

# Discounting Immigrant Families: Neoliberalism and the Framing of Canadian Immigration Policy Change

A Literature Review

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to develop a conceptual framework to assist in understanding how the immigrant family is impacted by recent changes to immigration policy in Canada. We contend that neoliberalism, broadly defined, is a helpful lens through which to comprehend some of the specific policies as well as discursive outcomes which have real effects on immigrant families. Based on our findings from an in-depth literature review, our goal is to identify and summarize the recent changes to the Canadian policy environment and to develop a critical conceptual framework through which to understand policy change in relation to families and immigrants.

**Key Words:** families, neoliberalism, policy change, social policy, multiculturalism, gender, race, neoconservatism

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*The era of neoliberalism is often defined as a set of changes in economic policy and in economic relationships, many of which created new challenges and insecurities for individuals. But it also reshaped the structure of social relationships, including relationships in the family, workplace, neighborhood, and civil society. It may even have reshaped people's subjectivities – their sense of self, their sense of agency, and their identities and solidarities. According to its most severe critics, the cumulative impact of these changes is a radical atomization of society. In the name of emancipating the autonomous individual, neoliberalism has eroded the social bonds and solidarities [including those forged in the family] upon which individuals depended, leaving people to fend for themselves as “companies of one” in an increasingly insecure world.*

(Kymlicka, 2013: 99)

## **Introduction**

The integration trajectories for immigrant families in Canada are a complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, which is difficult to study because of its scope. It is nonetheless important to examine. This working paper aims to develop a conceptual framework to assist in understanding how the immigrant family is impacted by recent changes to immigration policy in Canada. We contend that neoliberalism, broadly defined, is a helpful lens through which to comprehend some of the policy directions as well as discursive outcomes which have real effects on immigrant families. For example, the concept of the ideal immigrant, or the ideal immigrant family, as it is being constructed in Canada by the Federal Conservative Government, focuses on the neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency, traditional hard-working ‘family values’, a law-and-order orientation, and the embracing of a liberal-democratic value system focused on individual rights and western values.

This working paper is part of the SSHRC-funded partnership project [\*Immigration Trajectories of Immigrant Families\*](#). The intent of this paper is to examine the changing policy context as it affects immigrant families in Canada. The paper does not attempt to examine the in-depth, “on the ground” impacts of the current policy changes for two reasons: 1) because of their recent nature and lack of substantial presence in the literature, and 2) because the other research streams of the larger research project are better positioned to explore the phenomenon at this level. The other streams of research are focusing on children and youth; violence against women; labour and work; and community support. Consequently, based on findings from our literature review, our goal is to identify and summarize the broad recent changes to the Canadian policy environment and to develop a critical conceptual framework through which to understand policy change in relation to families and immigrants.

## **Immigration, Families, and Neoliberal Policy Change**

The literature on neoliberalism and immigration is broad-based and ranges across many disciplines. Keeping in mind that our focus is specific to the integration trajectories of immigrant families, the following review of the literature will centre on how neoliberalism is shaping immigration policy and how it might

be helpful to conceptually understand policy change in this area through a critical examination of a neoliberal approach to immigration.

To begin, the way neoliberalism is framed and applied to immigration varies considerably. Ilana Shapaizman (2010), John Shields (2004), Alexandra Dobrowolsky (2012), and Sedef Arat-Koc (1999) offer somewhat different foci on what the most significant elements of neoliberalism are with reference to immigration, and how neoliberalism influences policy and public discourses. For example, Shapaizman (2010) contends that: “The neo-liberal concepts of self-sufficiency and personal responsibility have had the most influential impact on the immigrant privatization policy. The privatized Canadian immigrant policy was designed for the self-reliant immigrant” (p. 20). She argues that the ideals of self-sufficiency and self-reliance are what constructs the ideal immigrant individual and, by extension, the ideal immigrant family.

From the vantage point of a macro-level analysis, although Shields (2004) agrees with Shapaizman’s position, he places emphasis on the broader impact of neoliberal restructuring on the labour market and the retrenchment of public social support systems (the welfare state and settlement services) and its negative effects on immigrant and refugee newcomers. For most immigrants and refugees, and in particular for those who are racialized (even those with high human capital assets), this broader impact has contributed to more difficult processes of labour market integration, poorer overall economic outcomes, and less publicly-funded support for the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees. Moreover, there has been a significant shift in immigration policy away from nation-building and longer-term integration goals – including a strong focus on the role of immigrant and refugee families to this process (hence the prior emphasis on family reunification through family-class immigration) – towards more “flexible” immigrants better equipped to quickly adapt to a changed economic environment (with a much sharper focus on economic-class immigration and temporary foreign workers). The introduction of the new Express Entry platform for economic immigrants, yet to be implemented at the time of writing, typifies this shift. According to this logic new immigrants, consequently, need to be resilient and more independently equipped, through such assets as their own human capital resources, to survive and progress in a highly competitive neoliberal economic and social landscape.

The common thread in the academic literature on immigration and neoliberalism is neoliberalism’s concentration on the more immediate economic benefits of immigration and the economic focus of immigration policy making. Dobrowolsky (2012) provides a helpful analysis in this regard, and outlines nine specific ways in which this is played out. She posits that neoliberalism aims to:

- (a) attract highly skilled immigrants;
- (b) expand low wage, temporary foreign worker programs;
- (c) diversify immigration “entry doors” and make some more flexible;
- (d) cut admission and settlement costs;
- (e) encourage settlement in less well-populated areas;
- (f) tighten border controls and crack down on undocumented migrants;
- (g) “change citizenship rules to reduce risks of undesired costs and unrealized benefits to the state”; and
- (h) “sell immigration to the Canadian public ... through a policy rhetoric that emphasizes

the hoped-for benefits of immigration while downplaying risks and disappointing outcomes”. (p. 197)

This position is affirmed by Arat Koc (1999; 2012) who contends that there is an emphasis on global competitiveness in neoliberal policy which preferences highly-educated, skilled, self-sufficient, and wealthy immigrants who can contribute immediately to the Canadian economy upon arrival in Canada. The aim of generating short-term economic benefit has also meant a tightening of rules for immigrants sponsoring family members who may consume public social benefits disproportionate to their perceived labour market/economic contribution (Shields, 2004). Therefore policies have been designed to make it harder to sponsor family members.

The above discussion outlines an emerging framework around neoliberal principles, which awards policy prioritization to “economic migrants” who are perceived as self-reliant and embrace practices and expectations around personal responsibility. Arat-Koc (1999) suggests that this framework further marginalizes people of colour and women specifically because of the systemic barriers they face due to patriarchal and racist ideals, which limit access to education, labour market participation, and other credentials deemed valuable in neoliberal immigration policy. Shields speaks to this phenomenon in terms of the growing social exclusion among immigrant newcomers, in part featured by the rise of immigrant-based poverty, which is particularly marked among racialized populations (Shields, 2004; Shields et al., 2011). As Shields observes, the increase in “individual and family reliance on the labor market irrespective of the market’s ability to deliver adequate levels of support” creates the conditions for widespread exclusion under conditions of neoliberal marketization (Shields, 2004: 40). Furthermore, Dobrowolsky, as noted in the above quotation, gives some examples within immigration policy of how the neoliberal phenomenon is being played out in multiple domains.

### **The “Ideal Immigrant” and the “Ideal Immigrant Family”**

Given the changes in the broad policy direction identified above, there is an active construction of an ‘ideal/model immigrant’ based on certain personality, cultural, and skill-based characteristics. This issue is also raised in the academic literature. Bridget Anderson (2013; 2014), for example, contends that state policy establishes the category of the “good citizen” who embodies the neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency, hard-work, and effective and efficient labour market participation. This sentiment is echoed by Pauline Barber (2008) who argues that the Filipino community is seen in Canada in many ways as an ideal group of migrants because of their perceived willingness to work long hours without complaint.

Anderson (2013; 2014) extends this analysis of the state’s notion of the “good citizen” by contrasting it with the idea of the “failed citizen”, and the “alien non-citizen”. These social constructs are juxtaposed against the “good citizen”, and those newcomers who fall outside the “good citizen” norm are subject to sanctions and other negative consequences for their deviance from expected standards. In other words, the “failed citizen” – the citizen or landed immigrant who does not conform to prescribed neoliberal values and behaviours – and the

“alien non-citizen” – the migrant with less than full legal status who is criminalized and excluded because their very existence poses a challenge to the cohesion and uniformity of the neoliberal state – have come to be portrayed as clearly articulating a vision of the undesirable migrant. Canadian immigration policy is being redesigned to align with this new neoliberal vision.

### **Neoliberal Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism, a cornerstone of the Canadian immigration landscape for the last four decades, is also being reconfigured toward a more neoliberal orientation and designed to fit more closely with neoliberal immigration change (Griffith, 2013). Multiculturalism has been targeted for change by neoliberalism because at its core, Will Kymlicka reminds us, it is about helping “to define the terms of belonging and citizenship” (2013: 101). Canadian multiculturalism was given shape by social liberalism that has sought to incorporate newcomers from diverse backgrounds to Canada by giving them a civic voice, recognizing their “legitimate” claims for respect and inclusion, and paving seamless paths for newcomers and their children to full liberal-democratic citizenship. This form of multiculturalism requires the use of an activist state to survive (Kymlicka, 2013: 103). This activist state – in contrast to the neoliberal state – willingly invests public resources in nonprofit organizations that engage in immigrant settlement service and cultural heritage expression, which give voice to underrepresented groups.

In terms of family implications, this social liberalism form of multiculturalism was concerned with a process of intergenerational accommodation and integration of immigrant populations around which family is central. Neoliberal multiculturalism, however, is about shifting the focus away from a rights and “accommodating difference” dialogue toward an emphasis on the need for newcomers to adapt and to adjust to Canadian society and its established western “pluralistic” value system. This involves a tacit dismissal of the rights claims approach and “activist” government it promotes. The reorientation gives emphasis to the duties and obligations newcomers have to adapt to Canada and become productive members of society. This approach fosters a very narrow view of what constitutes social cohesion, which is articulated as one of the core goals of contemporary immigration reform in Canada (Griffith, 2013). It is not insignificant that, in the British context, the cohesion agenda has been employed to attack multiculturalism policy as divisive and promoting disunity (Burnett, 2008: 47). In this regard, neoliberal multiculturalism rejects the idea of two-way street integration in which both the receiving society and the immigrants are changed in the process of accommodation, settlement, and integration. The expectation is for a one-way street integration process in which the newcomers are solely responsible for making the adaptations to fit into the receiving society’s system of established values and institutions.

There is, moreover, a distinctively narrow economic dimension to neoliberal multiculturalism. Here, the worth of ethnicity is valued because of its transnational social capital and general commercial value; in a global marketplace, multiculturalism is extremely useful for building commercial links overseas promoting “free trade”. Hence, under neoliberalism, multiculturalism is

transformed. It is no longer about creating “a tolerant national citizen who is concerned for the disadvantaged in her own society but a cosmopolitan market actor who can compete effectively across state boundaries” (Kymlicka, 2013: 110-111). As Kymlicka further observes:

Neoliberal multiculturalism for immigrants affirms – even valorizes – ethnic immigrant entrepreneurship, strategic cosmopolitanism, and transnational commercial linkages and remittances but silences debates on economic redistribution, racial inequality, unemployment, economic restructuring, and labor rights (2013: 112).

The goal has been to harness multiculturalism to commercial ends and manage the boundaries of acceptable diversity in society along paths consistent with the core neoliberal values framework (Burnett, 2008: 46). In such a discourse, the focus is on the individual entrepreneurial immigrant, immigrant resilience, and the immediate economic benefits of immigration. Absent is the idea of the contemporary immigrant family and notions of cross-generational sustainability and nation-building.

### **Family Matters: Self-Sufficiency, Neoconservatism, and the Assault on Social Welfare**

What are the implications of these types of developments for families? The work of Ann Porter (2012) and Stephen McBride and John Shields (1997) are instructive in this regard. Porter argues that neoliberalism puts the onus on the family for social reproduction and care in a state whose social welfare responsibilities have been significantly shrunk. In this model, the discourse and practices associated with neoconservative social values are added to the broader neoliberal ideological and policy framework. Neoconservative social values draw on:

social traditionalism and expresses concern for, and plays on, the popular values of morality, the work ethic, law and order, the preservation of the family and church, and the denunciation of feminism, homosexuality, sexual permissiveness, and drugs. ... A strong family is necessary to ensure that individuals do not become too dependent on the state (McBride & Shields, 1997: 31; also see Shields, 1990).

Consequently, neoconservatism advocates for traditional family structures and composition as a compliment to economic free-market liberalism doctrine in order to create the ideal self-sufficient, nuclear family. Hence, neoliberal and neoconservative values work together in this context: neoliberalism pushes for the self-sufficient family while neoconservatism pushes for traditional nuclear constructions of the family. These values combine to ideally situate the family to succeed in a neoliberal world where many social supports have become downloaded onto the family and privatized to the market place (Porter, 2012). Additionally, the non-profit sector is expected to fill in the gaps no longer covered by the state and which neither individuals families nor the private market have

covered either. This caring labour is provided primarily by the voluntary and low-paid precarious work of women (Evans et al., 2005; Shields, 2014).

Women have been particularly negatively impacted by these developments as the burden of unpaid caring work comes to be placed predominantly on their shoulders. In a post-feminist world, neoliberalism promotes the illusion of unlimited choice for individuals but this choice is, in fact, limited by and mediated through the marketplace. Moreover, “the antidote to social and economic inequality” is presented as “the promotion of unfettered consumption and privatization” (Craven, 2014: ix), which in reality simply results in elevated levels of societal polarization. For women, and mothers in particular, “work-life balance” becomes ever more skewed as caring responsibilities become downloaded away from publically supported institutions to the home or to be purchased in the private marketplace (O’Brien Hallstein, 2014). These care-giving services are delivered by a growing army of highly flexible and poorly compensated women and increasingly immigrant workers.

Women experience growing social, economic, and household problems as the effect of neoliberal policies are realized. This increase also has an impact on lowering newcomer women’s labour force participation. Not only is there the challenge of unevenly distributed duties but neoliberalism also promotes more gender-divided paid workplaces. As Arat-Koc (2012) observes:

Immigration policies have, under the influence of neo-liberalism, shifted further in a direction of hyper-masculinization, prioritizing economic class immigration, upholding the ideal of the self-sufficient, flexible, mobile (usually male) professional, and further downgraded the significance of the contributions most women could make as workers and family members (p. 11).

It is revealing how neoliberal solutions are tailored differently for the developed Northern versus the developing Southern world. In the North, neoliberal/neoconservative constructions call for the return to more traditional family formations as a solution to many social and economic issues. Yet, at the same time, neoliberalism draws upon and promotes the use of temporary forms of foreign migrant workers to fill labour-force gaps. Solutions to poverty in the South are, in part, portrayed as the need to embrace opportunity of migration and the sending of remittances back home in support of family who are barred from joining migrant workers in Canada (Craven, 2014: xi; Bryan, 2014). Hence, the contradiction in neoliberal policy is revealed in its support of traditional nuclear families for its domestic population alongside its promotion of transnational family formations for its migrant labour force.

The challenge around family reunification for migrants to Canada, many of whom will become permanent residents and citizens, is underappreciated. The costs associated with extended separation of family members is profound. This includes emotional distress, erosion of trust, the risk to family members left behind (as a consequence of such things as poverty and insecurity, war, civil violence), the need for expanded services at time of family reunification, and the added expenses for the migrant family connected with maintaining multiple households (Wayland, 2006).

The experience of settlement is greatly impacted by the support that is given by family members who are physically present. Migrants who come with family members, research concludes, make the settlement process considerably smoother and this promotes better labour market attachment (Wayland, 2006). The hidden cost of prolonged family separation to the immigrants and refugees themselves, the Canadian economy, and the larger societal structure are considerable. But such costs remain unaccounted for in neoliberalism's narrow and short-term economic calculus.

Reuniting immigrants with their families is important not just for the outcomes of principle applicants but also for the children of newcomers. This point is forcefully made by Busby and Corak (2014) from the C.D. Howe Institute:

[W]e suggest that the government, in general give more prominence to the family as the migrating unit. This way of thinking casts a negative light on the Temporary Foreign Worker program's use as a gateway to permanent residency. Structured as it is, the program needlessly separates children from their parents, and delays their arrival to the country, raising the risks that they will not reach their full potential in the country (p. 1).

Meanwhile, for children immigrating as part of the economic class or through family sponsorship, the Federal Conservative Government has changed the definition of dependent children from under 22 years to under 19 years and also eliminated exceptions for those over 18 who are full-time students. This effectively forces immigrants to choose between not migrating, leaving behind their children, or bringing them to Canada as international students with significantly more expensive tuition fees. The Government's rationale is based on the position that children arriving at older ages have lower economic outcomes and should immigrate on their own accord after "...demonstrate[ing] their own integration merits through other Canadian immigration programs" (CIC, 2013a).

It is not insignificant that the cabinet minister who was charged under the Harper Government with revamping the immigration system in Canada is one of the strongest advocates in the government of neoconservative social values. Jason Kenney has been the prime architect and force behind Canadian immigrant reform. He brought the law-and order, family and religious values, small state and self-sufficiency agendas to the immigration portfolio and his reforms are strongly imprinted with such ideas (McDonald, 2014).

Another important question that is addressed within the critical neoliberal policy literature — which has specific implications with regards to the intersections of class, gender, race, and other identities of migrants — is what do neoliberal principles mean for the welfare state and, more specifically, to the social programming priorities of the nation-state? Canada's diminishing focus on a welfare state model is problematized in the literature and it is helpful to consider as a product of neoliberal policy shifts.

Alan Sears (1999) introduced the concept of the lean state and argues that social welfare programs have been cut, in part, as a means to enforce a stronger work ethic and create a more productive population, while eliminating "wasteful" government spending. In this way, neoliberal ideals of self-sufficiency are maintained through the curtailment of the social safety net (Arat-Koc, 1999).

Dan Hiebert (2006) echoes this observation, noting that the welfare state has declined in the past two decades. He also makes the point, however, that “immigrants use fewer benefits than the Canadian-born population given their economic position” (46). In fact, empirical evidence demonstrates that, in Canada, immigrants make a positive contribution to the public purse, generally paying more in taxes than they receive in public benefits (Javdani & Pendakur, 2011; OECD, 2013). In the contemporary period, unlike in the United States and Western Europe, newcomers to Canada have not been subject to a strong policy discourse arguing the claim that immigrants are an economic drain on the nation and a major source of welfare abuse (Shields, 2004; Bauder, 2011; Banting et al., 2013: 166-169).

Some vocal neoliberal advocates in Canada connected to the Fraser Institute, however, have forcefully argued that many immigrants are an economic drain on the country and that radical immigration change is needed to address this problem (Grubel & Grady, 2011). It must be noted that the methodology used to draw these conclusions is problematic and has been widely challenged (Javdani & Pendakur 2011; OECD, 2013). Nonetheless, more recently the Federal Conservative Government has picked up on a somewhat more restrained version of the Fraser Institute position and have argued that some of the benefits received by newcomers are an unfair cost to taxpayers and that there is a need to reduce or eliminate any negative economic costs to Canadians associated with immigration.

To this end, the Canadian Government has moved to limit access to social and health benefits of newcomers in various situations. For example, the Federal Government significantly reduced refugee claimants’ access to health care through the Interim Federal Health Program (a decision of the Federal Superior court has recently ruled this action as being unconstitutional),<sup>1</sup> which also has the effect — as Samantha Jackson (2012) illustrates in a recent *RCIS Research Brief* — of rendering refugee claimants even more precarious in the labour market than they already are. The Federal Government has also introduced a Super Visa for parents and grandparents in conjunction with implementing a yearly cap of 5000 applications for sponsoring these family members, which significantly reduces the opportunities for families to reunify permanently. Meanwhile, the Super Visa requires the purchasing of health insurance, which in practical terms means that those families who can pay are well-positioned to sponsor long-term visits for parents or grandparents who would otherwise not be eligible for any state support during their visit time in Canada. But for those who cannot pay the Super Visa, all routes to temporarily reunite families will remain closed. Immigrant wealth, in other words, will increasingly determine whether immigrants’ extended families will be reunited or remain apart (Alboin & Cohl, 2012). Also, more recently in April 2014, Private Members Bill C-585 was introduced by a Conservative MP. This Bill would allow provinces to restrict access to social assistance benefits for refugee claimants by imposing minimum residency requirements for eligibility. While it is not a Government proposed bill, the

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Federal Superior Court ruled that the cuts to refugee health care amounted to, in the words of the court, “cruel and unusual” treatment and an “outrage [to] Canadian standards of decency” (Janus, 2014).

Conservatives have been accused of strategically using private members bills to pass legislation that is not subject to the same checks and balances as government bills (Ditchburn, 2014).

Other immigration changes affecting family members include an increase of 30% in the minimal yearly income required to sponsor parents and grandparents, as well as an increase in the time period in which sponsors will be financially responsible for sponsored parents or grandparents (from 10 to 20 years). Once again, economic immigrants who do not require upfront support and social investments have come to be prioritized for permanent residency and citizenship in the reform of Canadian immigration policies, with family-class considerations for granting access to Canada given less importance (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). In a recent *RCIS Working Paper*, Jacklyn Neborak (2013) points to the “problematic transformation of the Canadian immigration system of mostly focusing on economic outcomes and compromising social values, thus undermining the place of the family unit in Canada” (p. 18).

Forces of the political right in Europe and the United States have had some success in public appeals for divesting in immigrant access to welfare supports by playing upon xenophobic and racist views of significant portions of the electorate. They have been able to shift blame for such things as high unemployment, loss of social cohesion, cultural fragmentation, and government deficits onto immigration and multiculturalism policies and immigrant populations themselves (Flint & Robinson, 2008). Such approaches, however, have been far less compelling in the Canadian context. As Banting (2010) has shown through survey data, Canadians are very broadly supportive of high levels of immigration, recognizing and valuing immigrant contributions to the country. Canadians, as a whole, do not believe that immigrants as a group abuse welfare or are a burden on taxes, nor that they take jobs from the native-born. Contemporary Canadian identity, moreover, has always been linked to immigration (Bauder, 2011) and over the last four decades has come to be linked strongly and directly to support for multiculturalism and the increasing diversity of Canadian society. Hence, direct anti-immigrant appeals have not found fertile soil in Canada.

Neoliberal approaches to immigration have consequently needed to be filtered through a position that is supportive of immigration but which reframes the narrative around “positive types” of newcomers who contribute to Canadian society — the “good immigrant” versus the “bad migrant”, who is perceived as a drain on society, who is in the country illegally, and/or who has abused the immigration rules to “jump the queue” to enter Canada over the more “deserving” (Bauder, 2011). There is active framing of negative immigrant stereotypes that counter-poses “good” (newcomers that conform to neoliberal norms) as opposed to “bad” immigrants who, so the argument goes, pose economic, social, cultural, security, and democratic value risks to Canadian society. In this way, the Federal Conservative Government has been actively attempting to reframe the immigration discourse in Canada along these lines, breaking with the previous cross-party consensus on immigration and multiculturalism policies (Griffith, 2013).

Dorbrowolsky (2012), adopting more of a political economy perspective, makes the important point that settlement services and welfare-state supports for new immigrants and refugees are actually very important in helping newcomers

feel supported and welcome, making immigrants more likely to stay in the places where they land as newcomers. Publically supported services can play a positive role, consequently, in attracting and retaining immigrants, which is especially important in smaller non-gateway communities that have experienced considerable challenges in retaining newcomers once they arrive.<sup>2</sup> More generally, Reitz (1999) notes that institutional supports made available by the state are very important for creating an environment that enhances the “warmth of the welcome” that is critical to the process of successful immigrant integration. Canada’s immigrant settlement service model, in which non-profit organizations supported through government funding provide a strong web of community-based newcomer assistance, has been credited as helping to make Canada among the most welcoming countries for immigrants (Richmond & Shields, 2005; MIPEX, n.d.). Public investments in immigrant and refugees settlement services are a key dimension to this achievement historically. Moreover, the state’s commitment to fund settlement support sends an important symbolic message to both Canadian society and to newcomers themselves: that immigrants are valued and welcomed in Canada.

The outcome of the neoliberal erosion and privatization of the welfare state – including state-funded settlement services – is that the people (including native-born Canadians) who are most vulnerable within society are the very ones who are most reliant on such public supports. Given the intersections of race, gender, income disparity, social class, and other important indicators, immigrant families have been and will continue to be significantly and adversely impacted by policy changes that continue along these lines.

### **Immigration Policy – From Nation Building to Manpower Agency**

Another important theme found within the critical literature about neoliberalism relates to the overarching purpose of Canadian immigration. While the economic benefits of immigration have always been central to Canadian immigration policy, historically this benefit has always been framed within a nation-building context. This has meant a number of things, including the idea that the economic benefit of migration would take place over an extended period, including second and third generations, and that an implicit social contract existed between the immigrant and Canada, namely that timely citizenship would be granted to newcomers once settled. According to this implicit social contract, citizenship could be achieved in as little as three years. It has also resulted in Canada having among the highest levels of newcomers taking up citizenship compared to migrants in countries like the US and most European nations.

Over time, immigration policy evolved and the goals of economic and demographic benefits to Canada were complemented with the goals of family reunification (family class immigration) and humanitarian aims (refugee-based migration). While economic and demographic considerations remained dominant in Canadian immigration policy, the family and humanitarian goals served to balance out a one-dimensional narrow economic focus (Kelley & Trebilcock, 2010). Current reforms reject this balance and are creating a far more narrowly-

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<sup>2</sup> Ironically, the delivery of settlement services in these communities in particular is increasingly following the neoliberal model (Flynn & Bauder, 2013).

focused economic immigration policy constructed on a short-time horizon (Alboim & Cohl, 2012). Not only have the humanitarian and family reunification goals been downgraded in importance, but the recognition of economic benefits brought by immigration has also been narrowed. Successful economic immigration is no longer being measured over a working life and with the contributions of second and third generations, but in restrictive five and ten year time spans. In terms of citizenship, increasingly it is a case of “only high skilled immigrants need apply”. Neoliberal policymakers, in particular, see a number of distinct benefits to restricting immigration to the highly skilled. Such newcomers are perceived to pose less of a threat to social cohesion, they are thought to “adapt better to the new society, learn the language better and rely less on public resources” (Duncan, 2012: 9).

The shift in immigration orientation is well articulated by Marci McDonald (2014) in an article on former Citizenship and Immigration Minister Jason Kenney. Referencing another former Conservative immigration minister Monte Solberg, she writes:

As the country’s official gatekeeper, Kenney turned a portfolio once seen as an instrument of nation building into what Solberg lauds as a gigantic manpower agency, screening out the elderly, people with infirmities, and those who had shown up unasked, in favour of the young and the skilled – those with enough schooling and language fluency to land jobs in the oil sands or at seniors’ besides, then blend seamlessly into Canadian society and metamorphose into that most valued of Conservative species, the hard-working taxpayer. “Jason has quite dramatically reoriented our system to one that responds to employers in Canada,” says Solberg. “It’s the most dramatic change since the Second World War”. (p. 26-27)

Kenney has often asserted that citizenship should be “harder to get and easier to lose”, with some of his critics arguing that this is producing a “citizenship of fear” (McDonald 2014: 27).

### **“Just-in-time” Immigration: The Missing Family**

The “just-in-time” benefits of economic immigration are more particularly evident in the unprecedented increase in the use of temporary foreign workers (TFWs) in Canada (what the Europeans in the past have called “guest workers”). Increasing numbers of TFWs are being used by Canadian employers to fill low-skilled jobs, but their ‘low skill’ status cuts them off from paths to Canadian citizenship and their temporary status of employment places them in precarious working situations. This trend breaks the historical linkage between migration, citizenship, and nation-building that has served as the foundation for Canadian immigration policy for many decades. Such changes have important implications for families, most importantly for the separation that TFWs experience in their own transnational family situations (see, for example, Goldring & Landolt, 2013).

To illustrate the rise in the use of TFWs, Canada admitted 257,887 immigrants as permanent residents in 2012, whereas 202,510 migrants were admitted as temporary workers. While the number of permanent resident

immigrants to Canada has remained relatively stable since 2005 – the year before the Harper Government came to power in Ottawa – the numbers of TFWs has grown substantially (the number of TFWs admitted in 2005 was 82,210). Most of this increase was in migrants assuming low-skilled jobs. Between 2005 and 2012, TFWs as a proportion of overall migration in-take increased from around 24 percent of the total migration to Canada to about 44 percent. Looked at another way, the total number of temporary foreign workers in the country more than doubled between 2005 and 2012, increasing from 224,022 to 491,547 (CIC, 2013b; ESDC, n.d.). This represents a major shift in orientation to a reliance on a more precarious temporary workforce.

The above position is reinforced by Belinda Leach (2013) and Janet McLaughlin (2010). Leach argues that:

Temporary foreign worker programmes are part of ongoing modifications to allow maximum flexibility for immediate labour needs. These programmes can bring workers to Canada quickly, but they limit access to permanent residency and citizenship, in sharp contrast to most of Canada’s earlier immigration policies. (p. 33)

The TFW program has come under intense criticism more recently because of widely revealed employer abuses and evidence that employers were hiring cheap compliant foreign workers over native-born residents (Hildebrandt, 2014; Walkam, 2014). The public and political fallout from this situation has caused the Federal Government to cut back on its reliance on the TFW program in 2014 and modify some of the rules governing the recruitment and treatment of TFWs by employers (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2014).

It is clear that Canada has moved from a project of relatively inclusive nation-building, based on permanent pathways to citizenship for most migrants, towards a model of restricted access to citizenship and the extensive use of TFWs to address “low-skilled” labour market needs. Through the use of TFWs, Canada is able to maintain a high level of permanent resident immigration focused on the highly skilled, which is designed to address skill gaps and demographic issues of population aging by employing a “tap on, tap off” approach to lower-skilled labour management closely attuned to the immediate needs of employers.

McLaughlin characterizes TFWs as a disposable and replaceable labour force – a classic example of Marx’s “reserve army of labour” – who will out of necessity accept “difficult work with wages, conditions, and benefits deemed unacceptable to most domestic workers” (McLaughlin, 2010: 80). What emerge are the neoliberal notions of efficiency and cost-effectiveness: in essence, employers become supported by the policy around TFWs and are thus able to attain a cheap, compliant, and just-in-time workforce while still maintaining high outputs. This system, McLaughlin contends, has significant negative effects on the TFW family unit. She posits that:

The emphasis on refraining from engaging in humanizing or romantic relationships can have a particularly profound cost,

generating a context of isolation and stress for many workers...One was even let go for making a long-distance phone call to his wife while she was in labor in Jamaica, even though he admitted and apologized for his action. Through such instances, migrants learn that developing romantic or even platonic relationships while in Canada, or prioritizing family contact at inopportune times, can have a negative impact on their employment (p. 85).

Working long hours with little opportunity to connect with your family, who are unable to come with you to Canada under the provisions of the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), can be very hard on both workers and the families they leave behind. Furthermore, as the above quotation outlines, the fear of losing your job even when engaging in simple acts like making phone calls or otherwise connecting with your families can lead to the breakdown of the transnational family unit. Of course, relationships that may develop between TFWs and Canadian residents are strongly discouraged under such arrangements because they may enable a TFW to stay in Canada through sponsorship and acquire the economic rights that come with permanent residency. This prohibitive environment can place a TFW in very vulnerable positions.

### **Government Austerity and the Neoliberal Agenda**

The recent emergence of government austerity is closely linked with the neoliberal public-policy agenda. Austerity calls for strong public sector restraint to address state budgetary deficits (real or manufactured) with the aim of restoring market-driven economic growth. Growth, according to the logic of austerity, is said to require balanced state budgets, declining public indebtedness, and a shrinking state sector (Schäfer & Streeck, 2013: 10). Such neoliberal-oriented growth, moreover, is predicated on a highly-flexible labour force with abundant competitively-priced human capital assets. The centrality of immigration and other forms of migrant labour is, as Gary Freeman notes, “not merely a temporary convenience or necessity, but a structural requirement of advanced capitalism” (as quoted in Hampshire, 2013: 11). Austerity has provided further impetus for the Federal Conservative Government to extend and embed its neoliberal immigration agenda.

Canada was not as deeply impacted by the 2007-2008 financial crisis as other nations and its public finances were in a good position to weather the subsequent economic recession. While it is true that the federal government during the first few years of the economic crisis adopted a narrowly-based “shovel ready” Keynesian set of policies to address short-term job creation and financial regulation to manage growing unemployment and stabilize the banking system, once the crisis eased the national government came to embrace an austerity path to restore economic growth. This was embarked upon even though the objective fiscal need for aggressive austerity was far from obvious. In the Canadian case, the ideological commitment to a neoliberal policy agenda fueled the federal government’s adoption of austerity policies (McBride & Whiteside, 2011; Evans & Hussey, 2011).

Importantly, immigration reform has been a central part of the federal government's policy change agenda in this period of austerity. Yet the linkage between austerity, neoliberalism, and immigration policy change is largely absent in the Canadian literature. Some limited attention to this issue has, however, taken place in the European context, which is instructive to briefly consider.

Austerity measures coupled with economic hard times has a tendency to bring migration issues to the political forefront. Unfortunately, it often promotes an inflammation of right-wing nationalist discourses, which questions using state resources to support 'others' (Collett, 2011; Shapaizman, 2010). The recent successes of far-right anti-immigration parties in the election to the European Parliament is a vivid political expression of this state of affairs (The Economist, 2014). While the neoliberal policy agenda seeks to play upon elements of the anti-immigration sentiment found within these right-wing political formations, it also wishes to tame this sentiment into the discourse of "good" versus "bad" immigration. Neoliberalism recognizes the economic value of immigration and engages in the global competition for migrant talent to fill labour market gaps and sees immigration as necessary to help address the problems of an aging population.

### **Changing the Immigration Policy Discourse**

In Canada, the attempt to shift the dominant discourse around immigration – away from a focus on inclusive citizenship and balanced family-friendly and nation-building goals towards a neoliberal course driven by limited short-term economic benefit with narrowly confined rights to citizenship – has been aided by the added force of the so-called "need" to redefine public policy through an austerity lens. The ability to define the policy paradigm is critical for how immigration comes to be discussed, debated, and understood within society. Controlling the discourse means, as Antonio Gramsci reminds us, establishing the "common sense" about how we comprehend and define the possibilities and solutions to problems in society (Giles, 2014: 2). Neoliberalism narrows this vision and suggests there is no other alternative. Discourses are consequently used by politicians, lobby groups, and other opinion setters to establish the parameters in which the debate around issues takes place.

In Canada, as in Europe, the employment of a more neoliberal lens on immigration has altered viewpoints and discourses about the value of family-based migration. In essence, various kinds of family migration have been identified:

with three interrelated problems: first, abuse of the immigration system through marriages of convenience or so-called bogus marriages; second, welfare state burdens as a result of low rates of labour market participation by marriage migrants; and, third, a perception of the "migrant family" as a patriarchal institution in which unequal gender roles, forced marriages and gender-based violence are prevalent. Thus what was tolerated as a migration flow that would "normalize" predominantly male labour migrations and potentially facilitate integration came to be seen as an obstacle to integration (Hampshire, 2013: 78-79).

The Conservative Government in Ottawa has eagerly embraced these themes and they are reflected in its immigration reform agenda. For example, the implementation of Conditional Permanent Residency for sponsored spouses that provides for their deportation if the relationship breaks down in the first 2 years, or the re-writing of the citizenship study guide that warns readers that Canada does not accept “barbaric cultural practices” such as spousal abuse and forced marriages. It is the second theme, however, to which we direct further attention, as well as to the so-called ‘bogus refugee’ to more fully expose the neoliberal family narrative/discourse in Canada (Bradimore & Bauder, 2011).

In such discourse, sparse attention is directed at the considerable contributions of the family unit to the economic integration of immigrant newcomers, or to other types of social and cultural contributions that immigrant families make to Canadian society. Dominant economic models in standard economics are being used by neoliberal-based policy makers, and these models are notoriously poor at acknowledging, accounting for, and measuring the non-standard forms of economic value added by families (Neborak, 2013; Vanderplant et al., 2012). Consequently, one of the most problematic neoliberal discourses constructed around family reunification is in reference to the “drain on society” that “non-skilled” and “dependent” family members who accompany principle applicants have on Canada’s “generous” social, health, and settlement services.

In this neoliberal discourse, Canada is portrayed as the generous host whereas some newcomers, particularly “dependent” extended family members and asylum claimants, are portrayed as seeking to take unfair advantage of the Canadian social support system. This discourse has been employed by neoliberal politicians to inform policy and legislative changes that limit family reunification and isolate and further marginalize many immigrant families.

Some examples of the policy shifts associated with these discourses are outlined in the speeches of both the current and previous Federal Ministers of Citizenship and Immigration (Chris Alexander and Jason Kenney, respectively) and by the neoliberal Fraser Institute. Specifically with reference to parents and grandparents joining their families in Canada, Kenny makes the following point as quoted in the *Edmonton Journal*:

There have to be practical limits to our generosity. We have to calibrate ... limits based on our country’s economic needs, our fiscal capacity. There is no doubt that the people who are coming who are senior citizens, they have much, much lower labour-market participation and much higher levels of utilization of the public health system (quoted in Gunter, 2011).

This discourse does not only apply to parents and grandparents. Chris Alexander, the current minister of Citizenship and Immigration, made the following statement on Friday March 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014, in reference to asylum seekers in Canada:

So because this system is no longer bogged down by claimants simply looking to take advantage of our generosity, Canada is able to offer protection to these genuine refugees much more quickly ... We all win as

taxpayers, as government-service providers, and as humanitarians when those who jump the queue, those who abuse our generosity, those who take money or generate money for organized crime, those who refuse to leave when their claims are rejected, and those who take advantage of our social programs, are forced to play by the rules, are held accountable. Bogus asylum seekers are not entitled to the same benefits as taxpaying Canadians or genuine refugees (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2014).

In this speech, Alexander alludes to specific regulations that have been put in place to limit the rights of “bogus” asylum claimants to ensure these same claimants cannot take advantage of Canadian laws and generous social programs. Of course, the “logic and ideology that underpins this line of thinking is exclusionary and inaccurate”, as RCIS researcher Claire Ellis and Gabrielle Inglis (2014) unveiled. These types of statements by leading neoliberal political figures illustrate a problematic intentionality to portray parents and grandparents of immigrants to Canada, as well as asylum seekers, as a problem and as people who are an economic drain on the limited resources of Canadian society.

The discourses perpetuated by politicians are not the only influence in driving changes to immigration policy. Think tanks and other organizations attempt to influence decision makers to implement immigration policies based on the logic of neoliberalism. One example with reference to immigrant families is the Fraser institute. In a report titled *Canada’s Immigrant Selection Policies: Recent Record, Marginal Changes, Needed Reforms*, the Fraser Institute (2013) paints the immigrant family specifically as a threat to the state and its generous social services, perpetuating notions of self-sufficiency as the only means to a successful immigration policy. The Fraser Institute (2013) speaks about immigrant families as a burden on the housing market arguing that “in the Vancouver area... if the average size of these newly arrived immigrants is three, 250 dwelling units need to be built each week. These new residents also add to strains on municipal infrastructure and traffic congestion” (p. 12). These kinds of arguments, along with the suggestion of the general abuse of public services, lead the Fraser Institute to make policy recommendations such as denying immigrants the right to bring their parents or grandparents to Canada (2013: 39). Such ideology-driven policy interventions have worked to reinforce the general direction of the Canadian Federal Conservative Government’s neoliberal reform agenda.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we established a working understanding of neoliberalism in the context of immigration and settlement that includes a focus on the values of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, individualism, and marketization. The Canadian Federal Conservative Government’s focus on these values includes an expectation that immigrants be resilient and able to successfully navigate the labour market upon arrival in Canada, a premium placed on narrow short-term economic benefits of immigration, and a systematic discounting of family-based migration. Furthermore, we discussed specifically the shift from a nation-building model, which saw permanent immigration to Canada as an important element,

towards enabling temporary foreign labour to work in Canada, which is an indicator of a neoliberal labour market-based policy orientation. Finally, we considered the changes in policy with reference to post-2008 austerity discourses, and how these neoliberal shifts have negatively impacted women in particular. Throughout this paper, we established that a neoliberal conceptual framework is central to understanding the policy environment in Canada with reference to immigrant families. This framework can be applied to other important aspects of the integration trajectories of immigrant families, including those related to labour and work, children and youth, violence against women, and community support.

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