

CANADA'S NON-COMPLIANCE WITH THE CONVENTION ON ELIMINATION OF ALL
FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (CEDAW): NEO-LIBERAL POLICY AND
THE SUPPRESSION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN CANADA

by

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B.A., Concordia University, 2010

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

(Political Science)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

September 2015

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Abstract

“Autonomous feminist movements are the primary drivers of change because they articulate social group perspectives, disseminate new ideas and frames to the broader public, and demand institutional changes that recognize these meanings”- Htun and Weldon¹

In 1981, Canada ratified the Convention of Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in what would be perceived as an attempt to create a more just and equal society for women. However, with the implementation of harsh neo-liberal policies that emphasize privatization and minimal government intervention, women in Canada, particularly those most disadvantaged, are facing human rights violations. The past decade has been especially damaging as Canada’s conservative government led by Stephen Harper made drastic funding cuts to women’s organizations and serious cutbacks to social services through austerity measures. These neo-liberal policies are not only incompatible with the CEDAW, but are in direct opposition to its mandate, and democratic values in general. I will outline the recommendations made by CEDAW to the State of Canada, and discuss the State’s blatant disregard towards the CEDAW and its principles of eliminating discrimination against women. I will describe the actions that the Canadian government, specifically the current conservative government, has taken to intentionally hinder the advancement of women’s rights. I will argue that that these violations are an attempt to suppress threats to the current politico-economic system, neo-liberalism, which, I will argue, is inherently discriminatory. I will further argue that, especially in light of its colonial past and neo-colonial present, Canada must

¹ Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon. 2012. “The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005,” *American Political Science Review* 106, no.3 (2012): p.5

support autonomous women's rights movements and provide extensive social services if an effort to eliminate discrimination against women is to be made.

Preface

This thesis is an original, unpublished, independent work by the author, S. Meitz

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Acknowledgments

"I write for those women who do not speak, for those who do not have a voice because they were so terrified, because we are taught to respect fear more than ourselves. We've been taught that silence would save us, but it won't." -Audre Lorde

I would first like to acknowledge the support, understanding, and patience of my supervisor, Lisa Sundstrom. Without you I would not have completed this degree. You offered endless support and understanding during the most difficult times. Thank you for the wonderful conversations and always being available to listen. You are truly an inspiring woman. I was also fortunate to have Barbara Arneil as my examiner. I did not know Barbara well but remembered her fondly from a gender meeting I attended. She is outspoken and intelligent. Without the support and incredible feedback of these women, writing about what I feel so passionately about may not have been possible.

Entering the program as a poor single mother, I was well aware that I would face challenges, what I did not anticipate was that these challenges would extend beyond financial burdens and a lack of time to uphold all my responsibilities. My intention was to use the acknowledgment section as an open letter to acknowledge the obstacles and discrimination I faced, and discovered, amongst students, faculty, and the university at large. But the truth is that I no longer have the time or money to invest into the education system and for every day that I do not submit this thesis, I pay. But I will say this; the education system is deeply deficient and is unwilling to acknowledge these deficiencies. The history of my department alone in addressing issues around sexism and racism are abysmal. I do not discuss it in my thesis, but the competitiveness and arrogance that is prevalent within neo-liberalism is widely embraced within our educational institutions. These attitudes do not permit us to effectively engage with one another thereby hindering progress. There are fantastic people in the department who are well aware of these issues yet there is not enough support to make adequate changes. I will not go into details about my experiences for various reasons, however, the university can be rest assured that I will not remain silent about them.

I would however like to thank the following people for their time, wisdom, friendships and endless support in helping me finish my degree:

My daughter, Oneida, you were with me every step of the way. No one has supported me more than you. Despite being so young you made conscious decisions to provide me with the time and space to work. You slept beside me while I worked, hugged me while I worked, and even pretended to work beside me while I worked. Your maturity far surpasses that of most children and I am infinitely lucky to have you as my daughter. No words can possibly express the love and gratitude I have for you. I would also like to thank my husband. Although you were not always keen on how much time I needed to devote to this degree, it did not sway you from helping out in every way to make its completion possible.

I would also like to thank professors Paul Mier, Edward King, Bela Egyed, and Noga Gayle who inspired me every step of the way to love learning. Thank you for being amazing teachers, you are few and far between.

Lastly, and definitely not least, I would like to thank my friends and peers. I moved to Nelson last year and received a great amount of support from my community. My bosses and co-workers provided flexibility unheard of in the workplace. Thank you to my friends at the Kootenay Co-op, especially Paul, Pat, and Cindy. Thank you for listening to me talk endlessly about my degree and providing me with the time to complete it. Thank you to Fitz and Marty for continuing to have faith in my abilities despite my absences. Thank you to Amy, Chris, Mel, Nat, Amber, Serjao, Laura, Myra, Marcelo, Krista, Lucas, and all your children for spending time with Oneida. Knowing that Oneida was spending time with such incredible people made it infinitely easier to re-direct my energy. And a special thank you to Meagan Auger. Meagan, you are brilliant and I am grateful for all our enlightening conversations. Thank you Spencer Grimm for being my brother. And thank you to Becca Monnerat, Justin Alger, Charlotte Kingston, Grace Lore, Rajdeep Gill, Eldon Yellowhorn, Serbulent Turan, David Moscrop, and Matt Wildcat for your insights and work that helped me to develop mine.

1 Introduction

Women in Canada, especially low-income, Aboriginal, immigrant and refugee, single mothers, and racialized minority women, have faced, and continue to face, human rights violations deemed “grave” and “systematic” by the Convention of Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW),² a United Nations treaty ratified by the State of Canada in 1981. All State Parties signatory to International Covenants on Human Rights “have an obligation to ensure the equal rights of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights”³ CEDAW defines discrimination as:

“Any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on the basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”⁴

The Convention further emphasizes:

“That the eradication of apartheid, all forms of racism, racial discrimination, colonialism, neo-colonialism, aggression, foreign occupation and domination and

² United Nations, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. *Report of the inquiry concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1 (2015), 3.

³ CEDAW. “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”. United Nations (1979). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

⁴ *Ibid.*, Article 1.

interference in the internal affairs of States is essential to the full enjoyment of the rights of men and women.”⁵

As a colonial State, Canada’s history is embedded in deeply discriminatory practices, and with the implementation of neo-liberal policies that have drastically reduced funding to women’s organizations and social services, women’s rights are being suppressed. These violations are not only a result of a long history of discrimination against women, but are strategies currently being used in an effort to preserve the neo-liberal agenda, and suppress any threats to this politico-economic system. An ideological underpinning of neo-liberalism, minimal government intervention is in direct violation of the CEDAW and its recommendations. These violations are the result of the implementation of neo-liberal policies and have proven to have disproportionately harmful effects on women relative to men.

Political scientist Ann Porter defines neo-liberalism as “a market-based political ideology; one that emphasizes reduced government intervention, free market forces, individual responsibility, and the extension of global capitalist relations.”⁶ However, underneath the neo-liberal rhetoric of economic growth, employment opportunities, and freedom and autonomy through minimal government intervention are the realities of increased unemployment and poverty, drastic cutbacks to social services through austerity measures, a redirection of funding from autonomous groups to organizations

⁵ CEDAW. “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”. United Nations (1979): Preamble. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

⁶ Ann Porter, “Neo-Conservatism, Neo-Liberalism and Canadian Social Policy: Challenges for Feminism,” *Canadian Woman Studies* 29, no.3 (2012) 1, 2.

that sustain a neo-liberal agenda, and the transfer of power into the hands of the corporate elite. The negative consequences of neo-liberalism can be seen both domestically and abroad, and reveal disproportionately harmful effects on women relative to men.

According to sociologist Couze Venn, neo-liberalism is a zero-sum game.⁷ It is an ideology that functions to yield high results for the wealthy at the expense of others. Neo-liberalism demands that certain measures be taken in order to preserve and foster this agenda. By drastically reducing and eliminating social services and funding to autonomous women's groups the state is intentionally restricting the capacity of women to effect change. In fact, democratic theorists Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon assert that feminist social movements have a greater impact on policy development than women in government. They argue: "Autonomous feminist movements are the primary drivers of change because they articulate social group perspectives, disseminate new ideas and frames to the broader public, and demand institutional changes that recognize these meanings."⁸ Therefore, supporting autonomous women's organizations is an essential component in advancing women's rights.

As a signatory of CEDAW, Canada agreed to comply with the CEDAW mandate: "consisting of a preamble and 30 articles, it defines what constitutes discrimination

⁷ Couze Venn, "Neoliberal Political Economy, Biopolitics and Colonialism: A Transcolonial Genealogy of Inequality," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no.6 (2009): 207.

⁸ Mala Htun, and S.Laurel Weldon, "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005," *American Political Science Review* 106, no.3 (2012): 552.

against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination.”⁹

In addition to implementing de jure women’s rights, rights we have in theory, the CEDAW mandate emphasizes the importance of de facto rights, rights we have in practice. These include *all* levels of government implementing mechanisms and institutions that support women’s rights and provide social services specifically designed to address the systemic problems that women face; and to eliminate existing social and cultural practices grounded in ideas of inferiority or superiority.¹⁰ Although this mandate is framed around equal rights and opportunity, it extends beyond simple equality; it challenges systems and structures that are inherently discriminatory. Therefore the opportunities for women must include the ability to effect real change, even when their interests are not aligned with the dominant systems and ideologies.

In 2002, Canada signed CEDAW’s Optional Protocol. The Optional Protocol is a mechanism of State accountability that contains two procedures: it acts as an instrument of communication, permitting individuals and groups of women to submit claims of violations pertaining to the CEDAW; and it authorizes CEDAW to initiate inquiries if reliable sources indicate grave or systemic violations of women’s rights.¹¹ The State is expected to submit written reports every four years. The CEDAW committee then evaluates these reports in conjunction with reports and letters written by various organizations and individuals. In CEDAW’s 2008 Concluding Observations on

⁹ CEDAW. “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”. United Nations (1979). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

¹⁰ Ibid., article 5.

¹¹ CEDAW. “Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.” United Nations (1999). <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/protocol/>

Canada, two paragraphs were highlighted, and the Committee requested that the State submit a report within one year explaining the initiatives it has undertaken in an effort to address the violations contained paragraphs 14 and 32.

Paragraph 14:

“Calls upon the State party to establish minimum standards for the provision of funding to social assistance programmes, applicable at the federal, provincial and territorial levels, and a monitoring mechanism to ensure the accountability of provincial and territorial governments for the use of such funds so as to ensure that funding decisions meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups of women and do not result in discrimination against women. The committee also calls upon the State party to carry out an impact assessment of social programmes related to women’s rights.”¹²

Paragraph 32:

“Calls upon the State party to examine the reasons for the failure to investigate the cases of missing and murdered aboriginal women and to take the necessary steps to remedy the deficiencies in the system. The committee calls upon the State party to urgently carry out thorough investigations of the cases of aboriginal women who have gone missing or been murdered in recent decades. It also urges the State party to carry out an analysis of those cases in order to determine whether there is a

¹² CEDAW. 2008. “Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: Canada”. CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/7. United Nations: 3.

racialized pattern to the disappearances and take measures to address the problem if that is the case.”¹³

The State neglected to submit this report in a timely manner, and instead submitted it in conjunction with the sixth and seventh periodic reports in February 2010.¹⁴ This report was vague and inconclusive. The state listed initiatives being taken but did not provide details of how it created these initiatives to meet the needs of those in the community, and how it planned to accomplish stated goals. Nowhere in the report does it speak about the nation-wide concern regarding our missing and murdered Aboriginal women, and an effectual inquiry has yet to be established. The report attempted to justify the State's negligence by describing the constitutional and legislative obstacles it encounters in upholding the CEDAW. Interestingly enough, this list helps us identify the structural deficiencies that need to be either modified or eliminated, which include: no mechanisms of accountability between governments and a lack of minimum provision standards for funding to provinces and territories to ensure basic human rights are being met.

I will examine the violations listed in paragraph 14 of CEDAW's 2008 Concluding Observations, namely: the lack of minimal standards of provision and mechanisms of accountability in regards to providing adequate social services and funding, and how

¹³ CEDAW. 2008. “Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: Canada”. CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/7. United Nations: 7.

¹⁴ CEDAW. “Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women: Combined sixth and seventh reports of States parties Canada.” United Nations (2007).

these violations affect and perpetuate the violations listed in paragraph 32, and women's rights in general. In section 1, I will outline the CEDAW mandate and recommendations for Canada. I will discuss the policies being implemented in Canada that prevent it from upholding the CEDAW. In Section 2, I will illustrate the way in which this current politico-economic system, neo-liberalism, violates the rights of women. I will argue that neo-liberalism is not only incompatible with upholding the CEDAW, but that these violations are strategies designed to suppress women's rights in an effort to preserve a neo-liberal agenda. Examining Russia, Greece, and the UK, I will illustrate a wider pattern around the world that neo-liberal policy has had on women in these signatory states. I will further argue that, as a result of Canada's colonial past and neo-colonial present, it is imperative that the State of Canada support autonomous women's organizations and provide extensive social services if an effort to eliminate discrimination against women is to be made.

2 Canada's Commitment to CEDAW: Non-Compliance and Violations

In January 2011, The Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA)¹⁵ and the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC)¹⁶ sent letters to CEDAW reporting that "grave" and "systemic" violations of women's rights had occurred, and requested, under article 8 of CEDAW's Optional Protocol, that an inquiry be launched. CEDAW continued to receive letters from many more women's organizations, and even members of Parliament,¹⁷ reporting violations of the Convention, but particularly regarding the 2008 Concluding Observations paragraphs 14 and 32.

The CEDAW Committee came to the decision that Canada had not upheld the Convention nor implemented the recommendations, and requested that the State provide additional information by January 2012.¹⁸ The State party at the time, the Conservative government, informed CEDAW "it would provide additional information only in the next periodic report in December 2014."¹⁹ CEDAW determined this as a failure to comply and decided to consider launching an inquiry. In July 2012 an inquiry was established and conducted, "in accordance with article 8, paragraph 2, of the Optional Protocol and rule 84 of its Rules of Procedure, and to designate three

¹⁵ Farha, Leilani. 2011. "FAFIA Letter to CEDAW", January 17. <http://www.fafia-afai.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/FAFIA-Letter-to-CEDAW-Committee-September-2011.pdf>.

¹⁶ Corbiere Lavell, Jeanette. 2011. "NWAC Letter to CEDAW", September 20. <http://www.fafia-afai.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CEDAW-Sept-20-2011-1.pdf>.

¹⁷ United Nations, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. *Report of the inquiry concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1 (2015), 9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

committee members for that purpose.”²⁰ CEDAW requested that the State of Canada cooperate in the inquiry and accept a visit to its territory in 2013.²¹ After several reminders between October 2012 and January 2013, on 29 April 2013 the State party finally consented to a visit. A visit was conducted in Canada from 9-13 September 2013, and in March 2015 CEDAW published a report regarding this inquiry.

2.1 2015 CEDAW Report: Canada

This report, the *Report of the Inquiry concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination on All forms of Discrimination Against Women*, focuses on the group of Canadian women facing the greatest discrimination, Aboriginal women.

Information from non-governmental organizations confirmed:

- High levels of violence experienced by Aboriginal women and girls, and the disappearances and murders of Aboriginal women;²²
- High levels of poverty among Aboriginal women, “which make them vulnerable to and unable to escape from violence”;²³
- “Reluctance [of the State] to address both the root causes of violence and identified failures of the police and the justice system to prevent the violence, protect women from it and respond effectively to it when it occurs”;²⁴

²⁰ United Nations, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. *Report of the inquiry concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1 (2015), 5.

²¹ Ibid., 5.

²² Ibid., 3.

²³ Ibid., 3.

²⁴ Ibid.,3.

- “Absence of a coordinated structure and broad policies to address these issues”;²⁵
- “Persistent marginalization and difficulties faced in accessing employment, housing, drinking water, health and education, as a result of continued structural discrimination”;²⁶
- Systemically underfunded First Nations communities;²⁷
- That the “Constitution does not explicitly distribute powers in all areas, there is a certain degree of overlap and flexibility between federal and provincial/territorial jurisdiction in many areas, such as legal aid or social assistance;²⁸ and
- Deficiency of implemented initiatives.²⁹

Predictably, this report echoed the violations listed in CEDAW’s 2008 Concluding Observations.

2.2 2008 CEDAW’s Concluding Observations: Canada

CEDAW’s most recent Concluding Observations of 2008 published the following concerns:

- Previous periodic reports not provided in an integrated fashion;³⁰
- Neglect to focus on recommendations made by CEDAW and to provide comprehensive reports on steps taken to implement them;³¹

²⁵ United Nations, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. *Report of the inquiry concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1 (2015), 3.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

³⁰ CEDAW. “Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Canada.” United Nations (2008) 1.

- No high-level representatives with decision-making power were included in the delegations;³²
- No leadership or funding power to set standards or effective mechanisms aimed at ensuring accountability of all levels of government;³³
- Lack of financial support for social services, particularly access to civil legal aid;³⁴
- Disproportionate rates of incarceration for Aboriginal women, ethnic and minority women;³⁵
- Drastic cuts to Status of Women Canada and modifications made to both the mandate and funding eligibility;³⁶
- High levels of violence against women and girls, and absence of mechanisms to address this;³⁷
- Failure to investigate missing and murdered Aboriginal women;³⁸
- Lack of childcare spaces;³⁹
- High rates of poverty, particularly for aboriginal, ethnic and minority women;⁴⁰ and
- Insufficient measures taken to address poverty, poor health and inadequate housing.⁴¹

³¹ CEDAW. “Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Canada.” United Nations (2008), 1.

³² Ibid., 1.

³³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴ Ibid., 5.

³⁵ Ibid., 7.

³⁶ Ibid., 6.

³⁷ Ibid., 6.

³⁸ Ibid., 7.

³⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

2.3 2003 CEDAW Committee Press Release: Canada

These violations have generated international alarm. In a 2003 CEDAW Committee press release reviewing Canada's fifth periodic report, "the 23 member body, whose experts serve in their personal capacity", expressed the following concerns:⁴²

- Structural adjustment policies have worsened conditions of marginalized women and affected distribution of social services (Philippines);
- Initiatives implemented lack real analysis (Germany);
- Neo-liberal economic policies making serious cutbacks to social services, such as social assistance and funding for shelters, perpetuating cycles of violence against women (Republic of Korea);
- Absence of national set standards for upholding the Convention and lack of government accountability between all levels of government (Benin);
- "Exacerbation of poverty appeared to be triggered by the weakening of social assistance programs", how could such an affluent State have such high levels of poverty? (Mexico);
- Absence of national standards for the provision of funding has had negative consequences for women in Canada, forcing them to share many of the same disadvantages of poorer societies (Portugal);
- Absence of analysis and measures taken to address systemic discrimination against Aboriginal Canadian women (Cuba);

⁴¹ CEDAW. "Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Canada." United Nations (2008), 9.

⁴² CEDAW. 2003. "Anti-discrimination Committee Praises Canada for Advancing Women's Rights, but Expresses Concern over Number of Women in Poverty". WOM/1380. United Nations. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2003/wom1380.doc.htm>.

- Adequate food and housing needs not being met for Immigrant and Aboriginal women who rely on social assistance programs (Bangladesh);
- Lack of integrated social support services for women, especially for the poor and ageing populations (Indonesia);
- Reports do not include cooperation with non-governmental organizations (Croatia);
- As a result of a lack of national standards for funding to provinces, women are becoming increasingly poor, meanwhile the province of British Columbia eliminated the Human Rights Commission and the Ministry of Women's Equality, while drastically reducing funding to legal aid, (Mauritius);
- Failure of Federal government to inform and train members of the judiciary to comply with the Convention (Netherlands);
- Lack of political will to fund, cooperate, and engage in serious dialogue with non-governmental organizations (Hungary).⁴³

Canada responded by stating "that such high deficits were hindering economic growth, poverty reduction and other vital programmes...and [the State] had turned those cuts around in an attempt to improve the poverty situation and had seen tangible results." Further, in regards to British Columbia, it stated that "servicing a large debt and continuing to run a deficit made promoting human rights difficult over the long term.

⁴³ CEDAW. 2003. "Anti-discrimination Committee Praises Canada for Advancing Women's Rights, but Expresses Concern over Number of Women in Poverty". WOM/1380. United Nations. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2003/wom1380.doc.htm>.

Decisions had to be made where to put scarce resources.”⁴⁴ Yet, a submission to CEDAW by the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) confirmed that “Canada has the resources, institutions and infrastructure to provide the social programs and services necessary to ensure women’s equal enjoyment of their human rights. Since the last reporting period, Canada has had a period of unparalleled economic growth and fiscal health, evidenced by continuous federal budget surpluses since 1998, amounting to billions of dollars.”⁴⁵

The state of Canada further claimed that they “had not consulted with non-governmental organizations specifically in the preparation of the report, but consultations with those organizations occurred regularly through other forums.”⁴⁶ However, letters written by women’s organizations confirmed that consultations had not been performed in a meaningful manner. Mere months before the CEDAW eighth and ninth reports were due, the State of Canada invited a few women’s organizations, such as the Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW), to a consultation, and they responded with:

“Our organization notes with concern that the consultation being offered by the Government of Canada to women’s organizations prior to the CEDAW review is extremely

⁴⁴ CEDAW. 2003. “Anti-discrimination Committee Praises Canada for Advancing Women’s Rights, but Expresses Concern over Number of Women in Poverty”. WOM/1380. United Nations.
<http://www.un.org/press/en/2003/wom1380.doc.htm>.

⁴⁵ FAFIA. “Submission of the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women on the Occasion of the Committee’s Review of Canada’s 6th & 7th Reports.” (2008): 9.
http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_42_8234_E.pdf.

⁴⁶ CEDAW. 2003. “Anti-discrimination Committee Praises Canada for Advancing Women’s Rights, but Expresses Concern over Number of Women in Poverty”. WOM/1380. United Nations.
<http://www.un.org/press/en/2003/wom1380.doc.htm>.

*limited. The CEDAW review process could be made truly fruitful for women in Canada if there was active, detailed and collaborative dialogue between women's organizations and governments at all levels, with the shared goals of assessing the state of compliance with CEDAW rights and identifying what steps can be taken now to advance women's equality in Canada. Such dialogue should, in our view, take place both before and after the CEDAW Committee's review. Unfortunately, the Government of Canada offers only minimal, online consultation. For governments in Canada, who purport to be committed to equality for women, this is another missed opportunity and a refusal to use the CEDAW review process to engage in a genuine dialogue with women's organizations."*⁴⁷

Despite an official commitment to eliminating all forms of discrimination against women, the State of Canada has not only been non-compliant in upholding the CEDAW, but continues to implement policies that deliberately violate the rights of women. Since its ratification, and especially since the Conservative government came into power in 2006, the State of Canada has demonstrated a blatant disregard for the Convention and the Committee's recommendations and requests. For the past 25 years, the CEDAW Committee "has let Canada know that its performance lags far behind."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Murphy, Susan. 2014. "Canada's Eighth and Ninth Reports on CEDAW", February 20. [http://www.fcfd.org/Portals/0/Advocacy/AdvocacyIssues/JusticeandHumanRights/CFUW%20feedback%20on%20Canada's%208th%20and%209th%20report%20on%20CEDAW%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.fcfd.org/Portals/0/Advocacy/AdvocacyIssues/JusticeandHumanRights/CFUW%20feedback%20on%20Canada's%208th%20and%209th%20report%20on%20CEDAW%20(2).pdf).

⁴⁸ Kerr, Sandra. 2006. "On Your Mark, Get Set: Is the Government of Canada Ready to Take Action on CEDAW?" *Women & Environments International Magazine* 72/73: 92.

2.4 Negligence in Addressing Systematic Discrimination

A necessary component in eliminating all forms of discrimination against women is an acknowledgment and analysis of systematic discrimination. Efforts to understand the root causes of discrimination against women require the State to recognize and take responsibility for the role it has played, and continues to play, in perpetuating discrimination against women. Upholding the CEDAW demands modifying or eliminating discriminatory systems and institutions. Like all ratifying states, Canada faces very specific problems that are connected to its historic and present political, economic and social structures and ideologies. The CEDAW March 2015 report states, “The impact of laws enacted during the colonial period has significantly reinforced gender-based discrimination and inequality.”⁴⁹ In some instances states with systematic discrimination, such as Canada, may need to adopt “Temporary Special Measures’ aimed at accelerating de facto equality”.⁵⁰ This is particularly important for historic colonial and neo-colonial States because these States often have deeply embedded discriminatory practices permeating their systems and institutions. These temporary special measures are defined as measures that involve “a wide variety of legislative, administrative and other regulatory instruments, policies and practices, such as outreach or support programmes, [and] allocation and/or reallocation of resources.”⁵¹

⁴⁹ United Nations, The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women. *Report of the inquiry concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination against Women under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women*, CEDAW. “Concluding observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women: Canada.” United Nations (2008) CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1 (2015),7.

⁵⁰ CEDAW. “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”. United Nations (1979): Article 4. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/text/econvention.htm>.

⁵¹ CEDAW. n.d. “General Recommendation No.25, on Article 4, Paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, on Temporary Special Measures.” (2004): article 22.

Article 10 of the General recommendation No.25, on article 4, paragraph 1, of the CEDAW, on 'Temporary Special Measures' states:

“the position of women will not be improved as long as the underlying causes of discrimination against women, and of their inequality, are not effectively addressed. The lives of women and men must be considered in a contextual way, and measures adopted towards a real transformation of opportunities, institutions and systems so that they are no longer grounded in historically determined male paradigms of power and life patterns.”⁵²

In Canada, implementing 'temporary special measures' could help mitigate the effects of systematic discrimination, and offer possibilities to those either disadvantaged by, or situated outside of, the neo-liberal ideology.

⁵² CEDAW. n.d. “General Recommendation No.25, on Article 4, Paragraph 1, of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, on Temporary Special Measures.” (2004): article 10.

3 Neo-liberalism

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, although non-partisan, has certain mandate requirements and recommendations that challenge systems or policies exhibiting discriminatory behaviour against women. Therefore, the CEDAW cannot be effectively upheld without seriously examining how the State of Canada's politico-economic ideology and policies contribute to, and perpetuate, discrimination. Sociologist and anthropologist. Kendra Coulter notes, "neoliberalism cannot be seen solely as an economic agenda...but rather must be understood as a multi-faceted project with real institutional and economic restructuring, coupled with reinforcing cultural and ideological processes."⁵³

Anthropologist Carol Greenhouse argues that neo-liberal ideology adheres to the "primacy of the private sector, the release of organizations and industries from government regulation, the creation of powerful nonstate transnational institutions and global market regimes, and assurance of the market's self-regulating character." However, with "structural adjustment and soaring capital accumulation...come permanent impoverishment and divided communities; privatization is accompanied by social fragmentation and democracy deficit; market values do not consistently sustain services...deregulation permits loss of accountability."⁵⁴

Coulter lists the ways in which neo-liberal goals are realized, which include: "privatization through direct asset sales; privatization of services through contracting-

⁵³ Coulter, Kendra. 2009. "Women, Poverty Policy, and the Production of Neoliberal Politics in Ontario, Canada." *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 30 (1): 5.

⁵⁴ Greenhouse, Carol. *Ethnographies of Neoliberalism*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press (2011): 2. <http://muse.jhu.edu/>.

out and outsourcing to the for-profit sector; delisting of services previously within the public umbrella; user fees of various sorts; public-private partnership arrangements for capital, operations and/or the financing of institutions, programs or infrastructure; income trusts; and promotion and celebration of volunteerism, charity, or fundraising as a substitution for public investment.”⁵⁵

Theoretically, privatization is said to unleash the free market where demands create supply. However, this ideology completely neglects to address the fact that patterns of discrimination will inevitably intersect with the free market, leaving those historically facing discrimination further disadvantaged. Neo-liberalism grants privilege to the corporate elite and prioritizes financial interests, although short-term. Despite evidence of the adverse effects neo-liberal policy has had on the economy of nations worldwide, and evidence provided by public health experts David Stuckler and Sanjay Basu that “every dollar spent on healthcare and education actually generates three dollars in the economy,⁵⁶ one can only speculate that the government and corporations either do not have the capacity to think long-term or their goals are immediate and self-interested. Placing virtually unregulated power into the hands of the corporate elite and expecting them to meet the needs of society is remarkably naïve, especially within a society that has failed to adequately address discrimination against women.

⁵⁵ Coulter, Kendra. 2009. “Women, Poverty Policy, and the Production of Neoliberal Politics in Ontario, Canada.” *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 30 (1): 7.

⁵⁶ Kilian, Crawford. 2013. ““Why Austerity Kills’.” *The Tyee*, July 2. <http://thetyee.ca/Books/2013/07/02/Austerity-Kills/>.

Advocates of neo-liberal economic reform promise growth and employment, meanwhile evidence of the contrary reveals itself both domestically and abroad. States implementing neo-liberal policies are experiencing record levels of unemployment and poverty, and those most affected are women. Revealing systematic results, I will discuss some of the effects that neo-liberal policy has had in Russia, UK and Greece. But first, I will discuss the actions of the Canadian government since the implementation of neo-liberalism, and why the state of Canada would be wise to avoid entering into such a crisis that leads to impoverishment and further inequality.

3.1 Value Shaping

Before citing actions that the Canadian government has taken in its efforts to preserve the neo-liberal agenda, I would first like to draw attention to the fact that neo-liberalism, and the subsequent implementation of policies that work to preserve its agenda, encourage particular traits and behavior, which intersect and extend into social and cultural networks. Political and economic systems do not solely influence our political and economic rights; they influence our everyday experiences and interactions. Effectively implementing and sustaining the neo-liberal ideology requires shaping attitudes and beliefs. Paul Verhaeghe, a senior professor at Ghent University and chair of the department for psychoanalysis and counseling psychology,⁵⁷ examines the ways in which neo-liberalism, especially free market forces and privatization, have had “a

⁵⁷ Verhaeghe, Paul. 2014. “Neoliberalism Has Brought Out the Worst in Us.” *The Guardian*, September 29. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/29/neoliberalism-economic-system-ethics-personality-psychoathicsthic>.

profound effect not only on our values but also on our personalities.”⁵⁸ Verhaeghe maintains that “every society defines and shapes its own normality – and its own abnormality- according to dominant narratives and seeks either to make people comply or to exclude them if they don’t.”⁵⁹ Couze Venn asserts:

“inequality is not only a by-product of a system based on competition, but is required as a condition; inequality is seen to be an inherent and necessary feature of free market economy, and is justified on the basis of its necessary and regulating role as a mechanism, which means that the state must not intervene to ‘compensate the effects of economic processes.’”⁶⁰

A State that prioritizes unrestricted competition driven by self-interest sends a message to the public that success is defined by these terms. A State that neglects to provide funding for legal aid or shelters for women in abusive relationships because such a program does not align with a pro-business agenda not only increases women’s vulnerability to violence by not providing the adequate resources to escape, but perpetuates cycles of violence by sending a message to the public that the high rates of violence against women are not a priority, but self-interest and monetary gains are.

⁵⁸ Verhaeghe, Paul. 2014. “Neoliberalism Has Brought Out the Worst in Us.” *The Guardian*, September 29. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/29/neoliberalism-economic-system-ethics-personality-psychopathicstic>.

⁵⁹ Monbiot, George. 2014. “Sick of This Market-driven World? You Should Be.” *The Guardian*, August 5. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/aug/05/neoliberalism-mental-health-rich-poverty-economy>.

⁶⁰ Venn, Couze. 2009. “Neoliberal Political Economy, Biopolitics and Colonialism: A Transcolonial Genealogy of Inequality.” *Theory, Culture & Society* 26 (6): 8.

3.2 Canadian Neo-liberalism

The State of Canada adopted neo-liberalism in the 1980's. However, Simon Enoch, Director of the Saskatchewan Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), notes that the Canadian corporate community began a strategic communications campaign in the early 1970's designed to mobilize public and political support for neo-liberal economic policies while simultaneously denigrating Keynesian-inspired state intervention and trade union power.⁶¹ He argues that neo-liberal policies are strategies designed by the corporate elite in response to concerns that "democratic encroachments were eroding their economic power."⁶²

Through the principles of reduced government intervention and privatization, the State of Canada increasingly withdrew its support of publicly funded programs and services, and transferred ownership, thus power, from the public to the private sector.

Economist Jim Stanford writes, "Canada was hardly a model of inclusion, equality, and democracy. But in the latter years of the postwar expansion, Canada progressed both economically and socially."⁶³ Yet in the mid-90's, Jean Chretien, leader of the Canadian liberal party "announced major cuts to the public sector and drastically reduced transfer payments to the provinces for education, healthcare and other services."⁶⁴ It was declared that policies to cut social services were initiatives designed to reduce a growing deficit. Then, in the midst of "unparalleled economic growth and fiscal health,

⁶¹ Enoch, Simon. 2007. "Changing the Ideological Fabric? A Brief History of (Canadian) Neoliberalism." *State of Nature*, October. <http://www.stateofnature.org/?p=6217>.

⁶² Enoch, Simon. 2007. "Changing the Ideological Fabric? A Brief History of (Canadian) Neoliberalism." *State of Nature*, October. <http://www.stateofnature.org/?p=6217>.

⁶³ Stanford, Jim. 2014. "The Three Key Moments in Canada's Neoliberal Transformation." *Rabble.ca*, April 9. <http://rabble.ca/columnists/2014/04/three-key-moments-canadas-neoliberal-transformation>.

⁶⁴ "Austerity." n.d. *The Council of Canadians*. <http://canadians.org/austerity>.

evidenced by continuous federal budget surpluses...amounting to billions of dollars”⁶⁵
the Conservative party led by Stephen Harper implemented increasingly harsh neo-liberal policies. These violations are the result of the implementation of neo-liberal policies and have proven to have disproportionately harmful effects on women relative to men.

In efforts to reduce the role of government, the Conservative party has recently adopted discourses of austerity. Similar to measures taken in the 1990s to reduce the deficit, austerity reduces the role of government by making significant cutbacks to public services, social programs, education, and healthcare. These measures are often either adopted principles of a neo-liberal State, such as Canada, or implemented through Structural Adjustment Programs imposed by international monetary organizations, such as the International Monetary Fund or The World Bank. Austerity rhetoric promises to balance the budget and stimulate economic growth by reducing government spending. However, the consequences have proven to be drastically different. Nick Fillmore, a Canadian freelance journalist and social activist, wrote, “The massive austerity program translates into less income, decreased services, and reduced healthcare for many of Canada’s most vulnerable people. It appears that more than four million Canadians- mainly the poor, the unemployed/underemployed and the under-privileged- are struggling.”⁶⁶ Public Interest Alberta, a non-profit, non-partisan

⁶⁵ FAFIA. “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” (2008): 9.
http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_42_8234_E.pdf.

⁶⁶ Fillmore, Nick. 2013. “Austerity Chokes Canada’s Needy.” *Al Jazeera*, August 10.
<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/08/201388102455922618.html>.

organization focused on education and advocacy on public interest issues, reports that “across Canada, 4.2 million people, including 967,000 children and their families live in poverty. Those most disadvantaged by austerity are poor, and according to a CEDAW submission, the Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA) reports, “while the poverty rate undergoes cyclical fluctuations, the poverty rate for women is always higher than the rate for men. Even when women’s poverty rate is at its lowest, one woman in eight is living below the poverty line in one of the wealthiest countries in the world.”⁶⁷ Single mothers, Aboriginal women, and senior women, women with disabilities and women of colour, find themselves particularly vulnerable to poverty. In a submission to CEDAW written by FAFIA in 2010, they report, “Nowhere is the link between poverty, lack of adequate housing, and violence more evident than in the human rights abuses suffered by Aboriginal women and girls.”⁶⁸ The CEDAW Committee confirmed that, “while current Canadian governments have the financial capacity to eliminate poverty among women, fiscal restructuring has resulted in reduced spending and tightened restrictions on social assistance and other programs essential to the safety and well-being of poor women in Canada.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ FAFIA. “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” (2008): 10.

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_42_8234_E.pdf.

⁶⁸ Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action. “No Action: No Progress- Canadian Feminist Alliance for International Action Report on Canada’s Progress in Implementing Priority Recommendations Made by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women in 2008.” (2010): 5.

⁶⁹ FAFIA. “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” (2008): 85.

http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_42_8234_E.pdf.

3.3 Austerity Measures

The implementation of austerity measures requires cutbacks to social services and programs that have proven to have disproportionately harmful effects on women relative to men. Austerity, as demonstrated above, widens the gap between rich and poor. And because women make up the highest percentage of the poor (with the poverty rate of Aboriginal women at 36%, and single mothers remaining the poorest family type in Canada)⁷⁰, austerity consequently impedes the rights of women who rely on social services for an adequate standard of living. In neglecting to provide services, programs and funding for women's organizations, the State of Canada completely neglects to address its role and responsibility towards eliminating discrimination against women, thereby failing to uphold the CEDAW.

In the 2008 Concluding Observations, CEDAW noted that it is "concerned at reports of cuts in social assistance schemes in many provinces and at the resulting negative impact on the rights of vulnerable groups of women, such as single mothers, aboriginal women, Afro-Canadian women, immigrant women, elderly women and disabled women, who -rely on social assistance for an adequate standard of living."⁷¹ And according to CEDAW's previous Concluding Observations in 2003, women make up more than half of social assistance recipients, yet "since the last reporting period, the most basic income security program for the poorest women has been eroded further.

⁷⁰ FAFIA. "Women's Inequality in Canada." (2008): 10.
http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_42_8234_E.pdf.

⁷¹ CEDAW. "Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: Canada". CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/7. United Nations (2008): Article 13.

Welfare incomes have declined; fewer women can qualify; new rules that have discriminatory impacts on women have been put in place; and old rules with discriminatory effects have been difficult, if not impossible, to disturb.”⁷²

FAFIA reports that “over the last decade, virtually every province cut welfare benefits. Together Alberta, B.C and Ontario have 60% of Canada’s population, and these are the provinces that have pursued the most aggressive welfare reforms.”⁷³ CEDAW’s 2003 Concluding Observations well documents gendered consequences when women do not have access to social assistance. Without adequate social assistance women lose autonomy in their relations with men. When confronted with poverty, women are forced to exchange sex for food or shelter or engage in prostitution to survive. Unsafe housing increases vulnerability to rape and sexual harassment. Women are more likely to have children apprehended due to lack of adequate housing and food. Low welfare rates also limit the capacity of women to leave abusive relationships.⁷⁴ And with an inadequate justice system and restricted access to legal aid as a result of earlier-mentioned cutbacks, women are unable to mitigate the effects of these economic reforms.

3.4 Legal Aid

The Conservative government also eliminated the Court Challenges Program (CCP), “established in 1985 to fund test cases initiated by individuals and groups to challenge

⁷² “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” Submission. FAFIA (2008): 86.

⁷³ Ibid.,87.

⁷⁴ “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” Submission. FAFIA (2008): 86.

federal laws and policies that violate the constitutional right to equality.”⁷⁵ The CCP provided low-income women access to legal aid. Without legal aid, women find themselves, and their children, at greater risk for domestic violence and incapable of fighting against any policies that perpetuate and exacerbate the violence. The then Treasury Board President, John Baird, when asked about the CCP stated, “[I] just [didn’t] think it made sense for the government to subsidize lawyers to challenge the government’s own laws in court.”⁷⁶

FAFIA points out that “Legal aid is the basic means through which persons of low income can have access to legal representation and legal services to defend themselves in criminal cases and to exercise their rights under law in civil matters. Civil law legal aid is used disproportionately by women, specifically in family and poverty law matters.”⁷⁷ FAFIA further states: “This reduction or elimination of legal aid funding means that poor women cannot access legal services when they are denied benefits to which they are entitled, such as social assistance, employment insurance, disability benefits, and workers compensation, or when they face eviction,” and “when denied counsel and faced with representing themselves, women often give up pursuing their share of family assets, or variations in custody or support.”⁷⁸ These cuts, although ideological in nature, are justified as responses to reduce the deficit. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, “Putting the burden of debt reduction on social

⁷⁵ Ibid., 20.

⁷⁶ Knight, Melanie, and Kathleen Rodgers. 2012. “‘The Government Is Operationalizing Neo-liberalism’: Women’s Organizations, Status of Women Canada, and the Struggle for Progressive Social Change in Canada.” *NORA- Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 20 (4).pg. 270/271

⁷⁷ “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” Submission. FAFIA (2008):17.

⁷⁸ “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” Submission. FAFIA (2008):17.

spending cuts rather than on taxation meant that the burden of Canadian deficit reduction fell on the lower end of the income distribution, and this was a significant factor behind the pronounced increase in Canadian income inequality over the 1990's."⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Jackson, Andrew. 2010. "Beware the Canadian Austerity Model: Europeans Should Shun Paul Martin's Deficit-cutting Ways." *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives*, June.
<https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/beware-canadian-austerity-model>.

4 Funding Cuts

Since entering office in 2006, the Conservative government has made a number of notable cutbacks to funding and to social services and programs that women relied on for an adequate standard of living and access to equal opportunity. Without continued funding, some of the most significant women's organizations, including NGO and grassroots organizations, were either drastically reduced in size and capacity, or ceased to operate entirely. Ann Porter writes, "Since 2006, more than 30 women's organizations and research bodies had their funding cut or been 'defunded,' including CRIAW, New Brunswick Coalition for Pay Equity, Réseau des tables régionales de groupes de femmes du Québec, Alberta Network of Immigrant Women, Ontario Association of Interval and Transition Houses (OAITH), National Association of Women and the Law (NAWL), Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC), Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare, South Asian Women's Centre (Toronto), Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail (*sic*), Match International (an aid organization that supported women's rights in the developing world), and Sisters in Spirit (an Aboriginal Women's project that had led the way in research regarding missing and murdered Aboriginal women)."⁸⁰ In addition to these grassroots organizations, the cuts to the government-funded Status of Women Canada further clarified the governments position in upholding the CEDAW and women's rights in general.

⁸⁰ Porter, Ann. 2012. "Neo-Conservatism, Neo-Liberalism and Canadian Social Policy: Challenges for Feminism." *Canadian Woman Studies* 29 (3), 6.

4.1 Status of Women Canada

The Royal Commission on the Status of Women Canada (SWC) is an intergovernmental organization established in 1967 with a mandate to “inquire into and report upon the status of women in Canada, and to recommend what steps might be taken by the federal government to ensure for women equal opportunities with men in all aspects of Canadian society.”⁸¹ According to sociologist Amber J. Fletcher, and political scientist Alana Cattapan, Status of Women Canada “was the product of extensive participatory consultation on issues affecting Canadian women. Public consultations across the country, along with 468 briefs and 1,000 letters from citizens, informed the work of the Commission and were reflected in the 167 recommendations made in its report to the Government of Canada.”⁸² SWC provides funding to various women’s groups, “including women’s shelters and research institutes. It was designed to develop gender-responsive policies for federal agencies and departments, and helped to monitor the implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women.”⁸³ In addition to providing resources, such as legal aid, rape crisis centers, shelters, and health clinics, women’s organizations, such as SWC, provide government accountability and contribute to healthy public policy.⁸⁴

⁸¹ Government of Canada. n.d. “Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada.” *Status of Women Canada*. <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/rc-cr/roycom/index-eng.html>.

⁸² Fletcher, Amber J., and Alana Cattapan. 2015. “Shifting Paradigms, Enduring Legacies: Reflecting on the 1970 Royal Commission on the Status of Women.” May 19.

<http://www.blogginglequality.ca/2015/05/shifting-paradigms-enduring-legacies.html>.

⁸³ *Voices-voix*. 2012. “Status of Women Canada: What Happened”, September 27. <http://voices-voix.ca/en/facts/profile/status-women-canada>.

⁸⁴ O’Grady, Kathleen. 2006. “Status of Women Canada Cuts a Loss for Healthy Democracy: Grassroots Organizations Play an Instrumental Role in Government Accountability and Contribute to Healthy Public Policies.” *Canadian Women’s Health Network* 9 (1/2).

In September 2006, the federal government announced a \$5 million funding cut to the Status of Women Canada (SWC). These funding cuts forced 12 out of 16 offices closed.⁸⁵ Moreover, the government modified the SWC's eligibility requirements, preventing organizations that engage in research, lobbying or advocacy access to funding.⁸⁶ An article published by 'voices-voix', a non-partisan coalition of Canadians and Canadian organizations, states, "the funding cut to organizations doing advocacy, research or lobbying is an attempt of the government to silence organizations that it considers 'useless' or not sufficiently aligned with its own ideology."⁸⁷

These funding cutbacks and modification to the eligibility requirements have led to the closure of various women's organizations and offices across Canada. For instance, Sisters in Spirit, an organization created out of concern for the missing and murdered Aboriginal women and girls, generated a lot of support, and according to the Native Women's Association, became "synonymous with missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada, and the experiences of their families and communities,"⁸⁸ yet the modification to the eligibility requirements left Sisters in Spirit ineligible to receive funding. NWAC wrote: "difficulties surrounding ongoing funding are not only impeding

⁸⁵ *Voices-voix*. 2012. "Status of Women Canada: What Happened", September 27. <http://voices-voix.ca/en/facts/profile/status-women-canada>.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*.

⁸⁷ *Voices-voix*. 2012. "Status of Women Canada: What Happened", September 27. <http://voices-voix.ca/en/facts/profile/status-women-canada>.

⁸⁸ Irngaut, Katharine. Press Release. "NWAC Is Concerned That the Federal Government Is Curbing the Success of Sisters in Spirit", (2010): 1.

the success and the much needed work of this movement, but also causing unnecessary pain to the families and communities.”⁸⁹

The Canadian Federation of University Women (CFUW) wrote that “the relatively new funding guidelines at Status of Women Canada that removed research, advocacy and lobbying as fundable activities, have also limited the capacity of many women’s equality-seeking NGO’s to engage meaningfully in ongoing dialogue with the Government of Canada about public policy, and the implementation of international conventions and commitments.”⁹⁰ According to FAFIA, SWC provided funding to women’s organizations precisely because they can analyze government policies, develop proposals that reflect the needs of women in their communities, and advocate for change.⁹¹ These cutbacks and closures have not only impacted women’s political and economic rights, they have impacted the social and cultural support systems for women.

4.2 A Re-Direction of Funding: Corporate Interests

Interestingly enough, funding wasn’t solely cut, but re-directed. Women’s organizations were forced to incorporate to qualify for funding, and for the first time for-profit organizations became eligible for funding from the women’s program.⁹² Those receiving the most significant financial support are now either for-profit organizations, or

⁸⁹ Irngaut, Katharine. Press Release. “NWAC Is Concerned That the Federal Government Is Curbing the Success of Sisters in Spirit”, (2010): 2.

⁹⁰ Murphy, Susan. 2014. “Canada’s Eighth and Ninth Reports on CEDAW” (February 2014):2. [http://www.fcfd.org/Portals/0/Advocacy/AdvocacyIssues/JusticeandHumanRights/CFUW%20feedback%20on%20Canada’s%208th%20and%209th%20report%20on%20CEDAW%20\(2\).pdf](http://www.fcfd.org/Portals/0/Advocacy/AdvocacyIssues/JusticeandHumanRights/CFUW%20feedback%20on%20Canada’s%208th%20and%209th%20report%20on%20CEDAW%20(2).pdf).

⁹¹ FAFIA. “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” (2008): 57. http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_42_8234_E.pdf.

⁹² Ibid.,57.

organizations with affiliations to major companies, often in natural resource extraction, public relations and/or law. And despite a mandate that restricts funding to organizations engaged in research, advocacy and lobbying, these recipients of federal funding are involved in precisely that.

According to Status of Women Canada, funded projects for 2014-15 included: the Automotive Industries Association of Canada⁹³ sponsored by 25 major corporations including, Bosch, BestBuy, Napa, and Valvolina; Canadian Women in Communications and Technology⁹⁴ sponsored by Bell, Rogers, MTS allstream, COGECO, Telus, Shaw, Microsoft.⁹⁵ Half a million dollars was granted to both the 'Information and Communications Technology Council of Canada Inc., and the 'Mining Industry Human Resources Council'. The 'Information and Communications Technology Council of Canada Inc.' is partnered with various corporations, universities, institutions, and industry leaders. Initiatives taken by the 'Mining Industry Human Resources Council' include looking to recruit Aboriginal people as a consequence of a labour shortage "for the mutual benefit and economic prosperity."⁹⁶ And the 'Electricity Human Resources Canada' received just under three hundred thousand dollars.

⁹³ "Disclosure of Grant and Contribution Awards: Automotive Industries Association of Canada." n.d. Status of Women Canada. <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/trans/account-resp/pd-dp/dgc-dsc/2014-2015/gc-sc-898-eng.html>.

⁹⁴ "Disclosure of Grant and Contribution Awards: Canadian Women in Communications and Technology." n.d. Status of Women Canada. <http://www.swc-cfc.gc.ca/trans/account-resp/pd-dp/dgc-dsc/2014-2015/gc-sc-890-eng.html>.

⁹⁵ "Women in Communications and Technology." n.d. <https://www.wct-fct.com/>.

⁹⁶ "Mining Industry Human Resources Council." n.d. <http://www.mihr.ca/en/priorities/Sustainability.asp>.

Objectives of the Mining Industry Human Resources Council include research, lobbying and advocacy, explicitly stating on their website that they “provide public policy support to mining industries associations.”⁹⁷ The Electricity Human Resources Canada mandate also includes conducting and disseminating valuable research.⁹⁸ It is important to note the degree of influence that corporate sponsorships and affiliations have in shaping the agenda of these organizations to represent their own interests. Htun and Weldon assert, “actors employ frames that advance their strategic interests, and they are more or less likely to prevail depending on their political clout, the extent of opposition, and their “fit” with historic patterns of policy.”⁹⁹

Federal funding has largely been provided for initiatives that focus almost exclusively on employment opportunities, completely neglecting to address the reasons why women continue to face economic and employment barriers. The re-allocation of funding and the changes to SWC mandate and eligibility requirements has drastically restricted the capacity of women to effect change, generating deeper disparities and inequality. By providing grants to industry leaders and major corporations for initiatives that function predominantly to recruit women into the workforce, while denying funding to women’s organizations that provide comprehensive and gender-based analysis of the underlying causes of why women find it difficult to access

⁹⁷ “Mining Industry Human Resources Council.” n.d. <http://www.mihr.ca/en/priorities/Sustainability.asp>.

⁹⁸ “Electricity Human Resources Canada.” n.d. <http://electricityhr.ca/our-solutions/labour-market-intelligence/>.

⁹⁹ Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon. “When Do Governments Promote Women’s Rights? A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Sex Equality Policy.” *American Political Science Association, Perspectives on Politics*, 8 (1). 2010: 211. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25698527?origin=JSTOR-pdf>.

employment and economic opportunities, shows a blatant disregard towards the needs of women, while serving corporate interests.

4.3 National Standards for the Provision of Funding

The Canada Social Transfer (CST), “more colloquially known as ‘transfer funds’ is funding provided by the federal government to support social services and programs throughout the provinces and territories. However, since the implementation of the neo-liberal ideology of reduced government intervention, government revenue has not been consistent with social investment, and without set national standards for the provision of the CST, provinces and territories are not being held accountable for their weakening social systems. In a submission to CEDAW, FAFIA recommends: “The government of Canada should attach common standards of adequacy for social assistance to the Canadian Social Transfer to ensure that social assistance rates in all jurisdictions are adequate to meet current real costs of food, clothing and housing, so that single mothers can support themselves and their children, and women are not coerced into remaining in violent relationships or engaging in prostitution because they lack adequate means to survive.”¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ FAFIA. “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” (2008): 91.
http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_42_8234_E.pdf.

5 Neo-Liberalism Worldwide: Comparative Case Illustrations

5.1 Russia

Neo-liberal policies implemented throughout different states worldwide have consistently revealed disproportionately harmful effects on women. Even other CEDAW signatory states were unable to mitigate the effects that neoliberal policies have on women. Russia's transition to democracy in 1989 became synonymous with neo-liberalism. This entailed undergoing a process of economic restructuring. Implementing neo-liberal policies signified severe cutbacks to social services and programs offered under socialism. Anthropologist Julie Hemment, states that "under state socialism, employment, education, healthcare, and day care had been constituted as rights. This new formulation changed all that."¹⁰¹ Hemment continues:

State run factories, enterprises, and bureaucracies were shut down and privatized, resulting in massive layoffs. During the decade touted as Russia's "transition to democracy", social indicators plummeted- rates of infection increased, male mortality rose dramatically, and a majority of the population found themselves to be impoverished. Early research indicated that women were especially hard hit by this economic restructuring. Guaranteed full employment and equality under state socialism, women as a group experienced democratization as demotion, a net loss rather than a gain. They found it less easy to adapt to market conditions and have fared less well than men in the new private enterprises and businesses. Meanwhile,

¹⁰¹ Hemmet, Julie. *Empowering Women in Russia: Activism, Aid, and NGO's*. Indiana: Indiana University Press (2007): 52

as the primary caregivers for children, the elderly, and the sick, women have been especially hard hit by cutbacks in state provisioning.”¹⁰²

Nikos Passas, Professor of Criminal Justice, examines the consequences of neo-liberalism in Russia and around the world and argues that neo-liberal policies in Russia have lowered productivity, increased unemployment, intensified inequalities, raised levels of poverty and eliminated social safety nets.¹⁰³ “Even the chair of the Privatization Commission admitted that the process [of neoliberal economic reform] created ‘pauper-proprietors’ who cannot survive without state protection.”¹⁰⁴ And “women, who are increasingly breadwinners but make up two thirds of the newly unemployed in Russia, are even more vulnerable. Economic desperation drives many of them to prostitution or high risk taking.”¹⁰⁵ The neo-liberal policies implemented in the efforts to democratize instead drastically reduced the role of government through cutbacks in government spending, leaving those most disadvantaged by these policies impoverished.

¹⁰² Hemmet, Julie. *Empowering Women in Russia: Activism, Aid, and NGO's*. Indiana: Indiana University Press (2007): 6.

¹⁰³ Passas, Nikos. n.d. “Global Anomie, Dysnomie, and Economic Crime: Hidden Consequences of Neo-liberalism and Globalization in Russia and Around the World.” *Social Justice, Criminal Justice and Globalization at the New Millenium*, 27 (2): 29-30.

¹⁰⁴ Passas, Nikos. n.d. “Global Anomie, Dysnomie, and Economic Crime: Hidden Consequences of Neo-liberalism and Globalization in Russia and Around the World.” *Social Justice, Criminal Justice and Globalization at the New Millenium*, 27 (2): 30.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*,33.

5.2 Greece

Greece's conservative-led government has cut spending and raised taxes in an attempt to lower its budget deficit, and the consequences reveal disproportionately harmful effects on women. For instance, a report written by the European Women's Lobby (EWL) states: "In Greece more than 30% of the budget of the General Secretariat on Equality, the only public mechanism on equality, was cut."¹⁰⁶ CEDAW's Concluding Observations on Greece in 2013 demonstrated strong concerns around austerity measures and the lack of social services and programs for women. The report states: "The Committee reminds the State party that even in times of fiscal constraints and economic crisis, special efforts must be made to respect human rights, sustain and expand social investment and social protection and to employ a gender sensitive approach, giving priority to women in vulnerable situations."¹⁰⁷ According to CEDAW, these drastic cuts have also resulted in a lack of organizations and institutions designed to collect research and provide gender-based analysis. The Committee expresses concerns that "very few studies and evaluations have been conducted to monitor the gender specific effects of the financial crisis"¹⁰⁸ and that updated data by "sex, age, race, ethnicity, geographical location and socioeconomic background are necessary for an accurate assessment of the situation of women."¹⁰⁹ A lack of updated data signifies either a lack of political will to carry out gender-based impact assessments and/or a

¹⁰⁶ "The Price of Austerity- The Impact on Women's Rights and Gender Equality in Europe." European Women's Lobby (2012): 13.

¹⁰⁷ CEDAW. "Concluding Observations on the Seventh Periodic Report of Greece Adopted by the Committee at Its Fifty Fourth Session". CEDAW/C/GRC/CO/7. United Nations (2013): 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 10.

serious shortage of women's organizations that act as mechanisms of accountability by providing updated research and gender-based analyses.

The consequences of austerity revealed themselves with unparalleled records of unemployment and poverty. Greece's unemployment rate reached a new record of 27.2% as of January 2013.¹¹⁰ According to Journalist Fragkiska Megaloudi, the "slashing of Greece's social safety net has caused the public to deteriorate."¹¹¹ High rates of unemployment have increased depression rates by 50 percent, drug and alcohol abuse has risen along with outbreaks of HIV, and many women have turned to prostitution.¹¹²

5.3 United Kingdom

Sharing many similarities, neo-liberalism in the UK has had devastating consequences for women as well. In CEDAW's Concluding Observations on the UK, Paragraph 21, titled 'The Impact of Austerity Measures on Women,' reports concerns around austerity measures and budget reductions that "have resulted in lack of funding for organizations providing social services to women, including those that are specialist women-only services"¹¹³ A UK study conducted by OXFAM confirms that women have

¹¹⁰ *Al Jazeera*. 2013. "Greece Unemployment Hits Record High", April 12, sec. Business & Economy. <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2013/04/201341261959680936.html>.

¹¹¹ Megaloudi, Fragkiska. 2014. "Austerity and Addiction in Athens." *Al Jazeera*, February 21.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ CEDAW. "Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women". United Nations (2014): 41. http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/CEDAW%20concluding%20observations%20251114.pdf.

been most affected by the tax increases and cuts to social services.¹¹⁴ “Women typically use public services more than men for a variety of reasons and will be more significantly impacted by their closure both in their own right and, usually, as principal carers. The combination of these impacts from austerity measures will have long-term consequences for both gender equality and, most likely, child poverty in the UK.”¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ OXFAM (2013): 3. <https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/cs-true-cost-austerity-inequality-uk-120913-en.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

6 Eliminating Discrimination Against Women: Autonomous Social Movements and Social Services

The CEDAW Committee determined that the overarching factors contributing to the discrimination against women are socio-economic disparities and the cutbacks to social services, which “increase women’s vulnerability to violence, as a lack of access to such resources reduces the choices of women in situations of risk and prevents them from escaping violence.”¹¹⁶ Women, especially Aboriginal, single mother, immigrant and refugee, and racialized minority women, make up the highest percentage of those living in poverty.¹¹⁷ Therefore, measures taken to eliminate discrimination against women must include improving access to healthcare, education, housing and supports for family and children.¹¹⁸ Improving services and implementing effective initiatives designed to eliminate discrimination against women require collaboration with women’s organizations. Further, according to CEDAW, any systems or institutions in opposition must be modified, or eliminated.

FAFIA reports, “While current Canadian governments have the financial capacity to eliminate poverty among women, restructuring has resulted in reduced spending and

¹¹⁶ Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. “Report of the Inquiry Concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”. CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1. United Nations (2015): 25.

¹¹⁷ “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” 2008. Submission. FAFIA.

¹¹⁸ Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. “Report of the Inquiry Concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”. CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1. United Nations (2015): 26.

tightened restrictions on social assistance and other programs essential to the safety and well-being of poor women in Canada.”¹¹⁹

6.1 Violence Against Women

Failing to address these violations, women in Canada are more likely to experience discrimination at multiple levels. CEDAW notes that social and economic factors increase women’s vulnerability to violence, often forcing women to “choose between poverty and remaining in a violent relationship.”¹²⁰ In CEDAW’s 2003 Concluding Observations, the Committee reported: “over 86% of criminal assaults in Canada are against women,” and “every second, a woman in Canada experiences some form of sexual violence.”¹²¹ According to Statistics Canada, over half of the female population has experienced physical or sexual assault; however, only 6% of assaults are reported to the police,¹²² and CEDAW confirms “Aboriginal women and girls experience extremely high levels of violence in Canada, particularly the high number of disappearances and murders of Aboriginal women.”¹²³ A 5-year national study of 100 women who were victims of male violence reported “failures in government oversight of 911 operators, police failures, poor decision making and failure to accord

¹¹⁹ “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” Submission. FAFIA (2008): 85.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 29.

¹²¹ Ibid., 29.

¹²² “Date Violence: Fact Sheet.” n.d. Native Women’s Association Canada. <http://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Date-Violence-Fact-Sheet.pdf>.

¹²³ Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women. “Report of the Inquiry Concerning Canada of the Committee of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women Under Article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women”. CEDAW/C/OP.8/CAN/1. United Nations (2015): 3.

appropriate sentencing.”¹²⁴ FAFIA writes, “Women across Canada report that the two biggest systemic barriers to women and children escaping violence are inadequate income assistance and the lack of affordable housing.” Despite the prevalence of violence at all levels, very few services and programs exist to protect women from violence. And without adequate counseling, shelters, housing and legal aid, the capacity of women to leave violent situations and to challenge discriminatory institutions that perpetuate this violence is greatly restricted.

6.2 Mechanisms of Accountability, Shaping Progressive Policy

The importance of autonomous women’s social movements in shaping progressive social policy cannot be understated. According to *voices-voix*, “autonomous organizations....are characterized by *independent* actions, where women organize on the basis of self-activity, set their own goals, and decide their own forms of organization and struggle.”¹²⁵ Democratic theorists Htun and Weldon, agree, “[autonomous] social movements are critical for advancing inclusion and democracy.” They argue:

“Autonomous social movements are critical to understanding the origins of progressive social policies that explicitly challenge the established social order by reshaping relations among groups. Autonomous social movements develop oppositional consciousness, imagine new forms of social organization, and mobilize broad societal action to generate understanding and support. They are essential to

¹²⁴ “Women’s Inequality in Canada.” Submission. FAFIA (2008): 30.

¹²⁵ *Voices-voix*. “Status of Women Canada: What Happened”, (September 2012): 554. <http://voices-voix.ca/en/facts/profile/status-women-canada>.

catalyzing the process of progressive social policy change and for its continuation."¹²⁶

In Canada, women's organizations not only help shape progressive public policy, but also behave as mechanisms of accountability. Autonomous women's organizations also play an integral role in government accountability by providing updated and comprehensive data, reporting to domestic and international human rights bodies, providing impact assessments and making demands on the government for adequate social investment. Returning to CEDAW's 2008 Concluding Observations, paragraph 14: "The Committee calls upon the State party to establish minimum standards for the provision of funding to social assistance programmes, applicable at the federal, provincial and territorial levels; a monitoring mechanism to ensure the accountability of provincial and territorial governments to ensure funding decisions meet the needs of the most vulnerable groups of women and do not result in discrimination against women" and "calls upon the State party to carry out impact assessments of social programmes related to women's rights."¹²⁷

Funding cutbacks to autonomous women's organizations in Canada have reduced the mechanisms of accountability, and thus, responsibility for upholding women's rights. Research, advocacy, and lobbying, permitted women's organizations to hold particular people and institutions accountable for discriminatory behavior. Their

¹²⁶ Htun, Mala, and S. Laurel Weldon. 2012. "The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence Against Women in Global Perspective, 1975-2005." *American Political Science Review* 106 (3): 2.

¹²⁷ CEDAW. "Concluding Observations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women: Canada". CEDAW/C/CAN/CO/7. United Nations (2008): 3.

role provides expertise and on the ground knowledge important for progressive policy, making the existence of autonomous women's organizations and collaboration with them an essential part of eliminating discrimination against women. Without adequate collaboration with autonomous women's organizations, the State of Canada cannot effectively eliminate discrimination against women.

Conclusion

As shown, neo-liberal policies significantly increase unemployment and poverty while simultaneously removing, or severely restricting social services and programs meant to reduce the impact of such crises. Social safety nets, such as social assistance and legal aid, are necessary in an effort to reduce the overall inequality that occurs, or has occurred, within a discriminatory system. However, with the implementation of neo-liberalism these resources and services have been steadily diminishing, and those most affected by these policies are women, particularly low-income, Aboriginal, single mother, immigrant and refugee and racialized minority women. FAFIA reported, "The lack of protection of Aboriginal women's human rights and their economic and social marginalization permit the cycle of racialized and sexualized violence to continue."¹²⁸ If a person experiences systemic discrimination, he or she is increasingly vulnerable to multiple forms of discrimination in other facets of their life. Reducing or eliminating access to services not only severely restricts the capacity of women to have an adequate standard of living, but also restricts their ability to make changes within that

¹²⁸ FAFIA. "Women's Inequality in Canada." (2008): 11.
http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/CAN/INT_CEDAW_NGO_CAN_42_8234_E.pdf.

discriminatory system. As Alex Himelfarb, Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, has stated, “The deeper the cuts, the more public services erode, the more inequality and poverty grow.”¹²⁹ Eliminating discrimination demands a redistribution of power to provide greater representation and capacity in decision-making, often perceived as vital components of democracy. It requires providing resources and services to those who have been, and are, discriminated against, and supporting and collaborating with the autonomous women’s organizations capable of understanding the actual needs of women. An absence of these efforts demonstrates a blatant disregard in upholding the CEDAW and violates the rights of women in Canada.

¹²⁹ Himelfarb, Alex. 2013. “The Trouble with Austerity: Cutting Is More About Ideology Than Economics.” *The Star*, February 24, sec. Editorial Opinions. http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorialopinion/2013/02/24/the_trouble_with_austerity_cutting_is_more_about_ideology_than_economics.html.

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