

# “We Are Forced to Declare War”: Linkages between the 1970 Abortion Caravan and Women’s Anti-Vietnam War Activism

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*To date, studies of the Abortion Caravan have addressed it primarily within the context of the growth of women’s liberation. At the same time, while the contribution of women to the anti-Vietnam War effort in Canada has been gaining increased scholarly attention, no works have yet explored the links between women’s abortion rights activism and their anti-Vietnam activities. This article explores these linkages through the 1970 Abortion Caravan, using oral history interviews, movement and mainstream media coverage, and the archival files of the Vancouver Women’s Caucus. Connections can be found in the women’s adoption of a language of war, in tactics and strategies used by each movement’s activists, and in the conflict between their competing political interests. This broader contextualization helps to illuminate some of the complexities of women’s abortion rights activism.*

*Jusqu’à maintenant, les études qui ont été réalisées sur la Caravane de l’avortement l’ont surtout été dans l’optique du mouvement croissant de libération des femmes. Or, s’il est vrai que les spécialistes s’intéressent de plus en plus à la contribution des femmes au mouvement contre la guerre du Vietnam au Canada, aucun ne s’est encore penché sur les liens entre le militantisme pour le droit des femmes à l’avortement et les activités de ce mouvement contre la guerre du Vietnam. Le présent article explore ces liens dans la perspective de la Caravane de l’avortement de 1970 en s’appuyant sur des interviews d’histoire orale, la couverture réalisée par les médias des mouvements et par la presse grand public ainsi que les dossiers d’archives du Caucus des femmes de Vancouver. Ces liens se voient dans l’adoption par les femmes d’un discours de guerre, dans les tactiques et les stratégies des activistes de chaque mouvement et dans la divergence de leurs intérêts politiques. Cette mise en contexte plus vaste nous aide à mieux comprendre certaines des complexités du militantisme en faveur du droit des femmes à l’avortement.*

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IN 1969, CHANGES to the Criminal Code of Canada made abortion legal when it was performed in an accredited hospital, by a licensed physician, after being approved by a therapeutic abortion committee comprised of at least three doctors who determined that the pregnancy endangered the life or health of the pregnant woman.<sup>1</sup> The May 1970 Abortion Caravan, the first national pro-choice protest in the country, is an example of women's rejection of these changes as inadequate and too restrictive. Beginning in Vancouver, the Caravan travelled across the country, making stops to educate the public, connect with other women's groups, and gather supporters for the final destination – Ottawa – where the women planned a weekend of public protests. To date, studies of the Abortion Caravan have addressed it within the context of the growth of women's liberation, and recent articles and book chapters have added to our understanding by illuminating the security state's perception of the female protesters and the women's strategies that helped to ensure substantial media coverage of the campaign.<sup>2</sup>

While the contribution of women to the anti-Vietnam War effort in Canada has also been gaining increased scholarly attention, no works have yet explored the links between women's abortion rights activism and their anti-Vietnam activities.<sup>3</sup> Yet interviews with Caravan participants who, like other activists from the era, were members of multiple protest movements reveal strong claims of attachment to or identification with anti-Vietnam War activism in particular. This article explores these linkages as seen through the 1970 Abortion Caravan, using oral history interviews, movement and mainstream media coverage, and the archival files of the Vancouver Women's Caucus.<sup>4</sup> Connections can be found in tactics

- 1 On the 1969 changes, see Jane Jenson, "Getting to Morgentaler" in Janine Brodie, Shelley A. M. Gavigan, and Jane Jenson, *The Politics of Abortion* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 20-36.
- 2 See Frances Wasserlein, "'An Arrow Aimed at the Heart': The Vancouver Women's Caucus and the Abortion Campaign, 1969-1971" (Master's thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1990); Ann Thomson, *Winning Choice on Abortion: How British Columbian and Canadian Feminists Won the Battles of the 1970s and 1980s* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2004); Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin, 2005); Christabelle Sethna and Steve Hewitt, "Clandestine Operations: The Vancouver Women's Caucus, the Abortion Caravan, and the RCMP," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 90, no. 3 (September 2009), pp. 463-495; Barbara M. Freeman, *Beyond Bylines: Media Workers and Women's Rights in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), pp. 123-156.
- 3 See Frances Early, "Canadian Women and the International Arena in the Sixties: The Voice of Women/La voix des femmes and the Opposition to the Vietnam War" in Dimitry Anastakis, ed., *The Sixties: Passion, Politics and Style* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), pp. 25-41; Roberta Lexier, "'The Backdrop Against Which Everything Happened': English-Canadian Student Movements and Off-Campus Movements for Change," *History of Intellectual Culture*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2007), pp. 1-18; Lara Campbell, "'Women United Against the War': Gender Politics, Feminism, and the Vietnam Draft Resistance in Canada" in Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Sean Mills, and Scott Rutherford, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009), pp. 339-346. Although he does not look solely at women's efforts, historian David S. Churchill has contributed immeasurably to our understanding of anti-Vietnam War activities in Canada. See David S. Churchill, "American Expatriates and the Building of Alternative Social Space in Toronto, 1965-1977," *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Fall 2010), pp. 31-44; "An Ambiguous Welcome: Vietnam Draft Resistance, the Canadian State, and Cold War Containment," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, vol. 37, no. 73 (May 2004), pp. 1-26; and "Draft Resisters, Left Nationalism, and the Politics of Anti-Imperialism," *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 93, no. 2 (June 2012), pp. 227-260.
- 4 This article is drawn from research for my doctoral dissertation for which I interviewed 15 Abortion Caravan participants. Taken with findings from the interviews conducted by Wasserlein, Thompson, and Rebick, this research reveals a collective identity of the participants. For more information on the interview

and strategies used by each movement’s activists, in the women’s adoption of a language of war, and in the conflict between their competing activist interests.

The juxtaposition of abortion rights and anti-war (or peace) activism is interesting for a number of reasons. Historically women’s peace activism has been grounded in maternal feminism or maternalism, the idea that women as natural caregivers are uniquely suited to look after concerns in the public sphere.<sup>5</sup> While the grounds upon which women based their activism expanded, historian Tarah Brookfield has demonstrated that their identities as mothers remained important throughout the Cold War period.<sup>6</sup> Abortion rights activism also focuses on motherhood in the sense that proponents advocate a woman’s right to determine when and whether she should become a mother. The way war is experienced is gendered, as sociologist Cynthia Cockburn argues, even “profoundly” so.<sup>7</sup> As men are often the combatants (at least historically), they experience war differently from women, who are often perceived, at least in part, to advocate peace from a desire not to become the mothers of soldiers.<sup>8</sup> Like war, abortion is also a gendered topic, with women physically experiencing unplanned and unwanted pregnancies very differently than men. A connection exists, then, between anti-war or peace activism and abortion rights activism that deserves consideration. In her study of women’s war experiences, Cockburn observes, “putting your body on the line for politics is an effective, if perilous, strategy. But for women, because of the way women are often reduced to the body and routinely sexualized, putting the body in play has a special meaning.”<sup>9</sup> The Abortion Caravan saw women quite literally place their bodies at the centre of a national discussion on abortion when they engaged in a series of public protests to demand control of their reproductive choices.

Despite these connections between the two issues and the two types of activism, there are important differences between the women who comprised the majority of the membership of mainstream peace organizations like the Voice of Women (VOW) and the women interviewed here who reported anti-Vietnam War activism. Frances Early has demonstrated a variety of ways in which VOW engaged in anti-Vietnam War activities, including support of humanitarian visits and a knitting campaign for Vietnamese children, which would have appealed to VOW’s membership, many of whom were mothers who had been motivated to act for the safety of their children.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, most of the women interviewed

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methodology, see Shannon Stettner, “Women and Abortion in English Canada: Public Debates and Political Participation, 1959-1970” (PhD dissertation, York University, 2011).

5 See, for example, Barbara Roberts, “Women’s Peace Activism in Canada” in Linda Kealey and Joan Sangster, eds., *Beyond the Vote* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 280; Tarah Brookfield, *Cold War Comforts: Canadian Women, Child Safety, and Global Insecurity* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), pp. 3, 5-7.

6 Brookfield, *Cold War Comforts*, pp. 82-97.

7 Cynthia Cockburn, *From Where We Stand: War, Women’s Activism, & Feminist Analysis* (New York: Zed Books, 2007), p. 35.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 21. See also Brookfield, *Cold War Comforts*, p. 4.

9 Cockburn, *From Where We Stand*, p. 177.

10 Early, “Canadian Women and the International Arena,” pp. 25-41. See also Brookfield, *Cold War Comforts*, pp. 71-75, 82-97; Roberts, “Women’s Peace Activism in Canada,” pp. 296-299.

for their participation in the Abortion Caravan did not yet have children; many identified themselves as women's liberationists, largely holding socialist world views that fell outside more mainstream, or liberal, Canadian feminism. When queried as to their membership in various organizations across the late 1950s and 1960s, they reported membership in mixed-gender organizations like the Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CUCND), which became the Student Union for Peace Action (SUPA) in 1964 and the New Left Committee after SUPA's demise in 1967. Notably absent from their answers were organizations like the Voice of Women or the National Council of Women.<sup>11</sup> More often, the women did not report belonging specifically to anti-war/peace organizations by name, but spoke more generally of membership in "New Left" groups.<sup>12</sup> All but one of the women had experienced some university, with several still enrolled in undergraduate and graduate programmes or working on university campuses.

Women's anti-Vietnam War activism was important to their activist or protest identities because it was through this engagement that they had gained experience and connections, but they also experienced a growing sense of frustration at their lack of access to leadership roles. This frustration fed the growth of women's liberation movements through women's radicalization and led to their adoption of more singularly female issues like abortion, over which women could exercise greater control as activists. The women remained committed to anti-war activities, however, and the interplay among these identities is visible in the strategies and tactics of the Abortion Caravan.

### **Women's Anti-Vietnam War Activism and Consciousness-Raising**

Although the anti-Vietnam War movement was global and, as Roberta Lexier argues, Canadian student activists saw themselves as "world citizens," my focus here is on the experiences of Canadians and Americans in Canada.<sup>13</sup> The war was experienced differently by Americans and Canadians as well as differently by men and women. In his article on the expatriate community in Toronto, historian David S. Churchill relates that, for many American draft dodgers and deserters, "the anti-war movement had been all consuming."<sup>14</sup> The importance of anti-Vietnam

11 During the interviews, women identified the following group memberships: the CARE campaign, the United Nations Club, New Democratic Youth for Social Democracy, National Council of the NDP, Student Christian Movement, Canadian Union of Students, New Left Students for a Democratic University, Friends of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Combined Universities Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (which later became the Student Union for Peace Action), Ottawa Women's Liberation, Toronto Women's Liberation, Vancouver Women's Caucus, Vancouver Women's Liberation, Feminist Action League (Simon Fraser University), Canadian Girls in Training, Red Collective, and Partisan Organization. See Stettner, "Women and Abortion in English Canada," pp. 210-211. For more on CUCND and its changes, see Dimitri Roussopoulos, *Legacy of the New Left: The Sixties to Seattle* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2006), pp. 39-45.

12 For various organizations and groups involved in anti-Vietnam War efforts in Canada, see, for example, Christopher Powell, "Kent State Comes to Canada: Internationalizing the Antiwar Movement" in Carole A. Barbato and Laura L. David, eds., *Democratic Narrative, History, and Memory* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2012), p. 35.

13 Lexier, "The Backdrop Against Which Everything Happened," p. 4.

14 Churchill, "American Expatriates and the Building of Alternative Social Space in Toronto," p. 35.

War activism for Canadians, especially students, has been recognized throughout the literature on the decade.<sup>15</sup> From her interviews with activists from the 1960s, Roberta Lexier calls opposition to the Vietnam War “the backdrop against which everything happened.”<sup>16</sup> Still, Lexier argues that, despite its importance, it was “a less a personal issue” for the young Canadian activists than for young Americans since Canadians had no draft to dodge.<sup>17</sup> This observation speaks to American historian Alice Echols’ contention that “true radicalism involved struggling against one’s own oppression.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, women’s contribution to the anti-war movement (whether American or Canadian) was perceived as that of “helpmate”; the slogan “girls say yes to boys who say no” glibly illuminates this characterization.<sup>19</sup>

Although recognizing the limited nature of Canadian women’s involvement is an important qualification, the observation nevertheless risks obscuring the degree to which some Canadian women linked their identities to their anti-war activism. For them, anti-Vietnam War activism was very much – and importantly – a part of their daily lives. Over 250,000 Americans immigrated to Canada between 1966 and 1976, and scholars suggest draft resisters and deserters accounted for around 40,000 of those; the majority settled in Vancouver and Toronto, the two cities in which most of the Caravan participants lived.<sup>20</sup> Of the fifteen women interviewed for this project, one came to Canada with her draft-dodging husband, while another had a husband and two brothers who were draft dodgers.<sup>21</sup> Still others lived in communal housing with draft dodgers, a point that Caravan participant Marcy Cohen argued made the anti-war movement in Vancouver “very

- 15 On the importance of the movement in Canada, see also Cerise Morris, “‘Determination and Thoroughness’: The Movement for a Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada,” *Atlantis*, vol. 5, no. 2 (Spring 1980), p. 5; Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), p. 219, 221; Cyril Levitt, *Children of Privilege: Student Revolt in the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), p. 49.
- 16 Lexier, “‘The Backdrop Against Which Everything Happened,’” p.10.
- 17 Roberta Lexier, “The Community of Scholars: The English-Canadian Student Movement and University Governance” in Marie Hammond-Callaghan and Matthew Hayday, eds., *Mobilizations, Protests, and Engagements: Canadian Perspectives on Social Movements* (Halifax: Fernwood, 2008), p. 127, and “‘The Backdrop Against Which Everything Happened,’” p. 10.
- 18 Alice Echols, “‘Women Power’ and Women’s Liberation: Exploring the Relationship Between the Antiwar Movement and the Women’s Liberation Movement” in Melvin Small and William D. Hoover, eds., *Give Peace A Chance: Exploring the Vietnam Antiwar Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1992), p. 173.
- 19 See Campbell, “‘Women United Against the War,’” pp. 339-341; Echols, “‘Women Power’ and Women’s Liberation,” p. 173. Although arguments against this perception appeared, for example, in *AmEx* in articles like “Exiled Women Are Organized,” they did so alongside notices for “The Group of Young American Women,” which focused on organizing to address the domestic needs (clothes, household items, baby stuff, even babysitting) of draft dodgers and their families. See Dorothy Jones, “Exiled Women Are Organized,” *AmEx*, vol. 2, no. 19 (April-May 1970), p. 30.
- 20 Renée Kasinsky, *Refugees from Militarism: Draft-Age Americans in Canada* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1976), pp. 77-81; Churchill, “An Ambiguous Welcome,” p. 4. James Dickerson suggests the figure is higher; see his *North to Canada: Men and Women Against the Vietnam War* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1999), p. xiii. For the well-documented expatriate presence in these cities, see David Stewart Churchill, “When Home Became Away: American Expatriates and New Social Movements in Toronto, 1965-1977” (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2001), p. 144, and “American Expatriates,” p. 32.
- 21 Charnie Guettel, personal interview with author, February 26, 2007; N. T. R., telephone interview with author, October 31, 2006.

much a part of my life.”<sup>22</sup> Additionally, most of the women interviewed recalled active and committed involvement in anti-war activities, including helping to smuggle deserters over the border and attending and organizing demonstrations and forums.<sup>23</sup> Women, moreover, purposefully sought out anti-war activities; as Caravaner Susan Kennedy related, “I was looking for causes to support, quite frankly, especially around women’s stuff and around the Vietnam War. Those were the two big ones for me.” She continued, “I was politicized by the events of the day, that being the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War and the ... growing [surge] of hippies and an alternate lifestyle. That all had a major effect on me.”<sup>24</sup>

In their analysis of social movement participants, David Meyer and Nancy Whittier refer to what they call the “spillover effects” whereby “the ideas, tactics, style, participants, and organizations of one movement often *spill over* its boundaries to affect other social movements.”<sup>25</sup> In the American context, Echols argues that women’s involvement in the anti-war movement was central to the development of both the women’s liberation movement and radical feminism.<sup>26</sup> Multiple studies have shown that, within the various protest organizations to which women increasingly devoted their political energies, they came to perceive their sexual objectification and powerlessness, a realization that was important for the rise of women’s liberation movements.<sup>27</sup> On this theme, one Caravan participant recalled, “There was a lot of sexism in the anti-war movement and the student protest movement of the 1960s, black and white, it didn’t matter what the racial or class component was.... There was a sense that women’s primary function in that

22 Marcy Cohen, telephone interview with author, March 2, 2007. On communal living arrangements, see Churchill, “American Expatriates,” pp. 39–40.

23 Heather Bishop, telephone interview with author, February 20, 2007; Joan Eliesen, telephone interview with author, April 15, 2007; Cathy Walker, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2007. Churchill relates that the experience of crossing the border was “arbitrary,” ranging from “remarkably simple” to “difficult and nerve-wracking” (“An Ambiguous Welcome,” p. 9). A meeting agenda from the March 26, 1970, Vancouver Women’s Caucus meeting helps to illuminate how anti-war activists figured into the running of the caucus; among actions to be taken in relation to the Abortion Caravan, one discussion item was listed as the need to determine if and how the women wanted to align with other groups, in response to a request from the Vietnam Action Committee. See Simon Fraser University Archives [hereafter SFU Archives], Frances Wasserlein fonds, Vancouver Women’s Caucus Binder 2/5 1970, F-162-3-3-0-6, “Monthly Meeting, Thursday, March 26.”

24 Susan Kennedy, telephone interview with author, January 2007.

25 David S. Meyer and Nancy Whittier, “Social Movement Spillover,” *Social Problems*, vol. 41, no. 2 (May 1994), p. 277.

26 Echols, “‘Women Power’ and Women’s Liberation,” p. 181. In his study of anti-Vietnam War activism, Christopher Powell similarly observes the radicalization of American women in, for example, the all-female organization Women Strike for Peace (WSP). See Powell, “Kent State Comes to Canada,” pp. 30–48.

27 On women’s perception of their sexual objectification, see, for example, Nancy Adamson, “Feminists, Libbers, Lefties, and Radicals: The Emergence of the Women’s Liberation Movement” in Joy Parr, ed., *A Diversity of Women: Ontario, 1945–1980* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 256–257; Dominique Clément, “‘I Believe in Human Rights, Not Women’s Rights’: Women and the Human Rights State, 1969–1984,” *Radical History Review*, vol. 101 (Spring 2008), pp. 112–116; Roberta Lexier, “How Did the Canadian Women’s Liberation Movement Emerge from the Sixties Student Movement? The Case of Simon Fraser University,” *Women and Social Movements in America, 1600–2000*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Fall 2009), <http://womhist.alexanderstreet.com/Lexier/doclist.htm> (accessed March 2013). Serious and ultimately divisive examples of this exploitation permeate the American New Left as evidenced in the works of Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women’s Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking, 2000), pp. 94–140; Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1989), pp. 51–137.

environment was kind of a social outlet for the serious male activist.”<sup>28</sup> Examples of women’s awareness of and frustration with chauvinism in the anti-Vietnam War movement in Canada can be found in *AmEx*, the American expatriate paper printed in Canada.<sup>29</sup> Such frustration over sexual hierarchies within the protest movements led to analysis and action. On this, Caravan participant Charnie Guettel elaborated:

For generations women had done mainly the shit work (“women’s work”) of “on the ground” organizing, mainly the envelope stuffers and telephoners, picketers, rather than the speechmakers, theoreticians, writers.... It was resisting chauvinist attitudes within left organizations ... that spurred the rebellion.... Women as socialists and radicals applied our politics to our immediate experience as political organizers, and transformed ourselves and our political organizations (and created new ones), transformed our politics, and our organizing out in the world.<sup>30</sup>

This process of self-examination and transformation involves what is referred to as consciousness-raising. Women’s recognition of their oppression directly speaks to the slogan “the personal is political,” which became one of the most popular in the women’s movement. Bonnie J. Dow relates that it “derives from second-wave feminist consciousness-raising groups, which functioned to create awareness that what women perceived to be personal problems were, in fact, shared by other women and were the product of their positions as members of an oppressed political class.”<sup>31</sup>

Several scholars argue that consciousness-raising was a necessary precursor to developing a language with which women could articulate their demand for rights like access to abortion.<sup>32</sup> Certainly, it was important in the lives of many women. Caravan participant Joan Eliesen, for example, relates:

I was politically very interested in social issues and poverty and anti-war and intrigued with the emerging things about the women’s movement coming out of the States. And when a friend told me that there was a little group starting in Ottawa, a women’s lib group, I was very excited to join up. And that’s when I really started to learn and read and talk and discuss about women’s issues. And it changed my life.<sup>33</sup>

28 N. T. R., telephone interview with author, October 31, 2006.

29 See, for example, Sandy Stevens and Mora Gregg, “The Parley in Montreal,” *AmEx*, vol. 2, no. 4 (June 1970), pp. 8-9; Stephanie DuRant, “Male Chauvinists,” *AmEx*, vol. 2, no. 6 (October/November 1970), p. 2.

30 Charnie Guettel, personal communication with author, February 27, 2007. As another participant explained, “If you look at the early documents like ‘Sisters, Brothers, Lovers, Listen’ ... women got really angry about how they had been treated in the movement” (Judy Pocock, personal interview with author, November 30, 2006).

31 Bonnie J. Dow, “Politicizing Voice,” *Western Journal of Communication*, vol. 61, no. 2 (Spring 1997), p. 248. See also Nancy Adamson, Linda Briskin, and Margaret McPhail, *Feminists Organizing for Change: The Contemporary Women’s Movement in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 200; Echols, “‘Women Power’ and Women’s Liberation,” pp. 172-173.

32 See, for example, Kristin Luker, *Abortion and the Politics of Motherhood* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 109,111; Rebecca E. Klatch, *A Generation Divided: The New Left, the New Right, and the 1960s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 180.

33 Joan Eliesen, telephone interview with author, April 15, 2007.

Yet we should be careful not to mistake a relative “absence” of public discussion about abortion with a lack of awareness or concern. Here American historian Leslie Reagan’s caution, that abortion was an “open secret” that women talked about discreetly and not something about which women were “silent” or without a language, is relevant.<sup>34</sup> This idea was reinforced by Caravan participant Peggy Morton, who spoke of meeting women in the community while publicizing the Caravan:

[The] conception that the problem was that women needed to be told they were oppressed, that they didn’t know they were oppressed, then they had to have their consciousness about their oppression raised, was just bullshit. Women were very acutely aware of the problems they faced on all kinds of fronts.... And the whole thing that women were wanting to discuss stuff was what are the solutions, what do we do about it, how do we change it, not whether it exists or not.<sup>35</sup>

Extending Morton’s observation to the activists themselves, it may be that the confidence (and frustration) gained from other protest experiences, like their involvement in anti-Vietnam War activities, led them to have a more vocal presence through the women’s liberation movement and in women-led initiatives like the Abortion Caravan, not that they needed to have their consciousness raised *per se*. This explanation makes sense when coupled with women’s frustration that their demands for abortion law reform were being ignored by the government and the medical profession. At the same time, changing social mores made talking more openly about such subjects like abortion acceptable. In her autobiographical account of the 1960s, Myrna Kostash argues that, through consciousness-raising, “women learned how to be articulate and get the ear of others for the first time,” but she also states that “women pulled out from the confines of male-dominated groups, gushed with literacy and eloquence and intellect.”<sup>36</sup> Hearing women’s voices, then, may not always have been a matter of their consciousness being raised, nor of finding a language they did not have, but of appropriating a language – like the language of war – that had greater currency in the male-dominated public and political space, and, as in the case of the Caravan, creating the opening for their voices to be heard.

Demonstrating a linkage between women’s anti-Vietnam War activities to the growth of the women’s liberation movement is the connection women reported feeling to the oppression of Vietnamese women. Historian Ruth Rosen argues that women in North America felt tied to Vietnamese women: “Vietnamese women and their heroic struggle became a symbol of both American imperialism *and* the revolutionary potential of women.”<sup>37</sup> In other words, since the women felt

34 See Leslie J. Reagan, *When Abortion Was a Crime: Women, Medicine, and Law in the United States, 1867-1973* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 21.

35 Peggy Morton, telephone interview with author, February 17, 2007.

36 Myrna Kostash, *Long Way From Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1980), pp. 170-171.

37 Rosen, *The World Split Open*, p. 137. Activists also perceived Canada as a “colony” of the United States and made links to Vietnam on that level. See Charles Campbell, “The Vietnamization of Canada,” *AmEx*, vol. 2, no. 2 (1970), p. 26.

like “colonized bodies” in the various protest organizations of which they were a part, they connected to the plight of those in Vietnam. That some Canadian women made the same connection as American women to women in Vietnam is demonstrated, for example, by the publication of a number of articles in *The Pedestal*, the newspaper published by the Vancouver Women’s Caucus. In the March and April 1970 issues, for example, there were extracts from “Ho Chi Minh on ‘The Emancipation of Women’” and an article titled “Solidarity with Vietnamese Women.”<sup>38</sup> In addition to articles on Vietnam, listings for events related to anti-war protests appeared frequently among abortion rights events in the Women’s Caucus calendar listed in each issue of *The Pedestal*.<sup>39</sup> Kostash’s memoir similarly supports this contention.<sup>40</sup> The overwhelming focus on both their own oppressions and their identification with Vietnamese women over women of colour in Canada also illuminates the infancy of and factions within the early women’s movement in Canada.<sup>41</sup>

Despite their expressed commitment to anti-war activities – so much so that it constituted an important element of their self-conception – women could not easily claim leadership roles in the movement. This is not to say there were no women in leadership roles or that women were not as important as men, but that anti-war activism was not singularly a “woman’s” issue.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, organizing for abortion rights enabled women to work on an issue that was more singularly a woman’s issue and, as such, one around which they could more easily take the lead. A number of Caravan participants recognized abortion as a key or logical issue around which to plan a national protest. For Cathy Walker, quite simply, women’s right to legal abortion was “central to women’s rights activities,” especially for young women.<sup>43</sup> For Betsy Wood the issue was a logical focus for the Vancouver Women’s Caucus because it inspired committed activism: “We knew abortion affected one in four.... It crossed political lines. It affected both men and women. And it didn’t matter whether you were Social Credit, or Liberal, or NDP. When you had a problem with an unwanted pregnancy, it was a big problem. So its time had come.”<sup>44</sup> Still another Caravan participant observed, “The abortion issue lent

38 “Vietnam – 1969,” *The Pedestal*, March 1970, p. 3; Diane Shrenk, “Solidarity with Vietnamese Women,” *The Pedestal*, April 1970, p. 7. The solidarity is also seen in their organizing of the 1971 North American-Indochinese Women’s Conference in Toronto, discussed in “Indo-Chinese Conference,” *The Pedestal*, February 1971, p. 3.

39 See, for example, “Vietnam March from CN Station” entry in the April calendar of “Women’s Caucus Calendar for April,” *The Pedestal*, April 1970, p. 8.

40 Kostash, *Long Way From Home*, pp. 186-187.

41 On student activists being criticized for overlooking “the plight of First Nations and other minorities in Canada,” see Lexier, “‘The Backdrop Against Which Everything Happened,’” p. 7. Acknowledgements of the oppression experienced by other Canadian women, especially Aboriginal women, at home exist, but were less frequent. In the iconic “Sister, Brothers, Lovers ... Listen...,” for example, the authors nod to the oppression of “Canadian Indians” alongside “the black people of the U.S., the Vietnamese.” See Judy Bernstein, Peggy Morton, Linda Seese, and Myrna Wood, “Sisters, Brothers, Lovers ... Listen...,” in *Women Unite!* (Toronto: Canadian Women’s Educational Press, 1972), p. 31.

42 Churchill, for example, touches on the important contributions Nancy Pocock made to the anti-war movement in Toronto. See Churchill, “American Expatriates and the Building of Alternative Social Space in Toronto,” p. 37, and “An Ambiguous Welcome,” p. 41.

43 Cathy Walker, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2007.

44 Wood as quoted in Thomson, *Winning Choice on Abortion*, p. 32.

itself very easily to a focused mobilization. As we radicalized, we were thinking what had big control over our lives – men, the media, advertising, and the state. Abortion was a great example of something you could go after the state on.”<sup>45</sup>

Personal experiences with unplanned pregnancies and incidents involving friends or community members influenced women’s involvement in abortion rights activism. For Susan Kennedy, the importance of the issue was unmistakable: “From [my] personal experience of having a child, having to give up that child, I really came to a conclusion that the system was wrong and that I had to do something to fight that.” She elaborated, “Because of what I had gone through, the idea that you could give up a child to some needy, needy people who really could look after this child and you couldn’t, embodied in that was such a putdown of us women and me as a woman.... I recognize the importance of it politically ... but ... for me ... it has such a personal aspect to it.”<sup>46</sup> For Kennedy, then, taking action on abortion was central to a claim of self-worth as well as equality.

Another Caravan participant was motivated to work for abortion rights not only because of her own experience of having had an illegal abortion, but also because of her perception of its place in a larger context of issues:

I had a history in the civil rights movement, I had a history in the anti-war movement.... We became involved with helping other Americans, especially deserters, who were in dire need of finding some kind of refuge. So once you’re well involved in one kind of activism, you start to see the parallel if there’s an injustice that you’ve already identified and you’re responding to, if you see a similar injustice in another area, you’re just more sensitive to it.<sup>47</sup>

Her quotation illuminates, in her commitment to social justice broadly interpreted, the connections and intersections between different areas of political activism.

It is important to acknowledge that, for several women, abortion was not the main issue with which they identified. One, for example, recalled, “It was just one of all women’s rights; it wasn’t my central focus for sure. But, you know, if you were a feminist at that time of course it was an issue.”<sup>48</sup> Similarly, in Judy Rebick’s *Ten Thousand Roses*, two Abortion Caravan participants related that abortion “wasn’t my issue personally” and “my issue wasn’t abortion, either.”<sup>49</sup> Participant Charnie Guettel explained that she became involved in reproductive rights “because everybody was in it.” She continued, “Women’s lib itself, the first couple of years everybody was in the abortion movement in the sense that it was just going down the pike.”<sup>50</sup> Caravaner Marcy Cohen reported a deep personal conflict over abortion because of her ties both to black power activists, some of whom criticized abortion as an aspect of racial oppression, and to draft dodgers or deserters, many of whom were anti-abortion. She reported that, although she was

45 Bonnie Beckman as quoted in Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses*, p. 38.

46 Susan Kennedy, telephone interview with author, January 2007.

47 N. T. R., telephone interview with author, October 31, 2006.

48 P. A., personal interview with author, October 26, 2006.

49 Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses*, p. 38.

50 Charnie Guettel, personal interview with author, February 26, 2007.

helping the Vancouver Women’s Caucus run an abortion referral service, she felt a “large personal crisis around abortion” in which she had to ask herself “what was more progressive” in terms of what a new world would look like.<sup>51</sup>

In sum, there was significantly uneven attachment to abortion as an issue among the Caravan participants. Those who expressed a deep personal connection or commitment to the issue generally had a personal experience with unplanned pregnancy or knew women who had.<sup>52</sup> Yet all women recognized its importance to women’s equality more broadly. Some women were either more detached or made an effort to distance themselves from abortion in spite of their commitment to general activism on the issue. This complexity or gradations of attachment to pro-choice activism is not always recognized, but is important to acknowledge when talking about women’s protest identities because it complicates our understanding of abortion rights activism and also has implications for Canadian feminism more generally.

### **Declarations, Analogies, and Strategies of War**

Several strategies and tactics women used in the Abortion Caravan mirror anti-war actions, illuminating the spillover of the women’s protest identities. For example, the Caravan was publicized through a declaration of war. Both the March and April 1970 issues of *The Pedestal* included the text of a letter that had been mailed to Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and other Members of Parliament in March of that year. The letter read, in part:

We charge the Government of Canada ... of being responsible for the MURDER BY ABORTION OF 2,000 CANADIAN WOMEN, who enter hospitals for treatment of complications from illegal abortions.... If another country murdered 2,000 Canadian WOMEN the Canadian Government would take immediate steps to stop the murders and should the murdering not be stopped, the Government of Canada would probably call an Emergency meeting and could quite conceivably declare war on that country. Laws can be changed very quickly in wartime, in a state of national emergency. The deaths of thousands of women and the tragedy of unwanted pregnancies constitute such an emergency. We, therefore, demand that an Emergency Meeting be called to end such carnage of Canadian women by illegal abortion.<sup>53</sup>

The women demanded the immediate removal of abortion from the Criminal Code and further informed Trudeau, “We consider the government of Canada is in a state of war with the women of Canada. If steps are not taken to implement our demands by May 11, 1970 at 3:00 pm, we will be forced to respond by declaring war on the Canadian government.”<sup>54</sup> For women who were very involved in the

51 Marcy Cohen, telephone interview with author, March 2, 2007.

52 For more examples, see Stettner, “Women and Abortion in English Canada,” pp. 228-231.

53 See “Women Declare War,” *The Pedestal*, March 1970, p. 2. The figure of 2,000 deaths stems from the estimation by the Dominion Bureau of Statistic that 100,000 abortions were performed yearly; more than 20,000 were admittedly yearly for complications. See “Abortion Cavalcade sets out for Ottawa,” *Globe and Mail*, April 28, 1970, p. 13.

54 M. Hollibaugh and B. Meadley, “An Open Letter to the Prime Minister,” *The Pedestal*, April 1970, p. 8.

anti-war movement, the adoption of this language of war was both logical and ironic. Framing their letter in this manner, as a warning or a demand, signalled, at least symbolically, not only their understanding of their authority to act on the issue, but an unwillingness to negotiate or compromise. Although women have historically adopted militarized language, these choices are notable because they broke with a decade of previous discourse in which many women advocated abortion law reform.<sup>55</sup> In contrast, this letter, which was signed “yours until repeal,” indicated that these women were prepared to fight for access to abortion beyond what had been granted in the 1969 abortion law changes.<sup>56</sup>

In response to the women’s published letter, several newspapers expressed uncertainty over what “declaring war” actually meant. As the *Calgary Herald* reported, “Exactly what this tactic involves, they say is a secret.”<sup>57</sup> Another newspaper article under the title “Pledge War Against Gov’t on Abortion” reported, “Asked what tactics the threatened war might include, the anti-abortion law group would say only it was going to work to fill hospitals across Canada with women who need and want abortions.”<sup>58</sup> This point is repeated in the June 1970 issue of *The Pedestal*, which declared: “The form that this declaration of war will take is actions in hospitals all across Canada to force officials to be responsible to the women they supposedly serve. We will not be stopped by red tape or other measures of diversion.”<sup>59</sup> There is insight into the meaning of their declaration of war in a VWC document titled “Abortion Caravan Proposals,” which called for “a co-ordinated action against the hospitals attacking them on all the ways in which they oppress and exploit women.” Suggested examples of such oppressions included the “treatment of women who go to hospitals for birth control” and “male chauvinist attitudes of doctors towards women,” as evidenced by the “phony moralism and refusal to give women information about their own bodies.”<sup>60</sup> The medical establishment, then, like the government, was a source and target of women’s frustrations.

What is less clear is the extent to which the VWC’s understanding of the “declaration of war” was communicated to other women’s groups. When queried on this point, Caravan participant Susan Kennedy, who joined the protest in Toronto, could not recollect the language’s intent: “I don’t remember the slogan

55 For more on women’s discussions of abortion in the 1960s, see Shannon Stettner, “‘He is still unwanted’: Women’s Assertions of Authority over Abortion in Letters to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* vol. 29, no. 1 (2012), pp. 151-171, and “Women and Abortion in English Canada,” *passim*.

56 The women also used war-like terms, calling their planned actions “mobilizations.” See “Women Demonstrate for Abortion,” *The Peak*, February 18, 1970, p. 2. On language choices, see Susan Jeffords, “Women, Gender, and the War,” *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1989), pp. 83-90.

57 SFU Archives, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), F-73-item1, Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 14, Lynn Rach, “Abortion Caravan on Move,” *Calgary Herald*.

58 *Ibid.*, p. 28, “Pledge War Against Gov’t on Abortion,” *Calgary Herald*.

59 Gwen Hauser, “Parliament Forced to Listen,” *The Pedestal*, June 1970, p. 1. At the public rally on Parliament Hill, Myrna Wood was quoted as making a similar threat: “If the government refuses to deal with us this weekend they will have to face us at the hospitals.” See Sheila McCook, “Pleas for Abortion Greeted by Silence,” *Ottawa Citizen*, May 11, 1970, p. 25.

60 SFU Archives, Frances Wasserlein fonds, Vancouver Women’s Caucus Binder 1/5 1970, F-162-3-3-0-5, “Abortion Caravan Proposals.”

‘declaring war on the government’ and what exactly was meant by it at the time. All our rhetoric was pretty over the top then but I assume we just meant that we would not give up the fight around this issue.... Violent action was not planned that I know of.”<sup>61</sup> In her interview with Caravan participant Kathryn Keate, Barbara Freeman also found the women purposely used “inflammatory” and “outrageous” rhetoric to get media attention.<sup>62</sup> A piece written for *Prairie Fire* by “Members of the Regina Women’s Liberation Caucus who participated in the Abortion Caravan” suggests that the Caravan was a first step in the struggle for legalized abortion: “The women have declared war on the Canadian government. Their actions in Ottawa did not succeed in bringing about the removal of abortion from the criminal code. Nor did they expect it would.... Last Monday, we declared war. That war has only just begun.”<sup>63</sup> So, the “declaration of war” was a symbolic beginning of the fight for legal abortion.

War language and images also characterize the press coverage of the Caravan, which was, in some cases, rather alarmist in tone and content. One example is especially illuminating. On Monday, May 11, 1970, approximately 36 women entered the visitor galleries of the House of Commons and, at an appointed time, disrupted Parliament by chaining themselves to their seats and shouting slogans for free abortion on demand. Alarmist press coverage surrounded the dropping of a water balloon from the gallery to the House floor. The *Montreal Star*, for example, reported, “At the height of the demonstration a water bomb was thrown into the chamber. It landed in front of a startled MP but failed to burst.”<sup>64</sup> The *Toronto Star* similarly reported, “One woman hurled a water bomb at the government benches before she was rushed from the galleries.... The water bomb made of a thin, plastic-like membrane, landed near the empty seat of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.”<sup>65</sup> The decision to call a “water balloon” a “water bomb,” while perhaps an attempt to convey the potential seriousness of such a security breach, also misrepresented and escalated the actual threat involved. Both generally and in reference to the “water bomb,” the newspapers’ responses to the Caravan reflected the fact that the protest was groundbreaking in its brazenness, but also that it followed closely on the Kent State shootings and their aftermath. The reaction also entailed a perception of the growing militancy of some protest groups; Christabelle Sethna and Stephen Hewitt argue that the Caravan was perceived as a threat, at least by the RCMP, because of its links to “Trotskyist groups,” not because of its aim of legalizing abortion.<sup>66</sup> In my interviews with participants, most of the women either identified themselves as socialist, without specifying membership in particular

61 Susan Kennedy, personal communication with author, November 9, 2007.

62 Freeman, *Beyond Bylines*, p. 147.

63 “Women Disrupt Parliament,” *Prairie Fire*, May 19-25, 1970, p. 3.

64 SFU Archives, Women’s Movement Collection (Marge Hollibaugh Collector), F-73-item1, Abortion Caravan Scrapbook, p. 30, Brian McKenna, “MPs Study Ways to Curb Disruptions.”

65 *Ibid.*, p. 24, Stan McDowell, “Abortion Backers Dump Coffin at PM’s Doot,” *Toronto Star*.

66 Sethna and Hewitt, “Clandestine Operations,” p. 485. See also Steve Hewitt and Christabelle Sethna, “Sex Spying: The RCMP Framing of English-Canadian Women’s Liberation during the Cold War” in Lara Campbell, Dominique Clément, and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Debating Dissent: Canada and the Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), pp. 135-151.

groups, or referred to having a socialist analysis of society, supporting Sethna's and Hewitt's interpretation.<sup>67</sup>

The Caravaners' use of symbolism extended beyond word choices to protest strategies. At anti-war protests in the United States, it was common for men to burn their draft cards, to show their rejection of the war (and by extension, the authority of the state).<sup>68</sup> At the Caravan protest outside the House of Commons on May 11, the women burned a copy of section 273 of the Canadian Criminal Code, which, prior to the 1969 law changes, had made the procurement or performance of abortion illegal. This action can thus similarly be read as a rejection of the state's authority over the issue of abortion. In Washington, DC, in November, 1969, there was a massive demonstration against the war – what historian Richard L. Hughes refers to as a “March of Death” – at which the names of dead soldiers were read aloud from pieces of paper that were then placed in coffins.<sup>69</sup> On their journey from Vancouver to Ottawa, the Caravan women also carried a coffin, which was symbolic of the death of thousands of women at the hands of illegal abortionists. Minutes from a VWC meeting in February 1970 illuminate how they perceived their protest and its connection to the theme of death: “Memorial services with Funeral music, drums, white coffins and red roses, and mass marches will be held in every city and town throughout Canada on Mother's Day.”<sup>70</sup>

The death imagery can be seen in a number of Caravan actions in Ottawa. On Saturday, May 9, during a weekend of protesting in Ottawa, between 150 and 300 women marched to the Prime Minister's residence where they found only a handful of RCMP guards.<sup>71</sup> They pushed past the guards, sat on the lawn of 24 Sussex Drive, and negotiated with the RCMP, who wanted them to leave, which they agreed to do after they had placed their coffin on Trudeau's doorstep. As they did so, Caravaner Margo Dunn made a speech about the tools of the illegal abortionist and how each one contributed to the death of Canadian women:

There are garbage bags on top of that coffin. These are used to pack the uterus to induce labor. Since they are not sterile, they often cause massive infection, resulting in sterilization, permanent disability, or death.... There are knitting needles on top of that coffin. These are used to put in the vagina in order to pierce the uterus. Severe bleeding results.... There is a bottle which is a container of Lysol, on top of that coffin. When used for cleaning, it is in solution. Women seeking to abort themselves inject it full strength into their vaginas. This results in severe burning of tissues, haemorrhage, and shock. Death comes within a matter of minutes. Intense, agonizing pain is suffered until the time of death.... There is part of a vacuum cleaner on top of that coffin. The hose is placed in the vagina in order to extract the fetus, but results in the whole uterus being sucked from the pelvic cavity.<sup>72</sup>

67 See Stettner, “Women and Abortion in English Canada,” pp. 210-211.

68 Richard L. Hughes, “Burning Birth Certificates and Atomic Tupperware Parties: Creating the Antiabortion Movement in the Shadow of the Vietnam War,” *The Historian*, vol. 68, no. 3 (2006), p. 542.

69 *Ibid.*, pp. 554-555.

70 SFU Archives, Frances Wasserlein fonds, Vancouver Women's Caucus Binder 1/5 1970, F-162-3-3-0-5, “General Meeting Report – Feb. 1970.”

71 Sethna and Hewitt put the number of guards at eight (“Clandestine Operations,” p. 490).

72 Although Keate refers to Dunn as “Elsa,” the women interviewed in Rebeck's book verify Dunn as the

Dunn’s speech not only highlighted the lengths to which some women would go to end unwanted pregnancies, but also illuminated the grisly, often fatal, reality of some illegal or homemade solutions to unwanted pregnancies.

The strength of Caravan participants’ commitment to both abortion rights and anti-war activism was starkly revealed in the aftermath of the Kent State incident. On April 25, 1970, two days before the Vancouver Women’s Caucus left Vancouver, United States President Richard Nixon ordered the invasion of Cambodia, a move publicized five days later. In response to this revelation, anti-war protests occurred across North America and, on May 4, 1970, four university students were shot and killed at one such protest at Kent State University. Demonstrations fuelled by anger, outrage, and grief occurred throughout the United States and Canada.<sup>73</sup> As students and anti-war protesters, many of the Abortion Caravan participants were shocked and distraught upon hearing the news of the Kent State deaths. Cathy Walker recalled the reaction some women had to the incident: “Some people were absolutely devastated at the thought that they [the US National Guardsmen] could fire on students.”<sup>74</sup> In *Winning Choice on Abortion*, Ann Thomson records a similar reaction from Margo Dunn, who recalled, “we were just – devastated! Devastated ... to think they were shooting us! I mean, we certainly identified with those students.”<sup>75</sup> On May 8, the Vancouver Women’s Caucus issued a press release drawing a link between women’s deaths from botched abortions and the shootings: “We see ourselves in a similar situation to the students of Kent, Ohio; correspondingly, peace can be kept not by the murder of innocent women but by listening and acting upon the demands of all oppressed people.”<sup>76</sup>

In response to the shootings, an anti-war demonstration was planned for Saturday, May 9, in Toronto, which conflicted with the scheduled departure of Caravan participants from Toronto to Ottawa. The women from Toronto had to decide whether to stay in Toronto to attend the anti-war protest or go to Ottawa, as originally planned, to participate in the Caravan. Some women easily made abortion their focus, while others were torn as they assessed their priorities. Heather Bishop remembered, “For me this issue [access to legal abortion] had to be addressed right then,” noting, “It was such a struggle in those days to get the men in the movement to recognize any issues that were seen as women’s issues as being as important as others that we really had to fight for every inch of ground ... so push come to shove it’s like our turn now.”<sup>77</sup> Similarly, Susan Kennedy recalled:

There started to be plans made for the biggest [anti-war] demonstration ever on the Saturday.... On the Friday night before we were supposed to meet at Queen’s

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speaker. The women often used names of famous feminists rather than their own names when speaking to the media. See Kathryn Keate, “‘Out from under, Women Unite!’ Personal Notes of an Activist in the Women’s Liberation Movement,” *Saturday Night*, July 1970, p. 17; Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses*, p. 42.

73 Powell, “Kent State Comes to Canada,” pp. 37-43.

74 Cathy Walker, telephone interview with author, February 16, 2007.

75 Thomson, *Winning Choice on Abortion*, p. 48. For other references to the war affecting Caravaners, also see pp. 47, 49, and 61.

76 As quoted in Freeman, *Beyond Bylines*, p. 143.

77 Heather Bishop, telephone interview with author, February 20, 2007.

Park.... There had been constant debate amongst the women “should we stay with the men and fight the war or should we fight for abortion?” And I remember sitting on the bus waiting for people to come.... Everybody saying “oh so and so decided to stay” and there was sort of a sense of those of us on the bus that there were lots of people to fight around the war and that would continue, but we had to be there for abortion.... I remember waiting, waiting, waiting for people to show up.... The buses weren’t quite full. Anyway, I just felt like I had to be there.<sup>78</sup>

One of the few male participants who chose to go on the Caravan rather than stay in Toronto for the anti-war protest explained his decision: “The way I understood it at the time was that it was a political responsibility. In other words, it was an issue that needed support and they needed men to support it. It was a matter of choosing which one was more important at that point. It was a tough choice.”<sup>79</sup> These comments underline the understanding not only of the importance of fighting for legalized abortion, but also of the unique opportunity offered by the Caravan. Because of its national focus, it had the potential to gain the type of media attention on abortion that was already afforded the anti-war movement, but had not yet been given to abortion protests.

The reasons other women made the decision to leave for Ottawa rather than stay in Toronto for the anti-war protest reflect a greater sense of conflict over their identities and priorities. Toronto-based participant Peggy Morton explained her internal conflict this way:

We’d been planning this thing [the Abortion Caravan] for a long, long time.... Then that week was the week that Nixon invaded Cambodia, and then, about five days later, announced it. So you have these huge spontaneous demonstrations all across Canada. Four days later the Ohio [Kent] State students were killed. Imagine how torn we were. We, who’d been very much a part of the anti-war movement, now we’re sort of duty-bound to go and carry on this thing which we’ve started, but the whole focus of the movement that weekend is somewhere else. Here we are, we’re in the Parliament, we feel duty-bound to do what we said we would come for, but at the same time, I think there was that real sense of here we stopped the Parliament and the thing that the entire movement, at least in North America if not the world was focused on, we were far from it. So it was kind of bittersweet in that way, just because of the timing. That must have led to discussion and debate afterwards, you know, did we handle that correctly?<sup>80</sup>

Her repeated use of the term “duty-bound” betrays her conflict at having to decide between the two protests. It also speaks to the point that, although many women supported the fight for abortion rights generally, since they perceived that it was connected with women’s equality overall, for them abortion may not have been their “key” issue. It underscores, too, the idea that Canadian women had strong attachments to the anti-Vietnam War movement, perhaps stronger than is sometimes recognized.

78 Susan Kennedy, telephone interview with author, January 2007.

79 Dante Nardone, personal interview with author, April 20, 2007.

80 Peggy Morton, telephone interview with author, February 17, 2007.

For some of the women interviewed, the anti-Vietnam movement seemed to be a more important issue than abortion rights. Judy Pocock’s memory of the decision reflects this privileging of the anti-war struggle:

Of course for us the excitement was ... what was going on here in Toronto.... All the women went to Ottawa and all of the guys had the biggest, most militant demonstration ever around Kent State. It was huge and a bunch of the men we were involved with or were friends with were arrested. It was a very big deal. I think we probably got a lot less publicity than we would have otherwise 'cause that was such a huge thing. It was really strange because we weren't there. So on our way there was conflict because we were there doing the Abortion Caravan, but our hearts, for many of us, were in Toronto because that was such a big deal. And for many of us that was all part of the same thing. That's really important that those two things happened at once.<sup>81</sup>

Pocock’s decision to participate in the Caravan echoes the conflict found in Morton’s recollection. While some women decided to stay in Toronto instead of going to Ottawa, those who chose to participate in the Caravan, despite feeling torn about so doing, illuminate that social movements not only spill over, but compete.

We see the interconnection of these social movement identities playing out during the women’s protest in Ottawa. Following the protest at Trudeau’s residence on Saturday, May 9, for example, some of the Caravaners who dispersed joined members of the Viet Nam Mobilization Committee and the Students for a Democratic Society for an anti-war demonstration held at the National War Memorial in Ottawa. The *Toronto Star*’s coverage of these protests captured the linkages between identities: “Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was burned in effigy [at the anti-war protest], called a murderer and had a coffin planted on his doorstep Saturday in a chain of demonstrations linking supporters of free abortion with opponents of the Viet Nam war and a handful of Quebec separatists.”<sup>82</sup> Additionally, Susan Kennedy recollected that, immediately following the House of Commons protest on May 11,

We spent time calling people in Toronto about the demonstration because it was the biggest anti-war demonstration Toronto had ever had including the mayor being arrested. And we spent hours on the phone trying to find out who had been arrested and comparing notes. And it was a real sense of coming back and being excited that we had gone off and done this at the same time. And to me there was also the sense that we felt things were happening in Ottawa, things were happening in Toronto, things were happening in other centres across Canada and across the States. You felt very much that you were part of something really big because between this [Abortion Caravan] and the stuff around the war and Kent State there was just so much activity that there was a tremendously powerful feeling.<sup>83</sup>

81 Judy Pocock, personal interview with author, November 30, 2006.

82 McDowell, “Abortion backers dump coffin at PM’s door.”

83 Susan Kennedy, telephone interview with author, January 2007.

Kennedy's recollection of making phone calls to Toronto in the immediate aftermath of the Caravan protests reveals the multidimensional character of the activists and demonstrates the need to situate abortion rights activism within broader activist contexts.

### **Conclusion**

Historian Christopher Powell argues that "May 1970 represents the zenith of antiwar activism in Canada" because of the protests that occurred nationwide in the wake of the Kent State shootings.<sup>84</sup> Similarly, that month marks a unique moment in abortion rights history in the country because it saw the first national pro-choice action in the form of the Abortion Caravan. That these two events happened at the same time was seen as noteworthy by Caravan participants. More immediately, for a small group of women, it necessitated a choice between or privileging of their protest identities. Placing women's abortion rights activism through the Abortion Caravan within the context of their anti-Vietnam War activism helps to complicate our understanding of the history of abortion rights activism as well as that of Canadian feminism more broadly. On one level, we see interconnections between protest strategies – be they language choices or symbolism – and a spillover between movements, "the transactive and interactive dynamic of movement politics."<sup>85</sup> Beyond that exchange, however, we also see competition between causes that played out rather dramatically during the Abortion Caravan when activists from Toronto had to choose between participating in the Ottawa leg of the Caravan and a large anti-war protest planned in Toronto for the same time. The women's reasoning and feelings behind their choices illuminate the degree to which some Canadian women linked their identities to their anti-war activism. We see greater complexity in women's relationship to abortion rights activism than is often acknowledged in studies of pro-choice activities that contextualize such events in a narrower women's liberation framework. Looking at abortion rights activism in connection to anti-Vietnam War activism reveals gradations of identification with or ownership over the issue that add depth to our understanding of women's activism as a series of negotiations between or privileging of identities and priorities.

Women have a long history as anti-war activists. In some ways, the Abortion Caravan's adoption of the language and symbolism of war, which can be seen as a continuation of past or ongoing anti-war activism, contributed to the event's success in that it likely earned the women some of the press coverage they received. The Caravan, however, was also very much a product of the long 1960s. The women who participated were, overwhelmingly, members of the women's liberation movement who had undergone a moment of radicalization; they had grown tired of feeling like "colonized bodies" in the various New Left groups to which they belonged and, through the Caravan, took leadership roles too often denied to them elsewhere. The Caravan was an opening the women devised, inserting their bodies – quite literally in the case of the House of Commons protest – into the fight for

84 Powell, "Kent State Comes to Canada," pp. 37.

85 Churchill, "An Ambiguous Welcome," p. 233.

reproductive autonomy. Whether consciously or not, the women’s involvement in the anti-war movement affected how they chose to struggle for abortion rights at this time. Through their repeated declarations of war, they signalled that they were unwilling to accept the status quo and were no longer prepared to use traditional channels to enact change. For these women, winning reproductive freedom was a fight, a battle, a struggle; the Abortion Caravan was a march of war or a march against future deaths from illegal abortion. Women’s actions throughout the Abortion Caravan demonstrated that they no longer had tolerance for the idea of legislative reform, but demanded “free abortion on demand” and never questioned their right to so do.