Voices for Justice

Iranian Women Graduate Students Theorize the Source of Oppression in Canadian Society

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Le nombre croissant d'immigrantes au Canada qui espèrent continuer leurs études supérieures a attiré l'attention de l'auteure sur la situation des immigrantes iraniennes dans ce pays. L'auteure fait partie de cette population et dans ses expériences académiques et sociales elle rencontre régulièrement du racisme qui continue à marginaliser les femmes du Moyen Orient au Canada. Cette oppression a mené l'auteure à explorer les racines de cet état de chose et aux possibilités de changement et de justice sociale dans les universités canadiennes et ailleurs.

The increasing number of immigrant (women) in Canada (CIC) who are hoping to pursue higher education has drawn my attention to the situation of Iranian immigrant women graduate students in this country. I am a part of this population, and in my societal and academic experiences I encounter regularly the Orientalism—western colonizing patriarchal perspective of Middle Eastern women (Said, 1979, 2003; Yegenoglu,1998)—and racism (Bannerji 1992; Caplan; Dua; Mohanty 1988, 2004) that continue to marginalize Middle Eastern women in Canada. This oppression has led me to explore the roots of this marginalization and the possibilities for change and social justice in Canadian academia and beyond. I argue that the post-9/11 terrorism discourse has reinvigorated and further perpetuated the stigmatization of Middle Eastern women. Thus, investigating the nature of the Canadian nation-state from an integrative anti-racist feminist perspective (Dei 2005a, 2005b; Ng 2004; Wane) will facilitate a greater understanding of the ways in which racism and Orientalism shape the day-to-day experiences of immigrant minority women, specifically Iranian women, since immigrant women are socially constructed in the way the Canadian state expects them to be (Dua; Ng 2004). I use an integrative anti-racist feminist perspective to discuss the intersections between race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and religion with respect to women's oppression (Dei, 2005a; Dua; Ng 2004; Wane). According to George Dei (2005a), integrative anti-racist feminism is described as an activist theory and, as such, insists on analysis that is always concretely and consciously linked to struggles against oppression. Thus, the purpose of this research is to underline the often silenced voices and invisiblized experiences of Iranian immigrant women in graduate studies. This study aims to resurrect these silenced voices in the hopes of offering a document that can become part of the dialogue on social change and justice in Canadian society and universities.

Method

In this analysis of Iranian immigrant women graduate students, I did a qualitative research study through interviews. My methodology utilized standpoint theory, which focuses on racialized and marginalized women's voices (Harding). I conducted interviews with eleven Iranian immigrant women graduate students who already hold a degree from one Iranian university. All interviews were conducted during the summer of 2008. All the participants are or were students in an Ontario graduate school; seven are enrolled in master's programs and four are completing doctorates. Their respective programs of study are varied (science, health, engineering, education, and humanities). These immigrant women students, who are between 26 and 55 years of age, differ in marital status, from single to (re)married or divorced, with and without children. I examine five main themes in this research: (1) women's challenges adaptating to a new environment—school and/or workplace; (2) the stereotypes they encounter of the "Oriental" woman; (3) discrimination, which causes them to be silenced in school and at work; (4) their strategies of resistance to overcome barriers; and (5) their feeling of belonging to Canadian society and their school.

My interview subjects made clear that racial constructions of Middle Eastern women are pervasive and are encountered on a day-to-day basis. Nonetheless, many indicated that they were also happy to be continuing their studies at a Canadian graduate school, despite their negative experiences. This contradiction informed their various responses to the issue of "belonging." The question "Do I belong in Canada?" repeatedly came up among my interview subjects, and their ambivalence speaks to the impact of a racist society in which equity and justice are a long way from being achieved. While exploring their voices, I investigate briefly the contexts of Canadian immigration policy and the structure of Canadian higher education to elucidate the ways in which they affect and construct Iranian women's status.

Canadian Immigration Policy and Its Impact on Educated Immigrant Women

In this section, I briefly investigate the nature of immigration policies and their impact on educated immigrant women in the context of the Canadian nation-state. Since the second wave of feminism in 1960s, many feminists have explored systemic discrimination and the ways Canadian institutions perpetuate racism and sexism among their citizens (Arat-Koc; Bannerji 1992, 2000; Das Gupta; Dei 2005a, 2005b; Dua; Ng 2004, 2005).

As an immigrant-based country, British Canada encouraged immigration for its economic prosperity from the second half of the eighteenth century (Heller, 1999). Historically, Canadian immigration policy has consistently privileged those migrating from Britain, France, and the United States (Dua; Galabuzi; Heller; Knowles 1997, 2007; Matas). Given the systemic exclusion of racialized minorities, the disabled, and women from the privileges of full citizenship (Das Gupta; Dua), many of these scholars have argued that racism, ableism, sexism, and all other forms of oppression are rooted in the perceived supremacy of the patriarchal white, middle-class British culture on which Canadian society is based. Anyone who does not fit the ideals supported by this view is rendered "other" and is excluded from the social, cultural, and economic structures of society (Smith).

In the two decades following the Second World War, in an effort to compete in a burgeoning global economy, Canada gradually opened its doors to more professional immigrants. The "point system" came into effect in 1967 and represented a response to the nation's economic needs (Knowles 2007; Yedi). In the context of nation-building, Canada welcomed people with certain skills and qualifications despite their ethnic origins. However, this neo-liberal attitude legitimized the misuse by policy makers of educated and professional immigrants as cheap labour, on the pretext that they lacked Canadian education and experience (Dua; Hojati; Mohanty 2004; Yedi).

Since the 1970s, the demographic of immigrants seeking a new home in Canada has increasingly included Asian and Middle Eastern peoples. Some of the main reasons for this increase in Middle Eastern immigration include the regime change in Iran and Afghanistan in 1978, and the eight years of war between Iran and Iraq (1980–1988), which also impacted other Arab countries. Further, since 9/11, the "War on Terror" has resulted in further instability in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and across the Middle East (Mohit). In order to compete in the emergent global economy, Canada began to accept more immigrants; however, this also resulted in a significant reduction in welfare benefits and the establishment of restrictive immigration regulations (Magnusson; Mohanty 2004). The new *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA), which came into effect on June 28, 2002,[1] dictated more constrained regulations for accepting immigrants. In addition to their occupation, applicants were awarded points in accordance with their age, education, and work experience. The focus shifted from occupation to education, and in 2002, an English test became a basic criterion for entrance to Canadian society. Arguably, these changes to the point system result in further discrimination with respect to gender, race, class, age, nationality, and language, given that those with greater access to education, or who are fluent in English as a second language, are usually from certain classes and age groups.

Until 1996, Iran was not among the top ten countries from which people immigrated to Canada. However, increasing difficulties in the social relations of Iran, such as the spread of injustice and lack of free speech, human rights, and women's rights, resulted in an ever-increasing migration to North America (Afshar; Esfandiari). Between 1996 and 2001, Iranians constituted four percent of the immigrant population, ranking seventh on the list of top ten source countries.[2] Concomitantly, the number of educated Iranian immigrant women is also increasing because, in an insecure and unstable patriarchy and dictatorship such as Iran, women who are looking for liberation and an improvement in their lives believe that opportunities to meet these goals are available in Canada. For example, in this research, Sarah, completing a master's program, expresses her hate of the patriarchy in Iran:

> *I hate patriarchy more than anything else in my culture and in Iran. Although I track patriarchy here in Canada as well, I enjoy the fact that as a female I have more rights and respect in Canada.*

Nevertheless, although Iranian women often move to Canada in search of liberation, they find different kinds of oppression upon arrival. From a Euro-American perspective, Iranian women are constructed as

"Oriental," and Iran's international policy after the Iranian revolution in 1979 reinforced this negative image. Iranian women are characterized as Muslim, backward, tradition-bound, uneducated, and the subject of male domination (Arat-Koc; Hoodfar 1992a, 1992b; Said 1979, 2003). Thus, educated Iranian women enter a socio-capitalistic society, such as Canada, bearing the burden of this negative historical image. As such, they encounter consistent oppression. Marginalization and isolation, which are mainly experienced by minority students (Acker; Samaul; Xu and Zhang), can be more complicated for students who are Orientalized. This is evidenced in the words of Mona, one of the participants in this research who studies in a master's program. Her program is mainly dominated by men. Mona says:

> *I remember one of the challenges in school with one of my white classmates. It was a group project and the guy who was my partner did not cooperate. He did not let me know that he couldn't do it. We just divided the responsibilities, and the day before submitting the project, he came with an excuse for not completing his share. I was stressed by the pressure that was put on me from all the work I was left to do on the last day. Also, I didn't know how to prove to the professor that I had done all the work in such a short period of time! This is mostly because he was a Canadian man with professional language skills, and normally it is easier to believe that he is a more proficient person than I am. I was one of the few girls who was in the program, and my appearance didn't match the stereotype of the others in the program. I was also afraid that if I were to complain, it would not only be me, it would also be my culture, religion, nationality, and other factors that would impact my complaint and cause the main problem to be lost and make the situation worse. Finally, I spoke up and the professor told us that he would find out who did what from the exam mark.*

At the end of the course, Mona achieved a good mark, but throughout the semester she was under pressure to prove to her instructor that she had been honest, because the instructor was basing the truth on Mona's and her classmate's exam results, not on Mona's explanation. In addition, it was a lesson in silencing for Mona; in a further interview she states: "As I was under pressure, I told myself that from now on I would not complain and only try to do my routine work."

Immigrant Iranian women may feel happy about being able to continue their studies in Canada, but as Mona's experience illustrates, they feel they must always be vigilant since they are viewed as outsiders and this can complicate their lives. Experiences such as Mona's might also increase as the number of educated Iranian immigrant women increases. According to Citizenship and Immigration Canada, since 2001 the number of immigrant women university students is increasing. This might be the result of the change in immigration policy that gives more weight to education as well as the conditions in the immigrant's country of origin.

The Canadian government clearly invites educated immigrants to enter Canada. Despite this, Statistics Canada (CIC) reveals that the unemployment rate is also increasing among immigrants. This contradictory agenda—inviting educated immigrants into the country, but rejecting them for socio-economic reasons is an indication of a racialized and sexist society (Gabaluzi). For example, Canadian statistics reveal that the number of educated immigrants between 1996 and 2001 was two times greater than in 1986 (CIC). Moreover, immigrant women have higher levels of education in comparison with Canadian-born women.[3] Despite this, immigrant women's previous schooling continues to be devalued in Canadian society (Galabuzi; Matas; Ng 2005; Wane). University attendance is nearly twice as high for recent immigrants[4] (those who entered Canada between 1996 and 2001) as compared with Canadian-born people between the ages of 25 and 44, and it is nearly three times as high in the 45 to 64 age group. Educated immigrants are willing to attend university and update their education to increase their chance of employment and/or to fulfill a desire to learn and improve their knowledge. For example, in this research, Hoda, a doctoral candidate who also completed her master's in a Canadian school, reveals that the only reason she could tolerate all the challenges she encountered at school was her interest in study. She states:

> *I can say* it is only [because of] my interest to study *that [I] could tolerate all those pressures*

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in school: supervisor compatibility and financial problems. But sometimes you go to the border [and] ask yourself [is] it worth tolerat[ing] all those pressure[s]? And my response is I do because I am interested in learning, *not for taking a better job, in fact, no, because with my master's I could get a job. It is only [my]* passion for learning *that draws me to finish it, because I can work with my master's. So anyone who asks me, "Do we continue to take our Ph.D.?" I say it is only one's interest to get [a] Ph.D., there is no other reason for taking it … only personal interest can help you to go through it.* (emphasis added)

Yet in reality employment opportunity is an important issue for immigrants. It is less of an issue for Hoda, as she has received her master's in a marketable program from a Canadian school. However, according to Canadian statistics, unemployment among university-educated immigrant women is four times higher than unemployment among Canadian-born women. It was also three to four times greater between 1986 and 1995 for educated immigrant women as compared to Canadian-born women.[5] These statistics reveal an interesting dynamic. Although the Canadian government and its immigration policies increasingly accept more educated immigrants, unemployment rates are much higher among these immigrants compared with Canadian-born people. Discrimination is therefore evidenced in the imbalance between job opportunities and the level of education of racialized immigrants and is a common experience among all immigrants (Hojati; Galabuzi; Samaul; Ng 2005).

Constructions of Canadian Higher Education and Minority Women's Status

The Canadian state utilizes academia as a tool for producing specific types of citizens, with particular types of knowledge—scientific knowledge, skills, and abilities. From this framework, I analyze the structure of Canadian higher education, its relationship with the state, and its impacts on minority women's status.

Since the 1960s, Canadian higher education has followed the United States' structure, which was influenced by the scientific management principles set out by Fredrick Taylor in 1911. These principles advocate scientific thinking and method as the way to improve productivity in favour of industry and market (Barrow; Mackinnon; Nobel; Shahjahan). It was through the engagement of science with capital (money, resources, business) that American higher education became involved in industry and in the market economy. Academia became an enriched source for improvements in science (Barrow; Nobel), while students and faculties came to be viewed as intellectual labourers through their work in areas such as research and publications. This work was mainly used for industry and for the fiscal benefit of investors (Axelrod; Shahjahan; Shiva). This perspective in general has been adopted in academia in the name of increased efficiency. The quality of work is viewed as less important than quantity, and knowledge based on curiosity and enquiry in academia has shifted to knowledge and research based on industry and job-market needs. As a result, knowledge and the products of research are commodified and sold like stocks on Wall Street (Axelrod; Barrow; Shiva).

Canadian higher education has similarly adopted these criteria. However, Canada is largely publicized as a multicultural and welfare society and is proud of this distinguished image (Hojati; Galabuzi). Gradually, Canada has moved away from the policies that contributed to this image, such as the promotion of the welfare state, by reducing healthcare benefits, increasing higher education tuition, and cutting student services in universities, as these become further embroiled in capital accumulation (Itwaru; Lee; Magnusson; Shahjahan). As a result, it is important to analyze the situation of immigrant women students from a political-economic point of view, since they participate directly in the profit cycle of higher education. Thus, these questions need to be asked: What is the benefit of higher education for immigrant women? Is there a fair exchange of learning for social and economic mobility? Moreover, in this exchange, is the immigrant woman student allowed to fully participate in the institutional structures that she is supporting?

Moreover, through globalization, the state's neoliberal agenda since the late twentieth century seeks to control resources worldwide, and especially in Middle Eastern countries. This agenda has promoted war and violence by focusing negative attention on the battle for resources so necessary for economic imperialism (Amin; Chomsky; Lee; Miles; Mohit; Roza). With the escalation of the War on Terror in the post-9/11 era, imperial interests and alliances have worked to vilify Iran and perpetuate a negative image of its people in the media (Yenigun; Zine). Indeed, Iran is widely understood as belonging to the "axis of evil" (Bush). It should be of no surprise then that in the midst of these neo-Orientalist discourses circulating with increased vigour, the presence of Iranian women in Canadian society is met with suspicion and racism. The deployment and reinforcement of these racist constructions have assisted in the creation of institutionalized barriers based on state-supported racism and other forms of oppression. The literature on higher education overwhelmingly shows that discrimination based on gender and race in Canadian undergraduate and graduate schools is an ongoing problem (Acker; Bannerji 2000; Braden; Dagg; Ella; Filteau; Hutt; Samaul; Willie, Grady, and Hope; Xu and Zhang). This fact becomes further complicated when we examine the interconnection of gender and race with religion, ethnicity, language,

and other forms of oppression. In this context, minority women as the "other," and second-class citizens (Mohanty 2004), are under multiple pressures to compete in a politically charged intellectual context such as the graduate classroom.

It is evident from my research that these multiple forms of oppression increase the pressure racialized women feel in the Canadian context.

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Sima, one of the master's students in my study, does not have any financial support from her school. She has to work to pay for her school expenses. Her situation as a graduate student is therefore tied to her workplace as well. Both places, school and work, have an impact on her life. She raises her voice regarding manipulation at work:

> *To me, multiculturalism is a racist concept. At my workplace, some colleagues [are] biased and … because of my language, my accent, and my religion they push me and manipulate my thought. For example, one of my colleagues pushed me and even changed my words to the manager and when I noticed and revealed his tendency, he told me "I can put a ring around your neck and kill you." I laughed and told him you can do it but then you won't have a team leader.* (emphasis added)

Sima is emotionally abused at work. She feels that her identity, religion, language, and even her accent are violated and disrespected. Sima's position at work is higher than that of her abusive colleague. But her knowledge and education do not bring her enough power and agency to bring colleague, but the ways she is societally racialized do not allow her the privilege and agency to prevent such violence. In a further interview, Sima explains that she complained about her colleague's behaviour to the top manager, but in the end she was not able to bring about any change in her situation at work.

Moreover, although this experience occurred in her workplace, Sima cannot separate herself from the experience when she is at school. If she continues to study in order to better adapt to and integrate into Canadian society, will academia allow her, a minority racialized student, to speak out about her challenges in a society in which academia is a part? Himani Bannerji reminds us that "the university too is a place in the world and the world is in it" (2000: 114). The university and the world are portrayed by each other. People who live and work in universities operate in the public sphere too. Universities are a reflection of society, with all its characteristics. We cannot separate higher education from the social, cultural, political, and economic structures that surround it, locally and globally. Sima also feels her racially marked body is under scrutiny in class as well as in the workplace. She says:

> *The instructor did not give [an] attendance mark to me. At the beginning of the term she mentioned [the] attendance mark. But in the last class she told everyone [that] it [would be] better [if] we changed attendance to participation, because sometimes a student cannot come, but she has a good participation. I realized that the instructor wanted to reduce my mark. When I objected that I attended and also participated in all classes, she told me, "You have to take the mark you got." When I shared it [with] the guidance [counsellor] in the department,* she advised me to ignore it, *and said, "My suggestion is [that] it is* better you ignore it. *It is your last class and course." Most of the students got [a] perfect mark [in] attendance, only I did not get [a mark], [although] most of those students did not come to the class either. I think my hijab was a big problem. The instructor was from an ethnic religious group that always supports the war in Iraq and says that American soldiers are innocent and are killed there.* (emphasis added)

How did the other students get a perfect mark for attendance even though they did not come to the class? Sima did not get a mark for attendance despite the fact that she had not missed any sessions and had participated in the class discussions. Sima was discriminated against because of her language, religion, and nationality. She was understandably upset when she was sharing this experience. The guidance counsellor in the department, who is a representa-

tive of the graduate school and who should support equity and justice in the classroom, suggested Sima ignore the problem. This response further compounds the discrimination and injustice in the classroom, because it shows the university's lack of willingness to follow up on the case. In addition, a guidance counsellor should be responsible for following up on the *cause* of the oppression, not encouraging students to ignore it. In other words, this guidance counsellor was participating in the continuation of oppression of racialized people in the institution. Examples of discriminatory behaviours and attitudes were shared not only by Sima, but also by most participants in my study, who faced numerous challenges in graduate school.

Iranian Women's Voices in Canadian Society and Graduate School

In my interviews, Iranian immigrant graduate students experienced racism through being stereotyped as Oriental women. This section represents only one short part of my research findings, which highlight the ways in which educated Iranian women encounter racism as part of their everyday interactions and experiences in Canadian society.

Fatemeh, who is completing a master's program, wears a hijab. Throughout her studies, she has found that wearing a hijab is a barrier in school and at work, leading to oppression, marginalization, and disrespect from some professors at her university and some colleagues at her work. She feels she does not have the power to change the situation.

> *In my school they don't like different religions, they don't like us who are different; because of my hijab they don't like me. For example, I was in a class where there were other students who could not speak English, even basic English, and at that time my English was better than theirs, but those students did not have scarves and I did. I was oppressed more, because I had [a] scarf. One day something happened that I will never ever forget, and I feel it with every fibre of my being. It was in the critical thinking course. After I had submitted the first assignment, the professor came to the class and stood in front of me but looked at the whole class, and said, "People who do not have critical thinking have to leave this school." It was really hard for me. She damaged me, in a way that* I lost my self-esteem; I was ruined *and I think I will never overcome this damage. Although I did a good job in that course, I don't have enough self-esteem. It is always with me that anyone who does not have critical thinking should not stay in this school. I can't forgive that instructor.* (emphasis added)

This stigma placed on a Muslim woman by an instructor can contribute to the negative image of Muslim women as "other." Clearly, the instructor herself was not applying critical thinking in her generalization of Muslim women not being capable of critical thinking. How can one have critical thinking but ignore and marginalize diversity among her students? The instructor's comment stayed with Fatemeh throughout the semester, and the instructor's negative stereotyping remains with her. While she was happy to be continuing her studies, she felt oppressed.

This oppression is not limited to the school setting, it is also found in the workplace. As Fatemeh continues:

> *In my work place, my colleagues looked at me and asked me, "Are you in a master's program?" And I said, "Yes, I am," and they said, "Oh, oh, YOU, YOU!" with a surprised tone. Again they asked, "Are you in a master's program?" And I said, "Yes, I am." And they said, "It is impossible."*

The negative image that Muslim women cannot be highly educated is socially internalized and stigmatizes Orientalized people, particularly women. According to Fatemeh, this discrimination comes from those of other minority religions as well. She continues: "In [the] workplace, other minority religious people hate me, although in terms of [the] job's hierarchy I am in a higher level. They hand in the work reports to others instead of me; they ignore me at work." Even though Fatemeh has the most responsibility at work, those she supervises do not cooperate with her and prevent her from having the power to manage. Therefore, race and gender intertwine with religion, education, and nationality to marginalize her. Moreover, power relationships based on religion, nationality, and language in a multicultural society such as Canada can be a significant factor for oppression. Fatemeh's experiences speak to Bannerji's notion of "common sense" racism in Canadian society, and the ways it is embedded in everyday life (Dua 14). Even racialized minorities use their privilege, such as their gender, class, religion, and nationality, to reproduce racist attitudes toward other minorities. As a result, Fatemeh feels frustrated at work, though she tries to recognize the positive support she does receive at work, too: "I thank God that we have [a] good union at work in here that supports us at least in words."

Oppression is not only a reality for those educated Iranian women who wear a hijab and self-identify as Muslim, it is apparently also felt by Iranian women who do not see themselves as Muslim, but as Iranian. Participants expressed the feeling that the Iranian nationality and language are also sources of disrespect and oppression. Sarah does not identify as a Muslim woman, and she does not wear Islamic dress. Nonetheless, she shares similar experiences:

> *My look and accent show I am a second-language speaker. In fact, Canadian people do not obviously*

express their hatred toward me. I remember one day in a computer lab one of the students, when he realized I am an Iranian student, asked me, "Are you a spy or a terrorist?" *"Both," I said. "You better watch out!" He said he is an ——Canadian and that his country is close to Iran, so Iran can send a bomb to his country easily now that he has recognized me. His absolute ignorance made me laugh at him. "I don't care how idiots think of me," I said. "Oh, I don't think like that," he said. "But I know most people sitting in this computer lab have this kind of image of you." "Yeah, right!" I said. "You don't think like that. Everyone else does!" That conversation happened one week after I entered Canada*. (emphasis added)

I asked Sarah what her feelings were after this conversation, and she continued:

Not a good first impression of Canadian people. Accusations like this really hurt. I'm not sure how many more people think like that but are not as blunt about it. Why am I always [put] in a position to prove myself innocent of all the guilty images as a woman, as an Iranian, inside and outside of Iran? Where [do] I go to get rid of [this] bias and ignorance?

The racial stereotyping of Iranian people as "spies" and "terrorists" is not limited to the school setting. The media's impact on Canadian people perpetuates the negative image of Iranian (women) in the public sphere as well. Sarah is proud of being an Iranian woman, but not of the way Iranian women are portrayed in the mainstream. She does not like to be judged by such stereotyping She is conscious of her status as an educated woman and is against the dictatorial, patriarchic regime in Iran, but she is judged in the same way that the Iranian government's policy is judged internationally. In other words, the global image of a country impacts its citizens around the world. Sarah left Iran in order to have social and cultural freedom, but in the host society, Canada, she finds that she is surrounded by the patriarchal and racialized stigma of Middle Eastern women.

Conclusion

Through Mona, Sima, Fatemeh, and Sarah we can examine racism not only based on skin colour, but also based on religion, nationality, language, and ethnicity. As my study demonstrates, Iranian women, whose bodies are racialized, have difficulty using their knowledge, education, experience, and skills as agency for educational and work development. In this context, Iranian immigrant graduate students' knowledge, experience, and education are overlooked. Canada's state policy, which follows the United States' agenda of neo-liberalism, the war on terror, and the military presence in the Middle East, Iraq, and Afghanistan, unquestionably impacts immigrant people in Canadian society (CBC; Elmer and Ferton; McLeod). Academia as a state tool for educating people is impacted by social-political and economic agendas. Canadian academia is a reflection of Canadian multicultural society that includes diverse students with diverse backgrounds and interests, who immigrate to this land for a better life and to contribute to the society's development. Thus, Canadian policy in academia at the state level needs a dramatic fundamental change if it is to be used to create justice in the local and global spheres.

Using an integrative anti-racist feminist perspective provides us with a direction to analyze neo-Orientalist discourse in the oppression and marginalization of Middle Eastern women in Canadian society and academia and the interconnection of race and gender with religion, nationality, ethnicity, and other forms of oppression. Through this perspective, we can examine the roots of agency, privilege, and power relationships in Canadian academia and society. In a multicultural country, ignorance and marginalization are historically structured and institutionalized within its domestic sphere. Therefore, without awareness of its sources, we cannot remove oppression from our society. Iranian women graduate students, as people from the Middle East, also experience this exclusion in Canadian institutions. As a result, raising their voices can contribute to social change and justice in this nation.

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[1]Canada Immigration Visa. "IELTS test for Canada immigration not required in *all* cases." Retrieved August 8, 2009, from http://www.canadaimmigrationvisa.com/ia19122003.htm

[2]Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Part B. "Who are the recent immigrants?" Table B-1. Retrieved July 17, 2007, from http://cic.gc.ca/English/resources/research/census2001/Toronto/partb.asp#b3.

[3]This percentage between 1996 and 2001 was 33 percent compared with 1986, which was 24 percent. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Part B. "Who are the recent immigrants?" Tables B-8, B-9, and B-10. Retrieved July 17, 2007, from http://cic.gc.ca/English/resources/research/census2001/Toronto/partb.asp#b3.

[4]Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Part B. "Who are the recent immigrants?" Figure B-2 and Table B-11. Retrieved July 17, 2007, from http://cic.gc.ca/English/resources/research/census2001/Toronto/partb.asp#b3.

[5]Unemployment rate in 1986 was four percent, and in 1995 it was six percent. Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Part D. Participation in the economy. Tables D-2, D-3, and D-4. Retrieved July 17, 2007, from http://cic.gc.ca/English/resources/research/census2001/Toronto/partd.asp.

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CATHERINE BURWELL

august

i
a dead stiff heat
streets the edge
of the city,
slows the motion
of children/mothers/
dogs

walking to a
friend's house,
coffee & cakes at
the edge of a freeway,
even cars
pass the afternoon
without energy

ii
three blocks east
& down a house
is demolished

here since the war years
her father built it

neighbours trade stories
watch the metal claw
scrape each wall
delicately away,
choke softly
on diesel
as dust

bursts/ & settles
bursts/ & settles

iii
she unlocks
the door
& blurred words

stir the air
behind her
a body on
a couch
encounters
cracks in
the ceiling

counts the ways
to say over
& over again

it's the heat, though she's been
losing faith all summer,
memory just a slow drift called
water

in a corner
fans whir,
purr the lost
hope of open
windows
& a better street

iv
the boats still
aren't clean
the boss says
so you and
the other guy
we're only muscle to him
haul garbage
scrub floors
wash sails till
6 pm,
backs bare to
the shouting sun,
mouths shut

come dark,
sleep and food will
weigh you down
but at midnight
i watch as
your muscles
shudder & twist,
& you curse softly
at the day

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