

# GAINING GROUND



## WOMEN, MINING AND THE ENVIRONMENT

CHRISTINE CLEGHORN, NATALIE EDELSON AND SUE MOODIE

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Portrait of a laughing woman posed with her hands on hips in ruffled dress and bonnet (Page 37 and back cover) ca. 1900 Dawson Museum Collection. Reference No. 6390

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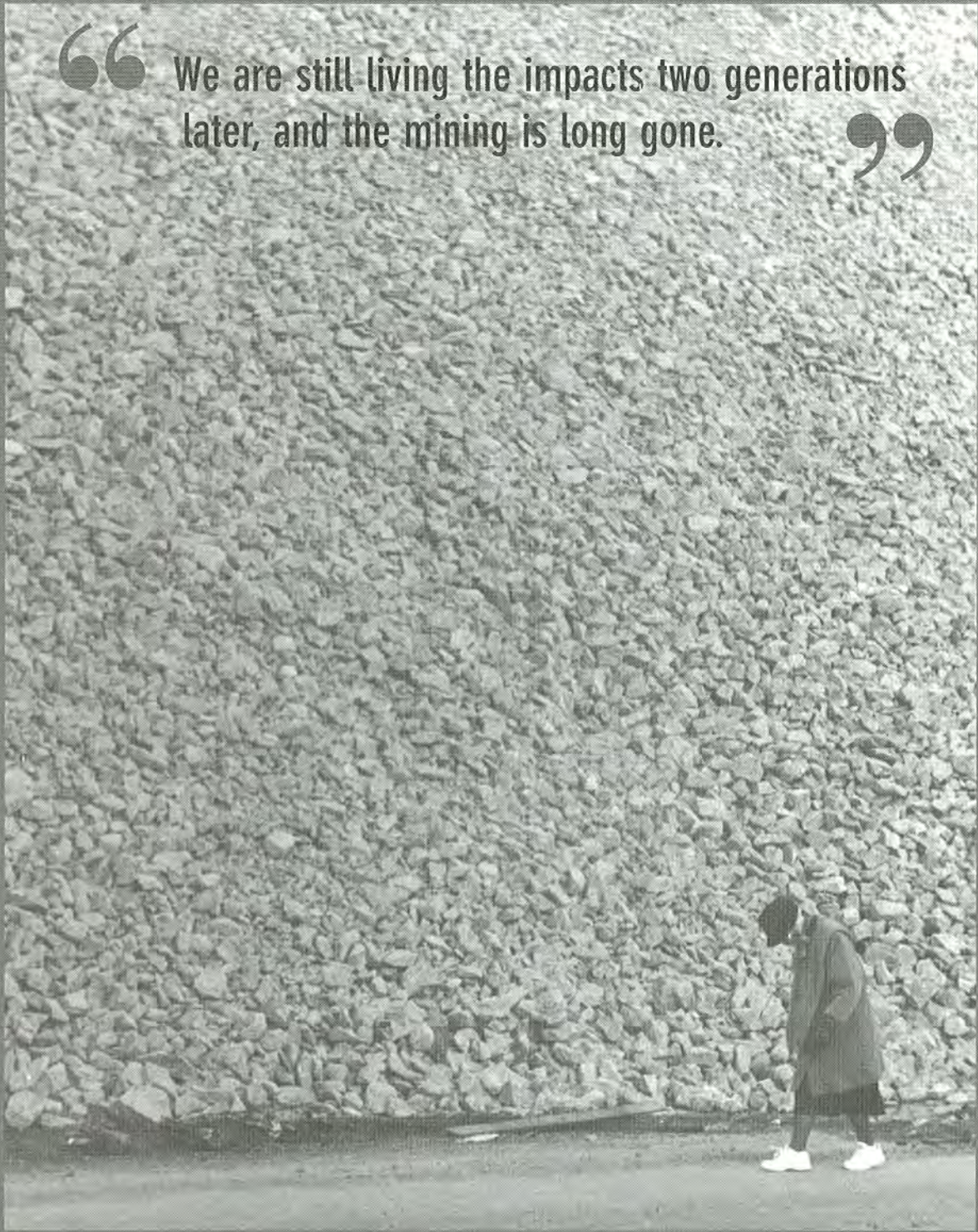
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“ We are still living the impacts two generations later, and the mining is long gone. ”



# FOREWORD

The idea for *Gaining Ground: Women Mining and the Environment* came out of the notable absence of information on how the mining industry impacts women, their families and the communities they live in. While technical and economic issues are carefully reviewed in the mine planning and environmental assessment stages of a project, how the project will affect individual, family, and community health is seldom scrutinized.

Women, as members of their communities, are at the forefront of knowing how mining projects affect the health of the environment, families and communities. They are strong and active forces in both their communities and home lives. Often, they are also agents who address, contemplate and cope with the social and environmental impacts of mineral resource development.

In September 2000, a two-day gathering was held at Lake Laberge in the Yukon Territory, Canada. The *Gaining Ground* gathering was initiated to bring together women and provide a forum where they could learn from and support each other in finding new and more effective ways to deal with the impacts of mining on their lives. The gathering brought together women from Yukon communities affected by mining, as well as women from outside the Yukon who have experience in the health, science, and social service sectors. Given the gathering's objectives, it also sought to rally women who

have experience with grassroots organizing. The gathering broke new ground in recognizing the impacts of mining on communities and families, and on the interrelationships between women, mining, and the environment. The gathering also helped to define opportunities available for positive action and articulate a direction for beneficial social change.

“ [Women] Often are also agents who address, contemplate and cope with the social and environmental impacts of mineral resource development. ”

In January 2000, the organizing group representing the Yukon Status of Women Council (YSWC) and the Yukon Conservation Society (YCS) began conducting a literature review and identifying issues and resources relevant to the gathering's objectives. The organizing group also began discussing who would be the individual women interested in the *Gaining Ground* ideas and gathering. As a next step, women were identified in each community to act as

contacts for the project. The community contacts used a questionnaire developed by the organizing group to be used as a basis for informal meetings to initiate discussions in their communities.

In addition to the questionnaire process, ideas about women, mining and the environment were discussed with a wide range of women from diverse backgrounds (e.g. tradepersons, environmental assessors, academics, and public servants) in order to learn from their

## FOREWORD (CONTINUED)

experiences of living in, or working with, communities with mining development activity. These discussions also included women who are grassroots activists and community members living in areas impacted by mineral development across Canada, the United States, and internationally. Case studies and resources suggested by these contacts focus on women's experiences and originate from a variety of sources.

A pre-gathering research activity consisted of recording interviews with three women living in the Yukon. The women were chosen for their lived experiences in mining communities, as well as their roles as service providers to a large number of Yukon women and families. "Woman A" grew up in a mining community outside the Yukon and currently works as an advocate helping women in need. "Woman B" is from an urban centre further south and worked as a nurse practitioner in numerous Yukon communities, including Faro, Ross River, Carmacks, Pelly Crossing, and Mayo. She is currently working in the area of health policy. "Woman C" was born in a mill town outside the Yukon and worked as a laborer for several years, both in the mill and in the pit in a Yukon mine. She currently works in the area of community wellness and prevention of violence against women in the Yukon. Their knowledge and analyses provided key insights to experiences common to people living in mining communities.

The information gathered from these meetings, interviews, and discussions was instrumental in setting the agenda for the

September gathering. At the Gaining Ground gathering, participants were provided with an Interim Report that included women's statements that both resonated with participants and reflected the diverse concerns and priorities that women have with respect to how mineral resource development affects their lives and their communities.

In all, fifty-six women attended the conference while approximately 40 others expressed

interest but, for a variety of reasons, were unable to attend. Their request to be kept informed of the outcomes of the gathering has created a larger network of interested and involved individuals who, despite not having attended the gathering, are now part of the post-gathering discussions and planning.

From the outset of the gathering trust was built by equally honouring the experience and knowledge of each woman attending.

In other words, academics

from "outside" were not organized to divide the group into "experts" and observers. A variety of information sharing techniques were used, including go-rounds, small break-out groups, thematic presentations highlighting academic and local knowledge, discussions around video presentations, as well as more informal creative outlets such as song writing and yoga. One result, reflected in many of the evaluations, was that women, regardless of their educational or cultural background, learned that their lived experiences were of inherent value to those present, and therefore to society in general.

“...ideas about women, mining and the environment were discussed with a wide range of women from diverse backgrounds...”

# INTRODUCTION

For over a century, women in the Yukon have lived with the economic, social, and environmental consequences of mining and mineral exploration. With the Klondike Gold Rush came the thirst for gold, the romanticism of the frontier, and the seeds of an economic system that was based on exploitation. Since the gold rush, successive governments have based our economy on mining and mineral exploration, even subsidizing these industries to make the Yukon a more attractive destination for mineral-chasing dollars.

In the 1970s, the practice of environmental assessment evolved, as an outgrowth of western society's increased awareness of humans' dependence on the earth, and to ensure that planning for developments occurred in a public forum. Justice Thomas Berger's landmark investigation into the possible consequences of the construction of a natural gas pipeline in Canada's north has proven to be the watershed with respect to the level of scrutiny that social and economic impacts of proposed projects undergo. Since Berger, the focus on technical aspects of projects, and economic benefits, has been at the expense of spending resources looking at how the individual, family, and community are likely to be affected. Government policies in the Yukon have continued to accord the mining industry a special status and have shied away from economic diversification from this non-renewable resource.

At the present, the Yukon's mineral industry is in a deep slump, despite government subsidies and a regulatory regime that is starved for inspectors and enforcement capabilities. The service industry has also been affected by the slump. This, coupled with an increasing understanding of the long-term social and economic consequences of abandoned mines, has led Yukoners to re-evaluate the role of mineral extraction in our economy. Yukon women are leading this discussion.

“ For over a century, women in the Yukon have lived with the economic, social and environmental consequences of mining and mineral exploration. ”

This paper will expand upon the reflections and sharing experienced by women at the Gaining Ground gathering. Its objective, as an extension of the gathering, is to provoke thought, incite discussion and spur action for positive social change in communities where there is mineral resource development. It is intended to foster and encourage empowerment of the individuals and communities encountering mineral resource

development. Specifically, this paper addresses issues women face and the lives they live in the communities where this type of resource development is taking place. We hope that this will be a useful tool for readers to help name and contextualize the reality lived by many women in the Yukon and in other regions where mining activity occurs. It is also our aim that this paper might act as a catalyst to stimulate discussion within both the feminist and environmental movements.



## INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

The cross-fertilization of ideas can lead to not only a broader understanding of the systematic ways the mineral industry affects women, families, and communities, but can also lead to new pathways for activists and organizations working in fields which support mineral exploration or that reflect and deal with the adverse consequences of its activities.

This paper will demonstrate that the basis of our economic system is exploitation.

While this ethic of exploitation frames our relationship with natural resources, it also overflows into framing how society is structured, and how women and the environment are subsequently impacted.

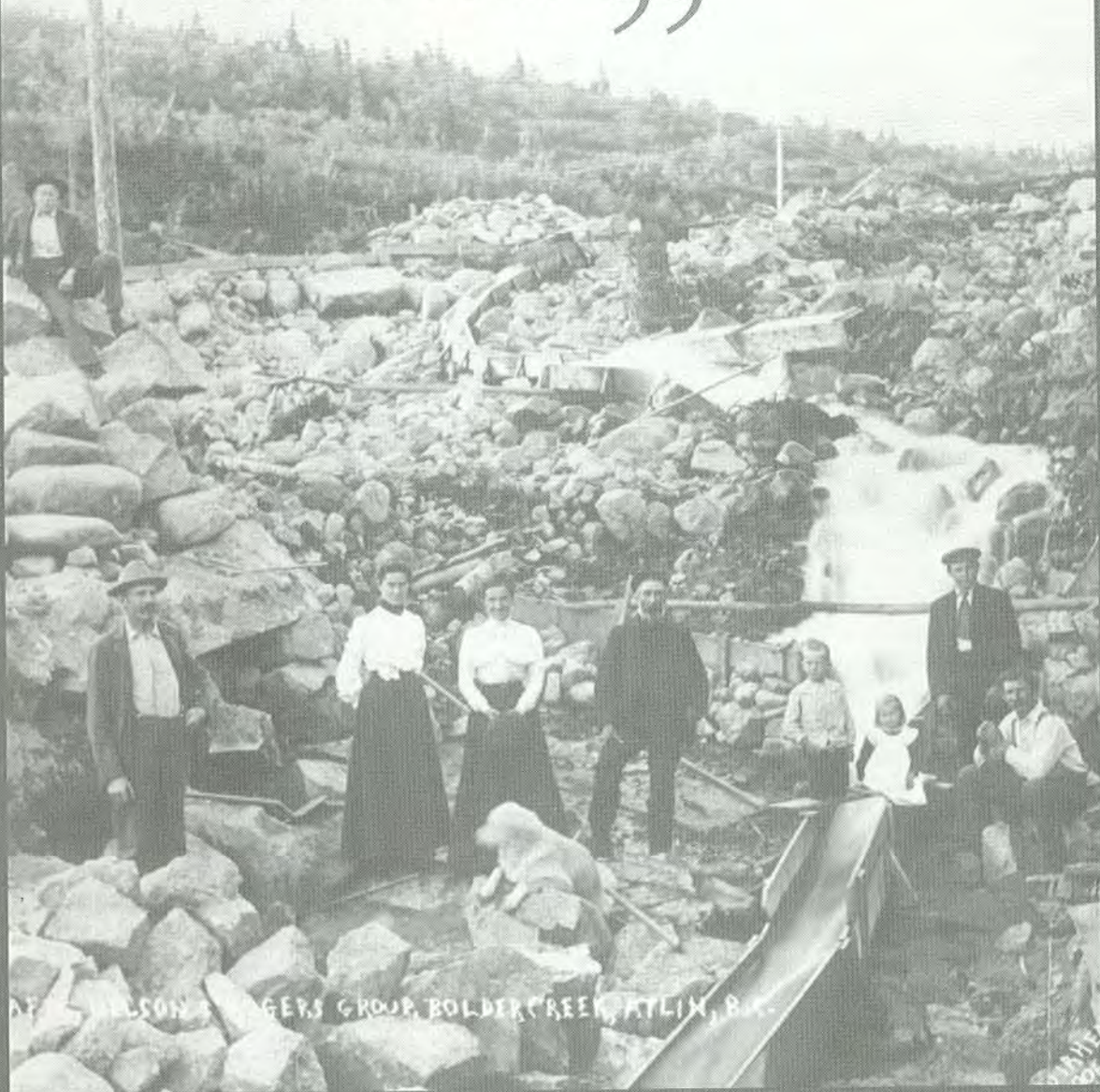
This paper will demonstrate the relationship between the exploitation ethic and the role of women in society and the economy. It will then explore these themes in the context of women's lived realities in the Yukon.

The paper will then turn to an examination of communities and empowerment, demonstrating that in order for communities to become empowered and gain authority over the natural resources around them, those aspects of communities that are rooted in the ethic of exploitation must be torn up and cast away.

The paper concludes with the Draft Gaining Ground Statement, and a discussion of ways forward.

“...this ethic of exploitation frames our relationship with natural resources, it also overflows into framing how society is structured, and women and the environment are subsequently impacted.”

“...Government policies in the Yukon have continued to accord the mining industry a special status and have shied away from economic diversification from this non-renewable resource.”



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# THE CONNECTION

## BETWEEN WOMEN, ECONOMY AND ENVIRONMENT

The following sections integrate the findings of the literature review, case studies, and community and individual interviews with the discussions that occurred at the Gaining Ground gathering.

In her book *Counting For Nothing*, Marilyn Waring links feminism with economics, showing that although production itself can cause ecological degradation, assigning economic value solely to production activities further jeopardizes the ecosystem, undermines women, children and communities, and perpetuates attitudes leading to environmental and social degradation, and war:

"I learned that, in the United Nations System of National Accounts, the things I valued about my life and country - its pollution-free environment; its mountain streams with safe drinking water; the accessibility of national parks, walkways, beaches, lakes, kauri and beech forests; the absence of nuclear power and nuclear energy- all counted for nothing. They were not accounted for in private consumption expenditure, general government expenditure, or gross domestic capital formation. Yet these accounting systems were used to determine all public policy. Since the environment effectively counted for nothing, there could be no 'value' on policy measures that would ensure its preservation. Hand in hand with the dismissal of the environment, came evidence of the severe invisibility of

women and women's work. For example, as a politician, I found it virtually impossible to prove-given the production framework with which we were faced-that childcare facilities were needed. 'Non-producers' (housewives, mothers) who are 'inactive' and 'unoccupied' cannot, apparently, be in need. They are not even in the economic cycle in the first place. They can certainly have no expectation that they will be visible in the distribution of

“Economics is a tool of people in power...economics didn't just come up out of nowhere. It's a tool of those who want to exploit. It's a justification.”

- Marilyn Waring

benefits that flow from production" (Waring,1999:1). This system of accounting also places a priority on mineral production. Whether for the generation of weapons or for manufacturing, the outcome is the same: production of metals and goods is attributed with economic value. It is this kind of production value that is supported financially while human and environmental health are not. Waring further reflects, "The current state of the world is the result of a system that attributes little or no 'value'

to peace. It pays no heed to the preservation of natural resources or to the labour of the majority of its inhabitants or to the unpaid work of the reproduction of human life itself-not to mention its maintenance and care. The system cannot respond to values it refuses to recognize" (1999:3). The bias of this system is difficult to escape because it silences the broader range of values while highlighting production as an economic process that is an absolute good, conducted for the benefit of all.

## THE CONNECTION (CONTINUED)

Who defines value? Who defines benefit? The economy itself is a gendered economy. The patriarchal constructs of economy result in the exploitation of environment and human sectors while these are also subject to a more rigorous scrutiny and the allocation of fewer financial resources. The financial dependency of social service and environmental groups is viewed as a form of begging, while mining exploration companies raise millions of dollars in high risk ventures without having to answer to much other than the rumour that “there’s gold in them thar hills.”

Often, a community definition of mining influence on people and the environment is disregarded in terms of being credible or meaningful. Author Vandana Shiva attributes this to the influence of dominant scientific knowledge and western economy. She describes the current dominance of western value system as a “monoculture of the mind.”

This influence of scientific knowledge disrupts the cohesion within communities and polarizes society into those with access and those without it, both in respect to the knowledge systems and the power system. With the “monoculture of the mind”, “the disappearance of local knowledge through its interaction with the dominant western knowledge takes place at many levels, through many steps. First, local knowledge is made to disappear by simply not seeing it, by negating its very existence. This is very easy in the distant gaze of the globalizing dominant system. The western systems of knowledge have generally been viewed as universal. However, the dominant system is also a local system, with its social basis in a particular

culture, class and gender. It is not universal in an epistemological sense. It is merely the globalized version of a very local and parochial tradition. Emerging from a dominating and colonising culture, modern knowledge systems are themselves colonising” (Shiva, 1995:32).

The way in which environmental assessments of mining projects are conducted is an example of the monoculture approach to

development. Decisions are made about the proposed mining project based on western scientific knowledge, generally a white male academic approach that negates the value of local and traditional knowledge. Many women have experienced what one woman described as “the PhD phenomenon. They talk amongst themselves and can’t hear or understand different world views” (Activist at Gaining Ground). Decisions are made about the potential

for mitigating environmental impacts without recognizing a wider base of values and concerns. Environmental assessment often starts with the premise that every impact can be mitigated, and where impacts cannot be mitigated, they are permitted for the greater good of society. In the dominant society, there is an invested interest – literally – in ensuring that the mineral production value supersedes any other value system. This is accomplished by using production value and a sense of economic good to silence the knowledge systems that speak of the intrinsic value of ecological health. In this manner, the serious nature of long-term environmental impacts is also silenced.

“...although production itself can cause ecological degradation, assigning economic value solely to production activities further jeopardizes the ecosystem.”

## THE CONNECTION (CONTINUED)

When a mine development is proposed, the quality of the ore is of little importance if an inexpensive way of excavating and processing low grade ore is possible. Attention is focused on the economic importance of production. Environmentally, this leads to irreversible impacts. With a lower ore grade, more land will be disrupted for extraction and required for processing (e.g. heap leaches) and a greater volume of waste rock will be produced and deposited. The environmental costs escalate, while the economic benefit is low.

At the community level, many women recognize the benefits of mining do not out-weigh the costs to their communities, society as a whole, and the environment, either globally or locally. A Yukon health worker interviewed stated: "I think the cost of mining is astronomical. I think the reason why it looks like benefit – that when you do those kinds of measurements – when statisticians and governments collect information, they weren't collecting all the information they needed to on the negative side. They left great areas blank. And so, at the end of the day, revenue versus deficit, whether you are talking about people or money or environment, they always weigh in favour of the revenue."

These revenues are also less likely to reach women. For example women in the Yukon are more likely than men to earn less than \$20,000, and men are more likely to earn \$60,000 or more, annually, even though a comparable number of Yukon men (84%) and women (78.5%) participated in the workforce (YTG Women's Directorate, 1999:vi). This picture is even more bleak for aboriginal

persons of both sexes of whom a greater proportion earn less than \$20,000 annually (YTG Women's Directorate, 1999:vi).

Significant gains for women living in western democracies have been made in recent decades. Some of these gains have been increased access to higher education and better employment, passing of legislation and creation of services addressing violence in intimate relationships, and achieving increased reproductive freedom. However, many of these gains are of the "add women

**“ At the community level, many women recognize the benefits of mining do not out-weigh the costs to their communities... ”**

and stir” variety that do not significantly change the status quo. The women that have benefited from this are usually individuals from a specific background: mostly educated, white, and upper/middle-class. They have benefited by gaining access to some positions of power that were previously exclusively held by men.

The past decades have also seen the increased participation of women within educational, judicial, economic, medical and religious institutions without significantly altering the hierarchical and exploitative nature of these power structures. Consequently, women as a group tend to be concentrated in the lower echelons of these structures. In the workplace, these “pink ghettos” are where the majority of working women are situated. They are usually jobs characterized by low-pay, low-status, repetitiveness to the point of causing chronic physical ailments, non-unionized, and are often part-time positions with no benefits. “Part-time” may reflect the categorization of a position and not the hours a person is required to work.

## THE CONNECTION (CONTINUED)

All of these disadvantaged forms of employment are accompanied with minimal opportunity for advancement. Part-time work also means impeded access to government-sponsored employment support programs that require Employment Insurance eligibility which in turn is determined by the number of hours worked per week. This creates a very different picture from the equality-seeking feminist vision that will be presented below.

The next sections demonstrate how feminist analysis can be used to obtain a different understanding of society and the influences that shape the ways in which resources, environment, women, families, and communities are similarly exploited. The links between colonialism and environmental racism are discussed, as well as the ethic of exploitation and the Yukon context. Through this lens, concepts such as "progress" or "growth" are redefined.

### FEMINISM AND ENVIRONMENTALISM

The word feminism is politically-charged. Many who are unconcerned with, or hostile to, the women's movement see it as being uniformly concerned with "Women's Lib," the dismissive reference to women's struggle to gain access to positions of influence within our society, be it in their homes, on the streets, or in corporate boardrooms. This reaction serves to marginalize the legitimate concern that women, who comprise just over half of the population, experience relative poverty,

violence and exploitation to the benefit and privilege of the remaining half. For many, it may come as a surprise that it is only since 1929 that women's legal status as "persons" has been given constitutional recognition in Canada. Further, aboriginal women did not get the vote until the 1960s.

Despite many gains made over a relatively short period towards the recognition and advancement of women's rights, it continues

“ There needs to be a recognition of the parallel between the degradation of women and the degradation of the environment. ”

to be a major challenge to educate and raise awareness within our sexist society as to what constitutes male privilege, at individual or systemic levels. Attempts to increase understanding of the state of women in our society are complicated by the erroneous belief held by many that women's rights have been exercised to the extent that women as a group are equal to men in terms of the power, influence and economic autonomy they exercise in society. Yet, while women as a group are officially equal, inequities remain. An example is the wage gap existing in the Yukon where women earn 80 cents to the male dollar (YTG Women's Directorate, 1999:vi).

There needs to be a recognition of the parallel between the degradation of women and the degradation of the environment. One of the ways of discussing this is in the tenets of ecofeminism. In the 1980s, the term "ecofeminism" arose from the adding of environmental concepts with the cultural feminist vision aimed at reversing the cultural valuation of the male and the devaluation of the female.

## THE CONNECTION: FEMINISM AND ENVIRONMENTALISM (CONTINUED)

The product was the formation of a nature-oriented counterculture movement that focused on women's culture and emphasized individual consciousness change over systemic political action. Often inherent within ecofeminism is a promotion of women's spirituality, concurrent with many New Age philosophies that focus on individual responsibility for one's material situation and experience. This leads to an apolitical stance with regard to social change because the focus is on the personal level and positive results can theoretically be only individually achieved.

While the exploitation of women and the environment may have the same root cause, another potential problem with ecofeminism is its tendency to essentialize women's connection to nature. In other words, women are seen as being more in touch with nature than men solely because of the fact they are women. Still, one can recognize that many women do feel deeply connected with the natural world, and thus experience the exploitation of resources as an exploitation of the self. Consequently, violent images such as rape have been used to illustrate the unbridled exploitation of the planet's resources. Yet, the abstraction of these images diffuse the real emotion felt and at the same time negate the experience of loss of spirit and way of life for those whose lives depend upon subsistence activities or who live close to the land. One woman attending the Gaining Ground gathering who lived on a trap

line described the pain and powerlessness she felt at intrusion of mining activities on her home place, saying, "It was like watching a friend being raped." This statement resonated profoundly with many of the women at the gathering because it was centered in the real and devastating emotions they experienced with the advent of mining development.

“ One woman ...  
who lived on a  
trap line described  
the pain and  
powerlessness  
she felt at  
intrusion of mining  
activities on her  
home place. ”

It is important to respect and validate women's lived experiences. It is also worthwhile to look at how graphic images can sometimes silence and reinforce the victimization of women within and outside both the environmental and the women's movements. Within environmental discourse, the vision for action often ultimately relies upon false constructs: patriarchal concepts of preserving the virginity of the land by fighting any intrusion, or mourning the victim - in this case land that has been brutalized by mining, logging, or other development. These constructs do not leave room for

the forces of nature to be impure or real, nor does it endow them with the strength and resources to be resilient to harm. In this theory, power is given over to the perceived dominating force: the mine developers. In either case, this vision does not offer a means of achieving positive social and environmental change within a community beyond that of individual enlightenment because it focuses on loss of empowerment.

## THE CONNECTION: FEMINISM AND ENVIRONMENTALISM (CONTINUED)

The "either/or" paradigm also serves to further fragment communities who are faced with tough decisions with respect to mineral resource development.

In her book *Radical Ecology*, Carolyn Merchant offers the concept of socialist ecofeminism that helps to mesh women's individual consciousness of environmental issues with an equality seeking agenda for positive social change. "Social and socialist ecofeminism ground their analyses in capitalist patriarchy. They ask how patriarchal relations of reproduction reveal the domination of women by men, and how capitalist relations of production reveal the domination of nature by men. The domination of women and nature inherent in the market economy's use of both as resources would be totally restructured. Although cultural eco-feminism has delved more deeply into the woman-nature connection, social and socialist eco-feminism have the potential for a more thorough critique of domination and for a liberating social justice" (Merchant, 1992:184).

The vision that informs the Gaining Ground discussion paper sees the domination of women by men as being the primary historical and most significant form of oppression in Euro-colonial society. "There was a division of labour, power, and value according to the classification of humans by sex. These divisions established a system that granted men power over women, prescribed specific

social roles to men and to women, and differentially valued those roles to the relative detriment of women" (Whalen, 1996:15).

Out of this imbalance emerged a patriarchal system grounded in multiple systems of oppression, including racism and colonialism which have had direct consequences for many indigenous peoples including the for-profit exploitation and destruction of the natural environment. Because capitalism, male dominance, racism, and imperialism are

viewed as interconnected "the abolition of any of these systems requires the end of them all" (Jaggar, 1983:15).

### COLONIZATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM

There exists virtually no place on Earth untouched by the legacy of colonization.

Colonization refers to "circumstances in which a dominant group undertakes to modify or eliminate the laws, customs and belief systems of a community

rendered unable to resist effectively.

Colonization is a pervasive structural and psychological relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, which is ultimately reflected in the dominant institutions, policies, histories and literatures of occupying powers. It involves the colonizer's taking over a community's social structures, governance, and administration and often imposing a different religion and world-view" (McGillivray and Comaskey, 1999:xiv).

“The domination of women and nature inherent in the market economy's use of both as resources would be totally restructured.”



## THE CONNECTION: COLONIZATION & ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM (CONTINUED)

The Aboriginal Women's Action Network's 1999 report on the impacts of Bill C-31 upon Aboriginal women in British Columbia states that "narrowing the definition of who was an "Indian" in the Indian Act was intended to legalize the taking of Native lands and resources and the sexist discrimination against Native women was merely a part of that ploy. Thus the Indian Act can be seen as a tool of assimilation and cultural genocide towards achieving the economic objectives of the colonizing powers, namely the dispossession of our lands and resources" (Huntley and Blaney, 1999:5).

Under colonization, aboriginal women's pre-existing roles and social status were altered, both through the social effects of Euro-Colonial relations with First Nations, and through the legislation of those effects in the Indian Act. "The Indian Act of 1869, presumed women to be dependent on , and the property of, their husbands. The act denied status to women who married non-Indian men and granted status to non-Aboriginal women marrying Indian men. In the evolution of the act, discrimination on the basis of sex and marital status had become law, and bilateral or matrilineal lines of kinship and descent shifted to patriarchal lineage. Treating Aboriginal women equally with other Canadian women in terms of marital status and child custody in the nineteenth century meant that Aboriginal women lost status." (McGillivray and

Comaskey, 1999:40) Colonization severely undermined aboriginal societies, as well as aboriginal women's roles as decision-makers within their societies. In Canada, aboriginal women and their children continue to live with the oppressive legacy of the Indian Act. "Bill C-31, in effect 28 July 1985 offered re-registration to women and children who had lost status through out-marriage. Bands received control over residency. Women and children might regain Indian status but be denied band membership, reserve access, residency, and housing" (McGillivray and Comaskey, 1999:41). Other complexities of Bill C-31 continue to create and perpetuate deep divisions within aboriginal communities (Huntley and Blaney, 1999:viii).

Because indigenous societies have been affected by colonization in many complex and interrelated ways, they often face common circumstances in the face of mineral resource development.

In the Canadian context, Mining Watch Canada has documented industry practices common to mining include the dumping of contaminants and the situation of harmful processing activities upon or near to aboriginal land and/or communities.

These are examples of environmental racism which show how Aboriginal peoples are considered less valuable in Canadian economic and societal structures and therefore are first to be impacted by the harmful effects of development such as mining.

“ Colonization undermined aboriginal societies, as well as aboriginal women’s roles as decision-makers within their societies. ”



## THE CONNECTION: COLONIZATION & ENVIRONMENTAL RACISM (CONTINUED)

Meaningful social and environmental change results from community empowerment, and that community empowerment is inextricably linked to the empowerment of women in that community. Positive social change—in the form of community action in the face of mineral development—must also seek to counteract the legacy of colonialism by valuing, respecting and promoting different ways of knowing. (By creating spaces similar to those shared at the Gaining Ground gathering, by fostering an environment where women and their so-called invisible contributions are fully recognized and honoured, we are making significant inroads to achieving more equal, healthy and resilient societies. The societies that will be better able to address the circumstances that occur within the context of mineral resource development.)

### THE YUKON CONTEXT

The prevalence of mineral exploration and development in the Yukon has had a significant influence in shaping Yukon society as we now know it. The telling of Yukon history often begins with the years just prior to the Gold Rush, as if the newcomers and gold seekers arrived in an uninhabited land. It ignores the fact that aboriginal people had lived, spoken their languages, governed their societies, and died on the same land for thousands of years. The values and attitudes of the gold seekers reflected the values that informed the larger process of colonization happening throughout Canada. Since the 1898

Klondike Gold Rush, mining has continued to be a major force of change in the Yukon. Mining is a cyclical boom and bust economy dependent largely upon outside influences such as the size and location of metal reserves, metal prices and international markets. This dependency has shaped the very fabric of some Yukon community structures, and greatly altered the communities that existed prior to the Gold Rush.

For someone who has never been to the

“ Meaningful social and environmental change results from community empowerment of women in that community. ”

Yukon, it is challenging to convey the extent to which mining mythology permeates everyday life. The quest for gold has been written about extensively, most often using images evoking the romance of the rugged frontier.

Women's history has also been neatly packaged within the Gold Rush, in popular titles such as *Klondike Women: True Tales of the Gold Rush, 1897-98*. Such

mythical and romantic lore has given mining activity an unparalleled status within Yukon economic discourse. Other economic sectors, such as tourism and the service industry, continue to rely upon the production and reproduction of Yukon mining history. This phenomenon translates to a quasi-evangelical tone with respect to mining. Mining is revered by some as the lifeblood of the Yukon, the sole viable economic base, and our Yukon heritage.

The Yukon Government has sponsored freelance journalists to cover “the human side of mining” in the local newspapers.

## THE CONNECTION: THE YUKON CONTEXT (CONTINUED)

Discovery Day is a territorial holiday celebrating the gold strike at Bonanza Creek, and Rendez-vous is a government and business sponsored celebration of the Klondike days, symbolized by the cancan dancer and the rugged, independent gold-panner. A drive just about anywhere in the Yukon will enable one to see vehicles sporting pro-mining bumper stickers. The Klondike Visitor's Association and the City of Dawson refer to Dawson as the heart of the Klondike Gold Rush (Visitor's Association, 2000:1). In describing Dawson City, the brochure states, "An incredible community that has preserved its past, Dawson City invites you to turn back the pages of time and experience our rich living history..... YES! We still have operating gold mines." Places with names such as Diamond Tooth Gertie's, Klondike Kate's, Bonanza Market, El Dorado Hotel, and Gold Rush Inn, create an environment that is steeped in mining imagery. However, this romantic imagery is far from accurate: "Several times a day a floor show overseen by a Diamond Tooth Gertie impersonator features a bevy of cancan girls who dance in a style that was seldom, if ever, seen in Dawson during the Klondike Gold Rush. Noted for its high kicks that exposed petticoats and stockings legs, the cancan was popularized in Parisian dance halls in the 1830s but was never as popular in conservative North America, even in the gold mining town saloons and dance halls" (Zuehlke, 56-57).

“ The Yukon Quartz Mining Act grounds the ability and priority of using land for mining in legislation, thus according to miners the right to mine. ”

### ETHIC OF EXPLOITATION

The mythology and lore of mining coincides with an ethic of exploitation that is legally entrenched within the Yukon Quartz Mining Act. Canada's free entry system of mineral staking assumes that mining is the highest and best use of the land. The assumption behind the system is that mining is inherently good for the economy, and therefore mineral exploration should not be hampered by land-use constraints. The Yukon Quartz Mining Act grounds the ability and priority of using land for mining in legislation, thus according to miners the right to mine.

From the Mackenzie era of "Roads to Resources" to the current day, this fixation on mineral production as a Canadian priority has resulted in Canada's entrenching its status as a developing country. As "hewers of wood, drawers of water, diggers of gold," we rely on primary extraction of minerals with very few secondary or tertiary manufacturing activities. In doing so, our economic system, which is focused on production value, continues at its lowest potential. This Canadian phenomenon is witnessed in the extreme in the Yukon where there is minimal diversity in industry and employment.

One woman spoke of her personal life at the time when she was a drug user as a metaphor for resource extraction in the Yukon saying, "When I was using, I didn't think ahead."

## THE CONNECTION: ETHIC OF EXPLOITATION (CONTINUED)

Decisions were only short term. The companies are the same way – they are looking for a quick fix.” If the task at hand is mineral extraction, there is little pressure to think into the future and plan a value-added system of economics and employment.

“Mining is exploitative. So I found when I was working (in the mining community) that when you start with your sole employer – your sole role model – the leader in the communities – being that exploitative, it went right down the line” (Yukon health worker).

Often, this ethic of exploitation coexisting with the legally-enshrined “right to mine” results in the appropriation of land for mining interests. An example of the layering of a resource-based community over a preexisting one is the establishment of the community of Faro upon the traditional territory of the Ross River Kaska Dene, who had trails and oral traditions that extended over the territory where the mine and new community were built. To the newcomers, it was a new community built in a frontier wilderness, but to the Ross River Kaska Dene, it was an encroachment upon land already in use for hunting, trapping and fishing and also had intrinsic cultural significance and value. A First Nations woman at Gaining Ground commented, “Mines are always built where there are the greatest riches. I mean the fish, wildlife and berries, and now there are not so many.” Many Kaska First Nations people who grew up in the area that became the Faro mine were forced to leave, and now reside at the Ross River town

site. This tendency is not unique to the Faro mine site but rather reflects the deep logic and structure of land-use planning. Weinstein explains: “In the past, resource developments proceeded with a number of assumptions about the significance of the land to native communities. The first...was that the land was not significantly occupied or used. The key word is, of course, ‘significantly.’ Hunting, fishing and gathering were not considered economic activities unless production was geared to a market. True economic activities were considered to be the production of commodities, such as furs, for sale. That attitude still prevails. Among resource managers and government planners trapping has been given the serious attention deserved by an economic activity, whereas hunting and fishing for household use, which have historically been the basis for native life in the north, have not” (Weinstein, 1992: 9).

“When I was using (drugs), I didn’t think ahead. Decisions were only short term. The companies are the same way ... looking for a quick fix.”

Exploiting natural resources for economic gain is not unusual in Canada. Neither is the sense of powerlessness in the face of the ethic of exploitation. The following quote comes from the environmental assessment hearings for a pulp mill in Alberta: “In appearing before this panel, we feel very degraded. We also feel that after a whole lifetime of work to develop a viable farming operation for our family, we now have to appear in front of this group of strangers and beg them to save our family heritage, farming operation, and our livelihood for ourselves and our family” (Richardson, 1993:29).



# WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES

Many women involved in Gaining Ground spoke of the ethic of exploitation that permeated the lives in mining-affected communities. The following sections discuss the additional strains faced in day-to-day life, and the resulting experiences of women in these mining areas.

These following sections examine the contributions and experiences of women in the private and public spheres of home and workplace. Specific attention has been paid to violence against women and alcohol consumption, as these "private" or hidden societal problems have rarely been examined in relation to mineral resource development.

## WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTIONS: UNPAID LABOUR

Imagine a world where women were not there to maintain the household, buy groceries, grow gardens, cook meals, raise children and provide care for the elderly and so on. Who would do this work – and how much would they be paid – if women did not already "take care" of it? Mine workers can be expected to put in 12 hour shifts only if there is a meal and a warm house waiting for them at the end of the day. Our industrial labour model is built on the assumption that "someone" is there at home to take care of these things. Where this is impossible to ensure, as in remote camps, the company itself is forced to pay for a cook, a janitor, and maintenance workers. The prospect of mineral resource development is usually seen as a net gain for the economy, and for society as a whole. What is consistently overlooked is the

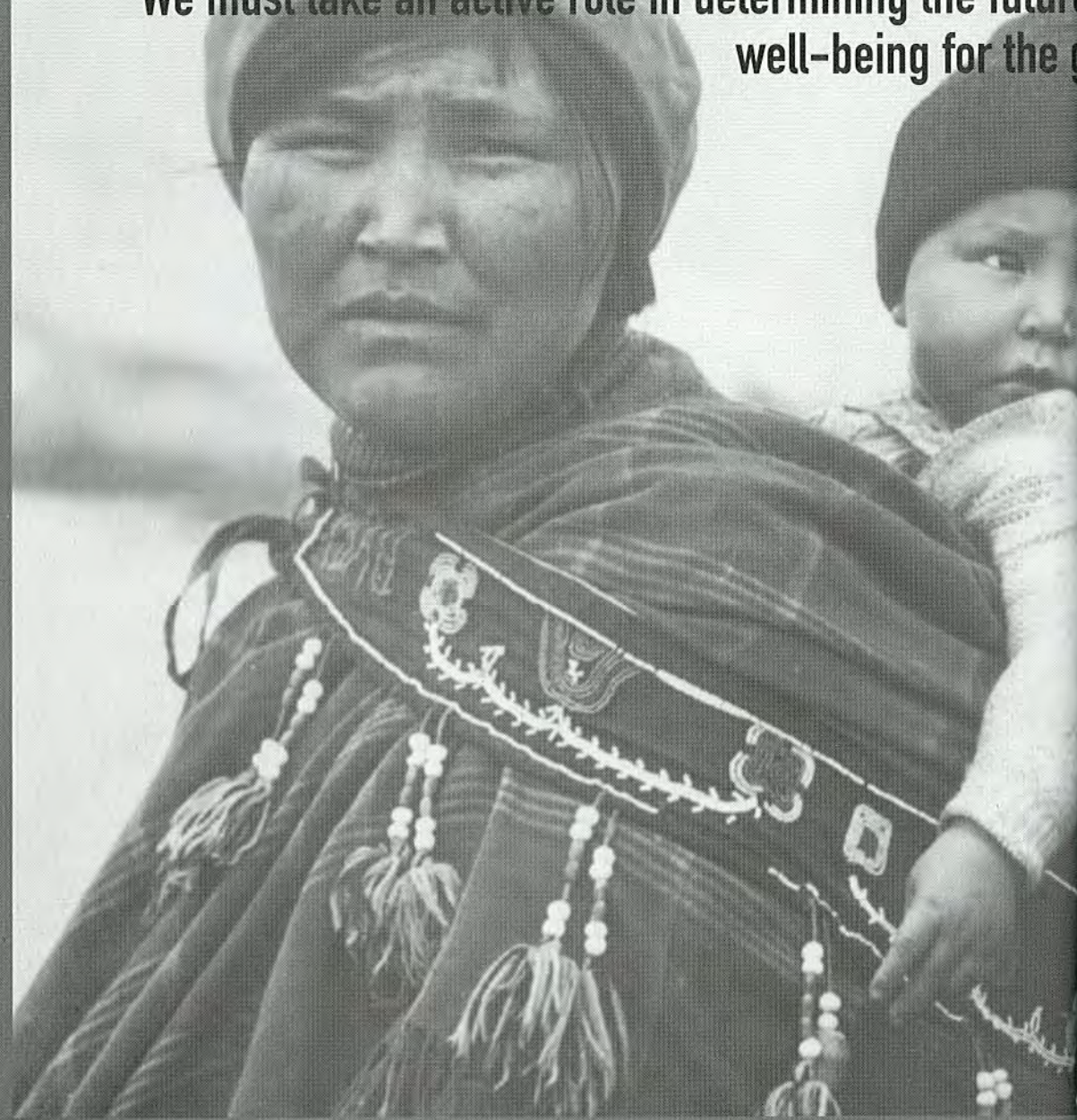
dependency of the public world's economic initiatives and projections upon the private, economically hidden, constant unpaid contributions of women. Yet, without such contributions, the whole system would suffer and possibly collapse. Ironically, as Waring points out, the value of women's labour, although historically discounted by mainstream economic analyses, is a far greater contribution to society than the mineral industry. Using the results of a

national time-use survey conducted in Australia in 1992 that looked at the value of unpaid work calculated at the average salary rate, Marilyn Waring notes, "In accounting for more than 48 percent of total production, the household was the single largest sector, exceeding the production of manufacturing by a multiple of ten, and the value of all mining and mineral extraction by a multiple of three" (Waring, 1999:xxix).

“ Mine workers can be expected to put in 12 hour shifts only if there is a meal and a warm house waiting for them at the end of the day. ”

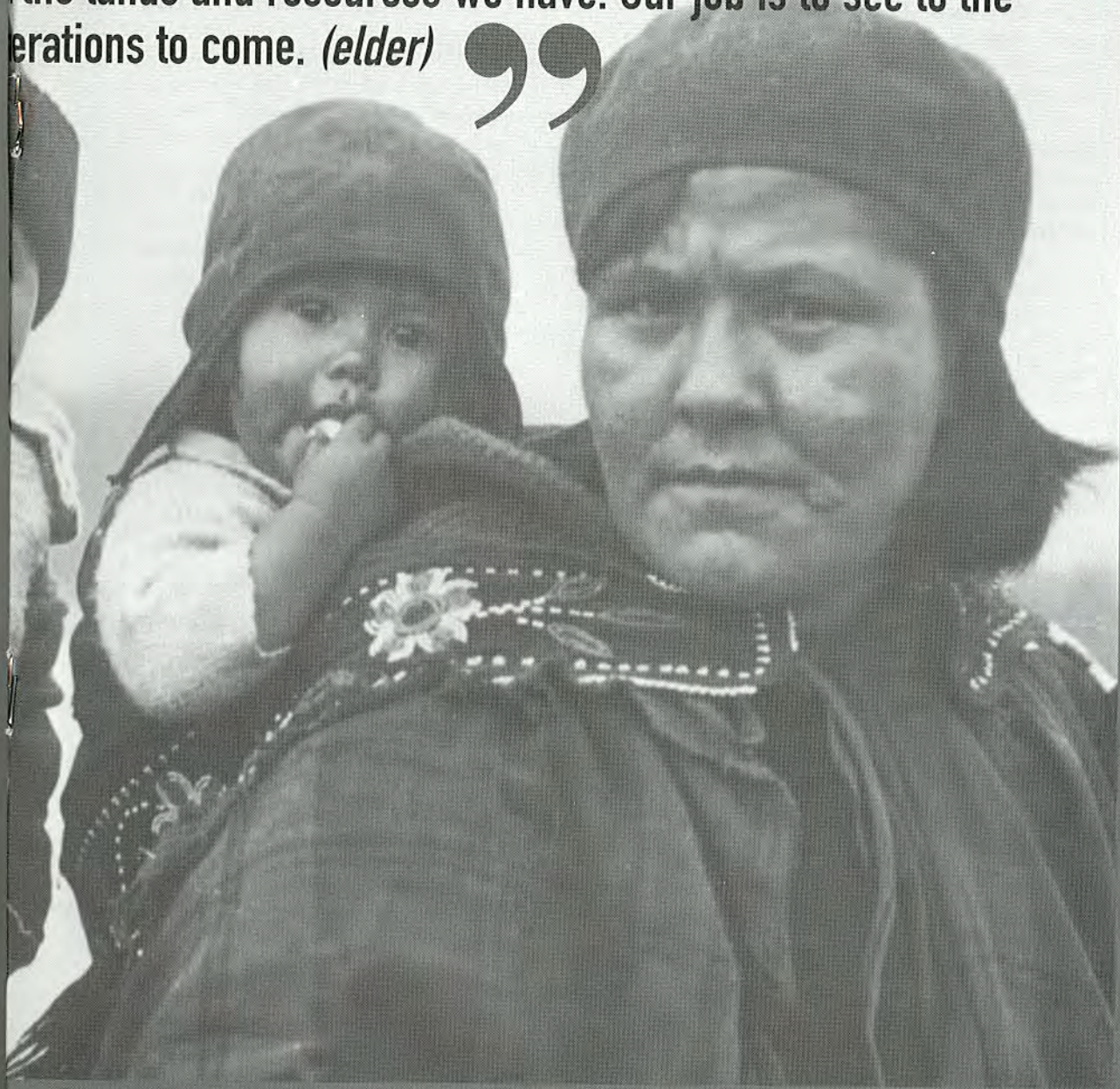
A 1978 report entitled *Five Million Women: A Study of the Canadian Housewife* stated that women's "invisible and unpaid work ensures the maintenance and renewal of the current labour force at the same time that it produces the next generation of workers" (Proulx, 1978: 5). The Counting Us In: A Statistical Profile of Yukon Women Report found that women continue to provide the majority of unpaid work in the territory. Women on average reported 48% of their time as spent providing some care to children. More Yukon women than men do unpaid housework, home maintenance and childcare. Women reported providing 14% of their time caring for seniors. (YTG Women's Directorate, 1999:vi).

“ So the reality is that mining affects us all, whether  
... We the women, keepers of the hearth and home, must  
We must take an active role in determining the future  
well-being for the generations to come.”





er or not we benefit from the economic development.  
be advisors to our young people, our leaders, and our Chief.  
of the lands and resources we have. Our job is to see to the  
generations to come. *(elder)* ”



# WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES: WOMEN AS HOMEMAKERS (CONTINUED)

## WOMEN AS HOMEMAKERS

“The servicing of family - the provision of food, clothes, housework and emotional support for family members, usually seen as a private service to husbands and children – is seldom considered significant to economic development schemes. Yet, it is women’s work in the family that allows their partners to participate in the economic development projects” (Women’s Research Centre, 1979:187).

The prevalence of mining in the Yukon has affected individual women in many ways. A 1979 study conducted by the Women’s Research Centre in BC highlighted the diverse experiences of women including those who came to the Yukon following their husbands’ work. While some women were satisfied with their quality of life, many women were isolated and stressed as a result of their husbands being absent for extended periods of time, and thus were managing their lives as single mothers would. Several women noted the semblance of having two different lives, depending upon whether the husband was away working or at home. Shift work also created a unique set of challenges for those women who were homemakers and tasked with the stress of maintaining silence during the day in a home with children as their husbands were sleeping after having worked nightshifts. The absence of adequate 24-hour childcare blocked many women from entering the workforce in non-traditional jobs. Women also made significant contributions to community well-being through participation in church groups and other volunteer organizations. A report on voluntary action in

“ The prevalence of mining in the Yukon has affected individual women in many ways... ”

BC noted that, “Voluntary work often substitutes for social services in small towns as the delivery of social services often lags behind economic growth and development” (Moore et al, 1975:191).

## FOOD AND HEALTH

Environmental and human health is often compromised by mining activity. Such activity often contaminates local air, food, and water sources or impedes the ability of people to access their usual wild foods. When wildlife is contaminated by metals associated with mining, there is a direct link to family nutrition since so many rural community

families rely heavily on harvested meats in their diet. Unfortunately, we do not know to what extent this affects health care needs, or reliance upon store-bought food requirements, because this has never been examined. Recent experience with the BHP Ekati mine in NWT shows that caribou have been impacted, but we do not know what impacts this has on the family. Although there has been one study that looks at how this has affected hunters and food providers, it did not go so far as to explore how this was dealt with within the family or what this meant for women as food preparers. For example, the following passage taken from the *Can't Live Without Work* study fails to elaborate on the significance of contaminated meat in daily life:

“...The liver [sometimes] doesn't have the right colour. Sometimes you'll have a big lump on the liver, then you kind of discard it a little bit or else you turn it into dog food.”

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES: FOOD AND HEALTH (CONTINUED)

Some First Nations elders have noticed an increase in the presence of parasites and disease in many fish and wildlife species caught near mine sites, as well as signs of ill health of the animals. In these same communities, elders have developed allergies to salmon and caribou, but the link between mining contaminants in the environment and their food has never been studied. One Yukon First Nations woman spoke of these worries, saying, "Animals in the tailings pond drinking from it. What will happen, what is the after effect?"

The elders are asking why is this happening, why are we sick, all these whys. Myself, I'm relearning. In the mean-time I have to look for answers."

When harvesting is affected, women turn to processed store-bought foods. "When people are afraid to eat their wild meats, we see more and more people are getting diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure. They are also too poor to afford the store-bought foods." (Yukon health worker). The need to find paying jobs increases when people can no longer rely on wild food sources.

Many women have expressed that experiencing the encroachment of mining development left them in a state of depression for a lengthy duration. "It was like Toronto had moved in across the valley from me. I didn't realize it at the time, but it really affected me. I was unable to function properly for a long time" (Yukoner).

As women work to fill the gaps left in the social safety net, they experience difficulties meeting all the needs. "People are educated to believe they must suffer to have progress. Therefore, they try personally to cope with the impacts of economic development. They are encouraged to blame themselves if they have difficulty coping with changes in the social infrastructure due to even the most obvious external factors" (Women's Research Centre, 1979:20). A woman who overextends

in providing care for others often does so at the risk of her own physical and emotional health. At the Gaining Ground gathering, a Native American woman from the United States made observations shared by many Yukon women present: "The impact of mining on women is huge in terms of stress, it affects

them emotionally...feelings of oppression, fear and anger." When these personal feelings need to be overcome each day, the effects may reach the family under her care and affect them in many different ways.

A feminist researcher participated in Gaining Ground gathering. She described the options and opportunities faced by recent immigrants, who feel they are forced to make the best of their circumstances because they "...would rather be sick than poor. In this instance, people often minimize their oppression, and see illness, violence, rights violations as the necessary 'risks' to be taken in order to get access to a more affluent economy."

“ Animals in the tailings pond drinking from it. What will happen, what is the after effect? ”

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES: WOMEN AS PAID WORKERS (CONTINUED)

### WOMEN AS PAID WORKERS

Looking eastward to NWT we see how women working in the Ekati mine have been affected, as discussed in the *Can't Live Without Work* report. This report discussed the significant conflict women experienced between having a career with a high income and leaving their children and families for extended periods. In the Yukon, one in three babies is born to a single mother (YTG Women's Directorate, 1999:v). For these primary caregivers, mine work may be too stressful to consider.

At the Raglan mine in Quebec, families in which both parents work at the mine have noted the stress of never seeing each other due to child care constraints that demand that parents always be on the cross-shift. In practice, this creates a single parent family. Additionally, when parents are home for 2 weeks on their time off, they are less inclined to hunt and harvest wild foods in favour of remaining in the community to socialize and take care of children. This has a direct impact on disposable income and nutrition. Furthermore, while women in the north are encouraged to breastfeed their children, mine shift rotations make this an impossibility beyond the standard 17 weeks of maternity leave. If we knew to what extent breast milk is affected by employment in hard rock mines, aside from timing of shifts and maternity leave reforms, steps could be taken to promote maternal and infant health. For example, infant health may be compromised by insufficient pre-natal and natal care. Additionally, breast milk may be contaminated due to the mother's ecological (due to the quality of sources of food, air, or water) or work related exposure to

contaminants. This brief snapshot from one mine demonstrates the complexity and interrelated variety of health concerns in mining-affected communities.

A woman who worked in a Yukon mine described the feeling of needing to hide her pregnancy in that work atmosphere: "So I think I always felt like it was safer for me to not be a woman. Whatever it took to fit in...I can remember at one point - I think it was maybe after the first or the second layoff - I was pregnant, and I was mining, on rotary drills. I can remember how sad I was at spending so many years doing something and negating who I was as a woman. Not being allowed to celebrate that."

It is interesting to note two historical examples where significance was attached to planning for the participation of women within the mining workforce. The "North East BC Coal Employment Survey" undertaken by the Cornerstone Planning Group determined that approximately one-fifth of the potential workforce in that region would require childcare. The second example is found in a 1975 speech, *Labour Shortage in Mining*, given at the 77th Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Institute of Mining and Metallurgy, where Fisher noted that working couples would soon constitute half the workforce. In order to attract married women the mining industry would have to make provisions for childcare: "A mining company may have to provide special facilities such as day care centres or allow two women to share one shift. Such practices are relatively new to our industry, but have been used successfully in labour-starved European countries for many years" (Women's Research Centre, 1979:205).

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES: WOMEN AS PAID WORKERS (CONTINUED)

History has not borne out Fisher's prediction. In fact, the increased transiency of mining interests has created a tendency of the industry to opt towards the mine site as workplace rather than establish a mining community with family housing, childcare centres, schools, recreation facilities, community centre, clinic, etc.

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Violence against women in intimate relationships exists within all societies. In Canada, a recent survey shows that while 30% of currently or previously married women have experienced at least one incident of physical or sexual violence at the hands of a marital partner, only 8% of abused women access transition homes. In 1997-98, more than 90,700 women and their dependent children were admitted to the existing 413 shelters in Canada. Women who are living with heavy drinkers are 5 times more likely to be assaulted by their partners than are women who live with non-drinkers (FREDA, 1999). For Aboriginal women, the groundbreaking work *Black Eyes All of the Time* (McGillvray and Comaskey) cites the Canadian Council for Social Development (1991) stating that it is "the exception rather than the rule to know of an aboriginal woman who has not experienced some form of violence throughout her life". This work also cites the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in observing that intimate violence "has invaded whole communities and cannot be considered a problem of a particular couple or an individual household" (RCAP, 1996:57) in (McGillvray and Comaskey:1999; 8).

The Yukon appears to have a higher degree of acceptance of violence towards women in relationships as demonstrated by the RCMP's

lapsed adherence to their mandatory charging policy and the "low range" sentencing patterns of the judiciary, even in the most severe cases. Male violence continues to be a key issue for women in the Yukon. It has been well-documented that violence in its various forms can have serious short- and long-term effects on women's health and well-being.

Before terms such as wife-battering and domestic violence came into common usage, terms such as "marriage breakdown" and "marital discord" were often used as euphemisms to describe what was most likely violence perpetrated against women by their intimate male partners. In a 1975 report, "Suicide in the Yukon," psychologists Abbott and Kehoe describe women's unstable mental health as: "a consequence of the lifestyle in the Yukon Territory which has often been described as a 'frontier culture' and 'a man's world' in which there is a large amount of marital discord. There may be a tendency for certain personality types to drift into the North in search of quick money, adventure, anonymity or other dubious goals which become unrealized. The wife of such a person may be the first overt casualty in this immature or unrealistic adventure" (Women's Research Centre, 1979:40). Similar observations are reflected in an interview with a former nurse-practitioner who worked in a Yukon mining community in the late 80s — Q: "When you say that the mining community life was hard on women, do you mean women working at the mine?" A: "No, the women at home. Very isolated, they didn't come out. We didn't see them. I've never seen so many hidden women. Hiding at home, they came from everywhere. Some were new immigrants to Canada. Some had moved their families from other mining communities. Guys worked shift. Guys were mean to their women."

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (CONTINUED)

The 1979 *Beyond the Pipeline* report compiled by the Women's Research Centre for the Northern Pipeline Agency also contains numerous repeated references to "marriage breakdown" and women's "cabin fever" also described as "housewife psychosis" and "depression." In the report, Sheila Benson, coordinator of the Whitehorse Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, described wife-battering and marriage breakdown as major problems for Whitehorse women. Child abuse, wife-beating, and increased drinking were seen as problems that would increase with large-scale development. To this end, the Yukon Indian Women's Association presented a transition house funding proposal to the Department of Health and Welfare in March 1979, stating "both native and white women stand to be adversely affected by the pipeline and Shakwak projects...with the influx of construction workers and those lured by stories of quick money, the need for a women's transition home will increase dramatically" (Women's Research Centre, 1979:227).

A 1998 study entitled *Rural Women and Violence* offers a complex analysis of the interrelated factors that perpetuate violence against women in intimate relationships. Of particular importance in this report, is the advancing of Websdale's (1998) concept of a "rural patriarchy." In other words, "the specific articulation of patriarchal values, attitudes and beliefs in rural areas is underpinned by religious beliefs, community cohesion and conformity, as well as the

economic realities of many rural areas which depend on single industries or agriculture" (Jiwani, 1998:3).

"Participants of one focus group elaborated on notions of masculinity extant in rural areas. They perceived these as contributing to woman abuse and to the devaluation of women in general. They ascribed this preferred masculinity to the kind of resource-

based and military employment that was available in rural areas which in turn both demanded and produced particular kinds of men: 'It's machismo, it's(a) tough, rugged type of image'" (1998:134).

Several participants mentioned the impact of an ailing economy as contributing to woman abuse. The specific aspects that were identified

included poverty, economic stresses, and seasonal or intermittent work (1998:135). One service provider emphasized, however, that despite economic factors, woman abuse was more intentional and less incidental in nature. "They are frequently telling us that their partners moved the family there because there's not an RCMP presence" (1998: 135).

In her book *What Happened to Fairbanks?*, Mim Dixon states that increased incidences of rape in Fairbanks at the time of the Alaska Pipeline construction was "an impact that didn't happen." However, it is important to remember that twenty years ago there existed extreme societal stigma levelled at victims of rape, and also that rape was very difficult to

“ Child abuse, wife-beating and increased drinking were seen as problems that would increase with large-scale development. ”

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN (CONTINUED)

prosecute legally. Rape in marriage was not considered a crime, and neither were most forms of sexual assault. We do know that increased consumption of alcohol and drugs contribute to situations that alter what the perpetrator perceives as consent. We also know that the presence of transient male workers increases the incidence of sexually-transmitted diseases and unplanned or unwanted pregnancies. The Beyond the Pipeline report refers to the generation of "D.E.W. line babies,"

who were those babies born following the construction of the distant early-warning system across northern Canada in the 1950s by US and Canadian military (Women's Research Centre, 1979:244).

### A "DRINKING CULTURE"

In the Town Hall discussion on health at the Gaining Ground gathering, a feminist researcher offered information from her ongoing research that concurs with the lived experience of the mine worker: "Industry offsets its responsibility by blaming violence on the individual, but many industries contribute to violence through promoting a 'drinking culture' or an exploitative one and this translates to an ethic of exploiting women."

The consumption of alcohol is widely promoted in the Yukon. According to the 1997 High Risk Drinking and Alcohol-Related Harm in the Yukon report, "Alcohol has been of crucial importance to the Yukon. In fact, the Yukon was conceived as a territory as a solution to the struggle for control over the

lucrative Yukon liquor traffic revenues between the federal government and the government of the then Northwest Territories," resulting in the Yukon Act of 1898. The summary of the research findings include: "The reality of high-risk alcohol behaviour in the Yukon is that it is taking place with a context of social and cultural acceptance and promotion as seen in: 1) the historic and current reliance of Yukon on revenue from the control, distribution and sale of alcohol, and 2) the continuation of the mythology of the Yukon as the home of the Klondike, where you can still drink, dance and gamble in the frontier style of 1898" (Tousignant, 1997: Section 1, page 3). This report calculated a conservative estimate of the gross annual cost of alcohol abuse at \$13,805,000, or \$441 per Yukoner per year (Tousignant, 1997:6). This analysis did not include

calculation of losses from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or Fetal Alcohol Effects.

Judge Heino Lilles, as reported in the January 5, 2000, Yukon News, estimates that the cost to the Yukon justice system of a typical child with FAS living to 40 years of age, is 1.5 million dollars. A further lifetime cost of 1 million dollars is estimated for health and social services. The FAS-related lifetime extra health care, education and social service costs per individual are estimated to be \$1.4 million in the United States (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon, Draft 2001).

“...many industries contribute to violence through promoting a ‘drinking culture’ or an exploitative one and this translates to an ethic of exploiting women.”

## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES: A "DRINKING CULTURE" (CONTINUED)

Dr. Frank Timmermans, the Yukon's former Chief Medical Officer of Health, has stated that, currently 5-10 babies are born annually with easily diagnosable FAS. This equates to 10 times the national rate of 3 out of 1000 and does not include other levels of alcohol related birth defects, ones that do not present the typical facial features but who suffer from brain damage nonetheless severe (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Society Yukon, Draft 2001).

The Yukon also has a higher incidence of per capita alcohol and drug consumption compared with the rest of Canada, as well as a high incidence of FAE/FAS, yet there are no women's alcohol or drug treatment programs. Yukon males are four times more likely than females to report drinking four or more times per week. Yukoners are three times as likely as Canadians to be current users of marijuana/ hashish (YTG Women's Directorate, 1999:78). Consequently, it is assumed that Yukoners also have a higher incidence of "hard drug" use. One former mine worker participating in the Gaining Ground gathering noted, "In the 70s and early 80s, even though there was a lot of prosperity, there were no programs. And the one or two people who were there in the helping profession – they seemed to drink a lot. There was a lot of family violence. There was a lot of drug and alcohol use. It seemed like there was a real split in the community...you know, there was incredible amounts of disposable cash. The amount of drugs was astronomical. Astronomical. We had any drug that we wanted anytime, and the disposable cash to do it. And we didn't pay for rent, we had no responsibilities."

**“government and industry ... tend to link all social problems to unemployment brought about by the absence of mining activity ... ”**

At the Gaining Ground gathering, a feminist researcher noted, "A transient labour force brings with it its own social problems such as drugs and alcohol. It will also bring these problems to nearby communities. The labour force will also be stratified in terms of class and race, which creates further tension and inequality."

Observations were repeatedly made how at the economic planning level, government and industry representatives in the Yukon tend to link all social problems to the unemployment brought about by the absence of mining activity, rather than seeing mining as the engine of a feast/famine cycle that exacerbates individual, family and community tensions. As recently as January 2001, Yukon Premier Pat Duncan publicly stated, in response to the pending closure of Whitehorse's only transition home, that the situation was another indicator of our need for economic development in the form of the Alaska Highway pipeline. This contradicts the main ideas put forward in the

High Risk Alcohol Behaviour in the Yukon report, in which Tousignant encourages us to "consider the significant social and economic change the Yukon has undergone. The Gold Rush, the building of the Alaska Highway, and the reality of the mining industry have all added to the boom-bust mentality and societal stress caused by rapid growth and equally rapid decline. Under such conditions, economic stability is very difficult to achieve" (Tousignant, 1997:3).



## WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES: EARLY FEMINIST RESEARCH (CONTINUED)

### EARLY FEMINIST RESEARCH ON YUKON WOMEN

In 1979, the Northern Pipeline Agency commissioned the Women's Research Centre in Vancouver, BC, to undertake a study of the lives of women and their families in Fort Nelson, British Columbia, and in Whitehorse, Yukon, "to identify the socio-economic concerns resulting from the proposed construction of the Alaska Highway gas pipeline."

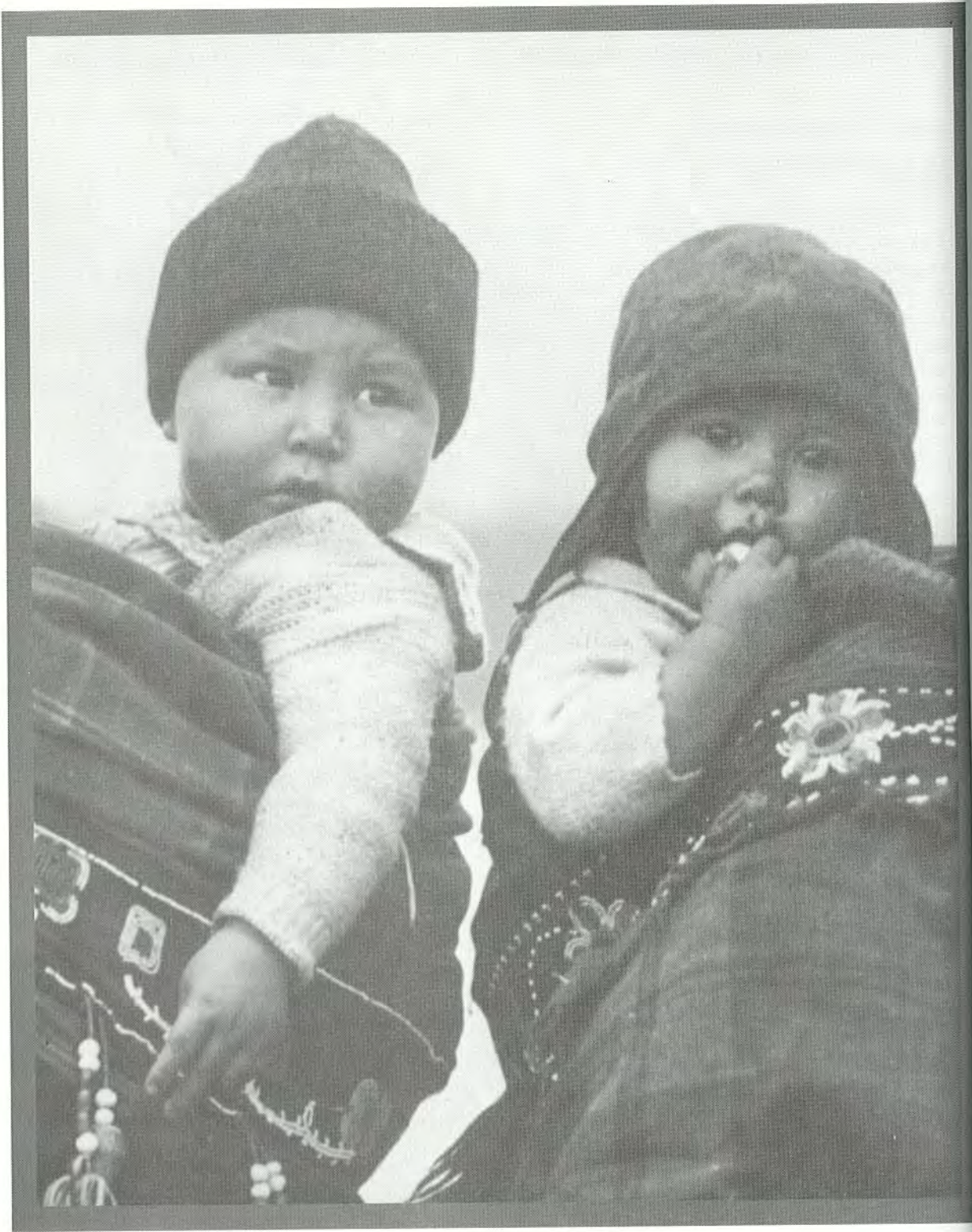
From the preface:  
"This report is entitled 'Beyond the Pipeline.' Such a title was chosen to clearly indicate that the impact of pipeline development does not end when the construction is finished. Women and their families in Fort Nelson and Whitehorse are already being affected by pre-pipeline activity; their lives will be profoundly influenced

“...the impact of pipeline development does not end when the construction is finished. Women and their families...are already being affected by pre-pipeline activity; their lives will be profoundly influenced during pipeline construction; and the impact of the pipeline upon them and their communities will continue long after the gas begins to move south.”

during pipeline construction; and the impact of the pipeline upon them and their communities will continue long after the gas begins to move south.”

It is significant that the Northern Pipeline Agency contracted a grassroots women's organization to independently assess how their initiative would affect women and their families. The study necessitated the Women's Research Centre collaborating with the pipeline committee of the Yukon Status of Women Council and the Fort Nelson Women's Centre. Consequently, the entire project was assessed through the lens of its possible impacts upon women, families, and communities, rather than these being diluted within an environmental assessment process. Such an undertaking elicits education, awareness, and discussion within communities. In addition, equality-seeking women's grassroots organizations received real benefits through the allocation of research dollars.

In the Yukon, this type of financial support has never been invested to examine the impact of mining on women and families.



# AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL

“Community strength, decision making and community unity are much better here when the mine is closed.” (Yukoner)

“The community is more wealthy when the mine is open. Transportation, recreation, and food supply are a lot better.” (Yukoner)

Mining affects communities, but what are perceived as impacts and benefits can differ across communities. The Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA) spells out what role First Nations communities in the Yukon will have in decision-making for their land base. While the UFA defines “community boundaries,” it fails to define communities. This section will define what a community is, then look at how mining impacts communities. Finally, it will examine the implications of resources extractive industries, especially in one-industry towns, where people work in communities but not for them.

## WHAT IS A COMMUNITY?

In 1978, Suzanne Veit prepared a report entitled *Labour Turnover and Community Stability: Implications for the North East Coal Development in BC* for the federal/provincial Manpower Sub-committee on North East Coal Development. She defined some of the components of a stable community as an established core population, a sound economic base; social service network, programs

and facilities; a low rate of criminal activity; and citizen participation (Veit, 1978:90).

While these elements allow a community to survive, they do not say much about the quality of life in that community. A 1996 United Nations Human Development report states, “Many elements of choice defy monetary measurement – the enjoyment of an unspoiled wilderness, the satisfaction from

our daily work, the sense of community that grows out of engagement and social activities, and the freedom, peace and sense of security that are common in a good society – all these are impossible to quantify yet they form part of the essence of human development.”

Environmental assessment is one tool that mine planners and communities can use to help ensure that the mine does not have negative impacts on a community’s health. The Yukon Health Act defines health as “the physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual well-

being of residents of the Yukon in harmony with their *physical, social, economic and cultural environments.*” Numerous participants at the Gaining Ground gathering asserted that these components are interrelated influences on community and individual health, and must not only be considered in isolation in the face of existing and potential mineral resource development.

“ Many elements of choice defy monetary measurement... the enjoyment of an unspoiled wilderness, freedom, peace and sense of security that are common in a good society. ”

## AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL: WHAT IS A COMMUNITY? (CONTINUED)

During the Voisey's Bay Mine/Mill environmental assessment, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Canada, Newfoundland, the Labrador Inuit Association, and the Innu Nation. The site of the proposed development was on overlapping Innu and Inuit lands, and neither government had signed a comprehensive treaty with the Canadian government. The MOU strove to reflect the geographical and cultural location of the project while harmonizing with the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act. The definition of environment was expanded to state that "environment" means the components of the earth and includes:

- (a) land, water, and air including all the layers of the atmosphere;
- (b) all organic and inorganic matter and living organisms;
- (c) the social, economic, recreational, cultural, spiritual, and aesthetic conditions and factors that influence the life of humans and communities; and
- (d) any part or combination of those things referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c) and the interrelationships between two or more of them. (VBAP, 1999:198)

While the environmental assessment process for the project was far from perfect, the terms of reference for the panel gave them the latitude to explore how the mine and mill would affect the community beyond the direct

environmental impacts. Ideally, a land-use plan would have been in place prior to exploration in the area, so that the community would have had the opportunity to determine for themselves which areas of their land base, if any, were appropriate for industrial development. "Failure to consider community planning for development reinforces a sense of powerlessness on the part of the local community. That sense of powerlessness can lead to failure to respond, which in turn exacerbates the impacts" (Dixon, 1978:269).

**“ I was 8 or so, I remember the miners walking to our community to dance and drink. I would go around the alleys and drink alcohol from the bottles the left behind. It was an invasion of my happy place. ”**

### IMPACTS OF MINING ON A COMMUNITY

"Many people who are running from something came here. This results in more violence, crime, alcohol, and drug abuse. Work in the mine is often physically not healthy." (Yukoner)

Communities become vulnerable to negative social impacts resulting from the influx of large numbers of transient male workers. At the Gaining Ground gathering, one First Nations elder described her experience growing up in a Yukon community: "I was 8 or so, I remember the miners walking to our community to dance and drink. I would go around the alleys and drink alcohol from the bottles they left behind. It was an invasion of my happy place."

## AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL: IMPACTS ON A COMMUNITY (CONTINUED)

When asked about the new mines and the benefits promised when they were building the mine, a Yukon First Nations woman replied, "Work for people. Obviously the men in our community want to work. So for a while a lot of people were working there. People were driving new trucks, all with the rest of the Joneses. But a lot of us, mostly women, knew the mine will shut down eventually."

The impact of mining upon traditional belief systems has been noted in many places. At the Gaining Ground gathering, one such example from the Philippines was cited. "With the change in economy as sea food was destroyed by mine wastes, no one could afford to celebrate. This affected teachings that were traditionally passed on from elders to younger generations." Other women at the gathering described breakdown of tradition in families from a health perspective, stating, "Loss of tradition is not just an indicator, but an actual cause of ill-health."

"I remember one guy got a new stove out of all that work and money, but that was only because his stove burned out while he was working; the others, it was only party, party" (NWT First Nations woman).

One respondent to our questionnaire summed up the dynamics of community strength in relation to the mine in their community. "Community strength, decision making and

community unity are much better when there is NO mine. People care for each other lots more when the mine is CLOSED. Relations and community unity are much stronger, remaining people live here because they consider this their home" (Yukoner).

Other women noted that when the mine was operating, there was much more hunting for entertainment, whereas after the mine closed, hunting was just for food.

**“ With the change in economy as ... food was destroyed by mine wastes, no one could afford to celebrate. This affected teachings traditionally passed from elders to younger generations. ”**

The unspoiled wilderness, the sense of community that grows out of engagement and social activities, the established core population, a sound economic base, and the social service network all were affected by the mine in the Yukon examples that women pointed to. The sound economic base was altered to the extent that when the mine left, the new economy it had created was unsustainable. Ross and Usher comment on how this dynamic played out in Sudbury, Ontario: "Workers devoted their working days

to producing goods and extracting resources for export outside the city or region, and with the money earned brought the imported goods they needed to live on. It seems little care was taken to develop a diversified economic base – a more informal base – which could have satisfied these needs locally, and which would have counterbalanced the dependency created by the dominant industry. People in these cities worked in the community, but not for it, and especially not for one another" (Ross, 1986: 124).

## AT THE COMMUNITY LEVEL: COMMUNITY SECURITY (CONTINUED)

### COMMUNITY SECURITY

Small communities experience little security in terms of benefits brought about by mining development.

For example, proposed mining activity always bring with it the promise of steady employment and therefore more community stability. However, the reality experienced by these communities does not mesh with the initial picture drawn by proponents of mining.

"The addition of more RCMP to the workforce and more cells in the jail doesn't address the problems that arise." In fact, communities where mining takes place are left to carry the burden of harmful impacts that inevitably occur. As one woman put it, "We are still living the impacts two generations later, and the mining is long gone."

Workers become overly reliant on the short term and/or fluctuating financial state of the mining and exploration industry.

“Small communities experience little security in terms of benefits from mining development.”

“When shutdowns occur, people have to maintain payments taken on when expecting a good paycheck.”

“The addition of more RCMP to the workforce and more cells in the jail doesn't address the problems that arise.”

“When things are up and running, there's lots of economic activity. When shut-downs occur, people have to adjust their lifestyles and maintain payments taken on when expecting a good paycheck. It can be very difficult. People have moved to the communities, bought homes, and then can't sell them once the mine shuts down.”

During the Voisey's Bay Mine/Mill environmental assessment hearings one woman summed up the sentiments of those people already living in the community prior to the permitting of the mine: “What others might believe to be simple is what we are more content with and that's providing for our families and enjoying their happiness. And when I say that, I don't mean that we would not like to move ahead in this world. I believe that we could do that and still maintain our culture and uniqueness” (VBAP, 1999:141).



# DRAFT

## GAINING GROUND STATEMENT

September 17, 2000 • Lake Laberge • YT

### THUS WE COMMIT IN SOLIDARITY:

1. to protect our right to health and safety for our land, ourselves, our families, our economy, and our future;
2. to support those of us in greatest need;

### BY:

- reclaiming our economy,
- recognizing accountability of the government and industry,
- educating government and industry on the full scope of impacts,
- demanding accountability of the government and industry,
- demanding industry and government address the many social issues caused by mining that affect women and children, and
- empowering communities to address these issues in the best way for them.

“ We, as women from many cultures and experiences, know that irresponsible mining practices impact and compromise our communities, our health and the environment. ”



# GAINING GROUND

"It's like cleaning a caribou hide. When you are starting, you can't rush it. We have to go slowly. Little by little things will change" (Mackey, 1995:i).

## FIRST STEPS: FINDING EMPOWERMENT IN THE FACE OF POWER

At the gathering, many women felt that newly formed alliances between the women of Gaining Ground were fragile and must be carefully tended before being subjected to scrutiny of media, industry and large-scale activist campaigns. Yet, there is a sense of immediacy in the environmental and community situations created by mineral development that is commonly faced by all attending the gathering. "We can't wait until the moose are orange before we take action." This sense of urgency was echoed by many women at the Gaining Ground gathering. For some women, this was the first time that their concerns had been openly shared with other women and been received with the strong empathy of those with common experiences. Women spoke frankly about the barriers they face in articulating their concerns. Numerous women at the gathering also described the feeling of being the "lone watchdog" in their community and therefore feeling isolated. One Gathering participant from the Yukon stated, "I'm having a hard time with my First Nation.

It's very quiet there, they aren't speaking out. They support me, but I'm very concerned about the high contaminants."

Another grassroots activist noted that it is a common experience for women "faced with the foreign world of male-dominated, corporate boardroom to think, 'What voice could I have in the process?'"

“...it is a common experience for women faced with the foreign world of male-dominated, corporate boardrooms to think 'what voice could I have...'”

It was a common theme heard that people felt unsure about what they had to offer in the struggle against the impacts of mining when the list of unknowns is so long. The sense of non-legitimacy, in terms of each asking herself, "How can I have the authority to act?" is hard to overcome. Some women described the intimidation felt in boardroom or public hearing settings, while others spoke about taking a stand against an issue that put them on the "other side of the fence" with respect to their communities, governments or Band

Councils. Throughout the gathering, in describing their experiences, participants often minimized their considerable knowledge or experience, frequently using phrases such as "I don't know what I have to contribute." Rather than being a reflection of false modesty, it is more likely about women having been isolated or marginalized, or rendered "invisible" when they questioned the values looming behind the barrage of dollar signs.

## GAINING GROUND: FIRST STEPS: FINDING EMPOWERMENT (CONTINUED)

Because women generally do not approach issues – especially those related to mining – with a sense of entitlement and confidence, any strategy for action towards positive social change will often

coincide with a journey into examining what will help a woman achieve the personal empowerment or sense of urgency to come forward and “take up space” to speak her truth. At the Gaining Ground gathering, women spoke of the importance of the following:

- trusting instinct,
- knowing that “you are not alone,”
- listening and respecting all,
- embracing pain and frustration in order to grow,
- finding power within one’s fear,
- building bridges across differences,
- sharing privileges and wealth,
- standing in solidarity with others,
- finding friendly insiders, and
- knowing we are parts of a whole.

The sense of powerlessness and futility of speaking out in public meetings is widespread.

Some people believe that “governments establish public hearings to placate the public by making people believe they have power they do not have. Thus, if citizens take part in

“ Because women generally do not approach issues – especially those related to mining – with a sense of entitlement and confidence, any strategy for action towards positive social change will often coincide with a journey into examining what will help a woman achieve the personal empowerment or sense of urgency to come forward and “take up space” to speak her truth. ”

a public hearing believing that they can influence its outcome, they unwittingly participate in their own subjugation” (Ashforth, 1990:12). While it is patronizing to state that women are unwitting victims of the state’s manipulation, the sense of futility women expressed indicates that they have seen through the supposed “fairness” of the process and thus believed their efforts were for naught. Kristen Reed summed up the intimidating feeling of standing before a panel in her comments to the Alpac Pulp Mill Panel: “To the panel and to the public, and to the 14 business suits that are here in the informal, non-intimidating setting that you have set up for us and the public, thank you very much” (Richardson, 1993:29). Similar observations were made at the Gaining Ground gathering. “It’s hard to

play the game when you have so much to lose.”

## GAINING GROUND: RESONANCES, INSPIRATION AND ACTION (CONTINUED)

### RESONANCES, INSPIRATION AND ACTION

Many women become inspired as another woman's story resonates within them and becomes a springboard for action. One participant wrote: "One activist put it into words for me during the conference. She was talking about her experience of becoming involved in mining activism. She talked about how, when she started, she was overwhelmed by her ignorance. It took her a while to accept that, even if she could spend all her time reading and learning about mining legislation, contaminants chemistry and health impacts of mining, she still would barely be able to make a dent in the information available. So she had to go through a process of forgiving herself...and then learn not to be intimidated by "experts" at hearings and meetings. She learned to feel comfortable simply trusting her gut when it said, "This doesn't make sense.""

“One bracelet does not jingle.”

— Joan Grant-Cummings,

Past-President, National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC)

One woman described the struggle to get information about mine contaminants from an urban centre to the local library, often driving six hours each way to get copies of reports.

Another described the isolation of living in the bush and not knowing what was going on in town let alone being able to contribute. She emphasized the importance of citizens' right to know, even faced with their efforts being continually sabotaged by companies.

Women at the Gaining Ground gathering, after meeting one another and sharing their stories, knowledge, struggles, victories and fears, created an atmosphere of trust and respect over a short period of time. The collaboration experienced during the gathering process inspired and gave shape to the writing of the Draft Statement.

“ Now that the hushed concerns of women have started rippling outward, we can feel safer standing in solidarity, speaking our truths, and respecting the ground we have gained. ”



# CONCLUSION

**"It's all fun and games/Til the mountain loses its soul/If you can't mine nicely/Don't you mine at all"  
(Gaining Ground Song, 2000)**

Whether expressed in song or discussion papers, women involved in the Gaining Ground project share the understanding that the exploitation ethic, economic structures based on production value, and the "right to mine" intertwine to provide systematic oppressions and the negation of any values other than monetary ones.

Knowing these realities, we can move forward to building a framework for mining in the 21st century that exposes what the true costs of mining are, and for whom.

From this we begin to recognize and expand on the strength and resilience of individuals, communities, and the environment. Within the Yukon, it may be a long time before

society understands that we must move beyond non-renewable resources as a basis for our economy.

**In the interim, as new mines open and abandoned mines fester, we can promote an understanding of the social and environmental impacts of mining development.**

With this understanding, we can provide progressive approaches to choose alternative economies.

We can question the assumptions lying behind any economy that brings with it the escalation of environmental and social problems.

Now that the hushed concerns of women have started rippling outward, we can feel safer standing in solidarity, speaking our truths, and respecting the ground we have gained.

**“ the exploitation ethic, economic structures based on production value, and the “right to mine” intertwine to provide systematic oppressions and the negation of any values other than monetary ones. ”**

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“ People care  
for each  
other lots more  
when the mine  
is closed. ”

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“ We can't  
wait until the  
moose are  
orange before  
we take  
action. ”



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