

CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST UTOPIANISM AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE POLITICAL_____

Discursive Democracy in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*
and the Norwegian Women's Shelter Movement_____

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To the memory of Marijs Vercauteren Bjerkvik (1954 – 2004)

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Themes

1.1.1 Contemporary Feminism, Feminist Utopianism and Transformation

Contemporary feminist utopian thought has challenged, transformed, and expanded the scope of conventional utopianism. Feminist utopias transgress conventional utopian perspectives of homogeneous, uniform, closed, and stable political and social *perfection*, instead proposing conceivable, dynamic, openended utopian societies. Contemporary feminist utopias privilege process over closure in constructing utopian visions of unfinished and continuously unfolding social development. Using the power of imagination feminist utopias create a space for the exploration of radically different ways of thinking and being. Readers are provided with the opportunity “to stretch and expand our understanding of the possible, thus making a multiplicity of radically different futures not only desirable, but also conceivable.” (Sargisson 1996: 52) With its focus on equality, social justice, plurality, and political engagement, feminist utopianism also reflects discussions within contemporary feminism(s).

Utopianism is a genre well suited to feminist deconstruction and the (re)envisioning of social relations. It allows the opportunity to envision a world of equality and autonomy where the patterns of domination in the patriarchy of our current social reality are deconstructed. As Kumar points out, “It is perhaps inevitable that women should take to utopia. Where else would they be free and equal?” (1991: 102) Feminist utopias create a space for experiencing an alternative social and political order, free from traditional patterns of domination, where individuals can collectively experience new paths toward self-realization. Dreams, hopes and aspirations take form in utopian thinking, allowing the desire for an improved and more just social reality to be experienced through the imagination. But, contemporary feminist utopianism does not offer any simple blueprint, or any programmatic solutions

to the questions of justice and social organization. Contemporary feminist political utopianism portrays an “agonistic and performative politics” (Honig 1992: 215), an ongoing struggle of political engagement and activism without the aim of attaining a final, perfect utopian achievement. Underneath the solidarity and relative social harmony in most feminist utopias, there is an unceasing rumble of political struggle, renegotiation, and change.

1.1.2 Democracy and Participation

Contemporary feminist political utopias are more concerned with democratic processes, and the reconstruction of the politics of democracy based on designs for active citizen participation and inclusion. Contemporary feminist political theory, resurging with the new wave of feminism in the late 1960s, has been deeply concerned with constructing new forms of democracy that recognize the problems of plurality, women’s autonomy, social justice, and equality. Many of these theories begin with a critical analysis of liberal democracy and the patriarchal thinking, which they contend constitutes it. As Mary Dietz puts it, “Feminist scholars have uncovered the inegalitarianism behind the discourse of equal opportunity, making us aware of how such presumptions deny the social reality of unequal treatment, sexual discrimination, cultural stereotypes, and women’s subordination both in the polity and the economy.” (2002: 27)

1.1.3 Redefining the Public Sphere – The Private Goes Public

Feminist political theory has also focused on the traditional separation between the political/public sphere and the private sphere. Feminist political theorists assert that traditionally, men, by law and in practice, have dominated both spheres. Women have been relegated primarily to the private sphere of reproduction and the household. Though women have had a significant, if subordinate, role in the private sphere, women and their lives have been, until recently, largely omitted from, or closed out of the realm of the political. The new women’s movement, which began in the late 1960s, has demanded greater access for women to the public sphere.

The women's shelter movement grew out of this new women's movement. Beginning in England with the establishment of the first women's shelter in 1972, the movement soon became a worldwide phenomenon. (Dobash & Dobash 1992, 25-28; Krisesentersekretariatet 2005a: 1) In addition to providing shelter for abused women, the movement also implemented experimental forms of participatory democracy, in its structures and practices, utilizing the emerging feminist theories of democracy, solidarity, and grassroots organizing. Political activism was also a central element. With utopian visions of wiping out men's violence toward women, the movement engaged in political action to bring a reconceived conceptualization of "domestic violence" into the public discourse and onto political agendas. This reconceptualization identified violence in the home, not as individual instances of familial dysfunction, but rather, as a part of the patriarchal structures of domination, which pervade society as a whole. The struggles of the women's shelter movement to effect political and social change have resulted in legal and attitudinal progress, but the initial goals of the movement are still long from accomplished.

1.1.4 Constructing Eutopia: A Good Place for Women

The Women's Shelter Movement (Krisesenterbevegelsen) which began in the 1970s, and the Secretariat of the Shelter Movement (Krisesentersekretariatet, hereafter the Secretariat), established in 1994, have been prime movers in the struggle for women's safety and right to a life free from violence. Their work has been focused in two areas: providing shelter and help to self-help for individual women who have experienced violence in close relationships, and taking action in the public sphere, through political and informational activities to effect social and political change and, thereby, achieve greater equality for women. The Women's Shelter Movement, and its affiliated shelters implemented feminist democratic structures and practices in the founding of their organizations, and strive to maintain this democratic environment over time. One of the primary aims of the Movement is the empowerment of women, through their participation in the democratic processes of operating a shelter, initiating political action, and in their efforts to free themselves from abusive relationships. I will examine three women's

shelters, which adhere to the platform of the Women's Shelter Movement, and the Secretariat through the theoretical framework of feminist democracy.

1.2 The Research Questions:

The research problem is formulated in these two main questions:

(1) How does contemporary feminist utopian thought transform the political and (re)envision the relationship between the public and the private spheres as conceptualized in the participatory, discursive democracy of Mattapoissett in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*?

(2) How does contemporary feminist utopianism actually take shape in a feminist eutopia, a good place for women? This study will focus on the Women's Shelter Movement in Norway.

1.3 Further Development and Guide to the Thesis

I will first provide an overview of the research methods, and the sources of information, which have been the tools in gathering and analyzing the empirical data in this project. Then, I will develop a theoretical framework, using political utopian thought and democratic theory. Utopianism will be discussed, first in historical perspective, and then in relation to some of the main criticisms of the genre from political theorists. I will provide a brief defense of political utopianism, grounded in contemporary feminist utopianism's transgressions of the conventional utopian mode, privileging a function-based approach to feminist utopianism that Lucy Sargisson proposes. I will then address contemporary feminist utopianism as a potentially transformative agent, in its portrayal of radically different ways of being, both socially and politically.

Jürgen Habermas and Hannah Arendt's ideas on power and political action will lay the foundation for the examination of participatory democracy that follows. The discussion of participation in democratic political life will begin with Carole Pateman's work, which engages the help of Rousseau and John Stuart Mill. Then, I will present two designs of deliberative democracy,

John Dryzek's discursive democracy, and Iris Marion Young's communicative democracy. The final topic within the discussion of democratic theory will be radical democracy, which perceives democracy as an ongoing project of citizen engagement in struggles for equality. Here, I will rely on the work of C. Douglas Lummis and Chantal Mouffe.

Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* will then be examined as a contemporary feminist utopian narrative, with its vision of the discursive democratic community of Mattapoisett located in the United States of the year 2137. Finally, the empirical aspect of this project, an investigation of the Women's Shelter Movement in Norway, will be presented. The Secretariat of the Movement and three of its affiliated women's shelters provide insight into aspects of feminist democracy in practice, as these women work toward the realization of the utopian hope for women's equality. I will conclude by identifying ways in which contemporary feminist utopianism, in narrative texts, and in the real-life test of feminist democracy manifested in the Women's Shelter Movement, can inform our perceptions of the political.

1.4 Methods and Sources

I chose a qualitative methods approach for the empirical aspect of this research project because the aim was to investigate a complex contemporary phenomenon, the Women's Shelter Movement (Krisesenterbevegelsen) in Norway, as a manifestation, or realization of contemporary feminist utopianism. An approach that allows for a wholistic, in-depth analysis was necessary for this purpose. Meaning, in the context of feminist utopianism, is conveyed through words and images, which guide the interpretation of this phenomenon in an intuitive process of exploration. Any effort to capture and examine the essence of this research topic demands a combination of qualitative methods that provides a depth of information gathered from several sources.

I have privileged a feminist approach to research that is informed by critical theory and standpoint theory. (Naples 2003; Harding 2004) These approaches are concerned with relations and structures of power, particularly as they relate to struggles against oppression. Feminist standpoint theories

are a collection of “feminist critical theory about relations between the production of knowledge and practices of power,” and are focused on the fact that knowledge is both socially and historically situated. (Harding 2004: 1, 10) Research in this context is an aspect of political engagement, the results of which can contribute to emancipatory struggles. This aim necessitated a qualitative approach as it places the researcher directly in the research process as a self-reflecting participant. An awareness of my own democratic socialist and feminist orientation has been a factor in my approach to the research problem. It is vital that the researcher maintains a self-reflective consciousness throughout the research process to resist perpetuating the structures of inequality and domination, which exist in society, and can emerge in the social relations of research.

A feminist approach to research assumes an interactive process where the researcher and the individuals or groups she studies engage in a dialogue focused on the phenomenon under examination and the research process itself. (Lather 1991: 71) The researcher and the participants under study educate and inform each other in a dialogical process of communication. Dialogue is essential to increasing the researcher’s capacity for reciprocity, to be able to see the world from the perspective of the Other, while sharing her own woman’s experience with the informants. This became particularly apparent during group interviews with veteran and new employees at the women’s shelters, where learning took place through a process of mutual exchange. In addition, the chapter of this research project, which is based on the interviews, was shared with the informants for their examination and input.

1.4.1 Positively Deviant Case

I chose the Women’s Shelter Movement for a single case study primarily because it appeared to be an example of a deviant case, deviant and exemplary in its success. Lijphart pointed out that a deviant case is implicitly comparative since the selection of the case involves comparing and identifying differences. (1971: 693) Talking with other feminists, examining the websites of several feminist organizations, and relying on my own experience from feminist activities focused on political action and change, the Women’s Shelter Movement emerged as an unusual case in its record of

success in effecting political change while empowering individual women. I decided to examine why, and to what extent, the Movement has been successful, focusing on what we might learn from this women's experience, and the knowledge it represents. Reviewing documents on the website of the Secretariat of the Women's Shelter Movement, I found their ideology and goals fit well with discussions of democracy, empowerment, and political action for political and social change. Though the Movement and its Secretariat are a single case, interviews at three different women's shelters, which are affiliated with the Secretariat, provided the possibility for comparison of some of the elements of discursive democracy under investigation in this research project. I decided to research the Women's Shelter Movement as a feminist utopia, a good place for women, and as an organization whose impact on Norwegian politics and society is quite visible, concrete, and positive, though often provocative. I determined that this single case would be adequate to address the questions posed in the research problem, particularly because it also offered the possibility for internal comparisons among the member women's shelters. Yin remarked that the case study "allows the investigator to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristic of real-life events. (Yin 2003: 2) This is the essence of using the case-study approach to analyze the complex social and political reality in, and around the Women's Shelter Movement.

1.4.2 Interviews

Data on the Women's Shelter Movement was collected primarily through interviews, with participant observation, and review of documents as a supplement. Interviewing was the most important aspect of studying this feminist utopia because it was the best way to capture the women's definition and experience of democracy within the Movement, and in the Movement's relationship to the greater political forum. I conducted informal conversational interviews with individual informants and groups. I scheduled a preliminary interview with the director (daglig leder) of the Secretariat to discuss the project and to lay the groundwork for the data collection. The director was a key informant and my guide into the Women's Shelter Movement's structures and practices. Her help was decisive in identifying

whom to interview, and in gaining access to key actors within the three women's shelters investigated.

I interviewed seventeen women in this study: eleven veterans each with approximately 20 years experience in women's shelter work, including the director of the Secretariat, four shelter managers, employees, and assistants. There was one operations manager who has worked at one of the shelters for about five years, though her experience with the shelter goes further back in time. There were three new, temporary employees, two of whom were students of social work, and one trainee on a project sponsored by the employment service. I also interviewed one woman who was living at one of the shelters, and finally, a sociologist who has conducted extensive research on the women's shelters in Norway. All the interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and I translated the interview material to English in the process of writing transcripts. The informants were very open in sharing the history of their involvement with the shelters and the movement. They showed extreme interest and trust in this research project.

1.4.3 Participant Observation

I participated as an observer in the general informational segment of a Fellesmøte, the regular meeting of all the employees and members of the women's shelter in this study, which still maintains a flat organizational structure. An issue involving the relationship of this member shelter to the Secretariat came up at the meeting, and provided an opportunity to observe how a disagreement within the organization was tackled. I was able to follow up on this issue in a later interview with the director of the Secretariat. In addition, I attended the twentieth anniversary celebration for one of the shelters, where a play, which had been written specifically for the outreach work of the shelter, was performed. The Secretariat had produced a resource booklet to accompany the performance of the play at secondary schools, which was among the documents I reviewed in this project. (Smaadahl 2002)

1.4.4 Documents and Sources

Examining documents fulfilled several objectives in this project. First, the information available in documents on the Secretariat's website, for example: the ideology statement, a brief history of the Movement, and the platform of the Movement, was essential to preparations for the interviews. Secondly, documents signify the formal structures and principles of the organization, giving a picture of how the organization aims to define itself and to fulfill its mission. In addition, they provide a history of the organization's development and changing priorities, and outline the Women's Shelter Movement's political agenda. Among the documents I reviewed were annual reports of the Secretariat and the shelters, the Organizational Plan of the Secretariat, press releases and newspaper articles, brochures and informational articles produced by the Secretariat, and reports on special topics and projects of the Secretariat. I was seeking information about the Women's Shelter Movement's record of implementing programs and effecting political change, all within the theoretical framework of feminist utopian democracy.

Another important primary source was a thesis (hovedoppgave) written by Ellen Ahnfelt (1987) about the process through which the Women's Shelter Movement brought the issue of violence against women into the public discourse and onto political agendas in Norway. Her experience as a member of the Oslo Women's Shelter Group, a pioneer in Scandinavia, gave her a participant's perspective on the early developments of the Movement. Several secondary sources provided insight into the early struggles for recognition and public funding of women's shelters.

2.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 UTOPIANISM

The “conviction that the world could be a better place than it is,” provides fertile ground for “the political engagement that is a core element, even the core purpose, of this particular field of intellectual inquiry,” political utopian thought. (Levitas 2001:26) Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* is one, among many, tendencious contemporary feminist utopian narratives urging its readers to political engagement and activism. As I begin to build a theoretical framework for the later examination of discursive democracy in the future Mattapoissett, I will first provide a brief history of utopianism. Then, I will address some of the main arguments against utopianism, and give a few counterarguments, grounded in contemporary feminist utopianism’s transgression of the conventional utopian mode. Finally, I will discuss some of the functional elements of contemporary feminist utopianism, which are significant to an investigation of feminist democratic projects, in theory, and in the practice of the Women’s Shelter Movement.

2.1.1 Utopianism In Historical Perspective

“The phenomenon of utopian discourse is worldwide,” and “.... it has ancient roots. (Moylan 1986: 2) Questions of the good life, the just state, and how a society can provide for the welfare of its citizens in a condition of harmony and equality have provoked the imagination of utopian writers since Plato undertook the design of the just city-state in the *Republic*. Plato described in detail the socialization process necessary to make the young into good citizens and how the guardians would serve the community and live without material possessions beyond the mere necessities. The philosopher kings would rule wisely and justly. The *Republic* described an ideal state, proposing a model for the good society. However, to most readers of today, this ideal city-state, despite its portrayal of order, harmony and justice, entails

a dangerous sacrifice of autonomy and recognition of difference, which leads some of us to question its place in utopian thought.

Utopianism has a long tradition, emerging again in modern times as Sir Thomas More “discovered” the land of Utopia in 1516 and wrote the first modern utopia, providing the genre with its name. *Utopia* was “written in a time of rapid social change ... [and] provided images of alternatives to the given situation...” (Moylan 1986: 3) More’s *Utopia* launched sharp criticisms at the English society of his time. He attacked the absurdities of the criminal justice system and the social inequality of his day. He questioned the institutions of private property and the Church. He cloaked his attacks in humor and satire, leaving us wondering at his true intentions. There is a great deal of ambiguity in his book.

More described the daily lives of the inhabitants of *Utopia* in great detail, down to the style of their houses and clothing, which were simple and functional. Gardens were a central feature of the community. (More 1999: 54) The socialization of the young and social relations within the Utopian society were outlined. The organization of labor was an important issue, as were agriculture and other aspects of guaranteeing the survival of the community. Wealth was held in common and there was disdain for ostentatiousness. “Learned men were called to office” in this harmonious, closed and stable society. (More 1999: 60) More provided imaginative possibilities for a new form of social organization, establishing in Utopia, an idea of how such a society might be achieved and maintained.

The account of life in Utopia was told by a traveler Raphael Hythloday, who happened to find this superior, rather perfect society by chance in his travels. In the utopian genre, these new and unusual societies are usually described by travellers who, either by geographic or time travel, have discovered and been impressed by the utopian society they have experienced. These new worlds offer the visitor a whole new scheme for social organization, with new approaches and solutions to the fundamental tasks of social and political life.

More’s *Utopia* set the stage for the utopian visions that followed. Many of the themes More addressed became part of the utopian tradition. The dissatisfaction with the contemporary social and political structures of the

author's society materialized in a desire for something better. That desire was concretized in the imaginary utopian society. Often, the new utopia offered a simpler, more harmonious life of self-sufficiency. The conventional utopias functioned as closed units, isolated and uncontaminated by the woes and evils of mass society and politics. Many utopian visions showed a contempt for politics and thus, the political aspects of life were altered, their importance often diminished. (Kumar 1991: 29)

Economy has been a central issue in utopianism. In conventional utopias there have been detailed descriptions of how economic life would be best organized for the collective good, usually in a rather programmatic, strictly planned way. Labor has been well organized and generally seen as a pleasure. Most utopias have allowed for meaningful leisure, for the life of the mind, in More's *Utopia*, for example. In many utopias there has been free time for constructive activity, in the arts or other areas of individual development. Utopias have envisioned a sort of collective harmony of cooperation in labor and distribution of wealth within a scheme of self-sufficiency. The self-sufficiency allowed for survival within isolation, precluding the need for contact with other worlds.

Utopianism led to experiments in alternative communities, like the Owenites, the Shakers, Oneida, New Harmony and the Fourierist communities. These communities usually did not last very long, but many influenced aspects of social and political life and the way we perceive urban development, education and mental health, for instance. Kumar points out that the Fourierist communities "had a decisive influence on American town planning and the idea of landscape architecture in the second half of the nineteenth century". (Kumar 1991: 78) New York City's Central Park was an outcome of the Fourierist community movement in the mid-nineteenth century. (Kumar 1991: 78)

Utopianism took a turn in the middle of the 1800s, developing a subversive character. Moylan pointed out that prior to 1850, the potentially "oppositional impulse" of alternative utopian visions was often muted "by removing it to the plane of an interesting but unattainable other." (1986: 5) He asserted that the utopian narrative prior to 1850 provided a sort of systematic blueprint for alternative forms of social organization, and "offered at least a

hope that the world as it was could be structurally different.” (Moylan 1986: 6) But, around 1850, with the expansion of industrial capitalism, utopianism changed from providing schematic models for social organization to more didactic and exploratory narratives concerned with radically different values. (Moylan 1986: 5-6) After 1850, utopias “tended to adopt a stance more concerned with teaching and exposing for the reader the still unrealized potential of the human project of consciously being in the world ...” (Moylan 1986: 6) This new utopian narrative, “the heuristic utopia offered a strength of vision that sought to subvert or at least reform the modern economic and political arrangement from within.” (Moylan 1986: 6) In its new form, utopia projected the reader into a future society, often springing from revolutionary change.

In the late 19th century, utopianism came center stage in the United States through Edward Bellamy’s extremely popular *Looking Backward* (1888), a socialist utopian vision. The book was instrumental in the Nationalist movement in the United States. (Kumar 1991: 101) Though Bellamy’s narrative contained feminist themes, “In the year 2000 Bellamy’s women are still frozen to the pedestal. They are icons of men’s inspiration, flagellants for masculine ambition, and prizes awarded to the most successful men.” (Tichi 1982: 25) In response and reaction to the portrayal of women in *Looking Backward*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, an American socialist, member of the Nationalist movement and feminist, wrote the utopian *Herland* (1915). (Kumar 1991: 102) There were no men in *Herland*, until the arrival of the outsiders who discovered the peaceful, harmonious, matriarchal society by accident. *Herland’s* women gave birth to female children through parthenogenesis; men were simply unnecessary. Perkin’s book was a first in the bounty of feminist utopian literature that has followed.

William Morris was also provoked by Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* and wrote *News from Nowhere* (1890) in response. “Morris was the first to confront the juggernaut of industrialism not with nostalgic rejection nor technological socialism but with a humanized and aestheticized socialism that blended the best of Romanticism and Marxism.” (Kumar 1991: 103) Morris’s vision is a garden metaphor where labor is a collective pleasure and where private property and the concept of money simply do not exist. The

relationship between society and nature is brought into focus. William Morris has appealed to feminists with his portrayal of autonomous women, particularly in the character of Ellen. He contrasted and, thereby criticized, English society of the late nineteenth century with the utopian life of Nowhere. The visitor to this utopia from Morris' English social context says to Ellen, "I was thinking of what you, with your capacity and intelligence, joined to your love of pleasure and your impatience of unreasonable restraint – of what you would have been in the past. And even now when all is won and has been for a long time, my heart is sickened with thinking of all the waste of life that has gone on for so many years! ... the contrast of the present with the future, of blind despair with hope?" (Morris 1998: 222) Morris creates a utopia where pleasure, aesthetics and freedom are exalted and politics becomes less central to the life of the community. Morris presents a form of discursive democracy where citizens negotiate issues of mutual concern in a process of deliberation. *News from Nowhere* carries many of the values still central to contemporary feminist utopianism, particularly a concern for autonomy, indeterminacy and resistance to closure, and self-reflection. Ruth Levitas points out that *News from Nowhere* "is provisional and reflexive largely in the sense that Morris understood this to be a necessary feature of utopian speculation." (Levitas 2001: 36)

The twentieth century presented formidable challenges to utopianism. It became suspect, implicated in the rise of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union and Germany, events that distorted and smothered socialist idealism. Moylan asserted that in addition to being coopted by Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany, utopianism was also taken into a third "totalizing system" represented by the corporate United States and its vision of "consumer paradise." (1986: 8) The utopian hope for something better gave way to critical despair; the utopian genre took a negative turn.

Dystopian, or anti-utopian narratives, such as Huxley's *Brave New World* and Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* emerged, virtually overshadowing utopian texts, and portraying nightmarish visions of social control, human isolation and terror. Socialism was the primary target of these dystopian visions. "Socialism's preeminence was expressed in the fact that when utopia shifted to its negative pole, to the mockery and despair of the anti-utopia, it

was socialism that was taken as the only tendency of the modern world that was seriously worth the full force of its attack.” (Kumar 1991: 62) In these texts, mindless consumption, or mobilization of the masses in totalitarian collectivities, using terror to effect human isolation, became associated with utopian ideologies. Moylan pointed out, “Unfortunately, the dystopian narrative itself has all too easily been recruited into the ideological attack on authentic utopian expression: commentators cite the dystopia as a sign of the very failure of utopia and consequently urge uneasy readers to settle for what is and cease their frustrating dreams of a better life.” (1986: 9) Utopianism had fallen into a very bad light. The utopian genre was endangered by “the disappearance of hope that had been the source of their [both utopia and anti-utopia] vitality.” (Kumar 1991: 63)

Then came the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, with the brilliant (utopian) rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and the base violence of the Birmingham, Alabama police reaching the American conscience through the newly established medium of mass communication, television. The 1960s followed on the heels of the Montgomery Bus Boycott and the civil disobedience that marked challenges to segregation laws in Birmingham. A period of social and political conflict, upheaval, and change ensued, when students, African-Americans, the poor, and other groups began demanding access to participation in decision-making processes.

During this time of unrest and growing political activism, utopianism experienced a revival, but these utopian narratives were very different from conventional utopian texts. Many of them were written by women and reflected the concerns and aims of an activist feminism. Pointing to the works of Russ (*The Female Man*), Leguin (*The Dispossessed*), Piercy (*Woman on the Edge of Time*), and Delany (*Triton*), Moylan wrote, “The new novels negated the negation of utopia by the forces of twentieth century history: the subversive imaging of utopian society and the radical negativity of dystopian perception is preserved; while the systematizing boredom of traditional utopia and the cooptation of utopia by modern structures is destroyed. Thus, utopian writing in the 1970s was saved by its own destruction and transformation into the “critical utopia.” (Moylan 1986: 10) By critical utopia, Moylan meant two things: an oppositional text that critiques not only the social and political reality

of the narrative's context, but also the utopian genre itself, and as "critical" in the nuclear sense of *critical mass* required to make the necessary explosive reaction." (Moynan 1986: 10) In addition to providing provocative social criticism, these "critical utopias" express an indeterminacy that challenges and rejects the closed, static, blueprint *perfection* of conventional utopias.

2.1.2 Criticisms and a Defense of Utopianism

Attacks on utopianism are generally directed toward the programmatic blueprint as a prescriptive device for social and political organization. This was Karl Popper's main critique as he pointed to the dangers of totalitarianism within utopianism. (Kumar 1991: 90) In addition, Popper pointed to the "incontestable truth that is imposed by an elite on the inhabitants" of utopias. (de Geus 1999: 236) Leszek Kolakowski criticized utopianism pointing out that the "striving for harmony and equality" results in the "suppression of conflict and diversity that are an inescapable and enriching part of life". He contended that this leads to "loss of creativity and freedom" and is a dangerous step towards totalitarian coercion. (Kumar 1991: 90) The reconceptualization of utopianism in contemporary feminist utopias - "critical utopias"- challenges these critiques by resisting the closure and conformity of conventional utopianism. Contemporary feminist utopianism envisions an unending resistance to oppression in the struggle for values pluralism and personal autonomy. In this sense, utopianism functions as a potentially subversive force and a resistance to totalitarianism. Contemporary feminist utopianism offers a substantial alternative to the sources of criticism launched at conventional utopianism.

2.1.3 Contemporary Feminist Utopianism as Transgression

Contemporary feminist utopianism does not offer prescriptive programs for the establishment of a finally free and closed, stable society. It resists the closure and finality, perhaps relinquishing the promise of stability that has been a central feature of conventional utopianism. Contestation, struggles and political engagement are more characteristic. While feminist utopias provide a strong criticism of industrialism's brutality towards nature and human life, they do not offer solutions of reclusive, harmonious societies in

stasis. Change, with its dangers and uncertainties, is privileged over any form of perfection or equilibrium. Contemporary feminist utopianism functions as transformative and subversive in its anticipation of radical political and social change through struggles for equality and freedom from oppression.

A central aspect of these struggles is the aim of approaching a workable solidarity in an atmosphere of pluralism and recognition of difference. The goal is to resist entrenchment in a oneness of social conformity, while maintaining a solidarity for collective survival. Equilibrium is not a goal, however, as it has been in conventional utopias. There is not one balance point and stasis in contemporary feminist utopian societies, but, rather, motion, flux, struggle and change. Equilibrium is stagnation, political death.

Is it possible to speak of the common good in the context of democratic feminism and feminist utopianism? Again, there is contestation over determining or deciding on what constitutes the common good. The concept remains undecidable in the radical feminist utopian vision. The common good as a key factor in maintaining social cohesion and harmony is another aspect of conventional utopianism that feminism questions. The tidy, harmonious, isolated, closed society of conventional utopianism is rejected in favor of a more contested, but diverse social organization. One feminist, and radical democratic theorist calls the common good “a ‘vanishing point’, something to which we constantly refer when we are acting as citizens, but that can never be reached.” (Mouffe 1992b: 379) The feminist utopian vision is elusive. It is an endless struggle, a process of reaching for functional solidarity while resisting the universalisms and homogeneity that stagnate power and social interaction.

Contemporary feminist utopianism is transformative, proposing radically different ways of being and living together. In this sense, feminist utopianism functions as a politicizing agent, revealing new forms of democracy and values pluralism. These utopian visions can be a compass or guide, presenting new alternatives in democratic processes for tackling real-life issues today. (De Geus 1999: 229) Utopianism is also didactic, providing an opportunity for learning how social and political issues might be resolved.

Contemporary feminist utopianism allows the reader to experience new forms of social and political relations, provoking new ways of perceiving reality.

2.2 DEMOCRATIC THEORY

2.2.1. Habermas, Communicative Rationality, Power, and Collective Action

Habermas's conceptualization of communicative rationality is central to a discussion of "democratizing rationality" put forth by Dryzek, where he juxtaposes communicative rationality to, and criticizes instrumental rationality, particularly as it is utilized in game theory. (Dryzek 1990: 3-6) Communicative rationality is based in social interaction, and contains the element of communicative action, which "is oriented toward intersubjective understanding, the coordination of actions through discussion, and the socialization of members of the community." (Dryzek 1990: 3) Reflection, more precisely, reflective understanding, is fundamental to this form of rationality. It also assumes the competence and equality of all citizen actors. The goal is critical analysis of social reality in order to generate normative judgments and formulate collective action for social change.

By contrast, Habermas characterizes the purposive-rational model, which he calls instrumental rationality, as oriented toward success, which he contends is inadequate to the understanding of collective social life and the coordination of action it entails. (Eriksen & Weigård 2003: 24) The concept of communicative rationality reveals limitations in the notion of individual maximization that is the foundation of instrumental rationality. While acknowledging that instrumental thinking is necessary to certain human endeavors, Habermas holds that is not appropriate for many aspects of political life, which involve collective action. Instrumental rationality entails "the capacity to devise, select, and effect good means to clarified ends." (Dryzek 1990: 3) Objectivism is a central theme in instrumental rationality, which claims that values and morals can be chosen and assessed in reference to objective standards that are universally applicable and accessible to all individuals. (Dryzek 1990: 4) Dryzek presents a critique of instrumental rationality, citing its tendency to suppress the spontaneity and creativity of

human associations, and inhibit the development of a sense of community. (Dryzek 1990: 5)

Habermas's conceptualization of communicative power reflects Arendt's concept of power, and the distinction she made between power and coercion. (Eriksen & Weigård 2003: 173) Communicative power "is the kind of power that emerges when citizens come together in public forums and come to agreement about the rules for social coexistence and about which collective goals should be realized." (Eriksen & Weigård 2003: 173) Power, for Habermas, is generated through the communication and interaction between citizens in the public sphere and is "an expression of the cooperation of united citizens," which comes through public debate. (Eriksen & Weigård 2003: 173, 191) Habermas advocates a deliberative form of democracy, which includes a vital civil society, and he contends, that "the integrative force of solidarity..., which can no longer be drawn solely from the sources of communicative action, should develop through widely expanded and differentiated public spheres as well as through legally institutionalized procedures of democratic deliberation and decision-making." (Habermas 1996: 28)

2.2.2 Arendt, Citizenship, Power, and Political Action

Hannah Arendt presents certain challenges for feminism, particularly in her insistence on the separation of the public and private spheres. However, her politics of speech and action can well inform a feminist democratic project. I will rely on *The Human Condition* (1958) in this discussion of political action. Mary Dietz commented, "...as a text for feminism, *The Human Condition* is both noticeably flawed and powerfully illuminating." (Dietz 2002: 108) The aim here is to focus on the aspects of the work, which could be illuminating for a feminist politics. One important point, put forth by Honig, is that, "Arendt would have been quite wary of any proclamation of homogeneity in "women's experience", or in "women's ways of knowing". She would have been critical of any feminist politics that relies on a category of women that aspires to or implies a universality." (Honig 1992: 227) I agree with this anti-essentialist perception, which implies contentions within feminist theory and politics.

Despite the contentions within feminism, struggles for equality create the potential for collective political action.

Nativity is “beginning something new on our own initiative.” (Arendt 1958: 177) Every human being is capable of action, of initiating something new in the world. Arendt was “a theorist of politics that is potentially activist, certainly dynamic, an agonal and performative politics...” (Honig 1992: 215)

Political action is a collective and dynamic process equally open to all citizens by virtue of birth. Hannah Arendt placed action and its concomitant speech at the pinnacle of human capacities. “Action, the only activity that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter, corresponds to the human condition of plurality, to the fact that men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world.” (Arendt 1958: 7) Plurality unites all members of the community by our common humanity, though we are, at the same time, each an absolutely unique human being, unlike any other ever to have inhabited the earth. (Arendt 1958: 8)

Arendt asserts that human plurality is “the basic condition of both action and speech” and “has the twofold character of equality and distinction.” (Arendt 1958: 175) We are all equal in our potential to act. The example of Rosa Parks comes to mind, a poor, tired, black household worker who defied the Jim Crow laws of racial segregation by refusing to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery, Alabama bus on 5. December 1955. This simple act of defiance initiated the Montgomery bus boycott, a keystone of the American Civil Rights Movement. Even seemingly minor acts of resistance can have great force when they occur at a decisive moment. Distinction is the expression of our uniqueness as we see in Rosa Parks unexpectedly refusing compliance to an unjust law, and setting the stage for the distinct brilliance in speech, strategy, and action of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., whose leadership mobilized a massive emancipatory movement. Self-reflection and critical consciousness were the hallmark of Dr. King's non-violent resistance tactics. It is through speech and action that each individual reveals his or her true self. The public sphere, the political realm, was, for Arendt, not only the sphere of speech and action, but also an unpredictable sphere of risk and danger. Arendt proposed an “agonal and performative politics”, urging political engagement and activism. (Honig 1992: 215)

Dissent and contention characterize the public sphere. They are a potential source of political energy that can create solidarity, uniting citizens, for a time, around a common concern. In Arendt's conceptualization of a dynamic political realm, associations form and dissolve as citizens organize in collective political action around a specific issue, taking their cause to the center of the political arena, disbanding to return to the margins to regroup in new constellations of political interest and action. Power is a potential force "generated when people gather together and 'act in concert', which disappears the moment they depart." (Arendt 1958: 244) Power was, in Arendt's thinking a potential force that was never actualized. Arendt said, "The boundlessness of action is only the other side of its tremendous capacity for establishing relationships." (Arendt 1958: 191) She spoke of the "web of human relationships" that is both a source of collective solidarity and conflict. (Arendt 1958: 183-84)

This web of human relationships is also the foundation of the great unpredictability of the political realm. "It is because of this already existing web of human relationships, with its innumerable, conflicting wills and intentions, that action almost never achieves its purpose..." (Arendt 1958: 184) The end of any action we as citizens initiate is bound to be very different from its original intention just by the sheer complexity and entanglement of political actors pursuing interests at crossed purposes. And, because we initiate action into an unknown future, we can never be sure of its consequences. "Since the end of human action, as distinct from the end products of fabrication, can never be reliably predicted, the means used to achieve political goals are more often than not of greater relevance to the future world than the intended goals." (Arendt 1970: 4) The process of democratic collective action gains importance in this perspective.

Arendt cited two remedies for what she termed as the irreversibility and unpredictability of political action. The faculty of forgiving is "the possible redemption for the predicament of irreversibility....of being unable to undo what one has done though one did not, and could not, have known what he was doing..." (Arendt 1958: 237) Without being able to forgive and to start anew, political life would stagnate in the mire of past deeds. To be free to initiate action, to start something new, we must be able to make amends for

the unpredictable and unintended consequences of our actions. This potential for renewal and change is essential to the functioning of a democratic community.

Since we act into an unpredictable future, we need some form of continuity, some way of anchoring our political and social life to a degree of certainty. Arendt identified “the faculty to make and keep promises” as “the remedy for unpredictability.” (1958: 237) We establish institutions, laws, contracts, and structures that serve as a sound foundation for our collective social and political life. For Arendt, plurality is the key element in human relations. We act, make promises, and forgive together, in the presence of others. “Only through this constant mutual release from what they do can men remain free agents, only by constant willingness to change their minds and start again can they be trusted with so great a power as that to begin something new.” (Arendt 1958: 240)

Arendt’s portrayal of the political sphere assumes a participatory and egalitarian democracy. The public realm is the dynamic space of collective political activity. Arendt resisted the politicization of issues related to economy, social justice, religion, and gender. These issues were relegated, by Arendt, to the private sphere. One’s ethnic heritage or sex represented identities not open to change or debate, and were, therefore, a private matter. Identity politics, focusing on a homogenizing unity and sacrificing recognition of the multiplicity of human identities is a potential source of political stagnation. (Honig 1996: 239) However, denying a place for issues of social and economic justice in the public sphere disempowers marginalized peoples. Members of marginalized groups must be able to gather together for political action on questions of social economy and justice, while resisting the tendencies toward ethnocentric or parochial attitudes that exclude other identities.

An inclusive, pluralistic democracy must inculcate in its citizens the virtue of respect, which Arendt defined as “a kind of ‘friendship’ without intimacy, without closeness; it is a regard for the person from the distance which the space of the world puts between us, and this regard is independent of qualities which we may admire or achievements which we may esteem.” (Arendt 1958: 243) This respect is a recognition of difference and equality. It

is a component of democratic restraint necessary for equal participation in the decision-making processes of a pluralistic and just democracy.

2.2.3 Participatory Democracy

Contemporary feminist conceptualizations of democracy privilege a participatory design of citizenship. The boundaries of liberal democracy are extended to include the active participation of greater numbers of citizens in a broader range of political activities. Democracy is conceived of as a discursive process through which citizens engage in collective and emancipatory political action aimed at achieving political and social justice. Participation in democratic practices, whether in the workplace, or in political organizations, is perceived as a socializing experience that enhances and cultivates the skills and attitudes requisite for active democratic citizenship. In addition, feminist democracy has reconstructed the relationship between the public and the private spheres,

Political theorist Carole Pateman formulated a theory of participatory democracy in 1970 in *Democracy and Participation*. She asserted that the issue of democratic participation was brought into public discourse, and the popular consciousness, during the late 1960s in the United States when university students began to demand a voice in decision making within the university. (1970: 1) Anti-poverty programs, such as the Community Action Program, required “maximum feasible participation of those concerned,” with client representatives in decision-making bodies. (Pateman 1970: 1) Pateman began her discussion of democracy with a critical analysis of the most prominent theories of democracy of the time, particularly those of Schumpeter, Dahl, Berelson and Sartori, which she claimed minimized citizen involvement in political processes in the interest of political stability. (Pateman 1970: 3-9)

Pateman used the works of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill to develop an argument in favor of greater citizen participation, citing the workplace, and local government as the primary training ground for democratic citizenship. Local-level democracy was cited as decisive in preparing citizens to participate in the higher levels of political life, particularly at the level of centralized government. (Pateman 1970: 30-31) The didactic

function of participation in democratic processes and its civilizing effect on human beings, were the central elements in Pateman's case for participatory democracy. Rousseau argued in the *Social Contract* that participation had a significant psychological impact on each individual, which fostered attitudes requisite for democracy. (Pateman 1970: 26) A certain economic equality was a condition for this participation of independent, yet interdependent citizens. "He advocated a society of economic equality and economic independence." (Pateman 1970: 22) Rousseau wrote about the development of the collective will, whereby the self-interest of each individual participant was influenced and mitigated through the democratic process of common decision- and law making toward a more collective resolution of political issues. Political socialization through participation was also a theme of John Stuart Mill's work on democracy. J.S. Mill "sees government and political institutions first and foremost as educative in the broadest sense of the word." (Pateman 1970: 29) Mill shared Rousseau's insight about public deliberation's mitigating effect on self-interest, encouraging more public-spirited collective decisions.

In *The Disorder of Women* (1989), Pateman extended her discussion of democratic theory to include a feminist perspective. In applying a feminist analysis to her earlier work on participatory democracy, Pateman cited limitations, as far as women are concerned, in both the work of Rousseau and J.S. Mill. While Mill problematized the domination of women by men, supporting the campaign for women's suffrage, Pateman pointed out "his consistent failure to apply his principles to domestic life." (Pateman 1989: 215) Pateman went on to challenge the public/private dichotomy, and asserted that, "the liberal-patriarchal separation of the public and private spheres has become a political problem." (Pateman 1989: 129) Feminist theorists have critiqued the public/private oppositional from many angles. (Pateman 1989; Fraser 1989) Of greatest importance to this discussion of feminist utopianism and the Women's Shelter Movement, are the continued subordination of women in the family despite political equality, women's weaker relationship to the labor market, and the related patriarchal character of social welfare policy. While according to Birte Siim, "Participation has made a difference in the sense that it has increased women's autonomy and their ability to influence

institutions,” in Scandinavia, she recognizes also that, “Women’s full citizenship remains an ideal that requires a ‘double democratization’ aimed at restructuring the political sphere, labor market and family.” (Siim 1994: 288) The vision of women’s achieving full equality, and citizenship, is central to the political work of the Women’s Shelter Movement, at the local, national and international levels. Women’s empowerment and participation in the public sphere are important to this process.

2.2.4 Discursive Democracy

The purpose of discursive democracy is to reach intersubjective understanding and move toward consensus through discussion. The discursive process itself is valued for its contribution to building a sense of community, and it can be used effectively in conflict resolution as well as decision making. Discursive democracy is an inclusive democracy of contentious engagement on the part of competent citizen actors who, in communicating across difference without eradicating difference, take collective political action aimed at effecting political and social justice. (Dryzek 2000: 3) Democracy in this context “is not a static concept, whose essence could ever be decided once and for all. Rather it is a dynamic and open-ended project.” (Dryzek 2000: 27) John Dryzek, a proponent of the discursive vein within the revival of deliberative democracy, suggests that discursive democracy can function transnationally and encourage the development of democratic dialogue even outside the structures of constitutional democracy. (Dryzek 2000:115)

The assumption that public discourse, particularly communication and active citizen engagement in the public sphere, has a profound influence on political life and the actions of the state, lies at the foundation of discursive democratic theory. Dryzek proposes a broad participatory democratic process where citizens take an active role in deliberations on issues that influence their lives. Democratic legitimacy in this context entails “the ability or opportunity to participate in effective deliberation on the part of those subject to collective decisions.” (Dryzek 2000: 1) The possibility of participation contributes to the understanding of democracy as a substantive

social process, rather than simply a symbolic aggregation of interests. (Dryzek 2000: 1) The concept of discursive democracy assumes contentious interactions in the public sphere, where competent citizens engage in deliberations aimed at achieving collective decisions. Reflection is a key element of the deliberative process. Participants can alter their preferences in the course of the discursive process as they listen to, reflect upon, and evaluate the arguments of the other actors. Dryzek contends that “The only condition for authentic deliberation is the requirement that communication induce reflection upon preferences in a non-coercive fashion.” (Dryzek 2000: 2) Democracy’s authenticity is grounded on the extent to which “reflective preferences influence collective outcomes.” (Dryzek 2000: 1) It is this process of communicative interaction, engaged in by competent citizens across differences, and aimed at producing collective outcomes justifiable to those involved in the process that characterizes discursive democracy. Democracy in this sense, is an inclusive, open forum where even marginalized groups can influence the agendas of public discourse and the political imperatives of the state.

Dryzek’s proposal for discursive democracy is grounded in critical theory. “Critical theory is concerned with charting the progressive emancipation of individuals and society from oppressive forces.” (Dryzek 2000: 20) Critical theory is a normative approach concerned with identifying and opposing the structures of domination and inequality that exist within society. Recognition and an assessment of the structures of inequality are, in this theoretical framework, essential to the conceptualization of justice. Liberal constitutionalism is too limited, from Dryzek’s perspective, and, therefore, must be extended to provide the foundation for authentic democratic political engagement. While certain provisions of the American Constitution, particularly the rights of free speech and association assured by the Bill of Rights, are fundamentally necessary to discursive democracy, liberal constitutionalism does not allow for the full exercise of the democratic franchise by all citizens. Dryzek aims to extend democracy from the often elite and exclusive practices of public reason and debate resulting from a liberal interpretation of citizenship, and to open the forum of public discourse to a broader range of communication styles and participation, even “including

uruly and contentious communication from the margins.” (Dryzek 2000: vi)
Discursive democracy advocates a dynamic process of intersubjective communication aimed at stimulating reflection, and allowing for the participants to change their preferences underway.

Preferences are not static, essentially self-interest based goals in discursive democratic thinking as they are in some other conceptualizations of democracy. Dryzek challenges the skepticism to deliberative forms of democracy, which rational choice theory and social choice theory assert, primarily because this theoretical tradition conceives of preferences as limited, fixed and prescribed choices expressed almost exclusively through voting. In discursive democracy, by contrast, choices evolve through a dynamic process of intersubjective communication and reflection, where contention is acceptable as arguments are presented and challenged. Citizen participation in the formulation of political choices is fundamental to the discursive approach. This participation often originates in the margins of civil society outside the state. Social choice theory privileges a “minimal democracy”, questioning the capacity, or the competence, of the average citizen to assess arguments and to participate to such an extent as discursive democracy proposes. (Dryzek 2000: 36) As Dryzek points out, “one of social choice theory’s main results is that all aggregation mechanisms are vulnerable to strategic manipulation.” (Dryzek 2000: 34) Thus, social choice theory is concerned with the potential for manipulation and distortion, and what is perceived to be an element of arbitrariness in deliberative processes. Dryzek counters, however, that, “the critical theory of communication that is the source of the theory of deliberative democracy is preoccupied with such agents of distortion and how to counter them.” (Dryzek 2000: 38) He points out repeatedly that there are “endogenous mechanisms” within the deliberative process that operate to challenge manipulation and distortion, and to limit “the range of preferences and options.” (Dryzek 2000: 46, 169) The process of collective communication allows the participants to evaluate arguments and assess the truth of claims. Communicative interaction among many participants has the effect of exposing lies, distortions, and attempts at manipulation, and focuses the attention on public interest, as opposed to narrow self-interest. “Individuals find that it is much more persuasive to couch

arguments in terms of the public interest rather than the self-interest that may truly motivate them, and they are eventually obliged to follow the public-spirited course of action as a result (or lose face).” (Dryzek 2000: 47)

Dryzek also challenges rational choice theory in its assumption that political participation is strategic, aimed at maximizing the achievement of individual self-interest, rather than collective, and that it is instrumental, focused on utility assessment and on achieving certain political or material ends, rather than on aiming toward collective decisions that emanate from the process of communication. Again, voting as the main source of citizen participation and expression of preference is, in light of discursive democratic theory, inadequate to authentic democracy. Dryzek points out that, according to rational choice theory, “an actor’s preferences, utility function, or goals are not changed in the course of social or political interaction, which otherwise could not be modelled in purely strategic terms.” (Dryzek 2000: 32) In perceiving democracy as a dynamic, communicative process, Dryzek calls for an alternative to these static models of democracy. He proposes an extension of the communicative rationality concept attributed to Habermas’s critical theory approach to political analysis.

Communicative rationality “is rooted in the interaction of social life.” (Dryzek 1990: 14) This aspect of collective reality entails intersubjective communication that is free from manipulation, deception, and coercion, engaged by competent political actors who are amenable to changing their preferences underway, and is aimed at reaching collective decisions. “Communicative rationality is a property of intersubjective discourse, not individual maximization, and it can pertain to the generation of normative judgments and action principles rather than just to the selection of means to ends.” (Dryzek 1990: 3) The process of this interaction is as important as the resulting collective decisions and political action. Discourse, in theory influenced by Habermas and in this context, “is pure freedom in the ability to raise and challenge arguments.” (Dryzek 1990: vi) This process of communication is, at the same time instructive; participants become politicized, gaining heightened political insight as a result of their participation. In addition, discursive democracy, grounded in communicative rationality, is “reflexive in its questioning orientation to established tradition”. (Dryzek 2000:

3) Questioning the structures of inequality and domination compels participants to communicative action directed toward political and social change. “Communicative action is oriented toward intersubjective understanding, the coordination of actions through discussion, and the socialization of members of the community.” (Dryzek 1990: 14)

Intersubjective communication, with the communicative rationality and resulting communicative action it assumes, is the cornerstone of the critical theory emanating from Habermas’s interpretation of the Frankfurt School tradition. What is the nature, and what are the boundaries of communication in this context? Dryzek urges an inclusive, authentically critical oppositional democracy and criticizes what he considers to be critical theory’s giving too much ground to liberal constitutionalism. (Dryzek 2000: 26-27) He argues that discursive democracy must be open to a broader range of communications than Habermas allows. Habermas excludes rhetoric from communicative interactions because, in its appeal to the emotions, it can be deceptive. (Dryzek 2000: 52-53) Dryzek argues that rhetoric is an essential tool in communicating public opinion to the state. He cites the example of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s brilliant use of rhetoric, grounded in the American Constitution and the Bill of Rights, as an effective and necessary means of bringing issues of inequality and injustice into the public discourse and onto public policy agendas. (Dryzek 1990: 51)

Communication in the process of discursive democracy must include not only argumentation based on pure reason, but also communication across social and cultural differences, such as storytelling, testimony, humor, gossip, and even communication with non-human nature. (Dryzek 2000: 1) Dryzek ties this last form of communication to an ecological discursive democracy, where green politics challenge the relationship between liberal constitutionalism and the market, and “citizens demand an active voice in basic decisions about economic and technological development.” (Dryzek 2000: 165) While discursive democracy advocates the admission of many forms of communication traditionally excluded from deliberation, Dryzek does provide criteria for boundaries: “...all forms of communication should be admitted only if they are (a) noncoercive, (b) capable of connecting the particular to the general.” As for rhetoric, Dryzek holds that “ emotions must in the end be

capable of rational justification.” (Dryzek 2000: 53-54, 167) Various kinds of communication can be held to critical standards, as supplements to rational arguments. While certain kinds of communication, like rhetoric and storytelling, can be oppressive, or can manipulate through appeals to the emotions, I agree with Dryzek that a broader range of communications must be allowed, and encouraged in deliberation. With regard to oppressive discourses, we can “rely on endogenous mechanisms to change views and beliefs in a benign direction.” (Dryzek 2000: 169) Discursive democracy must accommodate different styles of communication, particularly if it is to be inclusive of individuals and groups whose expressive style does not fit traditional models. After all, “discursive democracy is not an exclusive gentleman’s club.” (Dryzek 2000: 169) In democratic discourse, according to radical democratic theorist C. Douglas Lummis, “the project of thought itself must be carried forward at the level of common sense, in the language of common sense; democratic common sense is something created through moral discourse, choice and action.” (1996: 21)

Democratization of the types of communication admitted in public discourse is only one aspect of discursive democracy’s call for the extension of authentic, substantive democracy. Dryzek identifies three dimensions along which the process of democratization could occur: “The first is franchise, expansion of the number of people capable of participating effectively in collective decision. The second is scope, bringing more issues and areas of life potentially under democratic control (though a polity may deliberately decide not to regulate particular issues). The third is the authenticity of the control ... to be real rather than symbolic, involving the effective participation of autonomous and competent actors.” (Dryzek 2000: 29) Democratization requires a vibrant civil society, where groups of citizens can organize collective action and challenge state imperatives. Dryzek disagrees with liberal democrats who “might argue that there is plenty of scope for increased democratic authenticity within the confines of the liberal state...” (Dryzek 2000: 29) Activism in the public sphere, outside of state institutions and the constraints they are subject to, is an essential component of authentic democracy and the process of democratization. “An examination of the history of democratization indicates that pressures for greater democracy almost always emanate from insurgency in oppositional civil society, rarely or

never from the state itself.” (Dryzek 2000: 87) A politicized civil society is a contentious space of competing discourses. In this sense it offers great potential for democratization.

Dryzek privileges an “insurgent democracy” where oppositional groups organize around specific issues in a lively and contentious civil society. He sees “oppositional civil society and public spheres as sources of democratic critique and renewal.” (Dryzek 2000: 4) Oppositional groups identify and challenge the oppressive discourses within society, influencing how social problems and political issues are defined and social reality (re)constructed. Though these groups operate outside the state, they can have a profound effect on public opinion, which can, in turn, influence public policy. Discursive democracy “emphasizes the construction of public opinion through the contestation of discourses and its transmission to the state via communicative means, including rhetoric.” (Dryzek 2000: 4) The potential power of speech in a democratic context is central to public discourse. Communication, in its various forms, emanating from the relatively unconstrained public sphere, exerts a “communicative power” over the state. (Dryzek 2000: 101) In this way, marginalized groups can appeal to public opinion and reach policy makers.

Opposition groups can also serve a problem-solving function, offering potential solutions to social problems. Dryzek cites Janicke’s (1996) point that groups in civil society provide practical services, compensating for state or economic failure. (Dryzek 2000: 102) An example is the women’s shelter movement, which began in Britain in the 1970s, first, by providing shelter for battered women. Later, through political activism, the movement influenced public discourse on the issue of men’s violence against women specifically, and on equality issues generally. (Dobash and Dobash 1992, 12; Johnsen 1989: 89, 94) The shelters provided a practical critique of the state’s failure to effect social equality and protect the rights of women. (Johnsen 1989: 89) The women’s shelter movement has been a significant element in the women’s movement on a global basis. While there remains a great deal of resistance to women’s equality, gains in recognition of women’s reality and changes in public discourse and social policy have been significant and due largely to feminist activism in the public sphere. “Civil society can constitute a

site for democratization because it can be a place where people choose to live their public lives and solve their joint problems.” (Dryzek 2000: 103) The Women’s Shelter Movement in Norway will be explored in relation to this question at length later in the paper.

Civil society is also a site of democratization because the structure and practices within groups organized around specific social issues are often egalitarian and authentically discursive. (Dryzek 2000: 100) Democratic values are preserved as individuals participate directly in decision-making processes within the organization. While organizations may aim for a flat structure, where all members of the group have an equal role in the discursive politics of the group, Dryzek points out that, even organizations with a hierarchical structure, such as Green Peace, can retain a strongly democratic function and promote democratic values through their actions. (Dryzek 2000: 100) As oppositional groups gain legitimacy, they may have to develop a more hierarchical structure in order to maintain legitimacy and a relationship with the state. (Dryzek 2000: 97) In the Women’s Shelter Movement, for example, despite the retention of internal autonomy, many shelters felt compelled to develop a more hierarchical structure for legitimacy in relation to public funding institutions, and for efficiency in their delivery of services to users. (Andersen 1997: 15) Informants at the shelters spoke of this as a concern, particularly in the establishment phase. This issue will be more fully developed later in the discussion of the Women’s Shelter Movement in Norway. Change toward a more hierarchical structure may not necessarily result in a loss for authentic democracy, however, seeking legitimacy through inclusion in the state may represent a democratic loss.

Opposition groups often have greater influence on public discourse and, thus public policy, if they remain outside the state. Dryzek presents a discussion of inclusion, citing Selznik’s (1984: 13) definition of co-option, “the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structures of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence, though in co-option’s normal perjorative sense such absorption comes without any real power-sharing.” (Dryzek 2000: 88) Inclusion in the state, in this sense, means a democratic loss and disempowerment, not only for the group or organization included, but also for democracy in general,

since a significant voice of opposition has been silenced in essence. For inclusion to be benign, in Dryzek's analysis, two criteria must be met: "a group's defining concern must be capable of assimilation to an established or emerging state imperative" and "civil society's discursive capacities must not be unduly depleted by the group's entry into the state." (Dryzek 2000: 83) For if the aim is democratization and the extension of the democratic franchise, then an opposition group's being co-opted into the state represents a set-back for democracy. Authentic democracy entails contentions. When contentious voices from the margins of the public sphere are absorbed into the state, without being directly linked to state imperatives in the form of public policy changes that the opposition group was originally promoting, the inclusion is merely symbolic. This symbolic inclusion, then, means a true loss to the public sphere. Dryzek points out how "leaders of environmental interest groups who secured not only access but also employment at high levels in the Clinton administration, but found themselves unable to achieve much in the way of policy substance." (Dryzek 2000: 97) Inclusion in this manner diminishes the strength of democratic forces in civil society.

Dryzek points out that passively exclusive states, as in corporatist states, "do not attack or undermine the conditions for public association in civil society; they simply ignore it by offering few channels of access to the state." (Dryzek 2000: 106) Thus, activity in oppositional civil society is passively encouraged, and opportunities for further democratization prevail. This oppositional interaction between civil society and the state is fundamental to authentic democracy.

2.2.5 Communicative Democracy

Iris Marion Young gives the state a central role in promoting democratization. She would assign the state the responsibility to "promote the self-organization of members of oppressed groups.... provide greater resources to existing organizations representing oppressed and disadvantaged groups." (Young 1992: 532)

Iris Marion Young proposes communicative democracy as an extension of the deliberative form of democracy. Young's concern, like Dryzek's is that

a broader range of communicative styles and expressions must be allowed into public discourse. Discourse in Young's design for communicative democracy opens public fora for the participation of a broader range of engaged citizens. Communicative democracy is grounded in critical theory and proposes a model of discourse that takes the social differences among citizen actors into consideration. Young holds that "Cultural and social positions do not disappear even when we eliminate the influence of economic and political power." (Young 1996: 122) Further, traditional modes of deliberation close out social groups whose language or style of expression does not fit the conventional (white, male) rational model. Young insists that each participant in a political discourse must have "equal opportunity to make proposals and criticize, and their speaking situation must be free from domination." (Young 1996: 122) Therefore, a broader scope of communicative styles and expressions must be respected in political discourse. Young says that culture, with its power differences, enters the practice of speech itself. Deliberation in its conventional form is competitive and has been based on conceptions of reason and speech that are rooted in elitist institutions traditionally privileging white male values and speaking styles. (Young 1996: 123) The goal of communicative democracy, by contrast, is to move toward consensus through understanding. Even when a vote is necessary to resolve disagreement, the "result is a collective judgment." (Young 1996: 122)

2.2.6 A Radical Democratic Project

Radical democracy exhibits elements of contemporary feminist utopian thought in its critique of centralized power, its transformative character focused on emancipatory struggles, and its vision of new forms of citizenship within a discursive, pluralistic democratic design. (Lummis 1996; Mouffe 1992a, 1992b, 2000) Lummis claims that, "The spirit of democracy appears now and then in history, at those moments when people fight for it." (1996:17) This theme of democratic political struggle is central to contemporary feminist utopianism, and is particularly evident in Piercy's utopian narrative. Even in utopian Mattapoisett of 2137, the fight for equality and liberty for all is a never-

ending battle against forces of potential oppression. I will examine now some of the key elements in Mouffe and Lummis's discussions of radical democracy, which will be useful tools in analyzing the utopian community of Mattapoissett in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), and the Women's Shelter Movement in Norway.

Lummis valorizes civil society as the sphere that is open to the autonomous organization of citizens for collective action and association, be it political, cultural or economic. Like Dryzek, he believes civil society is an essential aspect of democracy, primarily because it creates a space for public discourse and the development of active citizenship. Power, as perceived in Lummis's radical democracy, resembles an Arendtian conceptualization of power as a potential force generated when people come together in the public sphere. (Arendt 1958: 200) He claims that civil society "empowers itself," and that power "is generated by a people in a democratic state of mind, and by the actions they take in accordance with that state of mind." (Lummis 1996: 31, 35)

Radical democracy, for Lummis is "grounded in the common sense of daily life." (Lummis 1996: 39) He situates democratic activity in the language and action of ordinary citizens, also claiming that, "the only truly effective education system for democracy is democracy – democratic action itself." (Lummis 1996: 37) Another central element of radical democracy is choice by lot. "Choice by lot would not have the power, which the election ritual does, of transforming an ordinary person into a superhuman," is how Lummis assesses this aspect of radical democratic practice. (Lummis 1996: 38) While always an issue in human relations, power is more diffuse in radical democratic visions, disseminated among an active citizenry, who are empowered through the very process of political participation.

Power enters into every aspect of human relations, and cannot be eliminated from human interactions, particularly those of political life in a pluralistic society. Chantal Mouffe's design for a radical democratic project, thus, entails a concern for "how to constitute forms of power that are compatible with democratic values." (1996: 247) This construction of power would challenge the relations of subordination in a society, which have a tendency to exclude individuals or groups from full participation in public life,

and which limit autonomous self-realization in the private sphere. She proposes an agonistic design of democracy, an “agonistic pluralism”, where active citizenship is encouraged and fostered, and citizens are empowered through participation in a democratic community. (Mouffe 2000: 98, 101) Some feminists, however, take issue with the conceptualization of democracy as an agonistic process. Iris M. Young, for instance, contends that agonistic politics favors those who like contests, or are more articulate, or more skilled at making arguments in a public forum. (1996: 122-23) I, nonetheless, agree with Mouffe that participatory democracy in a pluralistic society must entail agonistic struggles, and that through the process of collective action, individuals can develop competence to collectively, and effectively, articulate their demands. While opening the sphere of politics to a broader range of citizens, and making access and participation less formal and elitist, would represent positive democratic developments, agonistic struggles are necessary to challenge the hegemonic discourses and structures within a society at a particular historical moment.

Democratic institutions and practices grounded in the rights of liberal democracy, and the ideals of civic engagement, combined with “common recognition of a set of ethico-political values” establish the foundation of a radical democratic community. (Mouffe 1992a: 13-14, 235) Radical democracy envisages strong citizen engagement in an inclusive design for democracy, which by necessity of pluralism would be replete with contentions, contestations and struggles. “Pluralism implies the permanence of conflict and antagonism.” (Mouffe 1996: 254) Each citizen represents a complex multiplicity of identities, and changing positions of power and interest.

While consensus is an aim of decision-making processes in a democracy, antagonisms are inevitable. “To negate the ineradicable character of antagonisms and aim at universal rational consensus, this is the real threat to democracy. Consensus disguises the necessary frontiers and forms of exclusion behind its pretense of ‘neutrality’.” (Mouffe 1996: 248) An agonistic politics, with “recognition of legitimate opposition” allows these frontiers to be challenged, contested, and changed. (Mouffe 2000: 31) There is no neutral ground, but there are discursive processes through which struggles can be legitimized, oppositional political actors can be heard, and

antagonisms can be channeled into political action. Mouffe makes an important point, “Antagonism is struggle between enemies, while agonism is struggle between adversaries.” (2000: 31, 102-103) Adversarial relations imply not only respect and recognition despite differences, but also the possibility for communicative continuity, for politics itself.

While the discursive process, central to radical democracy, can move a pluralistic collective of citizens toward consensus, political processes must sometimes end in a vote, which creates losers. Symbolically mitigating such losses could be an effective strategy for minimizing antagonisms, as long as the losing party is not coopted or “bought off”. The citizens of Mattapoisett in Piercy’s utopian narrative argue (a lot) toward consensus, but sometimes they have to resort to a vote. In these deliberative struggles, which end in voting, the winners must provide food, entertainment, and gifts for the losers to ritualistically placate potential residual antagonisms.

Democracy contains the element of undecidability. A radical democratic project rejects the possibility of a rational, universal conception of citizenship, or formulation of justice in a democratic society. (Mouffe 2000: 32; 1992a: 237) It also challenges the oppositional distinction between the public and the private spheres. “The distinction public/private, central as it was for the assertion of individual liberty, also led to identifying the private with the domestic and played an important role in the subordination of women,” and the modern construction of citizenship was formulated on women’s exclusion from the public sphere. (Mouffe 1992a: 237) Radical democracy calls for a reformulation of the public/private distinction and citizenship, not, however, by *engendering* women’s citizenship with an essentialistic maternalism. Rather, Mouffe proposes a new construction “of the conception of citizenship where sexual difference should become effectively non-pertinent. This...requires a conception of the social agent..., as the articulation of an ensemble of subject positions, corresponding to the multiplicity of social relations in which it is inscribed.” (1992b: 376) Radical democracy is conceptualized as an open-ended process, in which new constructions of citizenship and discursive political action extend the democratic franchise.

3.

A CONTEMPORARY FEMINIST UTOPIA

3.1 MARGE PIERCY'S *WOMAN ON THE EDGE OF TIME*

Marge Piercy uses thirty years of war, environmental catastrophe and a revolution to deconstruct America of the 1970s, and project us into the utopian society of Mattapoissett in a possible future world of the year 2137. Living in the forced austerity resulting from the environmental degradation and excessive consumption of the pre-war era, Mattapoissett and the rest of this future world strive to build a more just society. Connie Ramos, and her life of austerity as a poor Chicano woman caught up in the dystopia of the 1970s mental health system of America, provide contrast and open a dialogue between these two realities. Experiencing the utopian society of Mattapoissett has a profound politicizing effect on Connie. The personal empowerment and autonomy that characterize life and citizenship in Mattapoissett eventually inspire Connie into subversive action.

Contemporary feminist utopianism functions as transformative and subversive in its anticipation of radical political and social change. (Sargisson 1996: 25) Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* is prominent among the feminist political utopias that have made a significant contribution to contemporary political discourse. (Moylan 1986)

3.2 The Atomic Bomb Question Lands Close to Home: Discursive Democracy in Utopian Mattapoissett

Political life in utopian Mattapoissett is informal and integrated into the daily activities of the community. Power is decentralized in a grassroots democracy that assumes the active participation of all members of the community. When Connie Ramos, visitor from the 1970s, comments that the citizens of Mattapoissett spend a great deal of time at meetings, Luciente, her guide in utopia, replies, "How can people control their lives without spending a lot of time in meetings?" (Piercy 1976: 155) While participation in the meetings, as in all other aspects of community life, is voluntary, the citizens of

Mattapoissett would consider it an aberration if someone were not actively engaged in the political and work life of the community. Could this strong sense of social obligation inhibit diversity, pressing deadening social conformity on the citizens of Mattapoissett? Political action in a democracy, perceived as an act of human expression and freedom, certainly challenges this question. Participation in a discursive democracy counters conformity, if the discursive process is characterized by relative equality and the recognition of democratic values.

Town meetings represent an open forum for participation in all decisions that affect the township. Luciente comments, "The councils. The town meetings. That's how general questions of direction of science get decided." (Piercy 1976: 277) Small projects are discussed and determined locally by those affected. Major projects entail deliberations and decisions at the higher regional level. Discussions of all projects include an ecological aspect, an assessment of resource and labor allocations, along with an evaluation of environmental and social consequences of collective decisions. The atomic bomb question lands close to home.

The planning council for the township meets at the old Grange Hall to discuss and make decisions on resource allocation and the environmental impact of planned development at the local level. The twenty-five or thirty council members represent a broad age spectrum, and are chosen by lot for one-year terms: "threemonth with the rep before you and three with the person replacing you and six alone." (Piercy 1976: 150) Speeches are limited to five minutes, and the reps "spoke in ordinary voices and did not seem to be speechifying. Behind some seated at the table sat others listening closely and at times putting in their comments and questions." (Piercy 1976: 150) Consistent with discursive democratic designs for participation, speech in the planning council at Mattapoissett is not formalized and elitist, but informal and open. Everyone has an equal opportunity to participate in making, and criticizing proposals. The leadership of the meetings is rotated among the members of the council. This characteristic of feminist, non-hierarchical democracy is particularly valued for its socializing effect. The Earth Advocate and the Animal Advocate facilitate communication with non-human nature, reminding us of Dryzek's design for a green discursive democracy that allows

extended forms of communication in deliberative bodies. In Mattapoisett, these advocates who speak “for the rights of the total environment”, are chosen annually by lot from among those who have dreamed that they are the new holders of these positions. (Piercy 1976: 151) The planning council reviews the needs of each village in the township, and attempts to “divide scarce resources justly.”, in consideration of the ecological whole. (Piercy 1976: 152) Piercy’s utopia is ecological in its concern for maintaining an informed and non-destructive relationship between humans and the surrounding natural world.

Regional issues are resolved at the next level, in regional councils. “Reps chosen by lot from township level go to the regional to discuss gross decisions. The needs go up and the possibilities come down. If people are chilled by a decision, they go and argue. Or, they barter directly with places needing the same resources, and compromise.” (Piercy 1976: 152) Issues of greater importance, for example, “...political decisions – like whether to raise or lower population - ...” begin with local deliberations, where a representative is chosen to speak for the town meeting at the higher level. Through a “holi simulcast”, the citizens of each local community are witness to discussions at the higher level. Local town meetings reconvene to discuss the issue again, and the reps carry the “final word” to another simulcast deliberation. Finally, everyone votes. (Piercy 1976: 154-155)

Consensus, a practical necessity in political decision-making, comes through arguing. Luciente tells Connie, “We argue till we come close to agree. We just continue.” (Piercy 1976: 153) The discursive process aims at reaching consensus. But, as Iris M. Young points out, even having to resort to a vote when discussion fails to resolve disagreement, the “result is a collective judgment (rather than the aggregate of private preferences).” (Young 1996: 122) In Mattapoisett, “the winners have to feed the losers and give presents.” when a political issues has challenged consensus. (Piercy 1976: 153) For Luciente reminds us, “There is no final authority.” (Piercy 1976: 153) The discursive process involving autonomous, competent citizens is a dynamic and open-ended project that characterizes democracy in Mattapoisett. A non-static, evolving authority obtains political legitimacy through the discursive process.

Decisions at the grand council level appear to be more stable over time, ensuring an ideological and political continuity. “At grandcil – grand council – decisions were made forty years back to breed a high proportion of darker-skinned people and to mix the genes well through the population... But, we broke the bond between genes and culture, broke it, forever. We want there to be no chance of racism again...We want diversity, for strangeness breeds richness.” (Piercy 1976: 103-104) The grand council is the source of the most significant historical decisions of “breaking all the old hierarchies,” particularly in the decision to use technology to break the chains of “the power to give birth,” making mothering a choice not linked to biology. “So we all became mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding.” (Piercy 1976: 105) Decisions made at the grand council level have, thus, effected a paradigm shift in the understanding of family and the socialization process. But, are these norms of social organization too restrictive? Luciente points out that the citizens of Mattapoissett use “we”...about things that happened before we were born, cause we identify with those decisions.” (Piercy 1976: 104) Political socialization in Mattapoissett seems to have effected a legitimacy for active citizen engagement in a discursive design of democracy, where values pluralism and equality are fundamental. Within this framework of communicative consensus, contentious deliberations among competent citizens characterize democracy as an open-ended, unfinished project.

We are not given the opportunity of learning how Parra, the mediator/“judge”, Luciente, or the others of Mattapoissett would judge Connie’s act of poisoning the doctors who dehumanize, drug and imprison her. Earlier in the book, Luciente appeals to Connie to become an activist in her time to assure the future possibility of Mattapoissett. In Mattapoissett, a perpetrator of violence is simply executed after a second offense. Certainly, in Connie’s eyes, the doctors she poisons have more than filled their quota of violent crimes. Is Connie’s action merely an act of revenge by a violent schizophrenic madwoman, or an act of political vision by a self-sacrificing liberator? The disempowerment experienced by the patients in the mental hospital is isolating, and precludes collective action, so Connie acts alone. Is her action political, or mere violence?

Marge Piercy creates in Mattapoisett a just and good society, not static, but ever struggling to provide a viable social framework to ensure collective survival and individual self-realization. Political life is integrated into daily living. Public decision-making takes the form of a discursive democracy privileging the active participation of competent citizens. The social environment of Mattapoisett seems to cultivate citizen competence; the citizens exhibit a sense of political efficacy and confidence to engage in decisions of all matter of concern to the community, including the direction of science and technology. Mattapoisett presents an emancipatory and potentially subversive vision of politics as a collective dialogue focused on social justice, universal political engagement, environmental consciousness, and personal autonomy.

TOWARD EUTOPIA: THE WOMEN'S SHELTER MOVEMENT

The Women's Shelter Movement – Krisesenterbevegelsen in Norway, with the eventual establishment of the the Secretariat of the Women's Shelter Movement (Krisesentersekretariatet, hereafter, the Secretariat), and three of its affiliated crisis centers, will be examined in this chapter as an empirical representation of a feminist eutopia, a good place for women. I will present the results of interviews and observations, concerned primarily with questions about participatory democracy, decision making, political activism, and the public information aspects of the work of the Women's Shelter Movement. I will begin with a brief history of the movement and an exposition of its platform and ideology, before discussing the experiments in feminist democracy that the crisis centers put into practice. I will examine to what extent, and how, the Secretariat, in cooperation with its affiliate members, is an important political actor, often in the role of a relentless opposition, active within a civil society, which is essential to a vital democracy, and that the Women's Shelter Movement has effected significant advances toward the realization of gender equality in Norwegian society. Inherent in this discussion is the development of the concept of men's violence against women in the public discourse, from a private individual family matter, to a social problem of significant proportions.

The utopian vision of a discursive democratic community struggling toward social justice and gender equality, as exemplified in Piercy's Mattapoissett in *Woman on the Edge of Time*, finds expression also in the visions and founding ideology of the Women's Shelter Movement. Informants at all three of the crisis centers told of the early days when they had the vision of wiping out men's violence against women. They believed in that vision, imagining the possibility that they, and their work at the crisis centers, would soon become superfluous. The struggle of the Women's Shelter Movement for social and political equality has not only been an external battle waged

against social and political structures of patriarchal hegemony, but also a continuous internal struggle of contentions over ideology, organizational and procedural issues, goals and intentions. While full realization of the initial aims of the movement are far from achieved, the Women's Shelter Movement and the Secretariat have been important catalysts in the process toward visions of feminist utopian equality, and every woman's right to a life without violence.

4.1 The Women's Shelter Movement in Norway

The Women's Shelter Movement in Norway, taking shape in the crisis centers and the Secretariat, is a form of "critical utopia". (Moylan 1986) It levies harsh social criticism against the public social service institutions for not having recognized, addressed, or tackled the ubiquitous problem of men's violence against women. For all its paternalistic social welfare policy, aimed at women and children as clients (Hernes 1987: 27), the state had not uncovered this problem that proved to be of significant proportions once it was transformed, through the work of the Women's Shelter Movement, into a public issue and a political question. The Women's Shelter Movement not only put a name to this hidden social problem, but also demanded, through requests for full public funding of the crisis centers, an extension of the state's responsibility to its women citizens, without the state gaining control over the internal working of these feminist institutions. A primary goal of the Movement was, as Ellen Ahnfelt pointed out, to make the problem of men's violence against women a public issue, but not a state issue, ("Offentliggjøring, men ikke statliggjøring...") (1987: 6)

The Women's Shelter Movement in Norway grew out of the new women's movement, which began in the late 1960s. The first battered women's shelter opened in England in 1972, after women had gathered to protest cuts in the school milk program. (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005a: 1; Dobash & Dobash 1992, 25) The women began to talk about problems of violence from their men and soon took the initiative to establish a women's shelter. Several shelters were opened in the British Isles, Australia, and North America. (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005a: 1; Dobash & Dobash 1992, 25-27) In 1976 The International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women was held in

Brussels where many women gave testimony about their experiences with violence in their homes. (Ahnfelt 1987: 47; Andersen 1997: 12) The Norwegian women who attended this tribunal were determined to initiate a project to help battered women in Norway. They established a crisis telephone, and documented the need for intervention in violence within the family, more precisely, men's violence against women in intimate relationships. (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005a: 1) The widespread skepticism in Norwegian society (Ahnfelt 1987: 82-92; Andersen 1997: 12-18) toward the need for shelters for battered women was challenged by the number of calls the crisis telephone received, and by the nature of the violence to which the women who called had been subjected. (Ahnfelt 1987: 131) This violence in the home was a form of systematic terrorization, reflecting structural gender inequalities and the subordination of women.

In Norway, the Women's Shelter Movement represented a mobilization of women at the grassroots level. Combined with successful efforts to increase women's representation in local and national political bodies, the Women's Shelter Movement managed to bring the nearly invisible, private issue of battered women into the public discourse and onto political agendas with unusual speed. (Ahnfelt 1987: 7) ¹ The movement demanded public support for the establishment and operation of crisis centers for women and appealed to the state. "Women from all of the political parties saw the need for establishing shelters for battered women, and unanimously supported the call to ear-mark public funding for the running of these centers." (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005a: 1) Despite the resistance to making this private, "family" matter of (men's) violence in the home a focus of public concern and political engagement, the Women's Shelter Movement achieved recognition, in part, because of the "woman-friendly state" that Helga Hernes has written about. (Hernes 1987: 15-16) The simultaneous mobilization of women at the grassroots level, along with the dramatically increased presence of women in the state seems to have made efforts to address men's violence against women quickly into a state imperative. (Ahnfelt 1987)

Funding was granted for the establishment of Camilla Women's Shelter in Oslo in 1978, but not without contentions. (Andersen 1997: 15) The

Women's Shelter Group in Oslo had submitted an application for funding to the Social Department, the Justice Department, and the Consumer and Administration Department in 1977. "The application led to a tug-of-war, both about economy and where the responsibility for an eventual crisis center should lie." (Andersen 1997: 14, author's translation) Andersen points out that the Social Department was reluctant to support the establishment of a private social service agency, though in the end it appropriated 300,000 kr. for 1978. (Andersen 1997: 15) "The Social Department thought, however, that the initiative had to be defined under the law on social care, and that the commune, therefore, was also financially responsible." (Andersen 1997: 15) Andersen further asserts that the Social Department initially paid out only somewhat over half of the appropriation, withholding the remainder, "because there was a wish on the department's part that the center have a hierarchical structure with communal representation on the board of directors (styret)." (1997: 15) As a compromise, the crisis center group, which strongly resisted hierarchical (and authoritarian) organization, agreed to establish an economy committee (økonomigruppe) with a representative from the Oslo commune in order to receive the remainder of the money. (Andersen 1997: 15) The Women's Shelter Movement met many challenges and barriers from public authorities in its establishment phase, but also experienced growing support in public institutions. ²

The Women's Shelter Movement continued to establish centers throughout the 1980s, resulting in the 50 crisis centers and 5 crisis telephones that are spread over all of Norway today. (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005a: 1) Two umbrella organizations have been founded, Norges Krisesenterforbund in 1991, currently with 15 member crisis centers, and the Secretariat in 1994, with 33 crisis centers and 4 crisis telephones comprising its current membership. Two crisis centers remain independent of these organizations. While it is unclear why these two crisis centers remain outside of the two organizations, the employees at Womanshaven explained that their group was reluctant to join the Secretariat at first. Their primary concern was that they did not want to lose their autonomy, and to be told what to do. In the end, they felt that the advantages: the extensive information the Secretariat

provided, and the pressure it could place on political bodies, were greater than any potential loss of autonomy.

The National Conference (Landskonferanse) of the Women's Shelter Movement meets annually, and all of the centers in Norway have the opportunity to participate. However, ideological conflicts and splits within the Women's Shelter Movement, reflected in part by the formation of two very different crisis center organizations, have influenced participation. There was a commotion in 1982 when the National Conference voted to exclude the crisis centers that had not ratified the platform (see below). "...[T]he Social Department - which at this point in time, was the central authority responsible for the financing of the women's shelters and telephones – put a stop to this. The women's shelters without affiliation to the platform received permission after this to be represented at the National Conference, but without voting privileges." (Jonassen and Stefansen 2003: 27, author's translation) This meant, in essence, that the unaffiliated crisis centers were excluded from full participation, and their attendance at the National Conference diminished. (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 27) The crisis centers affiliated with the Secretariat have ratified, and still follow the Women's Shelter Movement platform in their ideology, operations, and goals. Norges Krisesenterforbund has its own statement of purpose, which "however, says nothing about abuse being part of women's oppression or that it demands full public financing of the crisis centers on their own premises." (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 28) There continue to be strong disagreements between the two women's shelter organizations on basic principles, though both promote the empowerment of women, and the need for public information to influence social and political change, and thereby, mitigate the problem of violence against women.

The platform that was formulated and ratified at the National Conference in 1982 reads as follows:

"Violence against and abuse of women is a part of women's oppression. The oppression of women is socially determined. We wish, therefore, to attack every situation in society that legitimates, supports and maintains violence against women. In this work, we are non-partisan and are not affiliated with any particular organizations or denominations.

Women are united in the struggle against the oppression of women – private as well as societal. Besides the operation of each crisis center/telephone, we will

influence society to change the view on violence against women, through public information work, the systematic registration of violence against women, the follow-up of current issues in the media, and changing attitudes.

And we demand full public funding on the crisis centers'/telephones' conditions. The work will be, in principle, paid. We will maintain contact between the crisis centers/telephones and to the greatest possible degree support each other in common causes." (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005a: 1, author's translation)

The platform lays the groundwork for the Women's Shelter Movement's two-fold approach to ending violence against women. The shelters and telephones are service providers, offering battered women shelter, protection, support and "help to self-help". In addition, the shelters and the Women's Shelter Movement engage in work aimed at changing attitudes toward violence against women, and at effecting change in the political and legal systems. (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005a: 2) The focus in this paper will be primarily on the second function, the political aspects directed at social and political change. However, the issue of the empowerment of individual women, as members of the women's shelter groups, and as users of the shelters is an important part of the service function of the shelters and will be addressed as an integral part of the entire democratic project the Women's Shelter Movement represents.

Since violence against women is recognized by the Women's Shelter Movement as structural violence, not rooted in individual families or intimate relationships, but rather rooted in social structures and practices that subordinate all women (to men's domination and control), the movement has demanded that society as a whole take responsibility for combatting and ending this violence. This does not mean that the individual men who perpetrate violent acts against women are not to be held accountable for their actions. But, the Women's Shelter Movement has called for economic and political support, in addition to cooperation from the police, the health services, and social services, not only to enforce the equal protection of women's rights, but also to challenge the attitudes and social practices that have legitimated men's violence against women. It is, thus, the responsibility of society as a whole, and its political and legal institutions to combat this violence and protect women's rights as citizens.

“We do not have to go so far back in our own history [Norwegian] to find that violence against women was completely acceptable,” reported a sociologist I interviewed, who conducts research on issues of violence in Norwegian society. Informants at the three crisis centers mentioned that initially, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they experienced the attitude, even among some male social service managers (sosialsjefer), that women should be able to put up with a little violence from their male partners. In describing efforts to establish a crisis center in a rural area, the manager, a 20-year veteran at the center said, “Crisis centers were established in Oslo, Trondheim, Drammen, Bergen, and Fredrikstad. We discussed if there was also a need among us. And then, we discussed it with the social service managers, who just laughed, ‘abuse of women out here in the country?’ They had never heard of that. ‘Abuse of women, no, the woman/wife (kjerring) has to tolerate a little beating.’ It was a tradition, that sort of thing. But, we had two women social service managers [out of nine in this region] at this time, and they supported us.” The work of the Women’s Shelter Movement has influenced the way violence against women is perceived in the public discourse in Norwegian society. (Ahnfelt 1987: 15) Would this discourse have been possible without women in the public sphere, as political representatives, activists, and public servants, to recognize and support efforts to tackle this social problem?

In its brochure, *The Women’s Shelters in Norway*, the Secretariat cites the Beijing Platform for Action “violence against women is a manifestation of the historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of women’s full advancement. “ (Lysfjord 2001: 4-5) Violence against women is presented in the Secretariat’s literature as a hindrance to women’s full citizenship and equality in Norwegian society. (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005c) Violence against women is perceived as structural violence that limits women’s opportunities for participation in a democratic society.

4.2 Three Women's Shelters

Next, I will examine some of the commonalities of, and differences between the experiments in feminist democracy, which the three women's shelters that are the core of this study, represent. To protect the anonymity of the shelters and the informants who shared their experiences with me, I have chosen a name for each of the shelters. It was a bit difficult to find signifiers that could capture the essential uniqueness and defining differences of each shelter, and, at the same time, remain relatively neutral. In the end, I chose the names below at random.

Throughout the remainder of this paper, the three women's shelters will be designated as follows:

Womanshaven will be used to refer to the shelter that characterized itself as being "traditional" on the scale discussed below because it maintains a flat organizational structure and more direct member participation in decision making.

Harmony will be the designation for the women's shelter that placed itself about midway on the "traditional" – "professional" scale.

Sweethome will represent the shelter that characterized itself as hierarchical and closer to the use of the term "professionalized" as discussed below.

The term **employees** will be used throughout the following discussion in referring to the women who work at the shelters during the regular daytime hours. The term **members** will designate those women who take the shifts at the shelters outside of regular office hours, and who are active members of the shelter group. The women participating in the operation of the Sweethome women's shelter chose to call the women who take these shifts **assistants** instead of members, to differentiate from membership in labor organizations. At all three shelters, both the employees and the members/assistants are paid, but the salaries of the employees and the hourly wages of the members/assistants vary greatly from center to center.

In discussions with women at each of the shelters, we referred to a scale, used in research on the Norwegian crisis centers, generally categorizing the centers from "traditional", those with a flat structure and

greater participation of active members, to “professionalized”, those with a more hierarchical organizational structure, staffed by permanent employees, and which are more similar to ordinary helping agencies in their organization and approach. (Jonassen and Stefansen 2003: 48) While informants at each of the three shelters found a relative position for themselves on this scale, they felt it was potentially misleading and inadequate to capture important nuances. “Traditional” in this scale indicates centers that are radical in their adherence to the founding feminist ideology. “Professional” indicates a greater focus on the service-provision aspects of the women’s shelter, at the sacrifice of ideology and political activism. Informants at all three crisis centers said that their work has become increasingly professionalized, and that there is little time for feminist political engagement. Depoliticization, though not intentional, has occurred at all of the shelters in this study. However, the Secretariat has taken over coordination of the political activities of the Women’s Shelter Movement, and has achieved a high degree of visibility in recent years, as evidenced by their inclusion in commissions and hearings, and, as the sociologist I interviewed pointed out, in the media.

While changes toward a more hierarchical structure may indicate a capitulation to masculine models of organization, and a loss for feminist democracy, it is important to remember Dryzek’s reference to organizations like Greenpeace, which maintain a relatively high degree of internal democracy, and are significant actors in, and vital to, discursive democracy, despite their hierarchical organizational structure. (2000: 100)

4.2.1 Experiments in Radical Participatory Democracy

In initiating the establishment of the shelters, the Women’s Shelter Movement privileged a feminist experiment in democracy. “It was a given that we would have a flat organizational structure,” reported a veteran member of the Womanshaven shelter group, which established a center in 1979. All the shelters aimed at challenging the hierarchical traditions and tendencies that they perceived as problematic in institutions of the state and in organizational management. Every member of the shelter group was to participate equally in the collective decision-making processes that were intended to tackle the practical as well as the ideological aspects of providing shelter for battered

women, and for effecting social and political change. There was to be no formal leadership, no hierarchies of command, nor any standing constellations of power. All the tasks of operating a shelter for women, and influencing political and social attitudes toward questions of domination over, and violence against women were to be a collective effort of absolute equals. The ideal was not only to include all the members who had chosen to join the collective, but also all of the users of the shelters, the battered women themselves. Participation in decision making and cooperative, collective activities of the women's shelter group were to be a means to personal and political empowerment for all of the women involved.

While the core groups who initiated the three women's shelter projects consisted of only a few feminist activists, the first informational meetings boasted nearly 200 women in attendance, recruited primarily through announcements in local newspapers and by word of mouth. Informants from all three shelters said that there was a great deal of enthusiasm and idealism in these early days. From the initial organizational meetings, the three shelters managed to sign on 80, 110, and 160 active volunteer members, respectively, all of whom took part in the administration and practical work of running a shelter for battered women.

The Fellesmøte (FM), the common meeting of all members, is the highest authority of each organization. All members have equal responsibility and equal authority to attend and participate, which includes the rights to speak and to vote. In the beginning, all decisions relating even to the most minute details of the practical operations of the shelter, were debated and made through the FM. While this engendered feelings of ownership and belonging among all the members, these meetings were described as long and cumbersome. Several informants mentioned that there seemed to be a general will to consensus, but when so many decisions were required, particularly with regard to the practical details of operating the shelter, the whole process became unwieldy at times. An informant from Womanshaven affirmed that meetings are still sometimes unnecessarily long, either because of endless discussions, or the leadership of the meetings, which occurs on a rotating basis, is not consistently effective. However, the other informants, all

veterans of the shelter, expressed satisfaction with the way the flat structure and the Fellesmøte function in their present form, where the task groups take responsibility for many of the routine, practical matters and the Fellesmøte is open for the unlimited participation of all the members.

There were also difficulties in relation to external institutions, such as public funding agencies. “The politicians would not negotiate with a Fellesmøte; they wanted a person to refer to. We didn’t want to have any forman, or forwoman, as we called it. We were eventually pressured to do this.” Jonassen and Stefansen mentioned that some women’s shelters experienced “pressure to conform to bureaucratic organizational models to legitimize the organization.” (2003: 124) As Dryzek pointed out, organizations that operate with a radical democratic organizational design in civil society often are forced by the political institutions they have to deal with to establish some kind of formal leadership that is acceptable outside the organization. (Dryzek 2000: 97) All three of the shelters in this study cited this as a problem, not so much internally, at first, but in contact with public institutions with which they had to cooperate. The legitimacy of the shelters as effective service institutions was often questioned by those outside who perceived the radically democratic organizations as chaotic.

A sociologist, who has conducted extensive research on the shelters in Norway, pointed out that the flat structure is “not appropriate for all the goals the women’s shelters have. It is necessary for consciousness-raising and making violence against women visible in redefining this violence” as structural. But, the flat structure often presents considerable challenges to the efficient service provision aspects of the shelters. For example, in the early days of the Women’s Shelter Movement, each of the three shelters in this study, had nearly 100 active members who took part in the rotating shift work at the shelters. This was difficult for the users of the shelters who had to relate to an ever-changing staff of volunteer members. In addition, the sociologist further identified a discrepancy between the ideal of the democratic flat structure and the practical possibilities limited by such an organizational design. Some shelters, which claimed to have a flat, non-hierarchical structure, had, in fact, an informal leadership of 5 or 6, “the same

faces and names represented the shelter in all its external relations,” she reported.

All three women’s shelters in this study evolved in the early years of the movement, maintaining many of the features of the original, participatory democratic foundation, but with modifications to facilitate the daily operations of the shelter. Within the first few years, all of the shelters felt a need for an employee, or employees, to take responsibility for practical operations and to be the contact person for public institutions that operate primarily in the framework of daytime office hours. Long discussions ensued about the role of, and the qualifications for, these positions. There was a resistance to professionalization, with the understanding that each woman’s personal abilities, attitudes, and qualities were most important in light of the shelter’s remaining a low-threshold, woman-to-woman service, emphasizing equality between members/assistants, employees and the users of the shelter. Within the first two years of operation, one or two women were employed as shelter managers by each of the three shelters.

The organizational structure evolved through the practical demands of operating a 24-hour service for battered women, and through discussions among all the members in the obligatory, Fellesmøte, which is also constituted as the highest authority of the women’s shelter. Each shelter developed a system of task groups and committees to facilitate the execution of practical tasks and responsibilities. The shelters established an Arbeidsutvalg (AU), a Work Committee, to make decisions on practical matters. The shelters established guidelines to regulate the type and extent, of decision-making powers vested in these Work Committees (AU). All major decisions were, and still are, reserved for the Fellesmøte or the Annual Meeting (Årsmøte). At Womanshaven, the most “traditional” of the three shelters studied, there are five task groups, which each select, ideally on a rotating basis, one representative to the AU for a term of six months to one year. The AU meets regularly, every 14 days, with the employees, to make decisions and resolve routine, practical questions regarding the operation of the shelter. At this shelter, the five task groups rotate taking responsibility for leadership of the common meetings, Fellesmøte, and coverage of the work

shifts at the shelter outside of the the regular office hours covered by the employed staff. Though the five task groups were originally intended to function on a rotation system, shifting between members so that all would learn all the tasks of operating the shelter, most members have chosen to remain in the same task group over the long run. “Everything was to rotate,” said a veteran member, “but, it doesn’t happen so much. Many want to stay in the same group. The [...] group – it’s something I have expertise about and I have friends in the group. We’ve been working together for 25 years.”

As two of the shelters developed a more hierarchical structure, the importance of the task groups diminished. These two shelters, Harmony and Sweethome, no longer have this system. They have dispensed with the Work Committee (AU) and the task groups altogether. The structure of the administration and the division of labor varies considerably between the shelter that continues to use a flat structural design and the two shelters with a more hierarchical organizational form. At the two more hierarchically structured shelters, Harmony and Sweethome, the employees take responsibility for most of the functions originally performed by all the members/assistants through the task groups. Womanshaven, with its flat structure, thus, demands a great deal more participation from its members. The committee work at this shelter is paid, but the sums are rather symbolic in relation to the investment of time and effort required. All three shelters established a Board of Directors (Styre), but the composition and authority of each Board varies considerably. A discussion of the organizational structures and procedural practices of each of the three women’s shelters follows.

4.2.2 Womanshaven - a Flat Structure

Womanshaven has a Board of Directors (Styre) with eight members, four selected from the 14 communes that support the shelter, and four representing the shelter. The communal representation is composed of two mayors, one each from the northern and southern communes in the region, the fiscal administrator (økonomisjef) in the host commune where the shelter is located, and a social service manager (sosialsjef) chosen by and among the social service managers in all 14 communes. One of the mayors is “forman and has a double vote in cases that are of economic consequence for

the shelter's operation." (By-laws: 6) The four shelter representatives include a member of the economy committee, and one of the shelter managers, both selected for a two-year term. Two members are elected by the Annual Meeting (Årsmøte), each for a two-year period, with one person up for election every other year to have overlap and continuity. This Board meets four times a year, and has responsibility for the overall economy of the shelter, but no authority over internal matters.

In addition to the Board of Directors, this shelter has several committees to facilitate the delivery of services within a flat organizational structure. The active members, who fill the shifts outside of the daytime hours, are organized into five task groups: training, marketing/public relations, office/administrative, children's services, and the physical residence. Each group elects a contact woman for a year at a time, who represents the group in the Work Committee (AU). The contact woman has responsibility for the meetings of the task group and functions in many ways as the group's leader. Each task group meets every fifth week, before the group takes its turn in covering the shifts outside the employees' hours. The shift work rotates among the five work groups, a week at a time.

The Coordinators' Group is composed of four members in two-year terms at this more "traditional" shelter; they have the main responsibility for the operation of the shelter. Each year two new members are elected to this committee, so there is always overlap between experienced and new members. The Coordinators' Group follows up on issues raised by the Work Committee (AU), and is responsible for taking issues to the Fellesmøte, the shelter's highest constituted authority. One member of this group is chosen to sit on the Personnel Committee. The Coordinators' Group meets every 14 days, and, in addition, the coordinators each meet, in rotation, with the AU, which means once every fourth AU meeting for each coordinator.

The Personnel Committee is composed of two members, one from the Coordinators' Group who serves for two years. The other woman has been on the Personnel Committee for several years, as a permanent member. She has professional competence in the field of personnel administration, and has

been willing to remain on this committee, in accordance with the wishes of the employees, and the approval of the Fellesmøte.

The Finance Committee (Økonomiutvalget) has three members. Their duties include paying bills and bookkeeping, setting up the annual budget, and maintaining an overview of the use of economic resources, processing employees' time sheets, and paying salaries and reimbursements.

The veteran members and employees of the Womanshaven shelter all felt that, despite its shortcomings, the flat structure is the only way to operate a women's shelter. "The flat structure is a very fine way to work. I am very positive...there are many different opinions about it at the shelter, but we have chosen to keep it," tells a veteran employee. The main frustration they point out is the time it takes to come to agreement and make decisions. "It requires a lot of the members." Another problem is that the more articulate members sometimes have greater power to press issues through at the Fellesmøte by way of their skill at speaking and presenting an issue convincingly. And, though the aim was to rotate leadership functions so all the members could learn the skills of leadership underway, not all of the women are equally skilled at organizing and leading meetings. This can create problems, frustrations and conflicts.

On the positive side of the flat organizational structure, the veterans point to the engagement that participation in democratic processes engenders in the members, and all the knowledge that the group has together, a large body of women's knowledge, which they have shared with each other over the years. One member pointed to the collective action aspect of being actively involved, though their work has become less political over time. The sense of belonging to the group has given them a collective strength to challenge public authorities and the widespread resistance they have encountered. "I would never have come so far alone, without the group. We would not have dared to go directly to the leaders of social services. We went head on, to the Departments, ministers, and the like.... but, now, we've stopped with such things."

Another veteran at this shelter, an employee, said that though they have less time to be concerned with the political aspects of women's shelter work than before, a controversial issue still creates a lot of excitement and group cohesion. "If we get such a problem, we become welded together. We manage to gather forces to resist." For example, "We have been afraid that we are going to be an underdepartment of the social service office. And when we feel that, we become stronger and agree among ourselves. We have contacted the Social Minister directly. We don't go the service route; we go direct."

4.2.3 Harmony - in the Middle

The shelter that was described by its employees as midway between traditional and hierarchical, has a Board of Directors that is the "Shelter's highest authority between the Annual Meetings (Årsmøte) and is binding in the external obligations of the Shelter." (By-laws 2004) All seven members of the Board are members and employees of the shelter, in other words, there are no external representatives on the Board. The employees' representative (tillitskvinne) and the personnel safety representative (verneombud) are always members of the Board. The members are elected to the Board by the Annual Meeting of all the active shelter members for terms of 2 years. Board members can be re-elected, but can serve for only two consecutive terms. The Board has responsibility for personnel and budget matters. The by-laws call for at least five meetings a year. In 2003, the Board held 11 meetings. "The Board constitutes itself and makes decisions by a simple majority. In cases of a tie vote, the vote of the leader of the Board counts twice." (By-laws 2004)

In addition to the Board of Directors, this shelter has a Committee for Cooperation (Samarbeidsutvalget), which was established in 1996 by the Annual Meeting. This committee is composed of three representatives from the shelter, and one representative from the social service department (sosialkontor) in each of the three communes cooperating with the shelter. The representatives serve a two-year term. There were two meetings in 2003, focusing on fiscal matters, an addition to the shelter's building, and rent guarantees for social service clients. (Annual Report 2003) The committee's

function is advisory, aimed at facilitating cooperation, and maintaining links between the shelter and public social service and funding agencies.

4.2.4 Sweethome – the Most Hierarchical Organization

The women's shelter that identifies itself as the most hierarchical in organizational structure, has a Board of Directors whose members serve a two-year term, where re-election is possible. The Board consists of seven representatives, four employees/assistants of shelter and three politicians. The operations manager (virksomhetsleder), a full-time employee of the shelter, serves as a non-voting secretary to the Board of Directors. The Annual Meeting of the assistants and employees of the shelter delegates the responsibility and authority for the operations of the center to the Board. All the active assistants at the shelter are gathered at regular, obligatory meetings, Fellesmøte, but these meetings are mainly called to take up themes and special topics related to the delivery of services, or to discuss problems and resolve conflicts. There is no voting at the Fellesmøte; voting on issues of importance to the Crisis Center takes place only at the Annual Meeting.

The Work Committee (AU) and task group structure, which were established in the initial phase of operations of the shelter, have been phased out. The employees make decisions on routine, practical matters and coordinate daily operations. The assistants, who take the shifts outside of the normal workday hours, only have responsibility for tasks related to the requirements of their shifts. The informants at Sweethome reported that establishing a more hierarchical structure, and thereby delegating most decision-making responsibilities to the full-time employees, in cooperation with the Board of Directors, facilitated more efficient service delivery to the users and reduced internal conflicts. The operations manager at Sweethome, the most hierarchical shelter, said that the new structure diminished power struggles and conflicts among the assistants, and between the assistants and the employees, which she felt were rooted in unclear, or unspecified decision-making responsibilities and the power struggles that ensued. The question is, (how much) does this reduction in member participation represent a loss for

democracy? It seems, by comparison, that the members of the Womanshaven Shelter Group had to make a much greater commitment to, and had greater say in, the decision-making processes related to running the shelter than the assistants at Sweethome, though employees at both shelters perceived, and described their work environments as very democratic.

4.2.5 A Diminished Membership of Veterans

All three women's shelters studied have followed the general pattern of sharp reductions in the number of active members/assistants that has characterized the evolution of all women's shelters in Norway since their inception just over 20 years ago. (Jonassen and Stefansen 2003: 119, 158) The total number of employees and members/assistants involved in all women's shelter work in Norway dropped from approximately 2800 in 1986, to under 1000 by 2002. (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 158) Among the total 2800 in 1986, there were about 100 employees. Research shows that from 1995, the number of employees increased to around 300, and had remained stable at this level through 2002, while "the number of volunteer workers [members] has gone down by over 40% from 1118 [in 1995] to about 700 persons." (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 119, author's translation) Womanshaven, the shelter that has maintained a flat organizational structure, started with approximately 110 active members, and now has 30 active members, in addition to the two full-time and two part-time employees. One of the part-time employees is a woman with immigrant background, reflecting the shelter's efforts to balance the staff composition in accordance with changes in the user population. The other is a young man ("lekeonkel") who works in a 20% position, and takes responsibility for activities involving the children who live with their mothers at the shelter. Harmony, the shelter midway between a flat and a hierarchical structure, initially had 160 active members. Now, there are 23 active members, a full-time manager, and two part-time workers (60% and 50%, respectively), one functioning as an assistant manager, the other working primarily with the children in residence at the shelter. In addition, there are two women working as trainees, one a student of social work, and the other in a special project sponsored by the

employment service (Aetat). The most hierarchical of the shelters has four daytime employees (three and a half positions), including a manager, an operations manager, and a facilities manager. There are about 12 to 14 active assistants who take the shifts outside of the regular daytime hours.

This reduction in the number of active members/assistants is linked, in research on the shelters, to more efficient operations of the centers. The users are presumed to benefit from having a smaller, more stable staff to have to relate to in a time of crisis. (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 121) At all three shelters, we discussed both the advantages and losses that these reductions in the numbers of active participants represent. The informants agreed that it is advantageous for the users to have a smaller, more stable, and familiar staff. However, the leaders of the shelters felt that it was a loss for feminist democracy, in a way, not to have the active engagement of the former members. They all expressed a desire to establish some sort of organization of former members, which could act as a network for the users when they leave the shelter to continue life on their own. But, the daily operations of the shelter have had to take priority over projects for initiating such a network. Along with the recruitment of younger women, this remains an unfulfilled dream, and a challenge for all of the women's shelters.

The average age of the employees and members/assistants of the three shelters in this study mirrors the results of research on the women's shelters in Norway as a whole. (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 216) Most of the members/assistants are older veterans, many of whom have worked at the shelter since its inception. "The members have been here for 15 or 20 years. What it gives you to be here? There must be something behind it – people stay here," reported one of the younger trainees at Harmony. The employees are also generally older women. According to Jonassen's and Stefansen's research on all of the women's shelters in Norway, "one third of the members and nearly 50% of the managers, have been involved in women's shelter work for ten years or more; half are 50 or older." Newly recruited members are also older. (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: ix, 214-216) The experience of the shelters in this study support these findings. The

managers of all three shelters have been on the job for over twenty years; they reported that most of the members/assistants are also older.

Many of these veterans, members/assistants and employees, are strong feminists. Three of the four managers described themselves as 1970s feminists committed to active engagement in women's issues, and concerned with the political aspects of the work of the Women's Shelter Movement. The one manager who said she has never considered herself a feminist joined the women's shelter group because she had been involved in a women's shelter in the United States during the 1970s, and felt she had experience to contribute, in addition to her desire to help other women. All four women expressed the importance of maintaining an attitude of feminist equality between all women, particularly in the relationship between those who work at the shelter, and the users who seek their services. They emphasized the need to recognize the agency of every woman, and not to perceive the users as powerless victims.

Recruiting new, younger members/assistants has been problematic. In addition, the younger women often do not possess the feminist fervor that was the foundation of the early Women's Shelter Movement. Many of the younger women seem to take women's equality as an accomplished reality, according to the veteran members and employees of the three shelters, and either do not see the need for feminist political engagement, or do not consider the work of the women's shelters as political. The younger informants in this study, the employment project trainee, and two students of social work, identified the shelter as a very democratic environment and workplace, but at first, only one, the student at Sweethome, considered the work there as political in any way. This student's perception of the work as political was primarily focused on the empowerment of each individual woman through the strong emphasis on the woman's making her own choices, which is at the core of the women's shelters' ideology. The other student and the employment project trainee, both at Harmony, began to recognize aspects of their work at the shelter as political during the course of our group discussion, which involved the participation of a veteran employee, the manager of the crisis center. The student described this experience at the shelter as

essential to her full development as a social worker, member of the greater political community, and future parent. She, too, emphasized the empowerment of individual women as the most decisive aspect of the shelter's activities.

I conclude from the above that the recruitment of younger women is important, not only for the continuation of the service aspect of the shelter's operations, but also for feminist discourse on women's equality, the building of women's knowledge, and the exchange of ideas through communicative interaction between older women and younger women. It is also important to recruit more women with immigrant backgrounds, and women from racial and ethnic minorities, to achieve correspondence between the membership and the increasing number of immigrant women seeking protection at the shelters. Multiculturalism and meeting the needs of all women were expressed as concerns by informants at each of the three shelters. The socialization aspect of dialogical communication and collective political action within a participatory democratic environment has been identified and lauded by countless political theorists from Rousseau and J.S. Mill, to Pateman and Dryzek.

4.2.6 "Women's Work" – Undervalued and Underpaid

The salaries of the employees and the shift workers/members vary considerably from shelter to shelter, in correspondence with research carried out on all the women's shelters in Norway. (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 214) These researchers identify the extreme variations in salaries, and the low salaries at many shelters, as one of the main issues, among many questionable employment conditions, for women working at the shelters. (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 159-160) It is problematic that the shelters must rely on the underpaid work of women, often of women doing double duty, taking shifts at the shelter on top of another, quite often full-time job. While women's contribution of low-paid labor enables the shelters to survive, within sometimes very tight budget constraints, and makes the services provided by the shelters inexpensive for the national and communal authorities who appropriate the funding, this represents, again, the

inequalities in the societal division of labor emanating from women's subordinate position in society. According to informants, this is particularly an issue at the women's shelters in rural areas where there are relatively fewer opportunities for employment, and women see the shifts at the shelter as a possibility to earn a little extra income. Earlier research confirms this point. (Jonassen & Stefansen 2003: 121) Many women become members/assistants of the shelter out of altruism also, according to informants at the shelters, and accept the low salaries because they want to help other women.

4.2.7 Goals and Political Activism

The literature from the Women's Shelter Movement identifies three primary goals of the work of the crisis centers: (1) "help to self-help", protection and safety, (2) tackle every form and case of violence against women, through social and political action, and (3) democracy in structures and practices. (Krisesentersekretariatet 2005b: 1-2) During the interviews, I asked each of the informants from the three crisis centers to range these goals in order of importance. They were also asked to indicate possible conflicts between these goals, which might arise in trying to achieve all three.

The responses of the informants varied, in sometimes surprising ways. Both employees at Womanshaven, without a doubt, identified the first goal, primarily the shelter and protection aspect, as the most important. One of these two informants, who had identified herself as a 1970s feminist stated that, regrettably, they had no time for much political activity any more. "I consider the work of the women's shelter to be political work, but that has come too much in the background," she reported. In the earlier days of the shelter, she explained, the political questions were perceived to be at least as vital as the practical aspects of operating a refuge for battered women. But, now, most of the political work had to come from the Secretariat, where there is an employee with political action as her main task. There is just not enough time for much local political action. They felt that, with its flat structure, the shelter still strove to uphold feminist democratic goals. Both informants said that despite some frustrations and challenges, the flat structure functioned quite well for them and the shelter. They expressed the importance of its

democratic aspects, but acknowledged that there were some members who desired a more hierarchical structure for the sake of efficiency.

The manager at Harmony named the political work as the most important of the three goals, because through changing laws and attitudes, all women would achieve greater equality. Like the employees at Womanshaven, however, she felt that there was not as much time for political work as before, and that the demands of running the shelter, as a safe place for women, have become greater over the years. She said that the Secretariat takes most of the responsibility for the political work now. It is essential, and good, to have someone who could represent the affiliated shelters, and women's issues generally, at the national level, pressuring public officials. The immense amounts of information the Secretariat provides the member shelters, in addition to being nearly overwhelming at times, is considered absolutely essential and extremely useful. Though she felt she did not do it often enough, this employee also said she would sometimes adapt an article or press release produced by the Secretariat for use in the local press. The political goals, which she prioritized, were a cooperative effort between the shelters and the Secretariat, though the Secretariat carries most of the load in relation to the media, the state, and the women's shelters.

At Sweethome, the most hierarchically structured shelter, the discussion of goals extended beyond the three mentioned above, though the service provision and democratic aspects were assumed as fundamental, a given. However, because this shelter has a relatively good economic foundation, more political, or outreach and public information goals are pursued as well. The shelter has chosen to make outreach and informational work one of its priorities, in addition to providing refuge for abused women. The manager has, as part of her job description, responsibility for a more formalized outreach program. She has a good deal of contact with schools in the region, and challenges traditional gender roles and attitudes toward sexualized violence using an educational booklet produced by the Secretariat, *How Far Are You Willing To Go For Love?* (Smaadahl 2002) The booklet is aimed to provoke open discussion of attitudes toward gender equality, structures and patterns of male hegemony in society, and control and violence

in intimate relationships. In addition to the booklet, a one-act play was written and is produced for schools in the region. The booklet is also a resource for teachers and other adults in the schools to lead discussions about the play, which portrays the development of a relationship from attraction, to control, and eventually violence. The Sweethome women's shelter celebrated its twentieth anniversary in December of 2004, with a presentation of the play for an audience of public officials and others connected to the shelter.

The employees at Sweethome struggled over the years, in what they considered to be an important part of their feminist political work, to secure better salaries, pensions, and other employee benefits, which contribute to a materially and functionally democratic work environment for all the employees of the shelter. As mentioned earlier, remunerations vary greatly from shelter to shelter. While informants recognized and emphasized rewards of the work other than economic, several agreed with the National Commission on Violence Against Women's (Kvinnevoldutvalget) recommendations to establish a women's shelter law, which would equalize economic resources and establish minimum standards for all the women's shelters in Norway. This Commission, which produced the NOU report (NOU 2003), recommended at the same time, that grounding the women's shelters in Norwegian law should not jeopardize the unique character of the shelters or their work. (NOU 2003: 89)

The question of internal autonomy continues to be a central concern of the shelters. Remaining a low-threshold service for women, where empowerment and the recognition of each woman's right to determine her own life are considered to be absolutely essential, is the priority of the women's shelters. The manager at Sweethome described what "low threshold" means in this context, "Immediate response when a woman calls. We go to where she is, or she comes to us. No appointment, no application, no waiting time." Resistance to becoming another conventional social service agency is strong at the shelters in this study. Challenges to their autonomy rouse the political engagement and activist fervor of the women involved in the movement. Political activism and concern for democracy remain fundamental to the Women's Shelter Movement, even when most of

the work at each shelter necessarily focuses on the protection of battered women.

4.2.8 Everyday Rebellions and Acts of Resistance

Opposition to the Women's Shelter Movement generally, and to the establishment of the individual shelters specifically, has been, and still is, a factor challenging the work of the movement. The fact that the women's shelters have demanded public financing, while simultaneously demanding complete autonomy has been an issue since the initial struggles of the movement. While progress has been made at effecting and improving cooperation at many levels in the public sphere, there remain barriers to recognition and acceptance. The women's shelters have proven their necessity and worth in providing women with protection from men's violence. Some of this struggle for funding and autonomy included acts of resistance and small rebellions.

Two veterans of the Womanshaven shelter group, an employee and a member, told the same story about standing firm and taking risks in the early days. The social service offices in the fourteen member communes demanded the names of the women who came to the shelter from their communes. As part of its low-threshold profile, which includes immediate 24-hour accessibility, mutual trust, and anonymity, the shelter maintained that the identity of each user was to be absolutely protected, unless the woman herself were submitting an application for specific social services from her commune. The shelter held that since men's violence was so widespread, each commune should contribute to the operation of the shelter based on the total population of the commune. Thus, the anonymity of the users would not be an issue. Several communes refused to appropriate funds to the women's shelter unless they received the names of the users to justify the appropriations. One mayor, a man, even came out in the press saying that the shelter was unnecessary to communal social service provision because there was no violence toward women from the men in his commune.

The shelter held its ground, closing down in protest for a week, or two, sending the women who asked for their help to hotels, and instructing the

hotels to bill the woman's home commune. The shelter members were anxious, worrying that they had taken too great a risk, and, that they might lose more than they stood to gain. But, to uphold their principle of anonymity, they did not give in.

There were members of the shelter group who were journalists and they instructed the group in how to use the media to bring their case into the public forum. The newspaper articles made the issue a matter of public discourse. After a week or two, the communes gave in. Besides the fact that there proved to be violent men in all of the communes, it was much less expensive for the communes to have the battered women stay at the women's shelter than at a hotel. The users' anonymity, and public funding were both secured in the end through an intercommunal agreement ratified by all 14 communes. But, this result was secured only through the risk of standing up for feminist principles.

4.3 The Secretariat of the Women's Shelter Movement

Krisesentersekretariatet - the Secretariat of the Shelter Movement (the Secretariat) is an umbrella organization with a membership of 33 women's shelters and four crisis telephones in Norway. The member shelters pay a percentage (1.5%) of their annual budgets toward the operation of the Secretariat, which employs one full-time staff member. "The background for creating the Secretariat was a desire to gather in a collective organization that will contribute to strengthening the women's shelters' work externally." (Annual Report 2003: 4, author's translation) The primary aims of the Secretariat are to facilitate the political objectives of the Women's Shelter Movement on behalf of, and in cooperation with, the member shelters, and thereby, strengthen and protect women's rights. At the foundation of this aim is a vision of achieving equality for women. The work of the Secretariat is extensive and varied, from acting as a pressure group on political authorities, and organizing conferences, to creating and distributing informational materials aimed at influencing the way people perceive men's violence toward women and, thereby, effecting attitudinal changes. In addition to its work within Norway, the Secretariat also participates in several international

projects. The Secretariat has become an important political actor in civil society, sometimes in the role of an advisor, sharing the expertise the shelters have accumulated over the past 25 years with politicians and public authorities, such as the police and health services. Sometimes, the Secretariat acts as an opposition, providing feminist critical analysis of public policy, and contributing feminist perspectives on gender equality to the public discourse.

The Secretariat now will be examined in relation to the theory of discursive democracy, both from the perspective of its internal operations, and in its role as a political actor in the public sphere. First, I will present a brief discussion of the organizational structure, and some of the formal and informal channels of communication between the women's shelters, their representatives, and the director of the Secretariat, who is their employee. Then, I will present some of the highlights from an interview with the director of the Secretariat, focusing primarily on her role as a lobbyist and advocate for feminist equality.

4.3.1 Structures, Communication, and the Role of the Director

“The Annual Meeting (Årsmøtet) of the member women's shelters and telephones is the Secretariat's highest authority.” (Annual Report 2003: 4) Kontaktutvalget (KU) – the Contact Committee functions as a Board of Directors for the Secretariat, having responsibility for the employment of the director and the economic affairs of the organization. The KU consists of five representatives, with personal alternates (vararepresentanter), who are elected for two-year terms. For the purpose of establishing representation on the KU, Norway was divided into regions. There is one representative, respectively, from the northern and western regions of Norway. The southeast region has two representatives, and the crisis telephones one. The KU's mandate and functions are outlined in a set of guidelines. (Annual Report 2003: 5) In addition to the regular meetings of the committee, several members of the KU also meet as representatives of the organization in external councils and committees, such as the Barne- og familiedepartementet (BFD) – the Child and Family Department, and international project groups. (Annual Report 2003: 5)

The responsibilities and duties of the director of the Secretariat are outlined in a job description, and mandated through the Organizational Plan, and resolutions of the Annual Meeting and the National Conference. The director expressed that she has a good deal of freedom to act on issues that come up in the media, and to participate actively in the public discourse around themes related to violence against women. “I have a rather broad arena for taking action as long as I stay within the mandate.” The resolutions of the Annual Meeting direct the focus of the central tasks for the director from year to year. “There is a resolution about what we want to do, and, thus, it is my job to lobby the authorities, to take part in the social debate, to convince them that this is the way to go, also on hearings. We [the Secretariat] are an organization officially included in public hearings (høringsinstans).”

The Secretariat director is also mandated to write reports and gather statistical data related to the work of the shelters; she commented, “Statistics are so important in political work.” In addition, the current Secretariat director has produced several small compendia outlining women’s rights, and thus, enabling the shelters more competently to inform the women who ask for their help. The Secretariat director has responsibility for gathering and analyzing information vital to the Women’s Shelter Movement’s political work, and for disseminating this information in a useable form to the member shelters, political authorities, and the general public. Informants at all three of the shelters in this study reported receiving considerable, sometimes overwhelming, amounts of information from the Secretariat. They expressed that this information is essential to their work, particularly in keeping them informed about changes in the law, and public policy.

Both the director of the Secretariat and the employees at the three shelters also reported quite a lot of informal contact besides the meetings and conferences, in which issues, policies and strategies are discussed and decisions are formally made. This informal communication occurs, in part, because these women have been companions in the struggle to address the issue of men’s violence against women for many years. Though the Secretariat has existed for only a little over ten years, the director has been involved in the Women’s Shelter Movement, initially from the grassroots level, for many years. All of the employees, and many of the members at the three

shelters have also been active in the movement from its early days, in other words, for 20 years or more. So, informal contact is perceived to be quite natural and essential. In addition, the Secretariat is a relatively small organization, which allows for more familiar, informal communication. Moreover, there seemed to be an unusual openness at the shelters, where the employees, even the younger women, all expressed experiencing an environment of trust and dialogue, which they had rarely met in earlier employment or training situations. When conflicts arise, however, the formal structures and procedural guidelines provide a means of recourse and conflict resolution. The women's shelters rely on their representatives in the KU as an important link to the Secretariat, particularly when disagreements arise.

4.3.2 Participating in the Public Discourse and Democratic Process

The media play a significant role in the public discourse, and both the Secretariat and the issue of men's violence against women have become increasingly visible in the media in recent years, according to a sociologist who has conducted research in this field. One of the reasons may be that the director of the Secretariat, in accordance with the platform of the Women's Shelter Movement, actively challenges, through the media, political and social relations, and situations, which are perceived to legitimate violence against women, and thus, hinder women's equality. To be able to participate in the sometimes fast-paced public discourse, which takes place in part through the media, an activist must have a certain amount of freedom to react and respond to topics as they appear in the media. However, when the director represents an organization in the public sphere, she cannot act alone in making decisions about which themes to take up at any given moment. The Movement allows the director to use her judgment rather extensively, but there is always a dialogue between the director, the KU, and the member shelters. The Secretariat director pointed out, "I have quite a lot of trust from the Movement, the Secretariat, and the board of directors. So what I have as guidelines are that before I send out a press release, the KU has to be informed, and it is very rare, I don't think I've ever experienced that a press release has been judged not to be sent." The Secretariat director also

provides press releases for all the member shelters, so that they can take up relevant issues at the local level.

The director commented, “Because I sit with clippings from local papers, I can say that many of the crisis centers get a lot in the media, in local papers ... I am very visible at the national level, but if you go in and look for it, there is a lot ... to look at individual local papers, and they [the shelters] have political meetings and they have demonstrations. So, I don’t agree that I have taken over the whole political role, that I am so visible.” While the shelters have experienced a depoliticization as the focus has shifted to the provision of services for battered women, and the workload allows less time for political activity, the Secretariat provides informational resources for the shelters to continue taking part in the public discourse at the local level.

The Secretariat also produces a newsletter for the member shelters where information on current political issues, and the Secretariat’s campaigns and projects are taken up. The newsletter keeps the member shelters updated on changes in the law and public policy debates that influence their work. The Secretariat director, who is the editor of the newsletter, commented, “If the shelters, which are to be society’s watch dog, don’t know about new changes in the law or a new policy statement (rundskriv), then they don’t do their job well enough.” The Secretariat director expressed a desire for more input from the shelters in the writing of articles for the newsletter. However, there is quite a lot of feedback from the member shelters about the newsletter, and issues that appear in the media, particularly when they disagree with an issue that the Secretariat has taken up. For example, the Secretariat director had written an article in the newsletter about having applied for funds, in cooperation with Norges Krisesenterforbund, for a project to map out the services provided by of all the women’s shelters in Norway. Several shelter groups reacted strongly because this issue had not been taken up at the Annual Meeting, nor had the member shelters given authorization for this sort of project.

During a Fellesmøte at one of the shelters in this study, an employee strongly expressed concern that the Secretariat director had gone beyond the mandate of the organization in seeking funds for this project without a resolution from the Annual Meeting. She asked for the approval of the

Fellesmøte to contact their regional representative on the KU to relay the shelter group's disapproval of the fact that the project had never been brought up for discussion at the Annual Meeting. The Fellesmøte voted to lodge a protest with the KU, asking for a stop to the project until the entire Secretariat membership had the chance to evaluate it and make a collective decision whether to proceed with it or not. The engagement of the members, particularly in a watch-dog function, helps to maintain democratic practices within the organization. Of course, there are contentions, which, as political theorist Chantal Mouffe points out, are a sign of vitality in a democratic organization, even when the goal is to move toward consensus. (Mouffe 1996; 1992a)

The director described the organization's formulation and preparation of arguments for hearings on political issues, or, for example, on topics to be taken up at the National Conference, as a significant consciousness-raising process, which must be given sufficient time for its important discursive democratic function within the organization. She explained that she often makes a draft of proposed arguments and positions, sends it out to the shelters for feedback, then, "sews together the results that apply for this organization. ... We take up the debates at regional conferences, annual meetings, for then, in the end, the process can take over a year." It is through this dialogical process that the members are able to reflect upon important issues and develop opinions, or change their opinions underway. The director commented, "...it is a consciousness-raising process, and reflection is very important. And, especially when we see that at a number of shelters, they have so much to do, they lose some of the gender and power perspective, and they can overlook the importance of their taking political action in their local environment to achieve changes." While the process of preparing arguments and trying to find some common ground to be able to formulate an organizational position takes time, it is vital to the democratic life of the collective, and to maintaining the political engagement of the members.

Debates and contentions within the organization are always present, and often quite intense, according to the Secretariat director. "... in the organization, we have quite a few big debates and I believe it is very good because these debates are very consciousness-raising. ...and I desire an

organization with a high ceiling. ... [a shelter group might threaten] 'we'll leave the organization because we cannot accept this or that.' The whole time we have debates and processes that go so long that we find the lowest common denominator. That is important. But, we have great debates." Despite the threats of leaving the organization, which arise in some of the more intense debates, none of the crisis centers have pulled out of the Secretariat, the director pointed out. And, the process of discussion, as intense and impassioned as it can become, draws the group toward an elusive consensus, described as the common denominator, that strand of cohesion, which holds the group together despite differences. However, when consensus cannot be reached through the deliberative process, the organization resorts to voting. The Secretariat director said, "We vote. This is after all a democratic organization. A shelter group might say, 'we do not agree, but we will yield to the majority.'" The Secretariat, functioning as a discursive democratic organization in civil society, which is less constrained than formal public institutions, also provides its members with a forum for debate, and the learning of skills necessary for participation in the broader public discourse. (DRYZEK 2000: 103) These margins of political life, which civil society provides, can prepare political actors for the greater contentions and struggles outside the organization in relation to the state, or other political actors.

The relationship of the Secretariat to the state entails both cooperation and opposition. "To be such a small organization, for the first, I feel we have strong legitimacy in relation to the state, and those who administer this society, they listen to us. ...we have good cooperation, and we are included in forums and commissions on a rather high national level," commented the director of the Secretariat. With expertise on men's violence against women from nearly 26 years of running the crisis centers in Norway, the Secretariat is included in an advisory role, on formal commissions and councils, and through informal contact with public officials. For example, the Secretariat director was a member of the National Commission on Violence Against Women that was named in August of 2001, and came with its report and recommendations, *Right to a Life without Violence: Men's Violence in Close Relationships*, in December 2003. (NOU 2003) The director pointed to cooperation with members of the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget), and the

political parties as an important factor in effecting political change. “It is not unusual that politicians in the Parliament call, or we have meetings.” The Secretariat is a willing political partner, but the director expressed an awareness of the dangers of being co-opted by an inclusion that could be more symbolic than an actual sharing of power. There are times the Secretariat must resist inclusion, and act as a political opposition.

The Secretariat director remarked that, for example, officials in the police directorate, and other public bodies have said, “It’s not so easy. One moment you can criticize us, and in the next moment, you cooperate.” Her response was, “That is the role I have. ... you just have to accept it, if you do your job. But, if you don’t, then I’ll come and catch you; you will be criticized so that your ears flap. With some, we have cleared up that role. ‘Yes, just catch us, if we don’t do our job in the police, then just go out and criticize us.’ The next moment we sit down together and do cooperative projects. We feel that many of the directorates cooperate much more with us than earlier because we sit with an experience-based knowledge, but also in relation to the movement generally.” While resistance to struggles for women’s equality still exists, the Secretariat has worked to build the legitimacy of the organization and the Women’s Shelter Movement.

“The highest goal [of the Movement] is always to strengthen women’s rights, so that they are protected, and we also use international conventions. I think that is important, these that Norway has ratified and signed. We hold them up to the authorities all the time.” In its role as an opposition group, the Secretariat presses public authorities to comply with conventions, such as the United Nations CEDAW, which Norway has ratified, but has not fully enacted within its legal system and practices.

There always remains unfinished business, and new issues arise, within the scope of men’s violence against women and gender-based inequality. The Secretariat director commented, “...if we become depoliticized, I believe that we lose. We cannot become a quiet group who accepts inequality and oppression. ... One thing is to get an end to the violence, but there are many other areas that we must work with parallel, so that women are not oppressed. The day we stop making noise, then we have accepted the violence, and then we won’t have that press against the

authorities and in the social debate to change structures and put through initiatives. ... And there is a lot of resistance, and we experience backlash now and then. But I believe it is a danger for democracy if we stop, for women's possibilities become so weakened." Among the newer issues the Women's Shelter Movement has faced in recent years are changes in the population of women who seek help at the shelters, which now includes more women of immigrant background. In addition, the Secretariat has taken up the questions of prostitution, and the international trade in, or trafficking of women.

International and regional cooperation are important aspects of the work of the Secretariat. The director of the Secretariat, and the members of the KU, for example, organized *Nordic Women Against Violence*, a Nordic Conference in the autumn of 2004. Through such conferences, women's organizations share, and learn from each other's experiences, and develop strategies for tackling the issue of men's violence against women at the national and international levels. The director and other members of the Secretariat have participated in women's actions and lobbying efforts in the European Union, through the European Women's Lobby, and at the United Nations. "On the international level, we are now writing an alternative report to the UN's Beijing Action Plan from 1995,... as are many other women's organizations..." reported the Secretariat director. Dryzek pointed out that organizations can function outside of, or parallel to, international bodies, in transnational civil society, aiming to challenge or influence political activities that take place on the transnational level, outside the boundaries of constitutions. (Dryzek 2000: 115-129) Part of the struggle is to achieve representation of marginalized groups who do not have direct access to decision-making bodies.

The Secretariat has several projects in Eastern Europe and Africa. In Zambia, for example, the Secretariat director took part in a project on "how NGOs (non-governmental organizations) can lobby to get the African states to ratify the UN's protocol to the Women's Convention, which gives the NGOs the possibility to file a complaint [against a country] with the UN. There are many that have ratified the Women's Convention [CEDAW], but they have not ratified the additional protocol that would give us access to the possibility of

reporting a country to the UN [for violations of the CEDAW].” The global women’s movement to stop men’s violence against women, and to achieve gender equality relies on the political engagement of women, acting collectively within and across national boundaries.

The Secretariat director pointed out the importance of political action at all levels, local, national, and international, to effect change in the social structures and attitudes that have prevented women from realizing full equality, “...because it is not possible to run a women’s shelter without at the same time acting politically. That is so important. One thing is the help we give to each individual woman, but if we are to effect change, we must put this practical experience into politics at all levels also.”

CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis, I have discussed how contemporary feminist utopianism, particularly Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, transgresses the boundaries of the political, creating space for the envisaging of new forms of social relations, political organization, and citizenship, largely through the reconstructing of our conceptualization of the public and private spheres. Using theories of collective political action and radical discursive democracy, I have aimed to analyze the structures and practices of experimental democratic communities, first in Piercy's utopian narrative, and then, in the Women's Shelter Movement in Norway. The influence of the Women's Shelter Movement on public discourse, and political decision making, has also been a central theme. Primarily with the help of Dobash & Dobash (1992), Ahnfelt (1987), and sources from the Secretariat of the Women's Shelter Movement, I have addressed how the issue of men's violence toward women in close relationships became redefined in the public discourse from a problem of individual, private family violence, to a social problem of significant extent grounded in the subordination of women, and women's exclusion from the public sphere. Through this discussion, I have conceptualized democracy as an ongoing discursive process, a continuous struggle to effect equality, autonomy, and solidarity within the framework of a pluralistic society. I have postulated that participation in democratic processes enhances citizen competence, encouraging the development of democratic values. Both Piercy's Mattapoisett and the Women's Shelter Movement make a good argument for political engagement and activism, where visions of greater justice inspire citizens to collective political action.

I will present now a critical review of the analysis, posing the two following questions: Has the analysis provided an adequate assessment of how contemporary feminist utopian thought transforms the political and (re)envisages the relationship between the public and the private spheres, as conceptualized in Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*?, and: Has the analytical framework allowed for meaningful interpretation of the radical

discursive democracy in the community of Mattapoissett, and the Women's Shelter Movement in Norway?

5.1 A Critical Review of the Analysis

The choices that a researcher makes in relation to the theoretical framework and the methodological approaches to be applied in a research project, lay the foundation for the formulation of questions asked in the research process, and the interpretation of the empirical evidence under investigation. I will begin this discussion by examining my choice of Piercy's utopian narrative as a springboard for the analysis of the Women's Shelter Movement in Norway. Piercy used the technique of social realism to describe the utopian Mattapoissett, and juxtapose it to the dystopian 1970s society of the United States that she aimed to critique. Her presentation of political life was more substantive than most other contemporary feminist utopian texts, allowing for assessment of various aspects of the discursive process in a political community. I then turned to feminist and democratic theory to build a theoretical framework through which to assess the political transformations in Piercy's design for democracy, and to analyze the structures and practices of the Women's Shelter Movement. I identified common elements of democratic structure and practice, which appeared in contemporary feminist utopian thought, theories of collective political action, and radical and discursive democratic theory. I used this theoretical foundation to develop questions for the empirical aspect of the project.

I chose a qualitative methods approach, relying mostly on conversational interviews, which were, at first, exploratory, to gather information for the formulation of further questions, and to test whether the theoretical framework I had begun to build was appropriate and adequate for investigating the Women's Shelter Movement. Little research had been done on the Women's Shelter Movement in Norway from the perspective of discursive democracy with which I had chosen to approach the subject. However, Ahnfelt's (1987) analysis of the Movement's role in bringing the issue of men's violence against women into the public discourse, and several studies of the shelters as service providers, outside the public social system, provided a supplement to my qualitative data.

5.2 Summary – What We Have Learned

Contemporary feminist utopianism, finding expression through Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, provides a potentially transformative utopian representation of feminist discursive democracy, where citizenship is integrated into daily life. Mattapoissett is a society struggling to provide for the collective survival of the community, and the individual self-realization of each of its citizens. Active participation allows individuals to develop not only the skills of democratic citizenship, but also heighten their capacities of intellect, moral judgment, and political virtue, which Lummis points to as a fundamental aim of radical democracy. (Lummis 1996: 39) Public decision-making takes the form of a discursive democracy privileging the active participation of competent citizens. In Piercy's Mattapoissett, where social and economic inequalities have virtually been eliminated, and the political culture is based on active citizen engagement; citizens have no question of their competence to take part in the public discourse, presenting and challenging arguments, and making decisions of any magnitude. Piercy foreshadowed radical democratic theory, which also reflects elements of Arendt's conceptualizations of democratic citizenship as a performative act inextricably linked to human development. The citizens exhibit a sense of political efficacy and confidence to engage in decisions of all matter of concern to the community, including the direction of science and technology.

The women I interviewed, who have been active in the Women's Shelter Movement in Norway spoke of the courage, competence, and determination to act, which they have experienced together, particularly in the early days of the movement. They acted as average citizens and collectively articulated their demands to government ministers and other public officials, both at high levels within the public sphere, and at the local level. Several of the women pointed out that participation in the local, democratically structured women's shelters provided a training experience for later political work at higher levels within the public sphere.

The distinction between the public and the private spheres nearly disappears in Mattapoissett, and women and men participate equally in child-rearing and political decision-making, each according to "per" inclinations. Piercy plays with language to construct new gender relations, using the

pronoun “per” for both women and men. Piercy portrays the citizens of Mattapoisett as autonomous social agents whose sex, race, or any other unchangeable individual distinctions, are non-pertinent to political participation, or any other aspect of community life. The Women’s Shelter Movement acts politically to empower women, and challenge those aspects of the division between the public and private spheres, which have contributed to the subordination of women. In this respect the movement takes an active role in the redefinition of gender relations and citizenship.

In Mattapoisett, there seem to be strong institutions assuring the procedural rights of citizens and guiding the function of the discursive democratic process, but politics takes place in everyday language in political bodies open to everyone. The political communities in Piercy’s world of 2137 are small, allowing for democratic practice as a social activity. The women’s shelters represent a similar democratic community, small enough to allow deliberations including all members of the shelter group, where the political and social aspects of participation are closely intertwined. The structures and practices of the Women’s Shelter Movement allow not only for active citizen engagement in a discursive democratic forum, but also for effective collective action. Through the Secretariat, the National Conference, and the international alliances of the Women’s Shelter Movement, the women involved in the movement form an opposition, pressuring public authorities, and struggling to effect political, legal, and social change toward achieving women’s equality.

Piercy presents a pervasive impression of conflict, contestation, indeterminacy, and process, rather than closure in her utopian narrative, which reflects the fundamental elements of both feminist democratic theory, and contemporary feminist utopian thought. “[T]he recognition of undecidability is the condition of existence of democratic politics.” (Mouffe 1996: 254) Democracy entails agonistic struggles, which take shape through reflection, speech, and collective political action engaged in by autonomous citizens. Piercy’s tendentious text urges political activism in the present, energized by a utopian vision of a conceivable, more egalitarian future. The Women’s Shelter Movement in Norway, with its struggles, both internal and external, represents a real-life experiment in feminist discursive democracy.

The Women's Shelter Movement is not a model, or a blueprint, for *perfect* utopian social organization, but rather the manifestation of a design for a *good-enough*, radical democratic community, engaged in political action, providing shelter for battered women, and struggling toward eutopia, a good place for women and men. Empowered by hope, and a vision of women's equality, the Movement has proven to be a significant actor in its efforts to effect a transformation of the political.

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NOTES

¹ See Ahnfelt (1987) for an insider's perspective on how the issue of men's violence against women rapidly entered the public discourse and came onto political agendas. She presents all aspects of the establishment phase of the Women's Shelter Movement.

² Andersen (1997: 12-18) and Ahnfelt (1987: 81-92) provide insight into the barriers and challenges the Women's Shelter Movement met in the establishment phase, and the initial relations with public authorities.