



LIFE AFTER NEOLIBERALISM IN CANADA: HOW POLICY CREATES HOMELESSNESS AND HOW CITIZENSHIP MODELS FAIL TO PROVIDE SOLUTIONS

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The prevailing philosophy of neoliberalism is the ultimate cause of the recent rise of homelessness in Canada's cities. Neoliberal philosophy not only informed the decision to eliminate Canada's federal Affordable Housing policy, it has allowed the continuing neglect of public housing support despite the tragic consequences and it has motivated decades of other social welfare cuts. As well as destruction of the welfare state, neoliberalism in Canada is also characterized by laissez-fair economic policies which increased the competition Canadian businesses had to face and significantly decreased the number and quality of "blue collar" jobs, especially in Ontario (Luxton, 2013, p. 4) (Conway, 2004). Core ideas of neoliberalism such as conceptualizing the citizen as a competitive rugged-individualist and endorsing down 'trickle-down' economics have eroded what national sense there was of universal basic economic security rooted in the wealth of this land, the beauty of its cultures and the value of its people. This paper specifies how neoliberalism deepens the marginalization of specific segments of the Canadian population to the extent that they are excluded from housing and how social support models based in citizenship have failed us.

Keywords: Homelessness, Neoliberalism, Inequality.

Introduction

The prevailing philosophy of neoliberalism is culpable, more than any one policy, process or decision is for the rise of homelessness in Canada's urban centers over recent decades. Neoliberalism not only informed the decision to eliminate Canada's federal Affordable Housing Program, it falsely justifies the continuing neglect of the core social role of housing support and it has motivated decades of other social welfare cuts despite evident tragic consequences.

My research draws the causal connections between neoliberal ideology and the growth of homelessness in Canadian cities since the 1990s. Several decades into the era of neoliberal policy-making it is now evident that neoliberalism allows and supports the expansion of wealth of those who were already advantaged when this process began, at the expense of other members of our society who are disadvantaged in a variety of ways. When we address how neoliberalism deepens the marginalization of specific segments of the Canadian population, it becomes evident that social support models based in citizenship have failed to save us from the negative impacts of neoliberal policy. This analysis is part of a larger study which specifically analyses the demographics, costs of living and homelessness in three Canadian cities: Ottawa, Toronto and Winnipeg.

Homelessness

The latest figures show that 200,000 Canadians experience homelessness each year (Gaetz, 2013, p. 5). 30,000 people are homeless on a given night as summarized in table 1, and there are up to 50,000 hidden homeless on any given night (Gaetz, 2013, p. 5). The hidden homeless refer to those people who are finding temporary shelter with friends, family or acquaintances for an indefinite amount of time. The numbers in table 1 below are the calculations of a well-established Canadian homelessness researcher who has gathered data from cities, shelters and others who work and study in this field, as Canada does not yet conduct a nation-wide enumeration of homelessness. “Temporary institutional accommodations” tabulates people residing briefly in places such as jail cells or hospital beds who have no residence to return to.

Table 1: Numbers of Homeless People in Different Locations a Given Night.

Not sheltered	In emergency shelters	In violence against women shelters	Temporary institutional accommodations
2,880	14,400	7,350	4,464

Source: Gaetz et al., 2013:5

Homelessness tends to reoccur. Even short episodes of homelessness can have long-term health consequences, contribute to job loss, and also negatively impact children’s success in school. This level of social stress within the Canadian population is already going to have very serious long-term consequences but in cities across the country there are few, if any, signs of improvement.

The increase in homelessness which occurred between the 1980’s and the beginning of the 21st century reflects higher levels of poverty (Laird 2007:5) but the distribution of deprivations is complex and uneven across the Canadian population. Social structures of gender, racialization, disability barriers, and colonialism are shaping who becomes homeless. Neoliberalism has polarized income levels in Canada and has shoved thousands of members of disadvantaged groups so far to the margins that basic human needs can no longer be met.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism has been the guiding political philosophy in Canada since the 1980’s (Brodie, 1996, p. 5). It has been identified variously as a significant change in state form guided by political consensus (Brodie, 1996, p. 4) as a “regime-change” (Habibov & Fan, 2007), a transition to corporate rule (McBride S., 1997) and as a reversion to modernizations theories’ assumptions (from the 1960’s) that increased productivity and economic growth will enhance human well-being (Broad & Antony, 2011). This change, however it is identified, was a very significant retrenchment of the already powerful segments of the population which carry social advantages based in gender, class, ethnicity and relationship to colonialism (Shalla, 2011; Adrian, Stenning, & Willis, 2008; McBride & Shields, 1997. For the purposes of this analysis, Breitrueez’s description of neoliberalism’s impact on the citizenship model as “moving Canada from a model of social citizenship, where all citizens are entitled to a base level of benefits, to a model of market citizenship, where citizenship entitlement is contingent upon a person’s attachment to the labour market” (2005, p. 148) is especially relevant. Globally,

nationally and in policies of Canadian provinces, politicians have persisted in following principals of neoliberalism despite the personal and international economic crises which are resulting from those principles (Blad, 2011) (Luxton, 2013) (Weaver, 2011). There is insufficient recognition that a significant rise in numbers of homeless people in our population is an outcome of these decisions.

Neoliberal economic theory promotes government deficit- reduction through cuts to social supports provided by government, privatization of crown corporations, and deregulation in terms of loosening of trade restrictions (Willis, Smith, & Stenning, 2008) (Willis, Smith, & Stenning, 2008, pp. 1-3).

Sociological analysis of the consequences for individuals in Canadian society reveals both advantages and disadvantages, such as those shaped by gendered, racial and colonial inequalities, are amplified in the context of a neoliberal policy environment. In this paper I proceed to link examination of Canadian neoliberalism's market-deregulation impacts upon employment and social service cuts, with an understanding of the dynamics of gender, racialization and colonialism to reveal a chain of causality from neoliberal ideology to the experience of inadequate housing and homelessness lived by members of specific social groups in this country.

Employment and Social Inequality

Neoliberal theory dictates deregulation of markets to support economic growth through maximum flows of money and goods. Canadian governments have embraced this idea enthusiastically with free trade agreements including the Free Trade Agreement and the North American Free Trade Agreement. Fairly steady economic growth measured by gross domestic product has been achieved, but the price has been increased unemployment and polarization of the job market.

The labour market impacts from following neoliberal philosophy are complicated and variable, depending on which indicators and which segment of the labour market you consider, but in Canada the negative impacts are evident when you focus on less-advantaged members of the population. In the OECD rankings of income inequality, Canada is the country with the most rapidly worsening situation since the mid-1990's (Yalnizyan, , 2013). Between 1996 and 2001 less-educated members of the working population were the employees most negatively affected by wage declines, and greater import competition was partially culpable for the growing wage gap (Breau, 2010, pp. 1980-81). Wage inequality in Canada is stratified in a variety of ways as average earnings recorded in the 2010 census and indicated in Table 2 below. While enough to show some general patterns, this is only the most basic-level of analysis as in the Canadian job market, the less-advantaged have included women, Aboriginal people, newcomers, members of visible minority groups, people with disabilities, people with health problems and young people who lack work experience. Furthermore, it is evident from intersectional analysis that multiple identity factors influence economic and social outcomes deepening disadvantages or counter-acting them depending on the specific context being considered.

Table 2: 2010 Average employment incomes in Canada:.

Identity	Males	Females	Aboriginal people (including status, non- Status, Métis, Inuit)	Visible minority people under census equity categories
Average wage	\$52,026.	\$35,523	\$27,129.	\$23,345.

Source: Statistics Canada 2011 National Household Survey

In theory, we have been making a shift from an industrial economy to a “knowledge economy” in an effort to stay competitive, but there have been waves of negative impacts upon Canadian workers depending on their education, and their position in relation to social structures like gender and immigration status. In Canada between 1980 and 2000, having a university degree became more important for earnings, relative to workers without a degree (Boudarbat, 2006). This was even more strongly true for women than for men (Luxton, 2013)(Boudarbat, 2006:287), but Aboriginal women have not gained equivalent quality of employment to white women of equal education levels, nor have newcomers. Overall, rather than increasing the numbers of better-quality jobs, many workers are experiencing what Broad and Antony describe as the “casualization of labour” which has them coping with degraded, de-skilled contract work (Broad & Antony, 2011, p. 30). Wages for the highest two quintiles of earners have increased but have decreased for the bottom three quintiles and the bottom end have decreased relative to the cost of living. Yalnizyan (2013: 5) notes: “The poorest 40% of working-age Canadians are living on less after-tax income, in inflation-adjusted terms, than their counter-parts in the mid-1970’s.” Social supports are a factor as we see in the next section but the neoliberal push has shaped work inequality.

“Work is a cultural site that reproduces racial inequality and white privilege in Canada.” (Creese, 2011, p. 202). Creese relates this phenomenon to the combination of globalization and a variety of social structures to explain that discounting of immigrants post-secondary credentials and professional skills has worsened over time (201). She and other researchers also acknowledge social structures of gender which generate advantage and disadvantage as primarily women continue to be responsible for social reproduction. In addition to this inequality, with labour force interruptions and late-arriving equity policies, women have often been more recently hired, and thereby more vulnerable to firing in times of low demand.

In Canada (like in the United States and Great Britain) neoliberal policies have caused a rise in the long-term employment rate as well as higher rates of profit for large corporations (Broad & Antony, 2011, p. 29). Losing tariffs and other border-protections for Canadian companies increased the competition Canadian businesses had to face and significantly decreased the number of “blue collar” jobs in this country during the 1990’s especially in Ontario (Conway, 2004). There has been an increase in service-industry employment opportunities but flexibility has been off-loaded to the workers who can access fewer benefits and less employment security (Shalla, 2011). The US-centered economic crash of 2008 also speaks volumes about workers’ and investors’ need for regulation. Braedly and Luxton summarize the consequences: “In four months prior to March 2009, 295,000 jobs were lost in Canada (Statistics Canada 2009)” (Luxton, 2013, p. 4).

Liberalism and human capital theory have made a grossly inaccurate portrayal of *laissez-faire* economics as fostering a fair, competitive meritocratic system in which intelligence, knowledge and hard work stratify opportunity and advancement in the work place. This strongly-ideological perspective has been employed over and over in Canada to justify deep cuts

to government spending on social supports. I return to the theoretical debates after a summary of what has happened to social services since the 1970's.

Deprived Patterns of Social Welfare in Canada

The steady destruction of social welfare began decades ago and reductions of government spending on social supports have become deeper and deeper as, guided by neoliberalism, the policy priorities were debt reduction and low tax-rates rather than human well-being. 1984 marks the key turning point for social housing policy when, under the Mulroney Conservatives, the federal government stopped new funding under the National Housing Act and shortly thereafter ceased low-income housing support altogether.

When a UN Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Miloon Kothari, visited Canada in 2007, he called for immediate action, and expressed shock at the lack of respect for the right to adequate housing in a country as developed and wealthy as Canada. He called for Canada to: "commit to a comprehensive national housing strategy with stable and long term funding" (Kothari, 2009, p. 2). He also expressed concern about women being disproportionately affected by poverty, housing affordability and homelessness, noting that Aboriginal women face some of the worst barriers to securing safe and affordable housing (Kothari, 2009, pp. 18,22). The UN Special Rapporteur urged Canadian governments not only to include Aboriginal governments in the process of developing housing strategies, but also to work with Aboriginal people for timely resolution of outstanding land claims (Kothari, 2009, pp. 25-57).

The homelessness Canadians have witnessed and experienced starting in the 1990's are the cumulative result of not only the federal government abandoning social housing, but also of a more general destruction of Keynesian welfare state institutions, along with chronic gaps in that system. The 1990's were brutal in terms of reductions in social supports. Provinces gained social housing responsibility at roughly the same time as they lost a total of 3 billion in federal- support dollars for health, education and welfare programs. In the period between 1984 and 1993, the federal government stopped supporting construction of any new social housing units and downloaded responsibility for all social housing onto the provinces (Donnan, 2005). Social housing units were not provided on the reserves set aside for First Nations during the 1970's as they had been elsewhere, and the federal government had failed to provide basic infrastructure like running water and sewer on hundreds of reserves, leaving people at risk of serious water-borne illness that other Canadians did not fear (First Nations Information Governance Centre, 2012, p. 50). Certainly structures of inequality predate neoliberalism in Canada but neoliberal policy widens the gaps between the people whose success is supported and those who are left to fend for themselves.

Between 1992 and 1993, Liberal Finance Minister Paul Martin eliminated \$1.2 billion from transfer payments to the provinces (Shapcott, 2004, p. 199). When the Canadian Assistance Program which used to be the mechanism for redistributing federal tax dollars in support of basic provincial social services (like health services, welfare and education) was eliminated in 1995 and replaced with the Canadian Health and Social Transfer, another 1.8 billion was eliminated from provincial transfers (Shapcott, 2004, p. 199). Minimum wage levels were frozen below what is needed for living in reasonable comfort. All provinces opted to make welfare payments punishingly low and the national unemployment insurance plan was redesigned to exclude part-time, temporary and many other workers from the opportunity to receive benefits.

Consequently, during the 1990's people in economic difficulties in Canada effectively lost the main social supports once designed to help people transition through such difficulties as job

lost, family breakup, illness and injury (Peressini, 2009, p. 375). As the 1990s progress the combined effect of policy change and social structures is that the duration and quality of employment opportunities became worse for much of the Canadian population. By the mid-1990's unemployment insurance had stopped providing benefits to segments of the work force that had the most difficulties getting good-quality jobs: especially newcomers, Aboriginal people, women, new parents and students. Workers who are marginalized by Canadian social structures like gender and racialization are much more likely to have multiple part-time, short-term contract jobs with no benefits (see Fernandez, 2012). Although everyone continues to pay into these employment insurance schemes, only full-time workers who have been at the job for a long time, who are laid off through no fault of their own, are not in school, and can prove they are very actively job-searching, have any hope of collecting that insurance. Meanwhile the job market is relatively unstable and even university-educated employees are vulnerable to corporate bankruptcies and other work interruptions. People survived by using up their savings if they had some and individual debt-loads increased in the process of meeting basic needs like food, medications, heat and shelter because other government sources of support also dried up. Each time there was a loss of income (from staff reductions, family-breakup, serious illness, child-care shortage or other naturally-occurring events) families were pushed closer to eviction from their dwellings or into less safe and suitable quarters.

The aforementioned reduction in transfer payments from the federal to the provincial order of government meant a freeze in social service cheques while inflation brought cost-of-living increases every year. Although social services in Canada are administered provincially, there has been consistency in that all of the provinces and territories set welfare rates below what individuals and families would need in order to survive. The National Council of Welfare and the Caledon Institute have monitored the extent to which basic household needs could be satisfied by people on welfare across the country (see for example: Tweddle, Battle, & Torjman, 2013). Canada is a country of regions with fairly significant variation so there isn't a single poverty line which is useful. A regionally-sensitive measure for estimating a household's abilities to meet basic needs like healthy food, adequate shelter, heat and clothing is the "Market Basket Measure". Table 3 illustrates the sizeable gap between what welfare provides in two very different Canadian Cities and people of five different welfare categories in their respective provinces.

As the numbers in this example indicate individuals and families find themselves thousands of dollars short of being able to house, feed and clothes themselves. Being on welfare has become a desperate situation as under terms of the programs liquid asset exemptions are minimal and these people have literally, nothing else to live on. Homelessness in Canada is no longer a phenomenon of the single male. Shelter providers in Ontario cities have been dealing with increased numbers of homeless families with children, and families who need shelter for longer periods of time. In Toronto, hostel admissions of homeless families with children increased by 76% between 1988 and 1996 (Cooper, 2004:96).

Table 3: Comparison of 2012 Welfare Incomes with Market Basket Measure (MBM).

	Total Welfare Incomes	MBM	Poverty gap	Welfare income as % of MBM
Ontario				
Toronto				

Single employable	\$8,067	\$17,259	-\$9,192	46.7%
Person with disability	\$13,772	\$17,259	-\$3,487	79.8%
Single parent, one child	\$18,598	\$24,407	-\$5,809	76.2%
Couple, two children	\$24,944	\$34,517	-\$9,573	72.3%
Manitoba				
Winnipeg				
Single employable	\$7,037	\$15,272	-\$8,235	46.1%
Person with disability	\$9,640	\$15,272	-\$5,632	63.1%
Single parent, one child	\$15,018	\$21,597	-\$6,579	69.5%
Couple, two children	\$21,819	\$30,543	-\$8,724	71.4%

Source: Tweddle, Battle, Torjman for Caledon Institute 2013 pg 53

Over the last fifteen years, the national governments frequently used “stealth strategies” in which the rhetoric of new, insubstantial programs disguised further cuts and undermining of social service supports. Overall, like with the employment impacts of neoliberalism, we see an uneven, regressive pattern in which the already-advantaged, wealthier Canadians receive supports and those arguably most-in-need-of public help are denied them. Canadian governments over the last twenty years have supported private home ownership and renovation through federal programs such as the First Time Homebuyer’s Plan, a first-time home buyer’s tax credit, home renovation tax credit, a government-backed mortgage insurance framework, and a variety of provincial tax-return programs but the governments programs avoided rebuilding the supports which could have helped to house families whose low incomes prevented them from becoming home buyers.

For the most part, short-term neoliberal thinking led to more short-term strategies. After the Canadian Federation of Municipalities declared homeless to be a national emergency in 1998 and begged for restoration of federally sustained social housing, the Liberal government who were then in power under Jean Chretien responded only with funding to help cities provide temporary shelter to the growing numbers of homeless. That program, called the Supporting Community Partnerships Initiatives (SCIPI) was not substantive enough to meet even the immediate shelter needs and funding continued to be insufficient as the Conservatives replaced the Liberals in parliament (Shapcott, 2004, pp. 204-05). To the great frustration of civil servants and service providers, restrictions under the SCIPI program prevented communities from using federal funds for affordable- housing construction. That program was renamed the Homelessness Partnering Strategy in 2007, and renewed for five years starting in 2014. In the meantime, social housing programs were really struggling under the burden of overwhelming need for capital input to allow new construction plus inadequacy of funds for annual upkeep. Kotharai (2009:15) noted that revenue figures revealed federal housing spending to be at its lowest in 2007 since 2003. He also observed that the portion of Canadians housing stock that

was publically owned was only 5% compared with 40% of housing in the Netherlands and 22% of housing in the UK and Sweden (Kothari, 2009, p. 14).

A more significantly constructive measure finally came with the Investment in Affordable Housing (IAH), which began in 2011. IAH is a program for cost-sharing of improving housing affordability. With the existing social housing stock aging badly and no new construction to meet the growing need for a decade, the funds available under IAH were insufficient did not amount the substantive national strategy required. In 2013 the IAH was renewed. An annual commitment of \$253 million is judged by experts to be less than half of annual funds needed to meet the need (Shapcott, 2013). Perhaps a more important success is that a “Housing First” response to the combined dilemma of mental illness and homelessness was acknowledged (after a strong push from policy advisors) by the government as the best way to proceed.

Canada’s housing concerns continue. A recent Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development report expressed concern about the debt-load of Canadian homeowners and that housing prices represent financial stability risks in some cities (OECD, 2014). The FCM has also continued to exert what pressure it could to secure much needed long term support from both federal and provincial orders of government towards affordable housing construction (Federation of Canadian Municipalities, 2014).

Other losses of social programs and punishing policies have made life even harder in the last twenty years for especially vulnerable people like women and children fleeing an abusive male. There are not nearly enough temporary shelters or transition homes to meet the need and give families who have been victimized by violence a secure place from which to rebuild their lives. University education is becoming less affordable because costs are rising but bursaries and student loans have not kept up. The next generation of children in low-income families are experience new forms of exclusion with little reason to believe that things will get better.

All orders of government continue to be under pressure to respond more effectively to the housing crisis in Canada.

Untangling ideology from causality: why homelessness in the midst of prosperity?

If neoliberalism were true, those who became too poor to be tenants of suitable, safe and affordable housing would be the those unwilling to work, lacking in ambition or intelligence and/or the least educated members of society and homelessness who impact people equally regardless of their parent’s income, gender identity, cultural origins and/or position within a family. The Canadian economy has been consistently strong since the 1980’s. From 1997 to 2007, the richest 1% of Canadians took home about 32% of all growth income gained here while growth in average income collapsed (Yalnizyan, 2010, p. 8). Tax levels for the richest Canadians were reduced dramatically so that the extent of the polarization is something we had not seen before: “Between the mid-1970s and 2007 the share of income accruing to the richest .001% Canadians more than quintupled” (Yalnizyan, 2010, p. 13). The highest-end tax rates, (those for people earning more than \$126,264 in a year, averaged across the provinces) dropped from 80% in 1942 to 42.92% (Yalnizyan, *The Rise of Canada's Richest 1%*, 2010, p. 16).

The growing homelessness within today’s Canadian cities is not primarily that of the itinerant male with an addiction problem. Rather, there have been growing numbers of working individuals, families, and women. Newcomers and aboriginal people are significantly over-represented relative to their proportion of the population and this has been the case for many years (see (Murdie, 2004); (Palmer, 2011); (National Aboriginal Housing Association, 2009)). The National Aboriginal Housing Association estimates that in 2006 more than one-third of the

Aboriginal population in Canada lived in unsuitable, inadequate or unaffordable housing compared to 18% of the non-Native population and this gap was higher (at 20.4% and 12.4%) in the urban populations (Belanger & Weasel Head, 2012, pp. 4,13) (. The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association in 2011 found that 18% of immigrants and 26% of lone parent families, compared with almost 13 % of all households did not have affordable, suitable, and adequate housing (Canadian Housing and Renewal Association, 2011). These patterns echo the social structures of inequality in Canadian society which neoliberal theory fails to acknowledge with its presumptions of fair competition and deserving rewards as characteristic of the labour market.

In order to understand this situation we need intersectional analysis with particular focus on structures of colonialism. For example, data shows that aboriginal women are significantly less likely to reap the rewards of education, ambition and sheer effort in terms of their incomes. The social factors which structure people's choices, impact upon their career, their health and outcome of their efforts are numerous and contradictory but the combination of intersectional analysis and anti-colonial analysis takes us a long way into understanding which factors create significant levels of marginalization.

The Canadian economy has been thriving. All reasonable expectations of human rights and governance would demand better policy outcomes than what neoliberalism produces in Canada. Deregulation and problems of distribution of wealth are plaguing this country.

It is also worth noting that citizenship's status does not have efficacy to deliver humane outcomes in the onslaught of neoliberal policy. Discursively, if not in reality, citizenship once carried an expectation of a reasonable share in the resources, the decisions and the cultural life of a nation, but even the authors of such notions, such as TH Marshal (Marshall, 1992) were making assumptions that the citizen was a white male supported by the unpaid labour of female caregivers at home and minimally-paid workers elsewhere (Lister, 2003). Contemporary citizenship however is sufficiently captive of neoliberalism for its flaws to be clearly revealed. Ultimately citizenship fails to inform policy towards reasonable outcomes in affordable housing because citizenship is carrying liberal assumptions of equal, masculinized and culturally-advantaged identities for all citizens. In the neoliberal era, citizenship (despite efforts like that of Lister's to revive its meaning) completely failed to respond to the social structures which create and expand inequalities between advantaged and marginalized aspects of identities. We need an honest framework which acknowledges how gendering, racialization and the persistence of colonialism are shaping opportunity and limiting support.

This paper has discussed how social stratification was deepened by policy changes which removed supports needed by specific segments of the population. Other supports like affordable child care, economic development in Northern communities, infrastructure and education on reserves and transitional supports for non-European immigrants were never developed properly but have a greater impact now with low-wage work and inadequate welfare levels blocking opportunities for personal economic improvement. The neoliberal model of citizenship individualizes responsibility acknowledging people of Canada as only autonomous income-earners, while failing to credit many of us as entitled to a share of the bounty of a resource-rich country when we are in need. Ironically the ancestors of our original people in Canada have been historically the most-deprived of opportunities to be free and self-supporting participants in our society. A citizenship framework is too narrow in its understanding of human needs and contributions for resolving homelessness. The outcome would be elitist, mirroring one limitations of Canadian policy. As Stasiulis notes of recent theory:

“The robust rediscovery of citizenship as an organizing frame for studies on relations among individuals, rights, states, territories, communities and markets in Canadian and international

scholarship is now as likely to focus on citizenship as inequality and exclusion rather than citizenship as forms of equal and inclusionary membership (Stasiulis 2002:365).”

When it comes to the housing crisis this is certainly the case. Traditionally, citizenship meant entitlements: based on our shared political identity we would be beneficiaries of opportunity and support, but neoliberalism has tied entitlements to a specific cluster of obligations, in a way that emphasizes contributions through paid work neglecting all other family, cultural and social contributions people of Canada make. Many people who reside in Canada are non-citizens, or citizens-minus because their identity, as it is structured by flawed social policies, marks them for disenfranchisement.

The institutionalization of gendered and racial inequalities in citizenship and in many policies relevant to housing and income are creating much higher levels of homelessness among particular groups within the population of Canada. Canadian citizenship is undermined as a foundation for developing a clear sense of universal entitlement to meeting of basic needs like housing because under Canadian law citizenship fails to overcome exclusionary and prejudicial treatment for people categorized under the Indian Act, by immigration and refugee policy, by access to higher education, and by gender norms. These are acts of racialization and prejudice which are fundamentally dehumanizing. In order to be inclusive and have space for equality of opportunity we need to work with a human rights framework that includes provision for life’s basic necessities for all the people living in Canada.

Even before the cuts of the last two decades citizenship as we have known it in Canada was already elitist enough, excluding everyone under the Indian Act, other people in certain immigration categories (which in turn were racially-biased), and making assumptions about social roles and economic opportunity which really only applied to well- educated white men. These assumptions and elitist tendencies were amplified under neoliberal ideology serving to justify exclusions rather than create a social norm of entitlement to the basic necessities of life. Blau and Moncada propose “the concept of privileging *the Other* and of prioritizing the rights of others as the cornerstone of ethics”(emphasis in original) (Blau, 2013). Can we as political beings not accept the ethical responsibility of inclusively considering the well-being of others in our political decisions?

Since neoliberalism has been the justifying framework which sustained momentum for so many of the unfairly- stratifying policies in the Canadian social framework over recent decades it is important to attack this misconstruction at the source. Neoliberal policy creates advantages for the large corporations and the richest people of society. It creates cumulative disadvantages leading social exclusion and even chronic homelessness for some, which cannot be explained by luck, effort or and other personal failings. Even citizenship as we have created it is insufficient protection from the problems caused by misinformed policy. Is it not time that we decisively dispel the illusions neoliberal theory and construct a new path forward that works for all members of society?

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