Invisibilized, Individualized, and Culturalized

Paradoxical Invisibility and Hyper-Visibility of Gender in Policy Making and Policy Discourse in Neoliberal Canada

SEDEF ARAT-KOÇ

In recent years in Canada, even as women in general have become almost invisible in social policy areas, the direction of policy debates and policy making has moved simultaneously and increasingly to invisibilizing and/or individualizing issues for white and Canadian-born women and culturalizing issues facing immigrant and racialized women. It seems that policy discourse and policy making under neoliberalism treat gender inequality as a problem solved for white Canadian women,[1] and an ongoing, cultural (baggage) problem for immigrant and racialized/culturalized women. The paper first focuses on the conditions of migrant caregivers as an example of a paradox in relation to recent developments in women's place in Canadian social policy and then discusses the paradox of invisibility *and* hyper-visibility *of women in public and policy discourses. The second section raises questions on where mainstream feminism stands in relation to this paradox to interrogate the contradictory and potentially subversive effects of neoliberalism and neoconservatism on feminism itself.*

Ces dernières années au Canada, même si les femmes en général sont devenues presque invisibles dans les domaines de la politique sociale, la direction des débats politiques et élaboration des politiques a mis simultanément et de plus en plus invisibilizing et individualisation des questions pour femmes née blanches et canadiennes et culturalizing les problèmes auxquels sont confrontés les immigrants et les femmes racialisées. Il semble que discours politique et politique rend en vertu du néolibéralisme traite les inégalités entre les sexes comme un problème résolu pour les femmes canadiennes blanches;[1] et une en cours, problème culturel (bagages) pour les immigrantes et les femmes racialisées/culturalized. Le livre se concentre tout d'abord sur les conditions des soignants migrants comme exemple d'un paradoxe par rapport à l'évolution récente de la place des femmes dans la politique sociale canadienne et discute ensuite le paradoxe de l'invisibilité et hyper-visibilité des femmes dans les discours publics et

politiques. La deuxième section soulève des questions sur où le féminisme mainstream se situe à l'égard de ce paradoxe pour interroger les effets contradictoires et potentiellement subversifs du néo-libéralisme et néo-conservatisme sur le féminisme lui-même.

In recent years in Canada, even as women in general have become almost invisible in social policy areas where they asserted serious demands for structural change, immigrant women appear to be central to selective policy discussions—as objects of discussion, rather than as subjects defining the terms and leading the discussion—on "culture" and multiculturalism. The direction of policy debates and policy making has moved simultaneously and increasingly to *invisibilizing* and/or *individualizing* issues for white and Canadian-born women and *culturalizing* issues facing immigrant and racialized women. It seems that policy discourse and policy making under neoliberalism treat gender inequality as a problem solved for white Canadian women,[2] and an ongoing, cultural (baggage) problem for immigrant and racialized/culturalized women. On the one hand, there is no discourse (other than claims to a post-gender, post-feminist order) or policy on gender; on the other, there is an inflation of discourses on the gender of "others."

The paper starts with focusing on the absence of improvements (and rather a worsening) in the conditions of migrant caregivers as an example of a paradox in relation to recent developments in women's place in Canadian social policy: a glaring *absence* of social policy dealing with social and economic issues concerning women, and an *inflation* of policy talk on immigrant women only in a culturalized framework in debates on multiculturalism and citizenship. Expanding on Alexandra Dobrowolsky's (2008) observation about simultaneous *"invisibilization"* and *"instrumentalization"* of women in current citizenship

discourses and practices in Canada, the paper aims to make sense of this paradox. The first section of the paper discusses the paradox of *invisibility* and *hyper-visibility* of women in public and policy discourses, looking at the kind of "women's issues" ignored or passionately discussed in the current public and policy discourse. The second section raises questions on where mainstream feminism stands in relation to this paradox. Expanding on the recent work by Hester Eisenstein (2005, 2009) and Nancy Fraser (2009) on the "dangerous liaisons" between feminism and the current economic/political/ideological order,

a generalization of their specific conditions of extreme vulnerability to other groups of workers. Whereas in the 1970s and 1980s, the temporary status and the denial of basic labour rights to migrant domestic and care workers used to be considered an anomaly, inconsistent with the general status of immigrants and general labour conditions in Canada, we now face an environment where the flexibilization and precarity of work for many people in the labour market, on the one hand, and an increased emphasis on temporary migrant workers in Canadian immigration policy, on the other, have come to almost

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this section interrogates the contradictory and potentially subversive effects of neoliberalism and neoconservatism on feminism itself.

Conditions of Domestic and Care Workers: Reflecting the Relationship between Feminism and the Canadian State?

The status and conditions of migrant domestic and care workers in Canada constitute one of the most striking examples for how gender and race inequalities are constructed, condoned, and/or reproduced by the state. For domestic and care workers, the replacement of permanent resident status with temporary work permits in the early 1970s marked the development of a status that created conditions of extreme vulnerability. As temporary work permits have made one's legal status in Canada conditional upon the continuity of live-in employment with an assigned employer in an assigned job, it has become much more difficult for foreign domestic and care workers to negotiate better working conditions or to leave abusive working/living environments.

Despite extensive research by anti-racist feminist academics and community groups over the last three to four decades, documenting the highly restrictive, exploitative, and abusive relationships enabled by the state (immigration) affecting this group of workers, and activism demanding changes, there has been a reluctance on the part of the state to improve the conditions.[3] While there has been a "rise and fall" in the struggle for labour rights in some provinces,[4] there has been an absolute unwillingness at the federal level to negotiate permanent resident (as opposed to temporary migrant) status upon entry and elimination of live-in requirements. Worse, in recent years in Canada, there has been an enormous expansion of migrant labour programs[5] and

normalize the restrictions, abuse, and exploitation faced by this group.[6]

It can be argued that the resistance to improvement in the status and conditions for domestic and care workers is related to the specific nature and place of this position in the new economy, as well as being related to the socio-economic and socio-political climate of neoliberalism which has generally affected struggles for social rights, equality, and justice negatively. A neoliberal economy is simultaneously dependent on and invisibilizing/degrading of domestic labour. While the withdrawal of the neoliberal state from care arrangements create the conditions of increased dependency on private care, a neoliberal economy demands workers who need to be traditionally "men-like" in terms of their working hours and commitment to paid-work, concealing their social reproduction. Unfortunately, the kind of "equality" some middle-class women have been able to achieve in a neoliberal labour market has been conditional upon being "men-like" in this fashion. The flexibility live-in migrant workers (as compared to citizen workers) can provide in enabling concealment of social reproduction makes them the ideal workers in this new economy:

> Migrant domestic workers… enable some middle-class women citizens to participate in the labour market as men's equals, because they are liberated from the home. The fact that they are migrants is important: In order to participate like men women must have workers who will provide the same flexibility as wives, in particular working long hours and combining caring and domestic chores… Migrants are far more flexible than citizens. Through their labour women citizens have male access to the public sphere, but they continue to fulfill female citizens' work of motherhood. (Anderson 190)

In Canada, the change in the government position on childcare has further exacerbated dependency on private care arrangements. In 2006, the Conservative government dismantled the national childcare program introduced by Liberals in 2003. Instead of funding childcare services, the government introduced a taxable family allowance of $100/month to parents with children under six (CRIAW 2006a).

As important as the reality of the new "normal" in the labour market and in immigration policies, however, what makes the *normalization* of migrant domestic and

with *delegitimization* of the women's movement in the 1980s when the organized women's movement and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) expressed opposition to the Conservative Party through their campaigns against the U.S.-Canada Free Trade Agreement and the dismantling of universal social programs. Delegitimization involved labeling the women's movement, along with other equality seeking movements and groups, as "special interest" groups and lobbyists whose "private" interests and demands were different from or in opposition to the interests of "ordinary" Canadians

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care workers' conditions possible are the changes in the political and ideological climate in which changes have (not) been (sufficiently) debated and challenged. Compared to the 1970s and the 1980s, there has been a drastic shrinking of political spaces to voice and debate social change in the last two decades. This has taken place through changes in the relations between the Canadian state and women's and immigrant organizations in a direction that has (at least partially) disabled these organizations in doing advocacy work; as well as a shift in the general ideological climate engendered by neoliberalism and neoconservatism which has contributed to marginalization and even delegitimization of perspectives critiquing policy and offering alternatives. As a result, there is no longer a strong-enough and effective-enough political voice, from feminism or immigrant organizations,[7] to challenge the unacceptability of these conditions and to demand change.

In Canada, one of the most promising sources of pressure for change in the late-twentieth century was the women's movement.[8] In the last two decades, the Canadian women's movement has experienced a sharp decline in the political commitment and institutional and financial supports for gender equality that the Canadian government used to provide in the 1970s and 1980s. Janine Brodie and Isabella Bakker have argued that in a process that started in the mid-1980s and accelerated in the 1990s, women in Canada have started to disappear "both as a focus of public policy and as a distinct political constituency" (66). Since the *liaison* between the federal government and the Canadian Women's Movement ended in the late 1980s, the women's movement, along with other equality seeking groups, has been subjected to a politics of *delegitimization*, *dismantling,* and *disappearance* (Brodie 2010; Brodie and Bakker). According to Brodie and Bakker, the process of marginalization started

(Brodie 1995; Brodie and Bakker). As delegitimization affected gender units inside the government, it led to a *dismantling* of gender-based policy capacity in both federal and most provincial governments. Starting in the 1990s, at the federal level, as well as in several of the provinces bodies such as Canadian Advisory Councils on the Status of Women and the Women's Directorates faced total elimination or downgrading and downsizing and budget cuts.

With these changes, there was a "progressive erosion of gender in governmental discourses, public policy, budgetary priorities, and institutional machinery" (Brodie and Bakker 75) and women as an analytic category more or less disappeared from government discourses, debates and policies.

The relationship between the Canadian women's movement and the Canadian state has taken an even more drastic turn since 2006 when the Conservatives came to power, not only cutting material supports but also aiming to effectively silence challenge and dissent from the women's movement altogether (Dobin; Gergin). Not only have the Conservatives cancelled plans to initiate a proactive federal pay equity legislation; accelerated elimination of funding for advocacy groups; and eliminated other means to demand equality and justice, such as the Court Challenges Program, they have also effectively declared equality to be a non-issue for women. In 2006, when the government closed the research branch and drastically cut the budget of Status of Women—forcing it to close most of their regional offices—they also eliminated "equality" from its mandate. As Prime Minister Harper and Minister Responsible for Status of Women, Bev Oda declared that women's equality had already been achieved in Canada; the government suggested that equality no longer needed to be a government priority.

Invisibility and Hypervisibility of Gender: The Paradox of Public Discourse

It is ironic, if not completely hypocritical, that in the same environment where gender equality has disappeared from discourses, making and implementation of policy, gender plays a rather prominent part, often centre-stage, when it comes to policy talk on specific groups of racialized women, immigrant women, multiculturalism and citizenship. As Alexandra Dobrowolsky has aptly observed, whereas women in Canada have in general been "invisibilized", "disappeared from the words and deeds of state actors" (2008: 465), some, specifically immigrant women, have been "instrumentalized," made "hyper visible, purposefully positioned in the public eye" (466). In the general public discourse and policy discussions, gender inequality is treated as a problem solved for white women, as if Canada is in a post-feminist state. As Janine Brodie and Isabella Bakker comment on Minister Bev Oda's 2006 statement, gender is "everywhere but nowhere" in general policy discussions. Yet it is seen as a problem specific to immigrant women, often from racialized communities. On the one hand, there is no discourse (other than claims to a post-gender, post-feminist order) or policy on gender; on the other, there is an inflation of discourses on the gender of "others."

There is a relationship between the invisibility of gender for some and its hyper-visibility for others. The key to this seeming paradox is that the hyper-visibility of "other" women helps *normalize* and *naturalize* the gender order in the larger society:

> In multicultural societies of the global North, it is not uncommon to seize upon immigrant women who belong to diasporic communities as victims of illegitimate gender discipline by minority cultures or faiths. The bordering of gender in the broader society tacitly emerges as appropriate, benign, or even natural. (Macklin 276)

The claims made about gender equality in the recent version of the Canadian Citizenship Guide, *Discover Canada: The Right and Responsibilities of Citizenship*, given to immigrants applying for Canadian citizenship, not only naturalize gender relations in Canada but suggest that there are no issues of equality or sexist cultural practices in the mainstream of Canadian society, other than those brought in by immigrants:

> In Canada, men and women are equal under the law. Canada's openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices that tolerate spousal abuse, "honour killings," female genital mutilation, forced marriage, or other gender-based violence. Those guilty of these crimes are severely punished under Canada's criminal laws. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada)

What is specific to the attention gender gets in recent public and policy discourses is that this attention is based specifically on a *culturalist* perspective. This perspective, which has gained a widespread currency as a central operational category in the social sciences and policy making in recent decades, uses a de-contextualized, de-materialized notion of "culture,"often based on essentialized, simplified, homogenized, and static conceptions of how culture is assumed to operate. One of the major problems with a culturalized understanding of the problems facing immigrant women from racialized ethno-cultural communities is that this perspective blames a "package picture" of "culture" (Narayan 1997, 2000) in the country of origin for all of the gender inequalities immigrant women face in diaspora. This "package picture" of culture relies on essentialized, overgeneralized, and distorted assumptions about the "cultural luggage" individual women may carry. A second major problem is that culturalization overlooks the significance of gendering and racializing effects of Canadian policies and experiences on the women. Invisibilizing the relevance and significance of what happens "here and now" and through real, material impacts of state policies and dominant social, economic and political forces, it helps to let the "host" society and the state "off the hook" in both the analyses of and solutions offered for gender inequality for immigrant women.

What is specific to the discourses of gender of "others" in culturalist public and policy discourses is that they only focus on selective issues and sources of gender inequality, conspicuously avoiding others. Whereas these discourses are characterized by an *indifference* to and resounding silence on certain systemic, structural and institutionalized, especially classed and racialized experiences of gender, they display an *intense* public and state *gaze*, almost exclusively, on personal patriarchal relations taking place in racialized families and communities. They simultaneously ignore gender as a structural problem related to social, economic, and political structures in contemporary Canada and rather treat gender as a *cultural* problem having to do with the "cultural baggage" others bring to Canada. In fact, the historical correspondence of neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and "the war on terror" at the present moment means that the more gender inequalities are ignored or denied as systemic, engrained, and structural, the more we are likely to encounter heavily culturalist (and racist) discourses and policy approaches. As much as invisibilization and individualization of gender act as forces of de-politicization, selective politicizing offered by culturalism also does so. It shifts attention and transfers responsibility away from the market, society, and the state to ahistorical, decontextualized references to "culture".

What can be called the culturalist turn in the discourse on immigrants is not unique to Canada. It is now common to North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe, even to those countries historically known for strong welfare states and liberal policies towards immigrants. As Thomas Hylland Eriksen comments in the context of Norway, the

discourse on immigrants changed significantly after 9/11:

> … there has been a shift from a sociological focus on discrimination and racism, towards a focus on repression and rights violations inside the minority communities.…
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> The ideological shift has led to a change in emphasis in the standard presentation of minority issues (enforced marriages rather than discrimination in the labour market; unwillingness to integrate among immigrants rather than demands for cultural rights), and entails that greater society is either regarded as non-existent or devoid of responsibilities.…

There are many examples of this perspective on immigrants. And gender recently is central to the culturalist gaze on immigrants and minorities receive. Since 9/11 there has been a specifically strong emphasis on what is characterized as typical gender norms and relations in Muslim minorities in Western countries. Sherene Razack argues men from these communities get represented as "dangerous" and women from the same communities get represented as "imperiled" (Razack, 2008). In Europe, Muslim headscarves and veiling as well as arranged marriages (often labeled "forced marriages") have been major areas of debate in several countries. Public debate and public policy in many countries have moved from a general discussion about integration to specific calls for cultural assimilation to what is defined as the dominant culture in the country.

In Canada, the 2003-2005 controversy in Ontario over the possible extension of faith-based[laws] to Muslims (the "Sharia debate") has drawn more public attention than any legal or policy developments affecting immigrants or racialized minorities. "Culture" has also been the main focus of attention in the "reasonable accommodation" debates that took place around the work of Bouchard-Taylor Commission in Quebec. As Gada Mahrouse (2010) has pointed out in an event marking the fortieth anniversary of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, it is striking to contemplate the irony whereby immigrant and native women were very marginal to the Royal Commission in 1970; but that racialized Muslim women, at least implicitly, are in the front and centre of the debates surrounding the work of the Bouchard-Taylor Commission, whose focus was not explicitly meant to be on women. A final example of the attention given to cultural practices, seen as the main, or even the only, force behind gender inequality is the introduction of Bill 94 in Quebec, banning women wearing the *niqab* from receiving basic services in any public or parapublic space and institution from government offices to hospitals, universities, and day care centers. The fact that no more than a handful of women in Quebec actually wear the *niqab* demonstrates the symbolic power of the politics around the bill. Defending the bill, Christine St. Pierre, Quebec's minister responsible for the status of women, has argued that Quebec was a "world leader" in gender equality and that with Bill 94 they "prove it once again" (Chung).

As important as the passionate gaze on "culture" the culturalist perspective invests and the attention it receives on the gender of "others," is the question of what is missing in this perspective. In addition to a general absence of interest in a material analysis of economy, society, and politics as forces shaping gender, what is also missing in culturalist public and policy discourses is a contextualization of gender in relation to issues facing immigrant communities in the present. One relevant issue, for example, is the rather drastic decline in the labour market conditions for Canadian immigrants as well as racialized minorities in recent decades (Galabuzi 2004, 2006; Ornstein 2006; Reitz 2007a, 200b; Statistics Canada).[9] The implications of this development for gender relations have hardly received a portion of the attention received by "cultural issues."

Another important development relevant to gender is regarding immigration and settlement policies and practices. It is well documented that immigration policies in recent decades have, under the influence of neoliberalism, shifted further in a direction of *hyper-masculinization* (along with shifts in citizenship regimes and the new ideals of citizenship in general), prioritizing economic class immigration, upholding the ideal of the self-sufficient, flexible, mobile (usually male) professional, or capital class immigrant and further downgraded the significance of the contributions most women could make as workers and family members (Abu-Laban; Arat-Koc 1999; Thobani 2001). In amendments to the immigration act the government has proposed in March 2011, there are plans to shift the status of immigrants sponsored as spouses (mostly women) to a conditional one for two years or longer. Even though the government claims this is strictly to test the genuineness of a conjugal relationship, immigrant and refugee advocacy and service groups are raising serious concerns that it would lead further toward making immigrant women dependent on and vulnerable to spouses (Canadian Council for Refugees; CLEO Net; OCASI).

In addition to changes in immigration policy, recent changes in the quality and availability of settlement services also have direct material impact on immigrant women, affecting their chances for dignity, autonomy, and well-being. The government has drastically cut settlement services for immigrants in recent years (Belgrave; Gergin; Keung). A review of the services, organizations, NGOs and research bodies also targeted by the Harper government for cuts and "defunding" reveal that many of them work on issues directly concerning women immigrants and women of colour (Gergin; Gruending).

The culturalist gaze does not seem to serve immigrant women and those in racialized communities. Instead of providing a through understanding of gender issues and empowering women to address them, culturalism creates blind-spots around the relevant material conditions that need to be identified and addressed and leaves women in

an awkward position. Commenting on the 2003-2005 Ontario debate on potential extension of religious laws to Muslims (the so-called "Sharia debate"), Bassel argues that the nature of the debate, focusing singularly on Islam, failed to acknowledge and address other important issues:

> Little attention is paid to the significance of underlying inequalities, which are not solely intragroup inequalities, but also *vis-à-vis* the host society (e.g. language skills, precarious immigration status), which make some Muslim women not only particularly

of Islamic law to be practiced on Canadian soil, and the potential harm through its acceptance, the debate shifted away from the actual merits or pitfalls of the arbitration process. The discussion became reassembled through the discourse of culture talk, to the effect that positions became hardened between either anti- or pro-Islam. (Bhandar 337)

Bassel problematizes the tendency among some feminists to "silence to protect" immigrant and refugee women from racialized communities. Her observations among Somali

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vulnerable to religious arbitration, but also prevent their discursive equality in claim-making, i.e. their participation in this debate over interpretation of their needs.

Needs, claims and priorities are defined with Islam as the focal point, whether in opposition to or support of the headscarf and religious arbitration. This one-dimensional focus dominates the public agenda and imposes a hierarchy of identities and needs. (172)

Davina Bhandar argues that the ubiquitous "cultural talk" in media, legal, and policy discourses has operated as a project of governance and a disciplining tool, shaping "the use of the 'cultural' for determining how citizens belong within nation-states" (338). Analysing the debate in Ontario over religious arbitration, she demonstrates how culturalism has suppressed some perspectives and positions and narrowed down the debate. Taking place in a context of Islamophobia and focusing almost exclusively on the "cultural difference" of Islam in a post 9/11 context, the debate has ended up effectively sidelining the general feminist concerns over the negative effects of privatized systems of justice. With the division of the political terrain along cultural/religious lines, not only has the heterogeneity of the "Muslim community" failed to be represented, but feminists who are secular and anti-racist "found it difficult to establish a foothold in the public terrain" (Bhandar 337):

> It was highly problematic to simultaneously articulate a position that was critical of the patriarchal and conservative views of the Muslim clerics producing a particular vision of the 'Good Muslim', and challenge a feminist response to Sharia law based in a discourse that propagated a … [racialized depiction of Muslims]. Once the deliberation turned to the cultural validity

women refugees reveal the resentment felt by women who are concerned about female genital mutilation, but do not agree with the way it is framed by the larger society and imposed as a priority over other issues:

> I wish that white liberal women would stop saving us. They only listen to you if you bash your culture. Yes, FGM is wrong. But the way they explain it is wrong. (174)

Overall, the culturalist framing of immigrant and racialized women's issues suppress complex voices and positions, forcing women to make impossible choices. Macklin suggests that the dichotomy created in popular discourses between culture and rights chokes the actual voices of culturalized women:

> …it is not so much that the encultured women is put to the invidious choice of "either your culture or your rights"; it is rather that she is not yet fully heard when she replies "neither, as presently constituted, and both, as I envision them. (299)

How do we make sense of the simultaneous *invisibility* and *hyper-visibility* of women in the public and policy discourses under neoliberalism? What is the political context in which this seemingly paradoxical *indifference* to gender inequality exists side by side with a passionate interest in and an intense gaze on the gender of "others"? As importantly, what are the implications of this paradox for feminism?

Ironically, it has been the very period when women and feminists have lost state and policy supports in their struggles for gender equality, that feminism has become one of the (pseudo) identities claimed by Western governments and societies. In explaining the simultaneous

invisibilization and hypervisibilization of gender in policy, Dobrowolsky (2008) emphasizes how the current conjuncture combines marketization and securitization. Also useful for this analysis is Wendy Brown's (2006) discussion of the nature and implications of the convergence of neoliberalism and neoconservatism in recent U.S. politics. Brown is interested in how neoliberalism, based on a market rationality and "expressly amoral at the level of both end and means" intersects with neoconservatism which is "expressly moral and regulatory" (Brown 2006: 692).

> …neoliberalism figures a future in which cultural and national borders are largely erased, in which all relations, attachments, and endeavors are submitted to a monetary nexus, while neoconservatism scrambles to re-articulate and police cultural and national borders, the sacred, and the singular through discourses of patriotism, religiosity, and the West (Brown 2006: 699).

Margaret Somers also sees connections between neoliberalism and nationalist patriotism. She argues that the internal *statelessness*[10] created by the last 30 years of neoliberalism has turned part of the citizenry to an alternate identity around ethnicity and nationalism to compensate for what they have lost:

> The last thirty years of neoliberalism and market fundamentalism in tandem with the new post-9/11 security state have produced this new regime, which is remaking the political identities of a broad swath of the public by increasingly turning them into stateless nationals who take comfort in the compensatory identity of cultural, rather than social, inclusion. (Somers 119)

Extending Brown's arguments about the U.S. to Canada, it can be argued that claims by immigrants and racialized minorities to equality and justice have been undermined in Canada (as elsewhere) by the dual pressures that have come from neoliberalism, on the one hand, and neoconservatism, on the other. While neoliberalism undermines claims to equality and distributive justice by forcing all policy discussions into the logic of market rationality, neoconservatism, especially after 9/11, takes equality out of the language of politics altogether by defining the boundaries of "the nation" along lines of whiteness and "Western civilization."

The combination of the immoralism of neoliberalism and the nativist moralism of neoconservatism seem to create a toxic combination for marginalized minorities. In policy debates on multiculturalism and citizenship, this translates to a move away from addressing the structural factors that lead inequality and exclusion, and an overemphasis on integration and "social cohesion" increasingly understood in cultural terms as assimilation—isolated from social, economic, political, and ideological factors that may, in the real world, actually enable integration

and social cohesion. What we see in the policy field as well as public discourses on gender, therefore, is a peculiar articulation of neoliberalism and neoconservatism where the laissez faire approach of neoliberalism over social and cultural relations get trumped by the "moral(izing) state power" (Brown 2006: 697) neo-conservatives assert over issues such as "national attachment", "national unity" and "national security". Overall, what seems to be happening at the present is a de-mobilization, de-democratization of the public sphere on the one hand, and a hyper-politicization, hyper-mobilization in a culturalist/nationalist mode, on the other. The hyper-politicization simultaneously involves an overemphasis on what are interpreted solely as cultural differences, and a depoliticization of social and political issues:

> Depoliticization involves construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, all of which require political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual on the one hand, or as natural, religious or cultural on the other. (Brown 2008: 15)

Challenges to feminist struggles for equality do not just come externally from policies and politics of neoliberalism and neoconservatism as exercised by governments and major political parties. As, if not more serious, is the role neoliberalism and even possibly neoconservatism can potentially play as constitutive, transformative of feminism itself. As Wendy Brown argues, neoliberalism is not just a world historical mode of organizing the economy, the state, or the relationship between the economy and the state. It is also a form of governmentality which organizes social life, and constructions of subjectivity, a mode of governance which "produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behavior, and a new organization of the social" (Brown, 2005: 37). We have already discussed some of the challenges neoliberalism and neoconservatism pose for feminist demands for social change. Also important to consider might be the question of whether they might have also influenced the public face and public meaning of feminism itself.

Subversions in the Public Face and Public Meaning of Contemporary Feminism:

Even though the review of recent Canadian social and public policy clearly reveals great losses for the women's movement, what we are experiencing may not simply or only be a marginalization of the women's movement, but rather a dual approach to feminism/feminists. On the one hand, there is a clear marginalization, and even demonization of critical voices in feminism, especially those making claims for class and racial equality, and/or openly criticizing state policies. And, on the other, there is simultaneously an exaltation of feminisms or feminist voices that can be instrumentalized. What is at stake for

feminism is more than the lost influence over the federal government and social policies. What is also at stake is the fact that the ideology demands and some of the achievements of the women's movement's in Western countries are being appropriated by right-wing governments to justify their agenda (of neoliberal policies and war) and that feminism itself might be being inverted and subverted in this process.

It is interesting that following 9/11, the same political environment where voices critical of the so-called "war on terror" have been not just marginalized, but violently suppressed,[11] has also been one where the feminist voices of selective women from the now racialized Muslim diaspora have been strategically placed on a pedestal in public discourse. Rather than a marginalization, what certain Muslim voices have received has been a hyper-visibility and hyper-upward mobility. Authors such as Ayan Hirsi Ali, Azar Nafisi, and Irshad Manji have been praised, promoted and handsomely rewarded professionally, financially and with exceptional access to public space. The popularity of these "feminist" authors whose books all made it to the best seller list has been proportional to the ideological justification they could provide for the "war on terror" (Dabashi 2006, 2011; Razack, 2005). Hamid Dabashi argues that the American imperial project has been dependent on the creation of collective amnesia, combined with production of selective memory (Dabashi 2006). The support of native informers and comprador intellectuals has been essential for the latter:

> For the American imperial project to claim global validity it needs the support of native informers and comprador intellectuals with varying accents to their speech, their prose and politics. Supported only by white men and women, the project would not have the same degree of narrative authority. But accents from targeted cultures and climes Orientalize, exoticize and corroborate all at the same time; they accentuate that supremely self-alienating moment when by offering their services native informers authorize and authenticate the dominant accent—which no longer hears its own imperial accent. (Dabashi 2011: 36)

Presented to Western publics as courageous "voices of dissent," these authors have demonized what they present as the innate barbarity of Islam, their countries and culture:

> They have undertaken their activities in the honorable name of defending the human rights, women's rights, and civil rights of Muslims themselves –and the relative lack of those rights in Muslim countries gave them the space and legitimacy they required. The blatant manner in which these native informers have demonized their own cultures and societies is made possible by the protection they enjoy when they relocate to the centers of West European and North American power. (Dabashi 2011: 17)

The irony of the simultaneous marginality of some (critical) feminist voices with the hyper-audibility of others does not just apply to the Muslim women native informers. Recent assessments by socialist feminists of the state of feminism—especially in the U.S.—point out a subversion in the public voice and meaning of feminism. Barbara Epstein has suggested that feminism in recent decades might have moved from a movement to a diffuse idea. She argues that it has been "simultaneously… institutionalized and marginalized"; that while its rhetoric has been selectively accepted by major sectors of society, and feminism has had little influence, as an alternative, transformative vision, on the direction of politics. In recent assessments over the state of feminism Hester Eisenstein (2005, 2009) and Nancy Fraser conclude with more serious warnings.

Eisenstein develops a powerful critique of liberal, "hegemonic feminism," showing how its central ideas have helped legitimize corporate capitalism. Critiquing recent U.S. feminist writing which suggests that we might be living in the best of times for women[12] Eisenstein sides with Brenner instead, who has argued that it is rather "the best of times and the worst of times," a time when some women have clearly benefited and enjoyed opportunities whereas for most women economic changes in recent decades have represented a downward spiral in recent years. In this context, Eisenstein argues, "feminism in its organized forms has become all too compatible with an increasingly unjust and dangerous corporate capitalist system" (2009: 1), as some "demands of feminism have been absorbed and co-opted" within the system (Eisentein, 2009: 16). In a world where alternatives to capitalism have become devalued and de-legitimized, she argues, several developments associated with the restructuring of the economy and of the state, as well as the "war on terrorism" have been able to draw on feminist ideas. As examples, Eisenstein (2005, 2009) mentions the decline of the family wage, the abolition of "welfare" in the traditional sense, and the 1996 *Social Responsibility Act* under the Clinton administration,[13] as well as the targeting of women for microcredit and the use of female labour in export processing zones. Eisenstein concludes, "in its 21st century incarnation, feminism has been a useful handmaiden of capitalism" (Eisenstein, 2005: 511).

Nancy Fraser has more recently commented that the feminist project for social change has been "largely still-born" (107) because the rise of second-wave feminism has historically coincided with a shift toward neoliberalism. Not clearly distinguishing between widely diverging positions of different feminist theories and practices, Fraser has argued that in the context of the shift toward neoliberalism, some feminist ideas have been "susceptible to serving the legitimation needs of a new form of capitalism" (113) especially as different dimensions of justice in feminist critique have become fragmented from one another and separated from the critique of capitalism, and

then selectively incorporated into dominant ideologies (99). Fraser laments the fact that feminist critique of the family wage, for example, has come to "suppl(y) a good part of the romance that invests flexible capitalism with a higher meaning and a moral point" (Fraser 110).

In addition to the "liaison" with neoliberalism, a second "dangerous liaison" for feminism has been with the "war on terror," where concerns about women's human rights have served as important legitimating forces for militarism, war and occupation in foreign policy, as well as policies racializing and criminalizing certain minority groups internally. Not mentioned by Fraser, but developed by Eisenstein and several other feminist authors,[14] is the fact that different feminist traditions and many individual feminists have been supportive and legitimizing of the new status quo of the security state. Pointing out how the Bush Administration's hostility to feminism and its embrace of women's rights in the language explaining the war against Afghanistan has been beyond cynicism, Eisenstein talks about how mainstream feminism has actively participated in this game:

> I propose to add feminism to the constituent elements of the war on terror. Indeed, if we define the word to mean the image of women's rights and women's freedoms that is being projected as part of the virtues of U.S. and European "civilization," mainstream feminism is essential to this war. It is particularly useful for the purposes of Islamophobia that Islamic societies, in general, be perceived and portrayed as uniquely oppressive to women. (Eisenstein 2009: 174)

Conclusion: A State of Feminist Success? Or a Feminism on Stilts?

Eisenstein's (2005) reference to "dangerous liaisons" suggest that the challenge for feminists committed to a transformative vision of feminism is not simply from neoliberalism "out there", but also from inside. While it is clear that the objective impact of marketization and securitization for women has been in the form of invisibilization and marginalization of women's struggles for equality, this has not necessarily served as a basis for an oppositional feminist consciousness against neoliberalism or the "war on terror." To the contrary, the pervasive ideological climate of neoliberalism, securitization and war, in a "cunning of history" (Fraser) not only undermine feminism as a transformative force but also "seduce" (mainstream) feminism to make it an ally of the status quo (Eisenstein 2009).

In her contribution to a recent collection of feminist responses to neoliberal and conservative changes to policy in Canada, Toronto activist Uzma Shakir explains how the weakness and the dividedness of the women's movement has meant that "denying, ignoring and undermining" women's rights has not posed political risks for the Harper government. Prevalent "Orientalist fantasies," Shakir argues, create the illusion that "women somewhere else … are worse off, so we must be better. Indeed, we need to save them from themselves, so by extension we must be both superior and liberated" (104). Shakir continues:

> Having bought into the myth that we have already achieved equal rights for all, Canadians are slowly being lulled into a false sense of security. (104)

The age-old divide-and-rule strategy is playing straight into the hands of a government that is systematically undermining what little gains some women have made in Canada. It is, in fact relying on the socioeconomic and racial divide between women and between mainstream society and racialized people to drive through its aggressively anti-woman agenda (Shakir 106).

As the popularity of the culturalist gaze and Orientalist assumptions about "other" women blind and/or insensitize the public—and some feminists—to the reality of deepening inequalities and injustices, they de-radicalize and de-politicize some feminists and de-democratize the public. "In the long run," Shakir warns, "we will all lose, but right now our division is doing just enough to thwart the development of a truly universal women's movement in Canada." (Shakir 106)

As the very same governments that undermine women's rights claim that we live in a post-feminist state that needs to be upheld as a beacon of liberation for the women elsewhere, we cannot talk about feminism having succeeded, but rather of feminism on stilts, delusional, and divided.

Sedef Arat-Koç is Associate Professor in the Department of Politics and Public Administration, and a member of the Yeates School of Graduate Studies, at Ryerson University. Her research interests include immigration policy and citizenship, especially as they affect immigrant women; transnational feminism; politics of imperialism; racialization and the politics of racism; and reconfiguration of social and political identities under neoliberal globalization. Adding to her many publications, her recent work includes "New Whiteness(es), Beyond the Colour Line? Assessing the Contradictions and Complexities of 'Whiteness' in the (Geo) Political Economy of Capitalist Globalism" (pp. 147-168) in States of Race: Critical Race Feminism for the 21st Century *(S. Razack, M. Smith, S. Thobani, eds. Between the Lines, 2010).*

[1]In the fall of 2006, Minister of Canadian Heritage (a portfolio that included the Status of Women), Beverley Oda, declared (in response to questions from the Standing Committee on the Status of Women re. significant cuts in budget) that her government "fundamentally believe[d] that all women are equal (Brodie 2008: 145).[2]In the fall of 2006, Minister of Canadian Heritage (a portfolio that included the Status of Women), Beverley Oda, declared (in response to questions from the Standing Committee

on the Status of Women regarding significant cuts in budget) that her government "fundamentally believe[d] that all women are equal (Brodie 2008: 145).

[3]The only exception has been the crackdown in 2009 against abusive recruitment agencies (See Nakache and Kinoshita 13-17). Although this is a positive development, I would argue that it does not challenge the nature and general conditions of the federal temporary worker programs.

[4]In the early 1990s, domestic and care workers in Ontario experienced a short window of opening in their labour rights. In 1993 under the New Democratic Party government, they were finally included in the Labour Relations Act after 50 years of exclusion from the province's legislation on collective bargaining. This victory was reversed after two short years, however, when the Conservative Party came to power in 1995. (Fudge)

[5]Between 2002 and 2008, the number of temporary migrant workers in Canada rose by 148 percent. In Alberta, the increase between 2004 and 2008 was 338 percent (cited in Nakache and Kinoshita 4).

[6]See the report by the Alberta Federation of Labour, 2010. Two recent reports, one by the House of Commons, the other by the Auditor General of Canada, neither of which are critical of the principle of using temporary migrant workers, that also criticize the conditions that increase the vulnerability of the workers. (Canada; Office of the Auditor General of Canada 2009)

[7]An example is the end of INTERCEDE in 2009. Based in Toronto, INTERCEDE functioned as a leading advocacy and service organization for foreign domestic workers since 1979. Like other organizations, INTERCEDE struggled since the 1990s, especially after government funding became limited to project-funding and restrictions were imposed on advocacy.

[8]Even though the question of how much the Canadian women's movement (dominated by white middle class women and a liberal agenda) would prioritize the demands of migrant domestic and care workers is highly debatable, it can be argued that the audible presence of anti-racist and socialist feminist forces in the movement did provide a non-negligible source of pressure from the 1970s to the early 1990s.

[9]Statistics Canada reports that in the quarter century between 1980 and 2005, recent immigrants lost significant ground in relation to Canadian-born people. Whereas in 1980, recent immigrant men received 85 cents for each dollar received by Canadian-born men, by 2005, they received 63 cents for every dollar. The figures for immigrant women represented a much more drastic decline, 85 cents in 1980 and 56 cents in 2005. Moreover, the decline was significant in the last decade. In 2000, immigrant women earned 65 cents for every dollar earned by Canadian-born men. In 2005, the figure dropped to 56 (Statistics Canada).

[10]By by "statelessness," Somers is referring to "a condition of pure market exposure no longer mediated by the now absent government" (2008: 134).

[11]The most glaring example is the reaction to the speech Sunera Thobani, the former president of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) and a professor of Women's Studies, gave at a conference in Ottawa in October 2001. Immediately following the speech in which she criticized U.S. foreign policy, she became the target of a demonization campaign by the media and some politicians, and faced death threats and vicious personal attacks. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) opened an investigation of her, which was later dropped, after receiving an "anonymous complaint" that her speech had violated the criminal code as it involved a "hate-crime" against "the American people" (Arat-Koc 2005; Nadeau).

[12]Eisenstein suggests that this position echoes of Thomas Friedman's optimism about the promises of capitalist globalization in his book *The Nexus and the Olive Tree* (Eisenstein 2009: 3).

[13]For an excellent discussion and critique of the support given by many American feminists and liberal feminist organizations for "welfare reform," specifically the 1996 *Social Responsibility Act* under President Clinton, see Mink.

[14]See, for example, Arat-Koc 2002; Hunt and Thobani.

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Susan Braedley is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Carleton University. She is the author of a number of articles and co-editor of *Neoliberalism and Everyday Life* (2010, McGill Queens University Press).

Jacinthe Michaud est professeure agrégée à l'École de Genre, d'études sur la sexualité et d'études des femmes/ School of Gender, Sexuality Studies and Women's Studies de l'Université York. Elle est l'auteure de plusieurs publications dont, *Conscience subalterne, conscience identitaire : la voix des femmes assitées au sein des organisations féministes et communautaires*, aux Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2005 ; « La représentation des besoins et l'obstacle de la double loyauté dans la recherche féministe : essai d'épistémologie autour de l''informatrice autochtone' de Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak », *Revue Canadienne de Politique Sociale*, no. 62, 2009 ainsi que « La reconnaissance des apports théoriques du féminisme dans la presse alternative de gauche : le cas du Temps fou », *Politique et Sociétés*, vol. 29, no.2, 2010

Leah F. Vosko is Professor of Political Science and Canada Research Chair in the Political Economy of Gender &Work, York University. She is the author and editor of a number of books and articles including, most recently, *Managing the Margins: Gender, Citizenship and the International Regulation of Precarious Employment* (2010), published with Oxford University Press.

FARIDEH DE BOSSET

The world

The world is understood
only by the eternals;
water, fire
wind
and sand,

patiently recording.

Farideh de Boset was born in Tehran, Iran, where poetry is a part of everyday life and conversation. Her first collection of poetry, A Tilt, *was published by Inanna Publications in 2012. She lives in Toronto. Her website can be found at <www.faridehdebosset.ca>.*

ILONA MARTONFI

The White Ruffle Dress (Daughter)

My mom in her white dress with ruffles.
Looking at the camera. Smiling –

It seems an ordinary picture, except
this photograph was taken in July
six years after Expo 1967
at the time of three little daughters,
before my brother.

Leather furniture, Tiffany, tapestries.

Lilac. Apple trees.

I am in first grade Tara Hall School.
Wearing crocheted poncho. Red sandals.
Metal lunch box. Yellow bus.

How can I go to class?
This morning father hit mother.

My childhood house in Anjou –
Searching for red needle cushion,

my mother sewed this dress herself.
She is cutting a Vogue pattern.

I have been sorting some boxes
my own daughter and I taking sewing lessons.
Painting, cooking, baking blueberry pies.

My mom in her white dress with ruffles.
Looking at the camera. Smiling.

Tell her, "I am happy with my husband.
Don't talk about the past!"

Digging up wild roses.

Ilona Martonfi is the author of two poetry books, Blue Poppy *(2009), and* Black Grass *(2012). Ilona has published in* Vallum, Accenti, The Fiddlhead, *and* Serai. *She is the founder/producer of The Yellow Door and Visual Arts Centre Readings, and the co-founder of Lovers and Others. She is also the recipient of the* QWF *2010 Community Award.*