sur le rapport” [We don’t agree. I want this noted in the report]. “Oh, okay, right.”

Racialized feminists also critique what they perceive as a tendency of French-speaking Quebecois feminists to take on the role of the victim (as francophone Quebecois who have been oppressed by the power of the English-speaking elite in Canada) without scrutinizing the ways in which they might as well contribute to relations of oppression. Soraya comments on this tendency:
It’s race, it’s the Quebecois people, it’s impossible. . . . There is a discourse of exceptionalism, of total and exclusive appropriation of the label of victim. Nobody else can be a victim because Quebecois, and Québécoises in particular, it’s impossible for them to share this. The nationalist discourse is really one of “We are the ones who have been oppressed and it’s unimaginable that we may be oppressors now.”

Soraya analyses the nationalist discourse as a protection that white feminists use against accusations of racism and exclusion. This hegemonic discourse sustains feminist whiteness as a position of invisibilized privilege by making the identity of victim still available to white Quebecois feminists, despite the historical changes that have happened since the 1980s. The inability of white Quebecois feminists to recognize the complexity of the power relations they participate in is supported by their political commitment to Quebecois nationalism. In that sense, Quebecois nationalism works like a powerful legitimizing discourse by which Quebecois feminism is made white. It fuels an epistemology of ignorance that blinds white Quebecois feminists to other forms of oppression, in a way similar to what republican values and secularism have done in France, providing hegemonic discourses that obscure inequalities inside the national territory.

Another important way in which racialized/immigrant feminists resist whiteness is by resisting postcolonial fetishization of Black bodies. Indeed, as Franz Fanon captured, race power relations work in part through processes of fetishization of nonwhite bodies, bodies made vulnerable to racist injuries. Both in France and in Quebec racialized feminist activists recall moments in which they have refused this process of fetishization, thereby putting a halt to the ongoing, power-infused postcolonial racialization that is projected onto them by white feminists. Sandra recalls her participation in a demonstration to celebrate the forty-year anniversary of the law decriminalizing abortion in Paris, and the tension she felt with white feminists during the march:

Exoticization, it also exists in activist spaces, and with our Afro-feminist signs, we encountered attitudes that we felt were totally out of place, discourses, for example people telling us that we were beautiful . . . like “Girls, you’re beautiful!” So we did not really understand, that’s not possible. And this hymn, this song about women that played a lot during the demonstration . . . this parallel between the history of slavery, that is about
Black peoples, and the parallel with women, that's a problem, when they say they are the Black continent, we really did not feel at ease.

Sandra presents the creation of her Afro-feminist group as a precise response to this type of event, a way to voice her own claims on her own terms and to resist the postcolonial fetishization that is still going on in feminist activist spaces and which reproduces the colonial gaze onto nonwhite bodies. This racial fetishization operates in a typical postcolonial manner, linking the colonial past to the present, imposing on racialized bodies racialized markers from colonial times. Sandra's critique of the women's hymn recalls the debate in the United States on the comparison between women and Black people during the 1970s (and reactivated in the context of slut walks, and in particular the one in New York City). However, in France, it was only in the 2010s that a similar critique could finally emerge, thanks to the self-organizing of Afro-feminists.

Similarly, in Quebec, Soraya recalls how she managed to resist fetishization during a conference panel she organized on Islamic feminism in Montreal in 2015. After her presentation about women participating in Quebecois mosques, a white feminist asked her about “the difficulties that Muslim women face in mosques.” Soraya analyzes the dynamic of the following exchange with this white feminist:

You know, it’s porn, it’s porn about Muslim women’s oppression. It’s voyeurism. I just told her, “It’s not original you know, madam, it’s not exotic. It’s sexism, basic misogyny. I don’t need to go further. Apply what you know in your own context and you will find the same thing.” And you know for me it was an intense moment because I refused to go into the terrain of “Give us Scheherazade histories of Muslim women oppressions.”

In this pivotal moment, Soraya, who was in a position to define the rules of the interaction because she organized the panel and sat on it, had the means to stop the process of fetishization and to reframe the discussion in the terms she chose. As she explains, the problem of participating in white feminist institutions, such as the conference she mentions, is that instead of developing her own reflections, she spends her time doing “popular education” to prove that “yes, you can be feminist and Muslim.” On this occasion, she could, however, change the terms of the debate by refusing to engage in a fruitless discussion that fetishizes Muslim women and their oppression.
Racialized feminists in Quebec and France resist whiteness through various strategies and discourses. They contest exclusion by organizing on their own, both to elaborate their own claims—claims that give as much importance to gender oppression as to racial oppression—and to become visible in the eyes of white feminists. By self-organizing, they ensure their representation inside the feminist movement. Challenging the whiteness of other feminist organizations means often calling into question their priorities, making race and racism visible, critiquing the implicit nationalist bias and resisting fetishization. These strategies demonstrate that racialized feminists are not outside of the mainstream white women’s movement. Rather they occupy the political position of a minority, a position of insider dissent that relentlessly proposes to reframe what “true” feminism should be. Doing so, they constantly displace the boundaries of the “good” and the “bad” feminist subject, expanding the moral and political horizon of the feminist project as it is defined by many white feminists. In that sense, racialized feminists’ strategies aim both at constituting their own constituency and configuring their own collective identity, and at challenging whiteness, which means reformulating feminism in new terms. By doing so, racialized feminists are addressing white feminists in political and moral terms about their definition of feminism and of the collective feminist subject. This address is often rooted in experiences of failed coalition and failed promises of inclusion, and it therefore expresses itself in the form of resentment and of political emotions such as indignation, frustration, or pain.

**Resentment and the Failed Promises of Equality**

As several previous quotations have made clear, racialized feminists’ discourses are often rife with emotions: anger, frustration, tiredness, indignation, uneasiness, and pain. These emotions are rooted in political and ethical grounds. They express the difficulties that arise when one is put in a minority position, forced to articulate her claims with a language that has been forged by others to express another consciousness and another sensitivity, that of a hegemonic and empty universal norm. As Paola Bacchetta suggests, using a Foucauldian lens to analyze the coformation of lesbians of color groups in Paris, these minoritized political subjects are created as an effect of the power exerted over them and, principally, through resistance to this power. This resistance can be oppositional or centered on the creation
of a collective identity, but, for Bacchetta, what matters is that subjects are coformed; formed through a variety of processes of circulation of power. These subjects are an effect of power but still remain in the process of being formed and reformed through their resistance. While her approach captures the process of political subjectivation as both an effect of power relations and of the resistance to these relations, it does not, however, consider these relations as also moral relations.

I argue here that the emotions expressed by racialized feminists are certainly an expression of their resistance to power, as Bacchetta suggests, but should also be interpreted as moral demands. While certainly the emotions and discourses of racialized feminists denote their resistance to power—as it manifests itself in patriarchy, racism, and heteronormativity—and the simultaneous affirmation of their collective identities through this resistance, these emotions and discourses also manifest, I argue, a certain form of relationality with white feminists that is not reducible to an effect of power. Racialized feminists contest the various forms of political and ethical violence that they are submitted to by the hegemony of feminist whiteness. However, they also make claims that white feminists acknowledge relationality, that is, their participation in the feminist collective subject.

Demands for recognition from oppressed minorities and the resentment—resentment—that they express are often interpreted, in a Nietzschean fashion, as demands for the recognition of a fixed identity or of an injury, that is, as demands for revenge that in fact may repeat the injury and transform it into a desirable identity, although one that is locked in the past. However, this interpretation may be misreading these manifestations of resentment. Indeed, I argue that expressions of resentment also point to a desire for political action and to establish moral relations on the basis of equality and freedom rather than on the basis of an asymmetrical relation between universal and particular. Resentment and the desire for recognition operate, as Linda Zerilli suggests, following Hannah Arendt, as a way to make the “world between us” appear and exist. Resentment is also an ethical call to action. Calling themselves feminists, racialized feminists create the political space of a possible “we.” Mani’s powerful words at the inception of this chapter ask for more than tolerance, recognition, or solidarity. They ask for reciprocity and love, a powerful metaphor for a collective political and moral bond: love is unconditional and demands that one place herself in the perspective of the other. Love acknowledges the existence of a reciprocal relation and of the responsibility it equally creates for both parties.
In this respect, resentment here is an ethical disposition that reminds white feminists of their failed promises of inclusion, and opens up a political space for action for racialized feminists.

Racialized feminists’ resentment often expresses a demand to white feminists to relinquish power and space. Their demand is not a demand to recognize differences or to promote a pluralism based on a diversity of identities. Rather, they ask, as Soraya puts it, for the right to be at the table and to not be treated like “a little sister” but rather like a feminist peer. This means, among other things, that their concerns should not be considered as particular or accessory, which is often the case. Nadia, a volunteer in an organization that promotes Iranian women’s rights in Paris, recalls how the rights of immigrant women are regularly forgotten by white feminist organizations when petitions and demonstrations are organized:

The minute you are not there, and it’s forgotten. I lived it myself [during] the call for the March 8 demonstration. I could not be present at the meeting, and I saw the list of claims, not a line on [immigrant women]. So the next meeting I said it, it was immediately accepted, and they said they were sorry. But it got me thinking. . . . They should know—our physical presence should not be the reminder.

Hence even on a consensual topic such as migrant women’s rights, white feminist organizations need a constant reminder to include these issues on their political platform. Best intentions seem not to be met by a change in practices, which fuels resentment from racialized feminists. This resentment sometimes surfaces as what Sabrina Marchetti has called postcolonial resentment, that is, a resentment that links the relationships between white and racialized feminists today with colonial relations in the past. Karima insists that while feminist movements may recognize colonialism as a historical fact, the persistence of colonial relations within Quebecois society remains largely ignored:

Even if it recognizes that there was colonial domination on countries in the South, the feminist movement has a hard time admitting that this domination continues here through immigration. Why is it so difficult for the feminist movement to recognize this? Because the feminist movement is part of the problem. . . . Where are immigrant women in the feminist movement here?
Karima’s resentment toward Quebecois feminists points to the ways in which white feminists ignore the realities of racism and neocolonialism, circumscribing colonial relations in the past and in another place and hence preserving their innocence here and now. In Quebec, several racialized feminist groups were also particularly disappointed in the outcome of an extended process of consultation organized by the FFQ in 2013 and 2014. The process was supposed to lead to the adoption of intersectionality as a principle for the FFQ and to improve the inclusion not only of racialized feminists but also of trans activists. These aims were formally reached during the Estates General of feminism in Quebec, organized by the FFQ, with the adoption of new principles that included intersectionality. However, the process by which intersectionality was finally adopted, and the resistance with which this claim was met, filled racialized feminists with frustration and anger. Indeed, during the consultation process, a group of white feminists, self-named Les Yvettes, decided to leave the FFQ, arguing that it was infiltrated with Islamic feminists. A year later, when the general assembly had to vote on the propositions formalized during the Estates General, opposition to intersectionality surfaced once again. Some representatives of grassroots feminist community centers, especially from outside Montreal, argued that intersectionality was too complex a principle and impossible for them to implement, at least for now. They asked for more time and contested the idea that intersectionality was necessary for their feminist praxis. In the face of this resistance, Soraya expresses her frustration, disappointment, and tiredness:

I’m on my way out. We are tired, it’s enough (sigh). The conclusion is a lot of effort, not a lot of gains. . . . You realize at some point it’s really violent, you still go back. People said the Estates General were a great victory, but you realize organizations have not changed their practices. People voted almost unanimously to integrate diverse women, indigenous women, intersectionality, but a year later, last spring, you have people from grassroots centers saying, “We don’t want to vote on this.” They say, “Women in our center are not ready for this.”

Paola expresses a similar dismay at the resistance that emerged against intersectionality during the process. While finally the vote went through despite the opposition, the voicing of resistance against intersectionality, as well as asking racialized women to delay their claims, was interpreted and felt as a form of political violence and a painful moment:
It felt a bit sad. They said, “Look, we are not racist, but you have to understand that not everybody—and we represent women's centers throughout Quebec—not everybody is on the same page. So give us some time so we can go back and work with them and when we're ready...” And we asked, “Does that mean we have to face the oppression until they are ready? They're not ready, we are ready, but we have to...?” It’s like telling Black people, “Wait for apartheid to end till everybody gets that it’s really not correct.”

For both Soraya and Paola, this event became a sign of the difficulty that white feminists have in relinquishing power. Soraya analyzes the resistance from grassroots organizations as a lack of political will but also as a way to refuse to relinquish power: “You know, it’s like ‘We have been the guardians, the pillars of the feminist movement, in Quebec for forty years and we don’t want to leave some space for others.’” This event thus made visible a latent conflict over who really represents the feminist cause, as well as the common space that feminists are supposed to share equally.

The claim that white feminists must relinquish power is both political and moral. It is a claim for the recognition of equal participation in the feminist project, as well as equal moral worth in this project. Indeed, Soraya’s pain and frustration display features like those Noémi Michel has described as the reactions to racialized discursive injuries in postcolonial contexts. Michel reads claims against racial injurious discourses as claims for equality, rather than identity, because racial injuries enact a form of exclusion from full humanity for racialized subjects. While racialized feminists have not been victims of racialized discursive injuries in the context of the FFQ’s meetings, they have felt injured by the way in which their own claims have met with new demands to be patient, to wait for equality. Paola’s comparison with apartheid and Soraya’s feeling that she has been subjected to forms of violence both capture the injurious power and unjust character of the demand for patience, tolerance, and self-restraint that white feminists have placed on racialized feminists. In this context, anger and resentment do not reveal a feeling of exclusion from humanity, but rather an exclusion from the feminist project, from the collective subject that it is supposed to create. Hence, what is being claimed by Soraya when she contests demands placed on her to be patient, is that those demands exclude her from the feminist collective subject and perform, discursively and socially, a form of inequality and a form of ethical violence. These demands to be patient breach the promise of equality intrinsic to the feminist project. Her resentment thus expresses a demand for
equality, as equal participation and equal discursive presence in the feminist project, a demand to recognize her equal moral worth as a feminist subject. It thus troubles and displaces the usual boundaries between the particular and the universal, the “good” and the “bad” feminist subjects.

Resentment here performs a refusal to abide by postcolonial structures of power and discourses. Michel argues, following Butler, that it is our fundamental relationality with others, our ontological condition as subjects of language, that makes us injurable because we are in need of the recognition of others for our existence.78 For Michel the postcolonial condition, the historical legacy of colonialism, makes racialized subject specifically vulnerable to racialized discursive injuries. I bring this insight to bear on the analysis of Soraya’s discourse to highlight how, in her case, the injury is located at the level of the nonrecognition of her equal moral worth as a feminist subject. White feminists’ discourses asking for patience are not interpreted by Soraya as performing a racialized injury that denies her belonging to full humanity, but rather as an injury that denies her belonging as a feminist subject to the political community created in the name of feminism. While this injury is of course related to her racialized body, what she resents specifically is the denial of equality performed in the context of a feminist community that is supposed to be a community of equals. This reading of resentment as manifesting a claim to equality, rather than the repetition of an injury, is confirmed by the joy Soraya first felt when the FFQ voted during a special assembly on the issue of the hijab and did adopt a position against the ban in question. She recalls how she felt then:

The majority went for the position of the executive [of the FFQ], which was no to banning the veil, no to forcing women to wear it. We were so happy, we were filled with joy, it was great, everybody was giving hugs to each other, everybody was happy. I remember my friend, who wears the hijab, and she tells me, “Today”—and I still shiver when I think about it—“today I feel like I could really belong to this society.” . . . So there you are.

This event was for Soraya full of promises. Promises of inclusion, belonging, and participation. Promises that her voice would be not only heard but would shape the agenda of the FFQ for the coming years. A promise that she would be considered as belonging, as a feminist subject, as a feminist equal. Her disappointment was all the greater that these promises did not materialize as she had wished. Failed promises have broken the possibility of a
common “we” she aspired to. On another occasion, she experienced a lack of solidarity from white feminists that also led her to question the possibility of a common future. When the debate on the Charter of Quebecois Values emerged in 2013, she asked white feminists with whom she had a history of common activism to express their solidarity with an informal network of Muslim women in Quebec, and to publicly take a position against the proposed Charter. However, none of them agreed, and this refusal performed once again a form of injury and denial of equality.

If promises have failed, making a collective “we” difficult to imagine, at least in Quebec promises have been made, and some may be kept. Soraya herself recognizes that the FFQ has shown solidarity and made efforts to include racialized feminists and has paid a price with the departure of some members. Paola also recognizes that the FFQ has supported the International Women’s Day march organized by racialized women’s groups for several years:

We often invite the president of FFQ to speak, and the FFQ has been great about that to say, “It’s your league, you organize, tell us what you want us to do.” . . . So I think maybe things like that have been heard, and the fact that the FFQ president sees us as allies too means there is a recognition that we have a common cause.

Importantly, Paola’s remarks show both that on this occasion her position is not that of a minority and that the relationship with mainstream white organizations may be envisioned as one of common cause, a collective “we” in which they are equal interlocutors. Similarly, in France, Maleiha explains that some strategic and punctual alliances with white women’s organizations may prove productive. While Maleiha argues that there is a need to decolonize feminist activism, here alliances were possible because her organization decided the terms that would frame their solidarity:

They talk very clearly about violence against lesbians, and this is thanks to us and other organizations that the fight against lesbophobia is on the agenda . . . but also double violence against immigrant women. . . . It started last year and it was clear. And we are satisfied because we were very clear. We said we agree to come but you need to articulate these issues clearly.

Hence, under specific circumstances, coalitions might succeed. While all racialized/immigrant feminists express in various forms discontent,
criticism, and resentment toward white feminists, they also recognize possibilities for alliances, if they are not placed in a minority position but can use their own language and priorities, and see these recognized and adopted by white feminists. Importantly, they demand that their equal moral worth as feminist subjects be recognized. I explore more fully in the next chapter the implications of these politics of coalitions.

***

In this chapter I have described and analyzed a variety of processes of political subjectivation by which racialized feminists come to give an account of themselves as racialized feminists. These processes and these accounts vary. In particular, racialized feminists politicize race and religion in different ways, depending on the context and the feminist generation to which they belong. Despite their differences, they all provide trenchant critiques of their encounters with white feminists, and recount their attempts at challenging the whitening of feminism by claiming feminism for themselves, outside of the universalist narrative provided by many white feminists. The discourses through which racialized feminists resist the regulation imposed by feminist whiteness on good and bad feminist subjects are of course eminently political. They denote their resistance to power, and how it contributes to shape their identities and subjectivations as racialized feminists. They also convey moral issues at the heart of the relationship between white and non-white feminists.

Failed promises of solidarity and inclusion leave the possibility of ethical violence looming. Indeed, following Adorno’s reflections on violence and the emergence of morality, Judith Butler notes that morality emerges from a divergence between what is posited as a universal interest and what is posited as the interests of particular individuals. This division happens when the universal “fails to agree with or include the individual.” 79 In this context, universality “can exercise violence” because it ignores “the social conditions under which a living appropriation might become possible.” 80 Transposed to the issue and subject of feminism, Adorno’s and Butler’s reflections on universality illuminate how the ignorance by white feminists of the social conditions under which the appropriation of feminism by racialized feminists becomes possible performs a form of ethical violence, which is felt as such. The dialectic between the minority position occupied by racialized feminists and the dominant one, parading as universal and occupied by white feminists, is therefore one of structural conflict. Deleuze has described well the position
and the dialectic of minority subjects: speaking from within a dominant language that they have not forged themselves, they also try to subvert its meaning in order to account for their position outside of its claimed universality. Deleuze's concept of minority is important because it shows how minority claims seek to deterritorialize the majority's claim to universality, a process clearly at play in racialized feminists' discourses.

However, Deleuze overlooks the question of the attachment of minorities to their identity category and their moral relations to the majority. Deleuze's analysis of the minority position is mainly a political one, looking for strategies of alliances among minorities to rethink emancipation and a revolutionary becoming outside of the narratives of the hegemony of universal subjects. While Deleuze recognizes that minorities are tied to “objective” identities (such as ethnicity or gender), he argues that they must be detached from these identities to become politically relevant, to be articulated with other minorities and to become a “universal minority consciousness.”

Hence in the dialectic between minorities and universality that must allow for forging a revolutionary political subject, the question of emotional attachments to minority identities, and the moral dimension of the relationship to the majority—marked by resentment in the case of racialized feminists—is left unexplored. Revisiting Deleuze's metaphor of the minority position as similar to that of a minor/minoritized language or dialect forged from within the majoritarian language, one can perceive how a minority position carries more than just resistance to power, and how minority subjectivity is not engulfed in or produced only through power. Indeed, language is not just a set of hegemonic rules to be subverted from within by its minoritized iterations, as Deleuze suggests. Language is also spoken; it is what enables my voice and my being a subject. As Sandra Laugier beautifully remarks in her analysis of Wittgenstein's and Stanley Cavell's approach to language as spoken: “The voice is both a subjective and a general expression: it is what makes it possible for my individual voice to become shared. In voice, there is the idea of a claim. The singular claims a shared, common validity.”

In this perspective, the minority position is not only one of subversion or deterritorialization of the majority, it is also a position that seeks common validity. The resentment and emotional grievance that racialized/immigrant feminists justly feel fuel in that respect a call to responsibility that they
address to white feminists, a moral call. Hence, while for Deleuze the minority is first and foremost a political position, one that articulates a tension and a conflict from within the hegemonic norm, racialized feminists also affirm their full participation in the feminist project not only at the political level but also in moral terms, through an address to white feminists.

Here Drucilla Cornell’s words about the recognition of differences between women come to mind: “This call to responsibility inheres in the aspiration to the ethical relationship and is, as a result, a crucial aspect of what I call ethical feminism. It can call us to both acts of identification and dis-identification. But it demands of us that we deconstruct the claim that there is an identity that we share as women and that the differences between us are secondary.” As racialized/immigrant feminists invent various new languages from within the hegemonic feminist norm to describe and politicize their own experience and thereby resist whiteness, this invention brings with it conflicts but also implies a possibility and a promise, the promise that this language, as a voice, both singular and claiming common validity, might open up a common space for collective political action, a space defined by feminist moral relations of equality.