

## International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy



# The Harper Government's New Right Neoliberal Agenda and the Dismantling of Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative

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### Abstract

This paper situates the Harper government's 2006 restructuring and effective dismantling of Status of Women Canada and its 2011 take down of the approximate 12,000 volume online library of the federal Family Violence Initiative in relation to two developments. These are the ascendant influence of men's rights and other antifeminist activism in Canada and globally; and the concurrent rise of a Hayekian-animating New Right neoliberal agenda intent on subordinating civil society and democratic rule to the forces of twenty-first century global capitalism. The paper contends that anti-feminism is among a host of neoconservative forces that the New Right instrumentalizes to augment and advance and its neoliberal agenda. For the New Right, however, the enemy is not gender equality or feminism *per se* but rather the market inhibiting commitment to social justice that feminism participates in and advances.

### Keywords

Neoliberal dismantling; New Right; feminism; men's rights; social justice.

*Please cite this article as:*

Mann RM (2016) The Harper government's New Right neoliberal agenda and the dismantling of Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 5(2): 50-64. DOI: 10.5204/ijcjsd.v5i2.308.



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## Introduction

This paper situates the Harper government's 2006 restructuring and effective dismantling of Status of Women Canada and its 2011 take down of the approximate 12,000 volume online library of the federal Family Violence Initiative in the context of two complementary developments. These are the ascendant influence of men's or fathers' rights and other antifeminist activism in Canada and globally, and the concurrent rise of a New Right neoliberal agenda intent on subordinating civil society and democratic rule to the forces of twenty-first century global capitalism. The paper contends that anti-feminism is among a host of neoconservative forces that the Harper government instrumentalized to augment and advance this latter neoliberal agenda. Accordingly, it situates dismantlings of Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative in relation to its larger effort to reconstitute state and civil society partnering in knowledge production and policy formation across policy domains. The paper's central contention is that an apparent affinity between the aims of antifeminism and the variety of neoliberalism that the Harper government embraced is tenuous, indeed brittle. For the Harper government, as for the New Right as a whole, the enemy is not gender equality or feminism *per se* but rather the market inhibiting commitment to social justice that feminism participates in and advances.

## Neoliberalism and men's rights

It has become commonplace to identify economic neoliberalism as 'hegemonic' (Davies 2012: 3), and for political leaders, for example Prime Minister Stephen Harper (2006-2015), to declare the struggle to convince publics of its virtues as over (Harper 2003, as cited in Wells 2013: 57). Indeed, a stridently entrepreneurial market state that aims to govern more by market transactions than by elected officials is said to be sweeping the globe in 'a vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment' (Harvey 2007: 23). Strategically imagined, orchestrated and diffused by networks of right-wing and progressive think-tanks, this new governance strategy takes varying, multiple and contradictory forms and styles, ranging from the rhetorically inclusive social investment activation model that prevailed in Canada under the previous Liberal governments of Jean Chrétien (1993-2003) and Paul Martin (2004-2006), to the explicitly exclusive, authoritarian, hyper-punitive, hyper-controlling and hyper-politicized blend of fiscal and social conservatism advanced by Harper's reconstituted Conservative Party of Canada from 2006<sup>1</sup> until its loss in November 2015 to Justin Trudeau's Liberal Party (see also Aucoin 2012; Behiels 2010; Dobrowolsky 2008; Gutstein 2014; Mahon 2008; Mann 2014; Morrow, Hankivsky and Varcoe 2004; Snow and Moffitt 2012).

While all forms of neoliberalism 'essentialize the market' (Dean 2010: 187), the New Right version that held sway under Harper rejected the very idea of social justice. This rejection is rooted in the Hayekian principle that the idea of social justice is meaningless, unattainable, incompatible with liberty and pernicious (Hayek 1976; see also Bholat 2010; Drolet 2007; Gamble 2013; Gutstein 2014; Johnston 1997; Larner 2008; Lukes 1997). Importantly, this version of neoliberalism does not call for a return to nineteenth century *laissez faire* capitalism. Rather, it envisions and imposes forms of state intervention that enforce 'fiscal discipline, public expenditure redirection, trade and capital account liberalization, privatization, deregulation, and secure property rights' (Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett 2007: 457). Otherwise stated, it charges states with the task of doing whatever they can do, given prevailing contingencies, to unencumber the market and the private property rights, implicitly of global corporations, upon which the market depends. Specific to this is the task of dismantling established institutions, powers and narratives associated with twentieth century efforts to make a space for social justice, and a rewriting of political culture to accommodate this dismantling (see also Abu-Laban 2014; Brodie 2007; Davies 2012; Gabriel and MacDonald 2005; Harvey 2007; Kantola and Squires 2012; Knight and Rodgers 2012; Mann 2014; Palmer 2014; Phillips 2006; Rodgers and Knight 2011; Sawyer and Laycock 2009; Smith 2012; Strong-Boag 2014).

Men's rights emerged as part of the backlash against feminism and other social justice-oriented social movements in the late 1970s and early 1980s, coincident with the ascendance of neoliberalism. While some men's groups continue to ally with feminism and its goal of ending gender inequality and violence against women (Messner 2015), in legislative deliberations on family violence and family law, in academic literature, in print media and on the Internet, it is the voices of antifeminist men's rights advocates that are prominent. Across these arenas, men's rights advocates are vehement that men are equal or primary victims of family violence, and that their victimization is in large part a consequence of feminist-influenced laws that both deny men's victimization and demonize and disenfranchise men. Disparaging official statistics that unequivocally identify women and girls as the principle victims of intimate violence, and taking specific aim at Status of Women Canada, Canadian men's rights advocates and their so-called pro-family allies have long demanded that the Government of Canada either provide equal funding for specialized services for men, or cease funding advocacy and support services for women (for review and analysis of these arguments, see Bertoia and Drakich 1993; Boyd and Young 2002, 2007; DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2007, 2014; Dobrowolsky and Jenson 2004; Dragiewicz 2008, 2011; Erwin 1993; Girard 2009; Mann 2005, 2008, 2012; Menzies 2007; Minaker and Snider 2006; Rosen, Dragiewicz and Gibbs 2009; Snow and Moffitt 2012).

### **Status of Women Canada**

Status of Women Canada is a federal agency of the Government of Canada that was established in 1971 in the wake of the 1967 Royal Commission on the Status of Women (SWC 2013a). Similar to women's policy machineries across many western jurisdictions, Status of Women Canada was created to facilitate partnering in a broad-based government and community effort to address the structurally-rooted problem of women's inequality and 'end violence against women in all its forms' (Sinha 2013: 3). As stated on its 'Who We Are' webpage (SWC 2013b) when Harper was in power, Status of Women Canada existed to advance equality for women through sponsorship and coordination of efforts focused on 'increasing women's economic security and prosperity; encouraging women's leadership and democratic participation; and ending violence against women and girls'. These aims remained consistent with the work of Status of Women Canada from the 1970s forward, during which it functioned as a site through which feminists and feminist-sympathetic individuals and groups networked and strategized to enhance support services for women, conduct research, and lobby federal, provincial and municipal governments and the international community on a range of issues salient to gender inequality (Brodie 2007, 2008; Gabriel and MacDonald 2005; Jenson 2008; Kantola 2010; Kantola and Squires 2012; Mann 2008, 2012; Morrow, Hankivsky and Varcoe 2004; Rodgers and Knight 2011; Shaw and Andrew 1995; Weldon 2002).

As has been the case with women's policy machineries in Europe and Australia, Status of Women Canada has been subject to what is now a more than two decade-long succession of reductions to its funding and authority, reductions that ironically coincided with cross jurisdictional acceptance of gender mainstreaming as a policy goal (Bacchi and Eveline 2003; Brodie 2007, 2008; Dobrowolsky 2008; Gabriel and MacDonald 2005; Hankivsky 2008; Jenson 2008; Kantola and Squires 2012; Knight and Rodgers 2012; Morrow, Hankivsky and Varcoe 2004; Shaw and Andrew 2005; Teghtsoonian and Chappell 2008; Weldon 2002). In Canada, initial cuts were imposed by the Progressive Conservative government of Brian Mulroney subsequent to its ratification of the Canada-US Free Trade Agreement in 1988, a precursor to the Chrétien government-ratified 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). These treaties initiated Canada's official embrace of economic globalization, and were fervently opposed by Status of Women Canada-funded women's groups and sister organizations in the US and Mexico, opposition that arguably helped make women's policy machineries a prime target for neoliberal dismantling (see especially Gabriel and MacDonald 2005; Kantola 2010).

In Canada, the 'pinnacle' (Rodgers and Knight 2011: 573) to date of efforts to deinstitutionalize state feminism came in 2006, when the Harper government closed twelve of sixteen Status of Women Canada regional offices and removed, albeit temporarily, the goal of promoting equality for women from Status of Women Canada's mandate and more broadly from its website listings of priorities and aims. At the same time, the Harper government prohibited recipients of Status of Women Canada grants from engaging in research or advocacy, and began requiring that all Status of Women Canada-funded projects demonstrate that they contributed to the economic wellbeing of women. As part of this, it began imposing measurable outcomes and associated indicators of innovation and performance upon competing grant applicants and, for the first time in Status of Women Canada's history, extended funding eligibility to for-profit agencies (Knight and Rodgers 2012: 267). As others have observed, these actions served to de-radicalize women's service agency practices, and impeded service providers' efforts to promote not only equality for women but also social justice broadly. In effect, they called into being a new 'market state feminism' (Kantola and Squires 2012: 390) that personnel working in Status of Women Canada-funded services reportedly endeavoured to resist, but found themselves compelled to accept to survive (see also Phillips 2006; Teghtsoonian and Chappell 2008).

### **The Family Violence Initiative**

Established by the Mulroney government in 1988, and currently under the leadership of Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the Family Violence Initiative is the Canadian government's 'main tool for reducing family violence' (PHAC 2013). This one-time 'horizontally organized' (PHAC 2005: 2) initiative incorporates the work of fifteen federal departments, agencies and Crown corporations, including Department of Justice Canada (DJC), Statistics Canada and Status of Women Canada (PHAC 2013). These fifteen agencies share responsibility for working towards the goal of reducing family violence by 'promoting awareness of the risks associated with family violence', 'involving government, research and community partners in efforts to strengthen the capacity of systems to respond', and 'supporting data collection, research and evaluation activities' salient to effective intervention (PHAC 2013). According to the last Family Violence Initiative performance report (PHAC 2010), by 2008 the Family Violence Initiative had produced over 12,000 resources in partnership with provincial-territorial and local agencies, which it housed and disseminated through the online library of the National Clearinghouse on Family Violence (NCFV). Between 2004 and 2008 alone, this online library reportedly distributed more than 475,000 documents to individuals and organizations 'across the nation and abroad' (PHAC 2010: 24).

Similar to Status of Women Canada, the Family Violence Initiative experienced successive funding cutbacks from the early 1990s forward. This has undermined the capacity of the Initiative to meet its mandate (Brodie 2007, 2008; Mann 2008, 2012; Morrow, Hankivsky and Varcoe 2004; Weldon 2002). With the coming into power of the Harper Conservatives in 2006, and especially following the introduction of this government's new 'Results-based Management and Accountability Framework' in 2007 (PHAC 2010: 1), PHAC began to seriously transform, and dismantle, the Family Violence Initiative. As a first step, it began erasing violence against women as a crucial aspect of the family violence problem, evidenced in PHAC's updates to fact sheets and reports posted on various facets of family violence, and in its 2006 launched and subsequently 'archived' E-Bulletin series (see also DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2014). Then, in March 2011, while I was mapping this development for a previous publication (Mann 2012), comparing updated reports and factsheets with Health Canada generated versions I had previously downloaded, PHAC removed the 12,000 volume NCFV online library from the Family Violence Initiative website. I was informed of this in an email response to my query on the suddenly missing NCFV link (NCFV 2011, pers. comm., 28 March):

The previous library services of the NCFV have been discontinued and the external catalogue will be taken down shortly. Only a small physical reference

collection of Canadiana is being kept in a closed storage location. We suggest that former clients first consult their local or institutional libraries for resources. If necessary, the NCFV may provide limited services to our remaining collection, upon request.<sup>2</sup>

Subsequently, PHAC discontinued its E-Bulletin series (the last 'current' E-Bulletin was dated May 2012) and removed the three performance reports from the Family Violence Initiative home page, reports that chronicle the initiative's history, aims and achievements (Health Canada 2002; PHAC 2005, 2010). Moreover, it drastically reduced the number of downloadable resources posted on the Family Violence Initiative's 'View Resources' webpage (PHAC 2012a), reducing these from 105 in 2011 (see Mann 2012: 58), to eighteen in 2012. These eighteen resources continue to be posted under six links on specific aspects of family violence: 'Abuse of Older Adults' (n=1; previously 12 resources), 'Child Abuse and Neglect' (n=8, previously 28 resources), 'Child Sexual Abuse' (n=1, previously 15 resources), 'Intimate Partner Abuse Against Men' (n=1, previously 3 resources), 'Intimate Partner Abuse Against Women' (n=5, previously 20 resources), and 'Family Violence' (n=2, previously 27 resources). Beneath this six-category listing, in embedded text, PHAC inserted a link (displaced from its prior location in the main upper right hand menu) to a 'Family Violence Prevention Resource Center' webpage (2012b) that posted 224 other 'disclaimer' marked 'archived' resources. These were similarly grouped under six links or categories: 'Aboriginal' (n=21), 'Children' (n=78), 'Men' (n=3), 'Women' (n=61), 'Older Adults' (n=29) and 'Family Violence' (n=32) (see PHAC 2012a). In a markedly distancing statement, PHAC (2012a) described these as 'developed by other organizations, including Family Violence Initiative partner departments, provincial/territorial governments, research organizations and family violence prevention stakeholders across Canada'.

Finally, though the Family Violence Initiative website did not advise web visitors of this, it is important to note that several Family Violence Initiative partner departments continued to post selections of family violence-relevant resources that they or other federal agencies have generated, including especially Department of Justice Canada, Statistics Canada and Status of Women Canada. More noteworthy, and again PHAC did not advise web visitors of this, many of the 12,000 publications once disseminated through the NCFV remained available through the Government of Canada Publications archive (Government of Canada 2014), either as a downloadable document or as a bibliographic reference. Still available for download, for example, was Leslie Tutty's (1999) much cited *Husband Abuse* report, which situates then emergent concern over intimate abuse of men by women in the context of men's rights lobbying; Lupri and Grandin's (2004) counter report, *Intimate Partner Abuse Against Men*, which identifies abuse of men by women as a serious and ignored social problem; and a *Family Violence: Department of Justice Canada Overview Paper*, which notes that some believe vulnerability to abuse is fostered by 'webs of overlapping inequalities' (Department of Justice Canada 2009: 12). In contrast, as is the case with many publications generated under the leadership of Health Canada, the archive provided only bibliographic information on the groundbreaking 1993 report of the Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, entitled *Changing the Landscape: Ending Violence, Achieving Equality* (Vaillancourt and Marshall 1993). Other resources, including some that advance a strident 'men are victims too' perspective, had vanished completely. For example, the archive provided no trace of two reports previously posted on the 'View Resources' webpage under 'Intimate Partner Abuse Against Men', which draw upon Statistics Canada survey data to 'prove' women's violence is equal to men's (Laroche 2005, 2008).

### **Antifeminist lobbying and its impacts on Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative**

Initially, it appeared that the 2006 dismantling of Status of Women Canada's capacity to work towards promoting gender equality and ending violence against women and PHAC's

degendering and take-down of family violence resources were responses to men's rights and allied pro-(traditional) family lobbying. With respect to Status of Women Canada, as noted earlier in this paper, from the 1980s forward activists affiliated with groups that claim to speak for men and traditional women have lobbied federal and provincial governments to either withdraw funding from Status of Women Canada or provide men's groups with equal funding for gender specific anti-violence services, research and advocacy. Indeed, in 2006 the pro-family organization REAL Women initiated an Internet campaign to convince the Harper government to eliminate Status of Women Canada funding, alleging Status of Women Canada advanced 'only "the ideology of feminists"' (Ditchburn 2006; see also CanWest News Service 2006). As documented in press coverage of the Harper government's controversial decisions, that same year, to cut Status of Women Canada's core funding, reconstitute its mandate and impose new terms and conditions on grant applicants, many believed that the government had bowed to this lobbying. Drawing on a typical post-feminist 'we are all equal' (Brodie 2008: 145) stance, the Minister then responsible for Status of Women Canada, Bev Oda, emphatically denied the relevance of antifeminist pressures, while famously proclaiming, 'we don't need to separate the men from the women in this country ... the government as a whole is responsible to develop policies and programs that address the needs of both men and women' (Canadian Press 2006a; see also Brodie 2008; Mann 2012). When opposition parliamentarians demanded she resign (Canadian Press 2006b), Minister Oda redirected discussion to the government's commitment to advance women's interests through efforts that use 'taxpayer dollars ... for real action, doing something real', for example, proving funding for job counsellors at women's shelters and business advisors for women starting a small company (for full Oda quote see CanWest News Service 2006).

Turning to the Family Violence Initiative, as Jillian Walker (1990) and others note, antifeminist rhetoric and lobbying on family violence have shaped the discursive practices of the Family Violence Initiative from its establishment. However, the 1989 Montreal massacre of fourteen female engineering students by a self-proclaimed feminist-hating male influenced the government to heed pressures by women's groups to prioritize enhancement of both supports and protections for victimized women, and research into the root causes of wife battering and other forms of violence against women (Brodie 2008; Shaw and Andrew 2005; Weldon 2002). However, from the late 1900s forward Statistics Canada and other partnering Family Violence Initiative agencies faced increasing pressure to acknowledge, to measure, and even to foreground men's victimization. Clearly, a discursive shift towards a more degendered perspective on intimate partner abuse and other aspects of family violence was in evidence prior to the coming into power of the Harper government (for example, Lupri and Grandin 2004; Tutty 1999). This demonstrates that, as in the US, the UK, Australia and beyond, the Government of Canada was bending to demands that it rethink its commitment to prioritize research into the gendered determinants of family violence and funding for women's shelters and other feminist influenced protections for women and girls (Brodie 2007, 2008; DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2014; Dragiewicz 2008, 2011; Girard 2009; Mann 2005, 2008, 2012; Morrow, Hankivsky and Varcoe 2004; Rosen et al. 2009). According to men's rights advocates and 'Status of Women Canada's nemesis, REAL Women' (Brodie 2008: 158), said research and support services created a 'narrative of victimhood' that denied both women's agency and men's equal or greater victimization in family and other societal contexts (REAL Women spokesperson Diane Watts as cited in Canadian Press 2006b).

Exemplary of how pressures to degender discourse and practice on family violence have impacted the work of Status of Women Canada is a booklet that Status of Women Canada continued to post under its publications link for 'Ending Violence Against Women' (SWC 2014a). Entitled *Child Abuse is Wrong, What Can I Do?*, this Department of Justice Canada (2012) education and information resource uses scenarios to identify nine forms of child abuse and to specify appropriate actions that a responsible adult should take. Only two of the nine scenarios identify a female child as a more likely victim, or sole victim, while more than half position a

woman as a primary or complicit perpetrator. The two exceptions are 'violence based on so-called honour', in which 'the victim is usually female' (DJC 2012: 28) and 'female genital mutilation', which by definition is specific to females (DJC 2012: 30). The gender of the child victim is deemed irrelevant across all remaining examples, which include forced marriage, child sexual abuse, child abduction, physical child abuse, emotional child abuse, child discipline and child neglect.

The elision of gender in the *Child Abuse is Wrong, What Can I Do?* booklet and in other resources posted by various Family Violence Initiative partner departments through 2012 is striking. However, there are hints that efforts both to marginalize Status of Women Canada and to erase gender were fading, as glimpsed in three 'What's New' Status of Women Canada-produced resources on sexual violence against women and girls that were posted at the top of the 'Ending Violence Against Women' webpage in June 2014 (SWC 2014b, 2014c, 2014d). Rather than minimize or deny, these recent additions highlight that, with respect to sexual violence broadly (SWC 2014b, 2014c), and with respect to the emergent issue of cyberbullying and internet luring (2014d), 'women [and girls] represent the vast majority of those who are sexually assaulted and that gender is a fundamental determinant of sexual violence' (SWC 2014b, 2014c). Indeed, as clarified in a Statistics Canada publication posted below the 'What's New' box, in Canada women and girls are the victims in seven of every ten police-reported family violence incidents (Sinha 2013:13). More compelling, as annual crime reports by Statistics Canada repeatedly verify, in Canada women are the victims of eight out of every ten intimate partner homicides (Cotter 2014: 3). It remains to be seen when and if recognition of these once routinely recognized facts on the gendered reality of violence in relationships of intimacy and trust is restored to texts posted by the PHAC-managed Family Violence Initiative.

### **Synergy or instrumentalization**

The Harper government's 2006 through 2011 reconstitutions and diminutions of Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative should not be seen as targeted anti-woman or even antifeminist actions. Rather, they are part of a larger Hayekian-inspired and think-tank disseminated New Right effort across western jurisdictions, which is aimed at silencing a diverse range of governmental and non-governmental organizations that have advanced social justice goals 'in the courts and in the policy process' (Brodie 2008: 146; see also AuCoin 2012; Bholat 2010; Dean 2010; Drolet 2007; Erwin 1993; Gamble 2013; Gutstein 2014; Harmes 2007; Harris 2014; Harvey 2007; Knight and Rodgers 2012; Mann 2014; Marland, Giasson and Lees-Marshment 2012; Palmer 2014; Sawyer and Laycock 2009; Smith 2012; Stone 2001; Strong-Boag 2014; Young and Coutinho 2013). In Canada under Harper, as is repeatedly reiterated in scholarship cited in this paper and in the press (for example, Goar 2015), targets for elimination, diminution, demonization, intimidation and silencing included not only Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative, but also the Court Challenges Program, the Law Commission of Canada, the long-gun registry, the long-form census, the Canadian Wheat Board, the Kyoto Accord, all but two of nine Department of Fisheries and Oceans libraries, and more broadly environmentalists, government scientists, the judiciary, civil servants, private charities, progressive think-tanks and Conservative backbench parliamentarians. Indeed, individuals and organizations that raised concerns about specific legislative proposals, or more broadly about the deteriorating state of parliamentary democracy, environmental degradation, criminalization of the mentally ill, increasing social and economic inequality, persistent poverty, persistent racism, persistent sexism and so forth, found themselves dismissed as special interests, demonized as radicals, listed as enemies or expelled as traitors and excluded from policy deliberations (for accounts and critiques of these developments by one-time Harper advisors and supporters see Flanagan 2014; Gregg 2012; Rathgeber 2014).

Canada's diverse targets of 'creative destruction' (Harvey 2007: 26) found themselves under threat due to their real or imaged potential to impede the hyper politicized 'new political

governance' (AuCoin 2012: 178) agenda and strategy that the Harper government embraced. This strategy and agenda were constituted through what a growing number of commentators characterize as a richly funded think-tank-disseminated 'conscious, explicit and top-down effort to reshape the institutional framework of Canada's democracy and the public symbols and representations of Canadian history, citizenship, and identity' (Abu-Laban 2014: 215). Simply stated, Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative were among a host of imagined and real 'special interest' impediments to what this author (Mann 2014) and others (for example, Abu-Laban 2014; Behiels 2010; Gregg 2012; Harris 2014; Rathgeber 2014; Smith 2012) have characterized as a radical effort to reinvent, remake and transform Canada. Men's rights and related antifeminist advocacy were among a multitude of socially conservative entities whose aims contingently synchronize with this attempted makeover (on the funding of and role of right-wing think-tanks in imagining and diffusing this agenda and politics see also Dobbin, Simmons and Garrett 2007; Gutstein 2014; Harmes 2007; Harvey 2007; Morrow, Hankivsky and Varcoe 2004; Palmer 2014; Sawyer and Laycock 2009; Smith 2012; Stone 2001; Young and Coutinho 2013).

While Stephen Harper claimed to be both a values conservative and a fiscal conservative, and while he referenced Hayek and 'the Austrian school' in his graduate thesis at the University of Calgary (Harper 1991: 37), in practice Harper seemed willing to sacrifice socially conservative values and fiscal conservatism alike to accommodate political contingencies (see also Behiels 2010; Flanagan 2014; Harris 2014; Rathgeber 2014; Smith 2012; Wells 2013). Indeed, Mr. Harper has made it clear that he views incompatibilities between what he and others term the neo-cons and theo-cons as something to be managed through astute deployment of micro-targeted hyper-partisan messaging and message control, informed by knowledge of various components of the conservative base as gleaned through political market research (Marland, Giasson and Lees-Marshment 2012; Paré and Berger 2008; Smith 2012). A key element in this messaging and message control is the elite-bashing strategy known as 'market populism' (Mann 2014: 408). This 'anti-reflexive' policy strategy (Young and Coutinho 2013: 91) relies upon the manufacture and instrumentalization of misinformation and ignorance. Emulating and evolving successful deployments of this strategy in Australia, the UK and the US (McCright and Dunlap 2010; Sawyer and Laycock 2009; Snow and Moffitt 2012), Harper government spokespersons and Mr. Harper himself have repeatedly and virulently impugned the legitimacy of a number of institutionally authorized and respected 'stakeholder experts', including the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, Marc Mayrand, the former Auditor General of Canada, Sheila Fraser, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada, Beverley McLachlin (Harris 2014).

At the heart of this anti-reflexive strategy is the Harper government's and other New Right governments' embrace of an 'Orwellian' (Drolet 2007; Gregg 2012; Harris 2014) willingness to suppress and manipulate research evidence and to circumvent, abuse or when possible change political rules and democratic practices to accommodate this. This was in evidence in legislative hearings across policy domains, including, for example, in hearings on the anti-terrorism act of 2015 (Roach and Forcese 2015), the so-called *Fair Elections Act* of 2014 (Clark 2014), the *Citizenship Act* of 2014 (Wingrove 2014), and in an unabated outpouring of 'tough on crime' bills that contravene the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms that the Harper government continued to 'ram through' over the objections of justice stakeholders, constitutional experts and opposition parties (Mann 2014: 406, 415).<sup>3</sup> As Harris (2014), among others, notes, the Harper government has ridden roughshod over experts, evidence and the policy process so often that it has earned an international reputation for championing 'policy-based facts rather than fact-based policies' (Harris 2014: 104), and more broadly for undermining civil society and democracy itself.

Notwithstanding Mr Harper's 2003 Civitas speech championing Burkian social conservatism (cited in Behiels 2010; Gutstein 2014; Harris 2014; Snow and Moffitt 2012; Wells 2013), the aim of the government he headed was not to advance men's rights, pro-family or other socially



conservative interests *per se*. Rather, drawing on those who have cited this speech and others (for example, Harmes 2007), this government's key aim was to remove federal, provincial and civil society impediments to the free operation of the global market, including capacities to research and document social injustices that appear to be rooted in structures and institutions of inequality. Explicitly refusing invitations to 'commit sociology' (Harper 2013 as cited in Abu-Laban 2014: 2017; see also Singh 2014), the Harper government appeared to be committed to doing whatever was necessary to achieve its market enhancing goal. Specifically, its much decried assaults on reason, evidence and the democratic process, its elite bashing, its political market research-driven catering to social conservative sensibilities and its efforts to assure its base that Canada and its citizens increasingly share their values are part of what a Hayekian-inspired global New Right 'playbook' (Harris 2014: 42) prescribes. Drawing on the government's intent as framed by a parliamentary secretary in hearings on a 2012 enacted omnibus crime bill, these were simply part of what is needed to 'reverse the damage' (Mann 2014: 413) of the social justice institutional legacy of previous governments. Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative are part of this institutional legacy.

### Conclusion

For decades, in Canada and beyond, neoliberal governments have been pushing women's groups and the organizations that represent them to the margins, and men's rights and other antifeminist advocacy has been instrumental in advancing this. However, the voice of feminism or more broadly the voice of social justice has not been silenced. Rather, in Canada and other jurisdictions, equality-seeking groups continue to struggle to find a place from which to be heard amidst the complex and contradictory assemblages that make up the hyper-marketized state and civil society interface at our historic moment (Jenson 2008). While it is true women's groups are no longer 'encouraged, empowered and represented' (Gabriel and MacDonald 2005: 80), women's advocates and service providers and Status of Women itself have nevertheless retained a toehold in relations of ruling. As Knight and Rodgers (2012) also document, despite the necessity to engage in what Kantola and Squires (2012) term 'market feminism', women's advocacy and the larger social justice project they participate in is not defeated. Indeed, notwithstanding the implicit influence of anti-feminism in the restructuring of Status of Women Canada and the Family Violence Initiative, the Harper government's silencings extended as much to those who oppose women's equality and supports for abused women and girls as to feminism. For neoliberalism, or more specifically, for the New Right, the enemy is not gender equality or feminism; it is the market inhibiting commitment to social justice that feminism participates in and that it continues to advance.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Harper founded the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC) in late 2003 through a merger of the established Progressive Conservative Party and the more radically right Reform Party (renamed Alliance). Under Harper the CPC has formed three successive governments, two with minority mandates, the third with a majority (2006-2008, 2008-2011, 2011-2015).

<sup>2</sup> PHAC subsequently restored a link to the NCFV (see PHAC 2013). Instead of connecting to its once rich storehouse of 12,000 publications, however, the current NCFV link connects web visitors to a 'Stop Family Violence' webpage that hosts links to funding opportunities and provincial and territorial government supports and services (PHAC 2014).

<sup>3</sup> The Supreme Court of Canada has overturned several of the Harper government's crime bills (see also Fine 2015; Fine and Hannay 2014).

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