The Fourth World examines the recent emergence of the Canadian Aboriginal women’s movement, its relationship to the broader feminist movement, and the applicability and appropriateness of contemporary feminist theories as frameworks for the analysis of Aboriginal women’s legal, political and socio-economic status. It is an exploratory study and does not suggest that the results are representative of Aboriginal women in general. Aboriginal women have often been the objects of researchers for academic purposes in various disciplines; however, the social realities and dynamics of the Aboriginal woman’s world have often been ignored or misrepresented and often entirely misinterpreted. Aboriginal women have often been viewed and treated as static remnants of the fur trade. The status of Aboriginal women varies due to several factors under colonialism; this book explores these factors from the perspective of Aboriginal women, based on their experiences and social realities as colonized persons.

This book started life as a masters’ thesis that was submitted to the Department of Native Studies and Graduate Studies at the University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, and it has undergone many changes to bring it into this form. It is based partly on research I conducted into the attitudes of Aboriginal women living in urban centres in Saskatchewan about their lives and the oppressions they face. It develops a framework for the discussion of Aboriginal women’s multi-oppresion, one which reflects Indigenous women’s perspectives. Feminism often assumes that all women, cross-culturally, share the same oppression, but I believe this assumption to be false. The Indigenous Circle of Life philosophy more appropriately embodies Aboriginal women’s conceptions of human nature, their political philosophy and their strategy for social change and liberation.

The Fourth World theory is inherent in the Circle of Life philosophy and in everyday oral teachings of Aboriginal people. In keeping with our oral traditions, these teachings are constantly being passed on at gatherings.
and also in private conversations. They comprise a distinctly Aboriginal worldview.

It is not my intent to malign the broader feminist movement but rather to elaborate on this distinct worldview of Aboriginal people. In this discussion, I concentrate on the four main schools of feminist thought: liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, radical feminism and socialist feminism. I apologize if there are any misinterpretations; they are solely mine. It should also be noted that not all Aboriginal women share this view. As can be noted in the Interviews, there were a few contradictory answers; these remain unedited as they were part of the data. I apologize once again to the informants for not being able to include entire interviews. Most interviews were at least one hour in length; therefore the data had to be broken down and only excerpts could be used.

Many contemporary Euro-Canadian feminists view male domination as the sole or main source of oppression for all women and quite often disregard racism and “national” oppression as contributing sources of oppression for Aboriginal women and women of colour. A crucial question is: Do Aboriginal women perceive themselves as oppressed within their own Aboriginal societies because of gender or as oppressed within the larger and more dominant Euro-Canadian immigrant settler society, or a combination thereof? I contend that the concepts of racism and Eurocentrism have not been adequately addressed by feminist writers analyzing the status of Indigenous women in the global community. As colonized persons, Canada’s Indigenous women may view their oppression differently from those of middle-class Euro-Canadian feminists. As such, many of the concerns and issues confronting Indigenous women may not always coincide with feminist theory or interests. It is also important to note that Aboriginal women do not live in isolation from Euro-Canadian society even if they reside on reserves. One implication of this non-isolation is that they have become exposed to national gender debates through the media and at public meetings.

It is my hope that Aboriginal women will benefit from this research, in that it provides them with an opportunity to express their social realities and experiences and to be contributors in the formulation of theory. Key questions addressed in this study are: (1) To what extent do Aboriginal women understand, experience and articulate their oppression? (2) To what extent do colonized women perceive racism as the source of their oppression? (3) To what extent do Aboriginal women view male domination within their own Aboriginal societies as the sole source of the oppres-
sion? (4) How do Aboriginal women articulate racism and gender oppression?

There are five chapters in this book. Chapter One examines contemporary feminist theories and methodology. Chapter Two begins by providing a background in the origins of the Aboriginal women’s movement in Canada and then examines various theories on Aboriginal women’s oppression. Chapter Three describes the methodology of the research project and provides the results of the data collection process. Chapter Four summarizes the research and formulates an alternative theory—the Fourth World perspective of Canada’s Aboriginal women. Chapter Five concludes with suggestions as to how Aboriginal people, both women and men, might go forward to form political strategies for social change and liberation.

Please note that the terms, “Indian, Native, Aboriginal, Indigenous and First Nations” are used interchangeably in this discussion of Canada’s Aboriginal inhabitants. The term “Indigenous” has been adopted by the United Nations as a working definition to describe colonized peoples globally (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs 1989; 1990: 231). The other terms are used by scholars and Aboriginal people themselves.
1. Contemporary Feminist Theory

Given the difficulty in summarizing the plurality of feminism, it is necessary to zero in on a framework that can be used as the backbone for discussion, while acknowledging that not all feminist groups fit neatly into this framework. The range of feminism is broad and varied. At the time this project was started, Jaggar (1988) formed the basis of discussion in Women’s Studies courses. To some critics, Jaggar’s analysis may be outdated, but by the same token, the same could be said of Marxist theory, which forms the basis of discussion in many academic writings.

Although this book is not about feminism, the situation of Aboriginal women is sadly lacking in feminist discussions of women’s oppression. The multi-oppression of Aboriginal women does not fall neatly into most feminist theories. A distinctly Aboriginal worldview is needed. Consequently, the four main schools of thought that inform the discussion in most feminist writings form the foundation for the development of an anti-thesis.

For the purposes of this book, Jaggar’s (1988) approach will be followed, one which Holland (1990) describes in the following manner:

In *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*, Jaggar defines, compares, and criticizes four “schools” of (Anglo-American) feminist political thought—liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist—and correlates each with a specific doctrine about what constitutes human personhood. (6)

**Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism is grounded in the basic moral and political values of liberalism: justice, equality and freedom for all. Liberal feminists do not challenge existing institutions but rather see reform in legislation as a solution. Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1992) state:
Liberal feminism then is consistent with the dominant American ethos in its basic acceptance of America’s institutions and culture, its reformist orientation, and its appeal to the values of individualism, choice, freedom and equality of opportunity. (466)

Jaggar (1988) believes that liberalism and capitalism complement each other:

Historically, the liberal tradition in political theory has always been associated with the capitalist economic system. Liberal political theory emerged with the rise of capitalism, it expressed the needs of the developing capitalist class and the liberal values of autonomy and self-fulfilment have often been linked with the right to private property. (34)

Liberty, then, is the guiding principle behind liberalism. Every individual should have the freedom to do what is good for that individual; every human possesses the capacity to reason for themselves as to what is good for them. This right to self-fulfilment should not be in any way restricted by those in authority, but rather every individual should have an equal opportunity to achieve that right, regardless of their sex, once the age of reason has been reached.

Jaggar (1988) and Holland (1990), however, believe that there are limitations to this “abstract individualism.” In particular, they criticize the notion that all individuals can attain fulfilment despite their circumstances and environment. Choice is not always an option. As well, they believe that liberalism is male-biased and has a middle-class perspective. The tendency for individuals to be egoistic has been recognized by some theorists, but most believe that individuals do have the mental capacity to put others first:

Only a few liberal philosophers, such as Hobbes and Bentham, claim that people always act in what they perceive to be their own self-interest. Most of the other major liberal theorists, such as Locke, Kant, Mill, and Rawls, conceive people as able to act on a moral principle of impartiality; which requires them to refrain from placing their own selfish interests before the interests of others. (Jaggar 1988: 30)

Liberal feminists believe that men and women have the same mental capacity but that women have been unable to reach their full potential
because of their role in the home and family. Liberal feminists believe that the sex roles perpetuated by the family and public learning institutions intensify this problem for women and that men have more opportunities to exercise and attain their full mental capacity because they are not confined to the home. According to Jaggar, what the liberal feminists advocate is an androgynous model of society.

### Marxist Feminism

Unlike liberal feminism, which appears to support capitalism and the status quo by seeking only reform, Marxist feminism challenges the capitalist system. Jaggar (1988) contrasts Marxism with liberal feminism:

Contrary to liberal theory, which is associated historically with capitalism and indeed often provides a rationale for it, Marxism offers a devastating critique of the capitalist system. Marxism charges, moreover, that the liberal theory employed to justify the bourgeois revolutions is mere egalitarian rhetoric, serving only to disguise the deep inequalities that inevitably characterize all societies divided by class. (51)

According to some authors, “Marxian feminism brings together Marxian class analysis and feminist social protest” (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1992: 466) to explain gender inequality. However, Jaggar believes there are problems with Marxist theory because of its ambiguity, arguing that his various interpreters and revisers often disagree as to what Marx actually said.

The rise of capitalism was seen to alter the value of woman’s work, as it was divided into a separate “private” sphere from men’s work, which is in the public sphere. Kronemann (1981) points out that, “Inherent in this argument, and in most Marxist writing, is a sharp dichotomy between the family and society, between ‘personal’ and ‘public’ life, of which only the latter is seen to really concern socialists” (223). This argument is thematic in Marxist feminist theories. According to Chafetz (1988):

Marxist-feminism recognizes that patriarchy predates capitalism. It is seen as rooted in the institution of the family. In various ways, theorists in this tradition suggest that women’s childbearing and lactating functions affect the division of labor between the sexes, leaving women a preponderance of the domestic and childbearing tasks, regardless of what other labor they perform. Therefore, the
roots of gender inequality are to be found in a sexual division of labor in which males provide much or all of the family subsistence. This division of labor is posited to arise with the dawning of private property and to be seriously exacerbated by the particular system of private property known as capitalism. (37)

Theorists in this tradition believe that women’s procreation and caregiving roles prevented them from working outside the home consigning them to the private sphere, while the men were seen to be outside this realm, in the public sphere. However, Marx has been often criticized by feminists for the male-bias in his theory of social oppression; he did not consider women’s labour in the home to be part of the production process. However, as Jaggar’s (1988) analysis of Marxist feminism suggests, “Engels’ account of the origins of women’s subordination has been of tremendous historical importance. Most Marxist and much feminist theory has taken this into account as its starting point … [and] together with Marx’s … reveals … important Marxist assumptions about women’s nature” (64). Engels’ claim that the family unit and monogamous marriages are responsible for the subjugation of women appears to be what feminists echo. As well, the notion of class associated with the rise of capitalism is common among Marxist feminists. Thus, what Marxist feminists use is a theory of social oppression to explain gender inequality:

The solution for gender inequality is the destruction of class oppression. This destruction will come through revolutionary action by a united wage-earning class, including both men and women. Any direct mobilization of women against men is counterrevolutionary, because it divides the potentially revolutionary working class. (Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley 1992: 469)

According to Marxist theorists, in a capitalist society people are oppressed by classism and not necessarily because of gender. The by-product of a class system is gender inequality. However, though theorists of the Marxist tradition may be able to explain the causes of gender inequality, they do not explore why women in the upper classes tend to exploit women in the lower classes. This exploitation of women by women, also a by-product of the class system, is probably an experience that is more common to women of minority groups, a reality that has been overlooked.
Radical Feminism

Radical feminists believe that patriarchy, with its pattern of domination and subordination, is the cause of women's oppression. Patriarchy places the male in positions of authority over the female. Violence, or the threat of violence, plays a significant part in the maintenance of this system.

In most feminist writings, *The Second Sex*, by Simone de Beauvoir (1949), is a major reference and is often a point of departure for the discussion of radical feminism. According to Sydie, de Beauvoir questions why women have accepted their position, “because one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (Sydie 1988: 139). The relations between the sexes are seen as central to the subordination and oppression of women. Male dominance in sexual relations, in other words what happens in the bedroom, and acts of male violence and abuse form the basis of oppression, according to radical feminists. There are some concerns about radical feminists’ prescriptions for women’s liberation, i.e., alternative forms of reproduction, lesbianism and sisterhood. Women’s communes and lesbianism may liberate women from male dominance, but not all women desire such living arrangements.

Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminists borrow from and combine radical feminism and Marxism to describe and explain gender oppression. From Jaggar (1988), Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1992), and MacKinnon (1989), we learn that this synthesis has not been fully developed. According to MacKinnon:

Attempts to create a synthesis between Marxism and feminism, termed socialist-feminism, have recognized neither the separate integrity of each theory nor the depth of antagonism between them…. Most attempts at synthesis try to integrate or explain the appeal of feminism by incorporating issues feminism identifies as central—the family, housework, sexuality, reproduction, socialization, personal life—within an essentially unchanged Marxian analysis. (11)

There does not appear to be much difference between Marxist feminism and socialist feminism, as both combine Marxism and feminism. In his analysis of race, class and gender, Bourgeault (1989) also advances this position:
Some feminist anthropologists (Marxist) are advancing a more accurate historical materialist interpretation of women's status in pre-capitalist societies. These analysts also recognize that gender relations must be analyzed as part of a total system, and not in terms of the structure and function of roles and relationships separate from political and economic influences. (88)

However, Bourgeault challenges the universality of patriarchy as a system of male domination, as some feminists have posited. As well, Bourgeault claims that, “unlike gender oppression, which is rooted in pre-capitalist societies and the transition to early class formations, race oppression is closely linked to the rise of capitalist relations of exploitation” (89). Bourgeault is critical of what he terms “Western” feminism's theoretical approaches because of the tendency of feminists to treat male domination as a distinctly separate and hierarchical system. Bourgeault’s position is well-taken because the main criticism from women of colour is that feminists tend to ignore racism or treat it as separate from sexism and classism in their analysis of gender oppression.

Critique of Feminist Theory and Methodology

The publication from which Bourgeault's (1989) article, “Race, class and gender: Colonial domination of Indian Women,” was taken includes ten other authors and covers a wide range of issues. Several contributors are women of colour who criticize the feminist movement for marginalizing their concerns and side-stepping the issue of racism. For example, Thornhill (1989) states:

[W]oman has become synonymous with White Women, whereas Women of Colour, such as myself, are seen as Others, as nonpersons, as dehumanized beings—or sometimes not seen at all…. We Black Women, it would appear, have no role in the finalized script of Canadian Women’s Studies. We have no speaking parts. Despite our unique experience of Triple Oppression—on the counts of race, sex, and class—and despite our special survival skills, which are indispensable cornerstones to the evolving documentary of female experiences, the Women’s Movement has failed to generate any in-depth analysis of Black female experience. (27)

Thornhill believes that the history of Black women in America and their
struggles for survival have not been recognized as part of women’s experiences.

Furthermore, race and sex cannot be taken as separate issues in the analysis of women’s oppression, which Thornhill believes has been the case in white feminist theorizing:

White women insist that sex and race are two separate issues. And yet, in the words of Black feminist writer, bell hooks: “At the moment of my birth, two factors determined my destiny, my having been born Black, and my having been born female.” Clearly, race and sex are two immutable facets of human identity and the struggles to end them are naturally entwined. (28)

hooks (1981) analysis of the history of the feminist movement in the United States and the relationship with the Black women’s movement shows that indeed Black women have been excluded from the broader white women’s movement. If they were included, Black women often remained segregated and marginalized at feminist meetings. hooks (1981) believes that American white feminists tend to promote their own interests:

At the beginning of the 20th century, white women suffragists were eager to advance their own cause at the expense of black people. In 1903 … a southern suffragist urged the enfranchisement of white women on the grounds that it “would insure the immediate and durable white supremacy.” (128)

American white women were outraged that Black men rather than white women would be given the right to vote and, in fact, did not advocate that voting rights be extended to include all women. hooks further believes that both the Black civil rights movement and the women’s rights movement have become weak, if not dead. She argues that collective feminist activism is not possible if only one group advances its rights and ignores the rights of others. She insists that American white feminists have achieved a certain degree of social equality but have not advanced the plight of Afro-American women. Competition between the two women’s groups “for male favor” (hooks 1981: 156) is believed to be one cause.

Another antagonism, according to hooks, is that slavery advanced white women’s status and domination over both Black men and Black women, and white women did not want to relinquish that status. hooks is disillusioned with the racism and classism prevalent in the women’s move-
ment and cautions that unless these issues are dealt with, the women's movement will remain a "sham," as it will be representative only of white women's desires. Equal pay with men will not necessarily mean liberation if racism and classism are not addressed. For women of colour, sexism, racism and classism are intertwined and cannot be treated separately in the analysis of women's oppression.

In the Canadian context, the most vocal groups of women of colour appear to be Black feminists, Asian-Canadian feminists, and other immigrant women who feel that their concerns are being ignored and marginalized by the broader feminist movement. A detailed critique of feminist theory by Aboriginal women is almost non-existent.

Within the American context, the problem facing Black feminists appears to be one of exclusion. In *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, Steady (1981) has compiled the works of mainly (but not exclusively) Black women, to show the diversity of perspectives and roles in their respective societies. In this study, Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (1981: 301–15) documents the history of the Black women's movement in the United States from 1830–1920. What is most profound in her report is the racial discrimination and exclusion experienced by Afro-American women in their attempts to get involved with the white feminist movement. There were several instances where Black feminists were asked not to attend certain conferences for fear they would jeopardize white women's demands for equality. When they were allowed to attend, they were often asked to sit in places reserved for Black women. Sojourner Truth's experience is one such example:

> Sojourner Truth was one of the few black women noted by historians to have frequented women's rights conventions. She, however, was not always welcomed. Her narrative reveals that the white women at the Akron, Ohio, Women's Rights Convention in 1851 beseeched the chairman to forbid her to speak before the group. They felt she would ruin the movement by giving the public the impression that their cause was "mixed with abolition and niggers." (Terborg-Penn 1981: 304)

These exclusionary tactics resulted in Black women forming their own women's groups, or self-help groups with men, because they did not get support from white women, who were supposedly fighting for all women's liberation.