

Nowhere at Home: Gender, Race and the Making of Anti-immigrant Discourse in Canada¹

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ABSTRACT

This paper - part of a larger project - traces some identifiable and gendered shifts in anti-immigrant/refugee discourses in Europe, the United States and Canada during the 1990s. My case study of Toronto, Ontario - in particular, recent racist portrayals of Somali refugee women as welfare cheats and efforts by anti-racist groups to articulate counter narratives of immigrant rights - suggests, respectively, critical links with racist constructions of California, especially immigrant Los Angeles, and the need to develop longer-term anti-racist strategies.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article, qui n'est qu'une partie d'un plus grand projet, retrace quelques discours identifiables et les changements dans l'équilibre des sexes, les tendances des discours anti-immigrants/réfugiés en Europe, aux États-Unis et au Canada, durant les années 90. Mon étude de cas de Toronto, en Ontario, en particulier les descriptions racistes des réfugiées somaliennes, disant qu'elles fraudent le bien-être social, et les efforts entrepris par les groupes anti-racistes pour protéger les droits des immigrants, suggèrent, respectivement, qu'il y a des liens critiques entre les interprétations racistes de la Californie, surtout à Los Angeles où il y a beaucoup d'immigrants, et le besoin de développer des stratégies anti-racistes qui sont plus à long terme.

The overweening, defining event of the modern world is the mass movement of raced populations, beginning with the largest forced transfer of people in the history of the world: slavery. The contemporary world's work has become policing, halting, forming policy regarding, and trying to administer the movement of people. Nationhood - the very definition of citizenship - is constantly being demarcated and redemarcated in response to exiles, refugees, *Gastarbeiter*, immigrants, migrations, the displaced, the fleeing and the besieged. The anxiety of belonging is entombed within the central metaphors in the discourse on globalism, transnationalism, nationalism, the break-up of federations, the rescheduling of alliances, and the fictions of sovereignty.

- Toni Morrison, "Home"²

Imagine that you have forgotten your

house keys. You go home and find a family of immigrants sleeping on your floor. What do you do? Call the police, of course, and have them removed.

- Jean-Marie Le Pen³

INTRODUCTION⁴

In recent years in Europe, far-right parties with racist, anti-Semitic and anti-immigration agendas have moved from being small groups on the periphery to becoming large organizations taking up major political space. Noteworthy examples are Jean-Marie Le Pen and his followers, and the *Front National* in France, but there are others. The bombings not long ago in London, England - targeted directly at people of colour, Jews, and lesbians and gays - remind us that racist and homophobic violence continues to be a serious problem of everyday life in many European settings.

Canada has seen parallel, albeit less dramatic, developments. Recent polls have revealed unsettling levels of racist and

anti-immigrant sentiment. Hate groups, long a feature of the Canadian political reality, have renewed visibility. In response to brutal attacks on immigrants, anti-racist groups have emerged in some urban centres. The 1993 federal election, in particular, saw heated debate about immigration, provoked in part, as Yasmeen Abu-Laban observes, by the rise of the Reform Party, "coupled with an ongoing breakdown in partisan and elite consensus on the value of multiculturalism policy and its symbolism." Shortly after that election, and under pressure from Reform, the new federal Liberal government sponsored a hastily-organized and tightly-controlled cross-country series of public "consultations" on immigration. The Toronto forum, held in the spring of 1994, was the site of stormy interventions by the Toronto Coalition Against Racism and by members of the white supremacist Heritage Front. Not long after, the city was rocked by the murder of a white woman, Viv Leimonis, in the course of a robbery committed at a popular café. The suspects in Leimonis' murder were young, black, Caribbean-born men raised in Canada. An ugly public and media debate ensued in which some called for the collection of race-based crime statistics and the deportation of so-called "immigrant criminals." Sergio Marchi, the federal minister of immigration at the time, used the occasion to introduce new measures to locate and deport "foreign criminals."

Significantly, new limitations on the movement across borders have been led, not by the far right, but by more "mainstream" parties, including Canada's Liberal Party. This is evidenced in North American context by the increasing militarization of the US/Mexico and US/Canada borders and heightened concerns over "security" in relation to immigrants and refugees. Canada introduced landing fees (the "head tax") for immigrants and refugees despite significant opposition, including from some Liberal caucus members, and only removed the fee early in 2000. As many have observed, immigration policy is clearly moving to further restrict family immigrants while renewing the emphasis on so-called "independents," investors and entrepreneurs. A more recent proposal to exclude immigrants who do

not speak English or French has been withdrawn (for now ?) in the face of strong organized opposition, particularly in Vancouver. Restrictions on citizenship have also been proposed; while still the immigration minister, Marchi floated the idea that children born in Canada to non-citizens would not be Canadian citizens automatically.

Arguably, the United States has seen some of the most disturbing attacks on immigrant rights, including state-level initiatives such as California's Proposition 187. Despite an impressive mass mobilization to oppose it, 59 percent of the California electorate supported the measure which denied to the undocumented the basic human rights of public education and health care. Yet, such developments are not just isolated instances of right-wing populism; the US federal government has dramatically limited the rights of legal immigrants to public benefits. Calling it "the federalization of [Proposition] 187," the US-based National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights declared that "this Congress has dealt the immigrant community the worst blow to our civil rights since the exclusion laws of the 1920s and 30s."

There is now a large body of scholarship that documents the long record of racist biases in Canadian and US immigration policy and practice. As Lisa Lowe summarizes for the US case, and her remarks are equally applicable to Canada, "immigration has been historically a locus of racialization and a primary site for the policing of political, cultural, and economic membership in the US nation-state." In the light of disturbing new developments in immigration, Lowe argues that what we are seeing is, in fact, "a 're-racialization' of immigrants that constitutes 'the immigrant' as the most highly targeted object of a US nationalist agenda." She further contends that such measures have, as one of their primary results, the further exploitation of those, especially immigrant women, who are already marginalized in the lowest rungs of the US labour force.

In this article, I draw on Lowe's argument in order to trace some identifiable, and gendered, shifts in Canadian anti-immigration rhetoric during the 1990s. Since my focus throughout is on the

Toronto experience, I will begin with a discussion of the city's particular location in debates about immigration; I want to argue that the circulation of anxieties about crime in the city, and about Toronto's changing demographics, rely on prior racist constructions of California, and particularly of immigrant Los Angeles. I will then turn to an analysis of journalist Daniel Stoffman's article, "Dispatch from Dixon." This inflammatory article about Toronto's Somali community generated a storm of protest letters when it was published in *Toronto Life*, a mass-circulation glossy magazine geared to the city's upper-middle class. Since the piece is also characteristic of contemporary mainstream anti-immigration/immigrant arguments, it deserves close scrutiny. I compare Stoffman's text with an equally controversial one generated by the Intelligence Unit of the Immigration Department. It, too, was the object of an outcry, as well as the focus of organizing by Toronto anti-racist groups. Finally, I will conclude with some brief reflections on strategic issues facing immigrant rights groups.

Indeed, developments in the UK and continental Europe have raised important new questions for anti-racist activists and scholars. Is racism actually increasing? Is it taking new forms? Can we, in fact, speak of a neo-racism? While there is scholarly debate on all these questions, most agree that racism is far from dead and that there has been an explosion in talk about "multiculturalism, immigration and 'race'." A further, and related, set of questions asks about the relationships among racism, identities and "globalization," and about whether the new conditions demand new ways of theorizing about race. In Canada, much of the critical literature on immigration draws very heavily on a political economy theoretical tradition, and focuses on racialization, labour and the role of the state. The significant body of Canadian literature on immigrant women written from an anti-racist feminist perspective has sharpened the critique of nation that is implicit in a lot of this work, while also contributing a much-needed gender and race intersectionality analysis. At the same time, the Canadian political economy tradition has some significant weaknesses even for those who remain committed to a materialist

approach to immigration. As Sedef Arat-Koc has noted, it frequently slides into functionalism.

And while literature on immigration, global cities, nation and racism in the new economic and political conditions has begun to proliferate in other national contexts, in Canada there is still much room for more empirical and theoretical work to be done, especially from a comparative and global perspective. As Michel Wieviorka observes in his comparative discussion of racism in Europe, "the most usual frame of reference for any research about racism and race relations remains national," in part because national categories and contexts vary in important ways for understandings of race and immigration. Yet it also is clear that transnational and regional approaches are fundamentally necessary for, as Lisa Lowe comments, "The contradictions of the 'nation' are never exclusively bounded in the 'local'; rather, local particularisms implicate and are implicated in global movements and forces."

These new conditions, questions and theoretical considerations also raise major strategic issues for anti-racist activists. In many international settings, popular struggles over immigration, such as the mobilization to defeat California's Proposition 187, have re-emerged and provided an important arena for anti-racist contestation. Yet what literature that does exist on anti-racist organizing and strategy is far more likely to come from activist journalists and independent activist intellectuals; there is relatively little scholarly literature on independent anti-racist mobilizing in contemporary context. As Cathie Lloyd observes for the British case, and her comments are no less relevant for Canada: "Much theoretical literature about anti-racism does not address movements, but rather different levels of state policy." She contrasts this with the French instance where "independent anti-racist organizations remain at the centre of the debate, although government policies on 'integration' are also an important issue." There are relatively few examinations of activist, non-institutionally based anti-racist organizations, which include consideration of both the "written materials and practices" of these groups; cross-national

comparisons, such as Lloyd's own work, remain rare. In what follows, I in no way propose to address all of these gaps in the literature. Rather, my intent is to develop some preliminary analytic and strategic points for those interested in constructing anti-racist arguments and coalitions around immigration and immigrant rights.

THE 'CALIFORNICATION' OF TORONTO?

California, particularly large urban centres such as Los Angeles, appears in the new American anti-immigration literature as the epicentre of "multicultural madness." With its large numbers of Latino/a and Asian immigrants, and ongoing struggles over education, environment, urban youth, policing, language and *la migra*, this state embodies all the fears so central to anti-immigrant discourse: "we" are being taken over by uneducated, undocumented, non-English-speaking, non-white people who form criminal gangs, steal jobs and destroy the environment through their explosive fertility. That the demographic composition of California is shifting so that whites will likely form a minority shortly after the millennium has also figured in such arguments while simultaneously obfuscating the fact that whites continue to dominate politically and economically. In a critical review of two recent US books on immigration, Sanda Lwin talks about the right wing's fear of "Californication" - that the United States will, unless immigration is stopped, be doomed to experience all of California's problems as immigrants relocate from there to other parts of the nation: "once California falls, so too will Texas, Arizona, New York, New Jersey, and Maryland." The image of "fornication" within "Californication" is particularly important here since much of this anti-immigration discourse embodies fears about new patterns of permanent Latino/Latina settlement and family formation; patterns which mark a break from earlier ones in which Mexicans, for example, worked in California while maintaining families and residence elsewhere.

The striking image of "Californication," I argue, is also at work in recent constructions of

Toronto, particularly those that link the city with Los Angeles. At first, this comparison may seem off the mark, particularly given that it is Vancouver, with its "lotus land" image, and not Toronto, that is invoked in the same breath as California. This is the California of neo-hippies, New Age devotees, and organic food. But Toronto is linked with another constructed California: that of immigrants, youth gangs and crime. Media discussion of Toronto's Yonge Street "riot," for example, took place against the background of the 1992 Los Angeles riot. Even more striking was the "Latino gang" incident in late May 1999, when Toronto newspapers reported that the city's Latino community was hurt and outraged by an advertisement sponsored by the city's police union. Prominently displayed at a major junction in the city's subway system and during the lead-up to the Ontario election, the poster invoked racialized fears of crime and urban youth with an image of five Latino "gang members." "There's only one thing that these guys fear," the ad reads. "Your vote." It urged people to cast their ballots for candidates with a tough law and order agenda. The poster no doubt was also an attempt by the police to deflect years of criticism about systemic racism and brutality, while assuring that police budgets remain one of the few public expenditures not subject to slashing. That the poster was displayed in the subway, a space often referenced both as evidence of Toronto's multiracial character and a site of potential danger, is also significant. Typically, the police brass refused to accept criticism from Latino representatives and from some of Toronto's municipal councillors, arguing that they did not mean to scapegoat anyone. Yet the image in the poster is, according to the police union president, that of an East Los Angeles gang, which was precisely what angered spokespeople in the Hispanic Development Council and the Toronto Chapter of the Chinese Canadian National Council, two of the groups which spoke out against the police ad. Clearly central to the poster's "law and order" message is an assumed understanding of LA as the city "we" don't want to become but might become without full backing for the police.

The popular representation of Toronto as

the most diverse city on earth has become commonplace; it is cited as a UN fact and rarely scrutinized. The city, so goes a familiar narrative, was boring until the 1950s, when "the immigrants" came. In this narrative of "cultural enrichment," immigrants appear as individuals who bring something to contribute to the city and nation. In recent years, however, the ever-present underside of this narrative - that immigrants "threaten to tear apart the whole" through their difference - has once more gained prominence. It is, in part, a response to new demographic realities. Toronto receives more immigrants and refugees than any other centre in the country, and a majority are people of colour. This has generated millennial jitters along US lines: this past year, for example, the *Toronto Star* has inaugurated a series, "Towards 2000," devoted to examining the city's transformation to an urban centre in which the majority of members will be people of colour. In keeping with the paper's traditional liberal outlook, it oscillates between a rather weak analysis of racism and subtle suggestions that there may be some inherent limit to the racial, ethnic and cultural diversity that can peacefully co-exist in one city without imploding.

WHOSE CITY IS IT? DANIEL STOFFMAN'S "DISPATCH FROM DIXON"

If the *Star* series only hints at possible trouble to come, other Toronto publications are not so circumspect. Daniel Stoffman's highly contentious *Toronto Life* article on the city's Somali community, "Dispatch from Dixon," announces that big trouble is already here: "Toronto has become a haven for Somali refugees. More than 4,000 are crowded into six high-rise condominiums on Dixon Road. Many are highly educated and multilingual, but most are unemployed. Many are cheating the welfare system. Some are probably war criminals. Would it be unreasonable to ask how we created this mess?" Crammed into this single article are all the classic allegations against immigrants: discourses of disease (TB), drugs, overcrowding, criminality, indolence, welfare-cheating, and Oriental inscrutability all appear along with stereotypes about Muslims. By contrast,

"Canadians" (a category that is never specified) emerge as quiet, hard-working suckers with "the world's most porous refugee determination system."

As others have pointed out, the evidential base of Stoffman's article is profoundly flawed, based as it is on documentary material that Toronto newspapers such as the *Star* refused to publish. In an unpublished critique, Anna Pratt notes that Stoffman's article relies on a small number of interviews with individuals whose comments and allegations are unsubstantiated and sweeping. These are peppered with Stoffman's own conjectures, most of which seem deliberately designed to provoke. A sample: "It would be surprising if the rate of welfare abuse in the Somali community were not above average."

Daniel Stoffman is a Canadian journalist who co-wrote the bestseller, *Boom, Bust and Echo*. Several years ago, he spent a year looking at immigration on an Atkinson Foundation fellowship and later published some of his conclusions with the C.D. Howe Institute. From there, he went on to publish on immigration in mainstream, mass-circulation magazines such as *Canadian Living* and *Maclean's*. In many ways, he is the Canadian counterpart to the anti-immigration journalists and ideologues who have emerged in the US context, of which Peter Brimelow, author of *Alien Nation*, is probably the most well-known and influential on both sides of the Canada/US border. As Lawrence Chua points out in his review of Brimelow's book, the interest of commercial publishers is itself indicative of "the ideological climate in which we are living."

What is Stoffman's basic argument about immigration? In his view, we no longer need immigration for all the classic reasons of "national interest": nation-building; increasing the domestic consumer market; or fulfilling labour and skills gaps. But he is careful not to argue in favour of "closing down immigration." Rather, he wants "to manage it in such a way that it doesn't harm the people already here." While the article does not specify details, we learn from the editorial notes for the magazine that Stoffman actually means, "we've got to lower the numbers and be more

selective." Although he makes reference to the economics of immigration, Stoffman's main reason for limiting the numbers is not about economic needs, absorptive capacities, or the economic impact of immigration. True, he suggests that Somalis are unemployed in large numbers and disrespectful of others who aren't: "The Somalis are learning that they have to be quiet on hot summer nights *so those who work for a living can get their sleep*" [italics are mine].

Rather, it is allegations of welfare fraud and resource drain, together with a so-called "culture clash" between Somalis and what he calls "the Canadian mind," that emerge as the central themes in Stoffman's article. "Welfare, and the alleged abuse of it," writes Stoffman, "is the most troubling of all the issues involving the Somali community." Never does Stoffman clarify that because many Somalis are here as refugees, and thus ineligible for work permits according to federal rules in effect at the time of his research, they must take welfare. At the centre of the alleged abuse is the figure of the Somali woman. Stoffman quotes UBC sociology PhD candidate, Aweis Issa, as his source for the following unsubstantiated comment: "About eighty per cent of Somali women are single mothers. Does that make sense? They are taking advantage of the system. They are not really single mothers. They couldn't be, because they are still producing children.[!] They are set up as single mothers, because a single mother gets a bigger welfare cheque." In the first instance, this comment condenses many of the longstanding myths about women on welfare, regardless of "race" or immigration status, myths about women outside of patriarchal control who reproduce just to get a cheque.

Current versions of this myth take place within a highly racialized context. In Canada, as in the United States and Europe, the unwillingness of the state to continue to invest in social welfare has encouraged a rhetoric that blames immigrants for burdening a social welfare system already in crisis. US President Bill Clinton was able to make use of this sentiment to support the dismantling of benefits for legal immigrants. Moreover, much of this rhetoric is profoundly gendered with women's

reproduction represented as a particular burden on an already strained social welfare system. Hondagneu-Sotelo argues for the United States that the 1990s marked a repositioning of anti-immigrant narratives. "As recently as the early 1980s," she writes, "the principal claim fueling immigration restriction was based on the allegation that undocumented immigrants steal jobs from US citizens and depress wages." With Proposition 187, arguments about "illegals" did not disappear, but "the dominant narrative" nevertheless "shifted to public resource depletion." "In this scenario," she adds, "poor immigrant women are drawn to the US to give birth in publicly financed county hospitals, allowing their children to be born as US citizens and subsequent recipients of taxpayer-supported medical care, public assistance, and education."⁵

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo, this narrative shift reflects anxieties about changing patterns in Mexican-American labour and settlement, a "transformation from a predominantly sojourner or cyclical pattern of Mexican migration to the widespread establishment of Mexican immigrant families and communities throughout California." One reason why women and children are at the core of the new anti-immigrant rhetoric is that, "they are central to making settlement happen." Cathie Lloyd makes a similar point for contemporary France, although there the process evidently started earlier, during the 1970s, when "settlement and feminization of the migrant population" produced a "discernible shift" in the way people in France responded to "immigrants," particularly North Africans living in France. "From units of labour," writes Lloyd, "families 'become visible,' and thus the question of living together in close quarters becomes important." This is what explains Stoffman's preoccupation with overcrowding in the high-rises at Dixon; it reflects an anxiety about a large, visible and permanent Somali settlement - permanent because women are having children. And since he argues that immigrant labour is no longer needed to build the country, African immigrant "families" (read: women and children) become a particularly troubling presence.

As the opening epigraphs suggest,

although in profoundly different ways, discourses of nation and exclusion from the nation draw heavily on images of the domestic, the private and the familial. In his suggestive analysis of race and space, Phil Cohen remarks that, "the gendering of home, its invention as a space of threatened privacy and public intervention, is a necessary condition for its mobilization in discourses of racism and nationalism, and these discourses in turn reinforce the patriarchal closure." Immigrants are either seen to be taking up too much space, as in the case of racialized constructions of Asian immigrant "monster homes" in Vancouver, or too little, as in Stoffman's reading of "overcrowding" at Dixon: "Each unit is designed to accommodate three people comfortably, but many of those occupied by Somalis have six or more." "In a typical case," he adds, "two single mothers, each with three kids, each get \$1,000 rent money from the welfare authorities. They decide to share a two-bedroom apartment for \$1,000. That means that eight people are living in a unit designed for three, but \$1,000 in rent money is freed up for other things - nobody in authority ever checks to see that the rent allowance is actually used for rent." The fact that such living conditions are alleged to be occurring in condominiums, rather than in lower-income housing, is no doubt intended to further fuel the class anxieties of *Toronto Life* readers. Finally, Stoffman's reading of "overcrowding" rests on mobilizing implicit patriarchal concerns about "single mothers" (who may or may not be "real") as women without adult male household members.

As Pratt observes, Stoffman's article cannot be read as an "isolated text." For one thing, it was published during a period of widespread public debate about so-called "welfare abuse" and deepening class divisions in the city. In fall 1995, not long after Stoffman's article was published, the newly-elected Conservative provincial government cut welfare payments by 21.6 percent; the effect on the city's poor has been catastrophic. Second, Stoffman's "Dispatch" must be seen in the context of other printed attacks on Somalis, some of them official, circulated during the same period. Consider, for example, the leaked 1993 report that came out of the Intelligence Unit of the federal

Immigration Department. While this report made even more sweeping generalizations than Stoffman's article, its allegations of widespread welfare abuse to support clan warfare in Somalia are very similar. It argues that the majority of Somalis are not really refugees from war in Somalia, but rather part of an international organized crime network set up by Somali clan leaders that is "systemically pillaging our social systems." This is a particularly charged allegation given that Canada's social welfare system is widely identified with the project of the Canadian nation itself. "The Somali refugee movement to Canada is primarily financially motivated," the document reads. "It involves a conspiracy, on the part of clans, to defraud the Canadian people by taking advantage of the welfare system." So generous is our welfare system, the report claims, that "the profitability of welfare fraud in Canada far outweighs any prospect of legitimate fundraising."

Like Stoffman's article, the report understandably caused an uproar, particularly after then Ontario Liberal leader Lyn McLeod uncritically read parts of it in the Ontario Legislature. In a subsequent analysis, the *Toronto Star* noted that neither senior immigration officials nor welfare authorities could find any evidence to support the allegations which were being widely circulated in such tabloids as the *Toronto Sun* and the *Vancouver Sun*. In response, Stoffman wrote that the government report "provoked justified outrage" and then repeated the same bogus allegations, drawing on the *Vancouver Sun* to do so. Such acts reveal both the willingness of *Toronto Life* magazine to participate in anti-immigrant hysteria and the persistence of particular discursive (and circular) constructions of certain categories of immigrants.

For Stoffman, welfare abuse happens because many Somalis, based on their experiences in their country of origin, "think of all governments as enemies deserving of exploitation. They call welfare *shab*, which means money for nothing." In other words, they are drains on the nation's resources; they take but do not give and so are not capable of fulfilling the demands of citizenship. Such arguments about resource

depletion have not entirely replaced older, more straightforwardly racist (and paranoid) narratives of "foreigners," however. The federal immigration report thus "explains" Somali "welfare fraud" in the following terms: "The Somali people are adherents of Eastern philosophy and for the most part are adherents of the Muslim faith. They are a proud people who see the world in ways we, as westerners, do not understand and cannot appreciate fully. In addition, they are opportunists whose use of confusion and misrepresentation are unparalleled except by the gypsies of eastern and western Europe." "We will not be able to rely on them," the report adds, "to adhere to our western notion of honesty."

In a discourse highly similar to classical European anti-Semitism, Somalis here are simply "Other." For anti-Semites, Jews as well as Roma ("the gypsies") are identified as nomads who do not "belong" to any particular place. The implication is that they must therefore go around destroying nations to which they cannot belong but in which they reside. The high mobility of contemporary immigrants and refugees clearly provokes serious anxieties for nations intent on securing national borders and national definitions. Cohen comments, "If immigrants put down roots, if ethnic minorities make a home from home, then they are perceived to threaten the privileged link between habit and habitat upon which the myth of indigenous origins rests." "If, on the other hand," he adds, "they are forced to remain migrants, kept on the move through continual harassment and lack of legal protection or rights, then their 'nomadism' makes them a threat to the stability of the social order." In Stoffman's article, and in the Intelligence Unit report, this contradictory discourse is *resolved in gendered terms*: Somali women, the bogus single mothers on welfare, are putting down roots by overcrowding the condominiums of Dixon, while their highly-mobile men are darting around the globe funding clan warfare with their Canadian welfare cheques.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON STRATEGY

Neither Stoffman's article nor the report

from the Intelligence Unit of the Immigration Department went unchallenged. *Toronto Life* received a storm of letters protesting "Dispatch from Dixon" and, as we have seen, critical journalists and academics contested the evidence in both documents. Recognizing the power of mobilizing and building solidarity among the city's communities, the (now-defunct) Toronto Coalition Against Racism (TCAR) also worked closely with members of the Somali community to hammer out a series of demands, backed by a public demonstration at Queen's Park, in response to the Intelligence Unit report. Predictably, the coalition's demand for a full public inquiry into the "welfare fraud" report met with no official response.

The tenacity of anti-immigrant rhetoric, not to mention the ongoing limitations on the rights of immigrants and refugees in many jurisdictions, requires those committed to anti-racist work to address some critical questions. First, how do we respond to arguments that Somalis engage in welfare fraud or that immigrants in general are a resource drain? One response, a common one, is to discuss the research that demonstrates that, on both sides of the border, immigrants are less likely than the "native-born" to draw on social assistance. Yet, as Elizabeth Martinez comments, the argument that "immigrants are not a financial burden to taxpayers can be useful," but rather limited. "Do we really want," she asks, "the public to focus primarily on the net financial worth of a human being rather than on the need to provide human rights for everyone?" But there is another, broader problem, here.

Arguments for and against immigration are almost always heavily structured around the boundaries of the nation. Thus, for Stoffman, immigrants who (allegedly) no longer serve "the national interest" become a threat to the Canadian people. By contrast, those who defend the value of immigration and the rights of immigrants frequently do so within a discourse that emphasizes the newcomers' contributions, economic and cultural, to Canada. But it is precisely these constructions of the Canadian nation and the national interest that need to be

called into question, even when they are mobilized to counter anti-immigrant/immigration arguments. In a recent issue of *Social Text* devoted to these themes, Bonnie Honig argues that the fundamental difficulty with counter-discourses about the "gifts that foreigners have to offer" as citizens, workers, consumers and community-builders is that they still operate within a nationalist framework and thus are ultimately problematic. "*Nationalist xenophilia*," she explains, "*tends to feed and (re)produce nationalist xenophobia as its partner*" [italics are hers]. "Since the presumed test of both a good and a bad foreigner," writes Honig, "is the measure of his or her contribution to the restoration of the nation rather than, say, to the nation's transformation or attenuation, the myth of an immigrant America [or Canada] serves to secure the very identification of democracy with the nation-state that widespread immigration might otherwise usefully call into question."

In addition, arguments about the contributions of immigrants, while strategically important to a limited extent, are in no way sufficient to counter the particularly powerful combination of sexism/racism embedded in the "resource drain" thesis. Note, for example, the recent Mavis Baker case. In July 1999, as I was writing this article, the Supreme Court of Canada came down with a long-awaited decision regarding the 44-year-old Jamaican-born woman. Ms. Baker, according to press accounts, had been a resident in Canada for eighteen years and has four children, all of them Canadian citizens. She entered Canada to work as a domestic; when her visa expired, she decided to stay in the country. She applied for landed immigrant status but was refused and ordered deported in 1992. One of the critical issues at stake in the case was the construction by Immigration officials of Ms. Baker as a burden on the social welfare system. Not surprisingly, given the centrality of women's reproduction in anti-immigration discourse, the investigating officer revealed particularly strong anxieties about Ms. Baker's status as the mother of four Canadian children - writing this fact in capital letters in his notes - and then commenting, "Do we let her stay because of that? I am of the opinion that Canada

can no longer afford this kind of generosity" (*Toronto Star* July 10, 1999).

In a unanimous decision written by Madam Justice Claire L'Heureux-Dubé, the Supreme Court ruled that Immigration officials unfairly made "a link between Ms. Baker's mental illness [postpartum psychosis], her training as a domestic worker, the fact that she has several children, and the conclusion that she would therefore be a strain on our social welfare system for the rest of her life..." The decision also spoke of the "benefits of having a diversity of people whose origins are in a multitude of places around the world" and the need, therefore, for those making immigration decisions to carry out their work with "sensitivity and understanding..." (*Globe and Mail*). A key argument of Ms. Baker's lawyers was that the decision to deport her did not take into account the best interests of her children, Canadian citizens, and that the move would violate international agreements on children's rights to which Canada is a signatory.

In an editorial supporting the Supreme Court ruling, the *Toronto Star* (July 12, 1999) said it "strikes a fair balance between Ottawa's legitimate desire to enforce its immigration rules and Canada's international commitment to ensure that children are not separated from their parents." Immigrant rights activists, however, should draw very different conclusions. First, the editorial does not address Ms. Baker's fundamental human rights, or her rights as a worker, only the rights of her citizen children to a parent. Yet, she is one of thousands of Caribbean women who have come to Canada as domestic workers and whose labour has contributed enormously to the economy. She also is by no means the only domestic worker who has faced deportation because her labour was no longer wanted, and she and her children were deemed a burden by a system that does not take into account how and why immigrants come, and the rights of immigrant women to a living wage and to children on their own terms. And while there is much to celebrate in this Supreme Court ruling, it in fact resolved very little for Mavis Baker herself. Instead of being granted immediate permanent-resident status, she will have to apply

again to stay in the country on humanitarian and compassionate grounds - at a time when the federal government is proposing to limit this route to status. In the meantime, her desire to work and go to school cannot be fulfilled because of her status.

Second, the editorial does not speak to the contradiction between international human rights/children's rights agreements and the increasing preoccupation of nation-states with policing people and borders. Indeed, while legal decisions such as this Supreme Court ruling are important, they also remind us that popular mobilizing by anti-racist groups, as well as by women's and labour movements, to defend the rights of undocumented people such as Mavis Baker is becoming a pressing political priority. Such political work will require a fundamental re-thinking of the immigration debate, of "the nation," and of gender and labour (including reproductive labour) in an international perspective. As one US immigrant rights advocate wrote in the

wake of debates there about "legal" versus "illegal" immigrants, "by reframing our defense of the undocumented in the context of the continuing globalization of the economy and the permanence of the international migration of workers, we will be addressing our immigration issue more accurately... We need to question the free-flow of capital over national borders, while controlling the flow of labor that ensures the exploitability of workers" [ellipsis is mine] (Galeo 1996). Without such an approach - one which must also include a gendered analysis of how women immigrants in particular are constructed as drains on the nation's social services, and how non-citizen mothers of citizen children are made invisible - more women in circumstances similar to Mavis Baker's will find themselves barred and deported as Canada becomes increasingly concerned with the "security" of its national borders and the "integrity" of the immigration system.

ENDNOTES

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2. In Wahneema Lubiano, ed., *The House That Race Built*. New York: Vintage, 1998.

3. Cited in Phil Cohen, "Homing Devices." In Vered Amit-Tilai and Caroline Knowles, eds., *Re-Situating Identities: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity and Culture*. Peterborough: Broadview Press, 1996, p.70.

4. There are a large number of endnotes in the original version of this paper. Readers interested in them may contact me at: Prof. Cynthia Wright, Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies, New College, University of Toronto, 40 Willcocks, Toronto, Ontario M5S 1A1. For reasons of space, I will indicate here only those sources which were particularly important in developing my argument.

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5. Of course, fears about immigrant reproduction and about "resource drain" have long been a feature of anti-immigrant rhetoric in Canada, and were mobilized to restrict the entrance of significant numbers of racialized women into the country until after the Second World War. The Chinese-Canadian example is well known. The dismantling of the Keynesian welfare state, together with the increased numbers of immigrant women of colour able to settle permanently in Canada, have revived old racist arguments in a rather different context.