

Engaging with an Invisible Politics: Gender Mainstreaming as a Practice in Newfoundland and Labrador

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ABSTRACT: This article examines the way feminists engage with gender mainstreaming in their attempt to transform gender inequalities in Newfoundland and Labrador, a province on Canada's east coast. It employs an anthropological perspective to explore one aspect of gender mainstreaming, namely the way gender analysis models are deployed in specific encounters, to consider how such equality templates can both reproduce and challenge pre-existing social relations. I argue that a feminist practice approach in anthropology, in particular its reflexive and practice orientation, can foreground the way gender models are actually implemented and interpreted. Through this analysis I argue that gender mainstreaming at this point reproduces wider relations of power – governmental and normative – and cannot yet accommodate pre-existing social cleavages in the province.

KEYWORDS: equality, feminist practice, gender mainstreaming, neo-liberalism, Newfoundland and Labrador

Introduction

The feminist practice (Ortner 1996) approach in anthropology produced rich insights into the heterogeneity of gendered agency and cultural struggles over the last 20 years. However, as Sally Merry and others note, gender politics has dramatically changed since the mid-1990s (Walby 2002; Merry 2005). The United Nations meetings for Women in Beijing (1995) signalled the expansion of gender equality discourse in human rights and through 'gender mainstreaming'. This shift provoked new questions about feminist 'engagement' and political organizing, now implicated in global governance. In this paper I argue that a feminist practice approach, its attention to reflexivity, the interpretive dimensions of gender and,

more recently, policy, can enhance our analysis of these transformative possibilities.

This article examines feminists' engagement with gender mainstreaming in Newfoundland and Labrador, a province on Canada's east coast. The analysis is rooted in my fieldwork with feminist organizations in Newfoundland, namely the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the eight women's centres located across the province. From the late 1990s onward, I observed the way feminists employed 'gender analysis' or 'the gender lens' in their analysis of policies, to address legal aid, poverty, employment and training, pay equity, violence prevention and domestic violence. Importantly, I noted at around the same time period, the way similar templates, known as 'gender sensitivity analyses' were

also deployed by NGOs I studied in north and south India (George 2007). The appearance of these templates in two very different settings was not surprising given the shifts in gender politics that had occurred in the 1990s.

Gender mainstreaming refers to the systematic application of a gender analysis to policy and legislation, which ideally attends to transforming gender inequalities. Formally endorsed at the United Nations conference on women, held in Beijing in 1995, gender mainstreaming has been taken up worldwide, by international governing organizations, nations and non-governmental entities, including in Canada. Yet, more than ten years after Beijing, numerous critiques expose the uneven and limited impact of this template in actually advancing gender equality (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002; Friedman 2003; Kardam 2004; Rai 2004; Moser 2005). Such critiques, however, tend to be macro in scope, oriented to policy texts alone. They neglect the way gender equality templates that underwrite gender mainstreaming may be interpreted by feminist and other social movement actors, the very people who might be well placed to advance gender mainstreaming.

The strength of feminist anthropology has been to foreground the historical, social and cultural contexts in which gender relations are situated and to explore the ways women make sense of their lived experiences. These analytic tools, rooted as they are in a reflexive fieldwork practice, provide a means to explore the way gender mainstreaming is understood in relation to both pre-existing feminist analyses and the social settings in which they are introduced.

This article explores one aspect of gender mainstreaming, namely the way gender analysis models are deployed in specific policy-oriented encounters, to consider how such equality templates can both reproduce and challenge pre-existing social relations. Gender equality templates associated with gender mainstreaming are arguably 'frames' and,

therefore, define and communicate gender inequality as a social problem that requires a solution and social transformations. A frame provides a diagnosis of a situation, in this case of gender inequality; it invokes strategies to change the situation and provides schemas or master frames to motivate, communicate and translate a situation, a problem or an issue into broadly meaningful, culturally resonant expressions (cf. Merry 2006b) or policy initiatives (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002).

So far, analyses point to the way these gender models are implemented in United Nations and World Bank initiatives, in regional equality charters (such as the European Union) and in specific countries, such as Canada, the U.K. and Australia (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002; Eveline and Bacchi 2005; Moser 2005). They increasingly point to how national settings and political and regional contexts inform the way gender models are introduced and taken up (Rai 2004; Walby 2005). The approach I offer here builds on this trend to situate gender mainstreaming, but within the grassroots.

Specifically I flag the relationship between gender equality models and community and governmental arrangements. Gender mainstreaming arguably also refers to a broader shift in gender politics towards working within and across institutions. Second-wave feminism in the U.S. and the U.K., for example, was characterized by the distinct and autonomous character of its grassroots organization (Bagguley 2002; Walby 2002). In Canada, there was not such a tidy distinction between feminist organizing, the 'state' and organized political parties, partly due to public funding that women's organizations received as well as the particular character of Canadian politics and Canada's welfare state character (e.g. Vickers and Rankin 1998, 2000; Dubrowolsky 2000). However, a shift to working 'across' institutions has intensified and it reflects two changes from the 1990s onward, one theoretical, the other realist.

Firstly, there is a shift in the understanding of the state, as a more open ended, fluid set of bureaucratic and policy arrangements that reaches into, and constitutes the management of, lives at the community level (Larner 2000; Teghtsoonian 2000, 2004; Grewal 2005; Larner and Butler 2005; Larner and Craig 2005). Secondly, the shift resonates with the overall expansion and reconfiguration of the service provision sector associated with the shift in welfare states towards neoliberal arrangements – services for counselling, community healthcare, violence prevention and community development. The expansion of agencies involved in this type of activity brought them into relationships with different levels of government but not as formal and permanently funded entities or as part of the full-time governmental labour force. Anyone working with this sector – largely framed as the voluntary sector – had to work with government and attend to government policies and mandates (Teghtsoonian 2000, 2004; Sheldrick 2002; Roelvink and Craig 2005). Feminist issues such as domestic violence and sexual abuse, pay equity and poverty, legal aid, custody and access, for example, entered normative and public discourse at this time (the late 1980s to the present) and services to address them were created in this context.

This theoretical and substantive shift, dovetailing as it has with the expansion of women centred and gender issues into public discourse, seems to foreground a normative shift in the way feminists work with different ‘scales’ of government (Grundy and Smith 2005), from the grassroots of community to the provincial, and federal levels. Similarly, an anthropology of policy directs us to policy connections, between organizations’ structures and ‘everyday worlds’ (Shore 1997: 14). Merry’s study of the way domestic violence is applied through United Nations policy reflects this shift in feminist anthropology, foregrounding the ‘field’ as social political spaces, and policies as cultural texts (Shore 1997; Merry 2006a).

When I began fieldwork on Newfoundland’s west coast in the early 1990s, the expansion of publicly recognized gender issues and gender-related services was underway. Through the 1990s, women’s grassroots organizations increasingly engaged with community-targeted governing practices. Voluntary organizations and contractually limited appointments provided short-term moneys for project development in the areas of violence prevention, victim services, and employment and training for ‘vulnerable’ populations. Feminists often worked in this sector, where they tried to incorporate feminist insights. The creation of gender analysis frameworks facilitated their efforts to create a more streamlined approach in a context where projects were short term and appeared to lack overall co-ordination. The fiscal crisis of the 1990s, in particular the moratorium on cod fishing that began in 1993, set the terms on which gender analysis would be effectively deployed – but also arguably provided spaces where government was open to engagement. When I returned in 2002 for more systematic study, gender analysis was well underway, but the terms of political engagement had greatly shifted.

In the section that follows I examine the gender analysis models that have been deployed in the last decade worldwide and in Canada. I then turn to the way gender mainstreaming, known as ‘gender analysis’ in Canada, was taken up by feminist actors in feminist and non-feminist arenas in Newfoundland and Labrador. I argue that the overly generic character of gender equality models and their detachment from other social inequalities renders them insufficient to resonate with many feminist and non-feminist actors. The result is that the gender equality models are marginalized, subverted and subordinated to more prominent social, historical and normative discourses within and outside of feminist circles. This includes the fiscal context, which in the case of Newfoundland, was characterized by economic and social crisis. In fact, the political

climate restricted the participation of feminist actors in ways that challenge the terms of engaging in gender mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming and Gender Analysis Models

The 'Beijing Platform for Action' called for governments to embrace 'gender mainstreaming' and the UN conference itself signified the historical moment when women's rights as human rights gained global recognition (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2002; Walby 2002; Kardam 2004). Gender mainstreaming is a strategy with an implied protocol, one directed to policy fields in government and its spin-off agencies, as well as community initiatives. It has been referred to as a 'frame' (Hafner-Burton and Pollack 2003; Walby 2005), a discursive template that reveals how movement actors communicate issues within and beyond their constituency. Anthropologists such as Merry have 'culturalized' framing, to foreground the culturally negotiated process of disseminating human rights discourse (2006a). This highlights the meaning-making process, one embedded in social relations and normative dimensions that are both shared and contested within and across ethnographic terrains. Translators are actors who are positioned as either cultural, policy or gender experts – those capable of communicating across discursive fields. This approach to framing then is one that usefully attends to the social and organizational contexts where meanings are created and contested. Yet, the situated character of gender mainstreaming, its application in specific settings, by actors who have policy or legal knowledge and feminist or gender analysis has not really been taken up.

The contested character of gender mainstreaming has, however, been explored in terms of the different models of gender analysis subsumed under the term gender equality (Eveline and Bacchi 2005; Walby 2005: 326). The liberal

model emphasizes similarity and individualism (women gaining equality on terms set by the male norm). The second model (a 'difference' approach) attends to women's distinct, constructed position in relation to men and gendered power relations. The third model (an integrated approach), arguably more transformative, imagines a change in gendering more generally; this includes the place of men in relations of power (Moser 2005; Squires 2005). Yet, only recently have these models sought to 'situate' gender itself in class, sexuality, racialized and ethnic relations (Eveline-Bacchi 2005; Squires 2005; Walby 2005). A feminist practice approach examines these matrices of power within a dynamic and culturally encoded process.

The awkward relationship between anthropology and feminism which Strathern (1987) identified provoked an analytic trajectory towards a reflexive approach to gender, to locate gender relations in webs of meanings, narratives and social relations. Moreover, following Visweswaran (1997) it encouraged a more historicist approach to feminism itself, as a social and political field of practice that unfolds in an unequal global context. Her call for feminist anthropologists to 'dis-identify' rather than over-identify with their subjects sought to de-centre simplistic notions that women worldwide possess a shared social reality and identity.

These insights produced reflexive and culturally situated analyses on gendered agency to foreground subjective understandings of gender inequality. This approach also disrupted the assumptions that rendered feminism a somewhat fixed and at times imperialist tool of analysis. Some anthropologists (Barillas 1999; Ertem 1999; Judd 1999; Stephens 1999; Amadiume 2000; Babb 2001; Moser 2004; Merry 2006a, b) have since engaged with feminism as a politics more explicitly by situating feminist or gendered politics in particular social, historical and colonial contexts. Gal (2003) attended to how feminist discourse is contested within

and reshaped as it travels within and across localities. And women's entry as 'femocrats' into institutional discourses and relations of privilege was highlighted (Moser 2004).

This approach, as Merry (2005) has recently shown, is informed by feminist reflexivity, a notion of the insider/outsider relationship as both situational and fluid. It encourages critical reflection on feminism, which is analytically useful given that feminists worldwide have played a role in constructing gender mainstreaming. Debates within feminism itself underlie the various models of gender equality. To draw out the contested, fluid and transformative possibilities of feminism is to view these gender equality templates as interpretive frameworks, not codified texts. It is also, I argue, to centre the participation of feminists who work at the crossroads of community and government.

My analysis of gender mainstreaming began during my fieldwork in India where the feminist organization I studied was drawn into gender mainstreaming initiatives. I argued that feminist non-governmental organizations form important sites of cultural production and serve as conduits for the implementation of gender mainstreaming (George 2007). The models are perceived and interpreted through a pre-existing feminist framework to expose certain relations of power and to subvert others. This analysis shaped my interest in exploring gender mainstreaming in Canada. When I returned to Newfoundland in 2003, gender mainstreaming was being utilized by local feminist organizations, which share much with the non-governmental sector worldwide.

In Canada, gender mainstreaming is largely informed at the formal policy level by two of the three models of gender equality discussed above; the model which foregrounds women's distinct and unequal position in relation to men has gained pre-eminence over the liberal model in governmental models of gender equality (Eveline and Bacchi 2005: 504). Newfoundland feminism also draws on this second

model (assuming gender-based differences). However, gender inequalities are framed and interpreted through sedimented histories, where regional identities of Newfoundlanders as culturally distinct from Canadians, prevail.

The feminist activism I examine here has a strong grassroots orientation and the research is centred on the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, a government-funded but ostensibly arms-length, umbrella organization connected to eight women's centres and other related organizations (such as women's shelters) across the province. The women's centres are important spaces, a house or office, which offer education, outreach, services and advocacy for women in specific (and some very remote) rural and urban areas across the province. A site of explicit feminist organizing and lobbying, these bodies are also connected to national organizations, such as the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAFIA), the National Association of Women Lawyers (NAWL) and Centre for Research and Information Alliance on Women (CRIAOW), all of which have drawn on gender analysis in their 'equality' seeking initiatives.

When I returned to the field in 2003, feminists deployed gender analysis to advocate in the areas of justice, violence, employment and social planning. Over the next five years, I traced the way gender analysis was introduced and taken up in feminist and non-feminist sites including a restorative justice (RJ) coalition and 'Violence Prevention' meetings. I conducted 125 interviews and engaged in participant observation the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, related organizations and provincial conferences and workshops; and analysed quarterly meeting minutes (1995–2005), building on my previous research in the province (George 2000a, b). An economic crisis in its major industry, the cod fishery, a cultural reckoning and a sense of distinct cultural identity provided an opportunity to reconfigure gender relations; but gender analysis could not bear the weight of

monumental re-ordering that gender mainstreaming implies.

Feminist Activism in Context: Cultural Reckoning and Fiscal Crisis in Newfoundland

The 1990s was a cultural and economic watershed in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. A moratorium on the cod fishery, beginning in 1993, threatened the basis of livelihood which had sustained settlement over several centuries. Long identified as a 'have-not' province in national narratives (George 2000a) and federal-provincial fiscal redistribution policies, Newfoundland's high tax burden, high deficits and debt-loads, like other Atlantic provinces, were worsened by cuts in federal moneys in the mid-1990s; these moneys were historically transferred to them to support programmes in health, education and welfare (MacDonald 1998). The cod moratorium precipitated a climate of economic austerity to create an ethos of shared hardship, wherein sacrifices had to be made. A narrative of 'fiscal restraint' pervaded public discourse and was supported by the notion that Newfoundland society was on the verge of cultural and economic extinction (George 2000b).

During the 1990s Newfoundland also underwent a collective moral crisis. Sexual abuse and violence against women, children and dependent adults in Catholic Church-run institutions surfaced to provoke a significant re-thinking of Newfoundland 'culture' and identity more generally. These economic, moral and cultural crises informed changes in government, so that education and health reform, economic and employment policies appeared as an inevitable response to these crises. The narrative that wide-scale change was inevitable and necessary, however, was one that feminists were able to draw on to lobby, agenda set and participate in various strategies and consultations.

Meanwhile, an overall 'gendering' of public discourse emerged in the province, Canada and worldwide regarding domestic violence and sexual abuse (cf. Majury 2002; Kelly 2005). Women working in front-line agencies describe how they came to link domestic violence and the gender biases that informed policing, court procedures, victim services, struggles over custody and access, needs for housing and legal aid. By the mid-1990s, gender analysis began to circulate in feminist, voluntary sector and governmental arenas, including the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, which as an umbrella organization, facilitates the meeting of feminists from across the province several times a year. Specifically, the second gender analysis model (focused on distinct experiences which unequally position women), came to predominate during this period of immense structural and cultural change.

Women's groups created their own 'gender analysis' known as the 'gender equality lens', which was circulated in handbook form, in feminist workshops, meetings and conferences from the late 1990s onward. Feminists engaged in a range of consultations aimed at re-designing everything from social service provision and employment to the terms of Confederation with Canada. The gender lens was supported by the Department of Justice in part because the prominence of sexual abuse and violence issues had raised the need for better services for women. For example, the expansion of a 'Provincial Strategy' to address violence was strongly informed by feminist models of violence, foregrounding its gendered character in intimate relations and public settings. A sexual abuse counselling service, formed in the 1990s, was exemplary of a new gender-centred approach.

In another example, feminists at the Gender Status of Women Council (2000) drew on the gender lens to analyse and uncover the gender bias in legal procedures, in particular legal aid. Elaine Condon, its former women's director,

described in an interview how her analysis of legal aid shifted from a 'local problem' to a much wider critique of the gender bias that informs resource distribution:

We had lots of women who couldn't get custody settled or property ... and we started thinking there was something wrong with legal aid and so we took a look. It came from the needs of the women that were coming to our women's centre. We did a gender analysis of legal aid because it seemed pretty bad to us that my husband could kick the shit out of me and if I wanted a divorce they wouldn't help me but they'd represent him so he wouldn't have to go to jail because he was charged with assault for kicking the shit out of me and that's basically what legal aid was coming down to. So, we used the guide ... What we discovered was that legal aid is really a Charter issue! There were things we recommended to the province and to the legal aid commission that could improve services, but really the issue also needed to be dealt with on a national level.

Elaine used the 'guide', the gender analysis framework, which helped her to translate the problem of legal aid into a rights issue, to form a bridge that provoked positive public support and government response. Elaine's report, supported by federal Status of Women funding, situated legal aid in the cultural context of power which positioned women and men differently to obtain legal aid, including Newfoundland's 'gender neutral' legal aid policy; the absence of statistics to document legal aid by gender and issue; and the provision of legal aid for a person to secure access to their children but not to help secure child support. It took considerable sleuthing for Elaine to uncover that there was a fiscal basis to the gender inequities that underpinned access to legal aid. Gender inequality was tied to the way funding was allocated federally for civil versus criminal cases in which women and men are, respectively, disproportionate beneficiaries. Seventy-four percent of legally aided clients in family law are female and two-thirds of civil legal aid certificates are given to women (Department of Justice 2002: 42). Since

the adoption of the Canada Health Transfer in 1996, federal contributions (already reduced) no longer distinguished civil legal aid moneys, which were now included as part of a block grant to provinces (Department of Justice 2002: 11). This change ensured there are no common standards for coverage, eligibility or levels of service across the country. In 2004, FAFIA publicized Canada's report from the UN committee which pointed, among others, to Canada's failure in providing legal aid for women (United Nations 2003). By 2007 the province claimed that it had addressed legal aid for women by improving its services.

Such positive outcomes were rare. The contested character of the gender lens was evident in both feminist and non-feminist arenas, namely multi-organizational coalitions directed towards restorative justice initiatives and violence prevention.

Advancing the Gender Equality Lens

The gender equality lens requires significant expertise in policy analysis to make it a helpful guide to exposing and re-configuring the gendered basis of services, programmes and policies. Feminists had to 'persevere in making gender analysis a central part of the policy' according to one long-time feminist civil servant and they prevailed in particular areas such as environmental planning. Gender analysis was not a given in the formulation of the Violence Prevention Initiative according to Joyce Hancock, a former Executive Director of the Provincial Women's Advisory Council:

We didn't want a short-term strategy. We didn't want individual communities to have to fight this ministry or that one individually. Government would have been happy to devolve some of the violence piece to community; now we can lobby in a more co-ordinated fashion. And we wanted to broaden the scope; we didn't want violence to stay a women's issue. But what we lost sometimes was the equality piece; people

who came to the table didn't necessarily have that gender analysis.

When introduced within explicitly feminist arenas, in conference-call meetings and workshops, for example, many women disliked the way a focus on gender displaced the focus on women. During one feminist workshop on gender and poverty several women suggested that the shift to 'gender' was a way of overlooking, bypassing or marginalizing the ways women are explicitly disadvantaged. They found that 'gender' could be used to equivocate. The 'men are different, women are different' model as Laura put it, could neutralize power relations. By contrast, when feminists engaged in the coalition arena or within the civil service, non-feminists were dubious about the centrality the model placed on gender, but for very different reasons. This was reflected in feminist attempts to advance the gender lens in 'Violence Prevention Strategy' meetings, and more explicitly when it was introduced in a 'Restorative Justice coalition' that feminists joined (Provincial Association against Family Violence, 2001)

The coalition was framed by restorative justice principles and included members of government agencies (probations, social work, police) alongside voluntary organizations (Crime Prevention, Transition houses, Circles of Support and John Howard Society); aboriginal representatives (Mik'maq, Innu and Inuit); the 'faith' community and feminist activists (some of whom were trained as mediators). Restorative justice claims to be a socially embedded approach to justice that is attentive to power relations (for example, between victims and offenders), somewhat inter-cultural and transformative (La Prairie 1998; Braithwaite 2000; Zehr 2002). This made the coalition an ideal setting to advance a gender equality lens (cf. Pennell and Burford 2002). However, the cleavages that contoured gender relations came to the surface to produce conflicting positions over the centrality of gender and to expose the contested quality of this model.

On the surface, feminists shared much with RJ activists, including a commitment to community and volunteer participation. Yet, for some coalition participants, the focus on 'gender' was code for women and gave primacy to gender as a central feature of power, a position that many refuted. This was reflected in the question, 'why is it always gender this and gender that?' reiterated by several male and female participants. The most contentious issue was the extent to which restorative justice could be used in cases of sexual assault and physical abuse, an issue fraught with debate over the centrality of gender and power (cf. Daly 2002; Stubbs 2002). This issue tended to fracture feminists, distinguishing 'law and order' feminists from those who held a more restorative approach.

Nor was the gender basis of violence and restoration easily confronted in aboriginal communities, where there was significant support for the use of restorative justice. The coalition attempted to use a diversity model, one that incorporated difference between aboriginal and settler Newfoundland society, and gender-based difference. However, these differences were designed as distinct spokes on a wheel, separate trajectories of inequality, not overlapping matrices of power. Underlying a shared vision the coalition sought to create were considerable cleavages that could not be readily and publicly addressed: historical power relations and markers of difference which informed 'Newfoundland' culture (settlers and aboriginal combined) and gender as integrated, overlapping axes of power in that wider cultural process. Moreover, aboriginal women had been raising the gendered and racialized character of sexual abuse, intimate and public violence within their own communities and in relation to the police and legal institutions. Yet, they were not well represented in the coalition, or in the feminist movement in the province. While aboriginal people constitute a small percentage of the Newfoundland and Labrador population, they are profiled

across Canada as one of the most destitute and vulnerable social groups in the country. Their legal and economic marginality is reinforced by geography to create a significant sense of disenfranchisement. There was aboriginal representation on the Advisory Council and on various women's centres; but aboriginal women frequently voiced the huge 'disconnection' they felt based on the immense problems that shaped their communities.

While Newfoundland has long been viewed as having a distinct 'culture' in relation to the rest of Canada (George 2000a) its cultural dynamics are not fixed or homogeneous; the contested character of Newfoundland culture is reflected in numerous social cleavages in which aboriginals (Mik'maq, Innu and Inuit) are differentiated from each other and from settlers; rural dwellers from townies; the Avalon peninsula from the west coast and Labrador. This cultural complexity informs matrices of power and subaltern narratives that pervade the province (George 2000a) and ruffle the notion of Newfoundlanders as a distinct social group. The gender analysis lens is one that, to be meaningful, has to engage with these narratives of being and living.

The gender lens, while it acknowledged cultural diversity, has not been able to account for, or confront these social cleavages. The restorative justice coalition, for example, reached an impasse for several reasons: it tried to connect very different constituents – feminist, aboriginal, government and faith actors to name a few – whose shared identity as Newfoundlanders was contested; nor did they have a sufficient organizational framework, nor the dialogue necessary to draw out and negotiate how violence, abuse and its restoration could be addressed against the larger historical backdrop. The gender lens is far too simplistic to provide the interpretive dimensions that are required. In fact, the lens is nothing more than a text or an instrument that to be effective should be understood as a framework that might organize political and social practice. It is this as-

pect of gender mainstreaming, however, that is most difficult to implement. As the restorative justice example suggests, feminists struggle to use it effectively and have found its value to be uneven.

When we turn to their relationship with government, however, the difficulties in implementation expose the unequal context in which feminist actors are situated to engage in gender mainstreaming. The critique of gender mainstreaming is that it forms an instrument of bureaucratic practice, removed from social actors, and not a means of social transformation. This trend is reflected further in the way government has restructured its terms of engagement with women's organizations over the last decade.

Gender Mainstreaming as a Tool of Governance?

The provincial government espouses a commitment to gender analysis and 'diversity' (Women's Policy Office 2000). But its practices tend to maintain a distinction between gender and cultural diversity, arguably because it is easier to manage. This is reflected in the way government recently organized a separate aboriginal women's conference, to which non-aboriginal feminists were not invited (much to their protest). This decision could have supported the autonomy of aboriginal women, given colonial history. However, several aboriginal women who work in one of the province's eight women's centres were not, to their surprise, invited. A few women's centres (on the west coast and in Labrador) do attend to aboriginal women's issues and aboriginal women form a significant part of their constituency. In fact, changes in funding structures both within the province and at the federal level have inhibited the gathering of different groups of women for advocacy purposes. This trend, feminists argue, discourages greater intercultural dialogue and coalition building amongst a variety of actors who attend to gender issues.

It is the intervention of government at both the provincial and federal level that I foreground because government practices tend to underwrite the way gender mainstreaming has been advanced, the extent to which it gets taken up, and the participation of feminist actors in that process. While governments ostensibly support gender mainstreaming they do so in ways that undercut the participation of feminist activists. This is problematic given that the terms of gender mainstreaming explicitly advance the participation of women's movements as civil society actors in gender mainstreaming (see Government of Canada 2005).

Each year that I returned to Newfoundland the relative openness to feminist work across government and non-governmental terrains was foreclosed, including the terms of feminist engagement in these initiatives. For example, the provincial government had decided to provide core funding to women's centres, a move which feminists initially applauded. This shift, however, allowed government, over time, to redefine the terms of engagement between itself and women's centres. Neoliberal accounting measures were introduced and the advocacy role of women's organizations was formally, through policy changes, curtailed. When the terms of selection for the new President of the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women were redefined to follow the public sector protocols, the arms-length operations of feminism had largely ceased to exist. An ethos of secrecy and a culture of fear intensified and some women, interestingly, were reluctant to speak with me. In particular, I found that women who worked within government wanted to talk to me 'off the record of my university consent form'. By contrast, I had experienced no difficulty gaining access to and interviews with powerful bureaucrats working in all areas of justice in 2001 and 2002. Their mutually respectful relationship with women's organizations permitted a more open-door policy for a researcher (such as myself), who

had a research history in the Newfoundland and Labrador feminist community.

At the national level, parallel governmental strategies – largely cuts to funding and advocacy – at Status of Women Canada (2003–2006) have produced similar results. While feminists often mark the Liberal government's federal budget of 1996 as a crucial shift to the marginalization of women's issues, more recent changes under the Conservative government have intensified this process. This includes the closure of regional Status of Women offices (2006) and NAWL, the National Association of Women Lawyers (2007), to move feminism off the radar in public discourse. Gender mainstreaming as a practice should refer to more than the application of models to policies, but as it is implicated in broader shifts in feminism as politics.

Engaging with an Invisible Politics

If we view gender mainstreaming as a process, a shift in the way feminists do politics, greater integration with government and related institutions has made feminism – its positioning as a critical politics – more difficult to capture. My attempts to trace the shifts in feminist activism led me to the policy arena where feminists had shifted their work: to consult, to lobby and to advance gender analysis to secure better services, female employment and to address women's poverty. These new terms of feminist organizing made the work of feminists less apparent, as women's centres' efforts could be either ignored or mainstreamed to the point that government often claimed credit for initiating a gender analysis training or piece of policy. My engagement had much to do with rendering visible their invisible efforts. Hence, I recorded stories from each centre, to document their work and to ask them to reflect on moments when they perceived their actions to have been effective.

To cite one case, I was struck by the Mokami Status of Women Council members in Goose

Bay, who had been frustrated with the abysmal sentencing in sexual assault cases. They set out to attend court during every sexual assault case – often as the only supporter of the victim – and they made extensive notes of the proceedings, including commentaries from lawyers and judges involved in these cases. Their report, the Purple Heart Campaign, got a reaction from government officials, who have directed considerable energy to improvements because they were impressed with the evidence these women provided. ‘The Minister carried our report around with him and he cited it in different meetings; we seem to have gained an ally with this particular Minister’ said Patrina Beals, the director. But grassroots feminists’ participation in this descriptive recording is also often framed in the context of ‘evidence-based’ research. This can be an unbalanced affair. There are many cases where activists’ expertise as witnesses, as participant observers, is credited at one level and dismissed at another, as unprofessional.

Feminist anthropology informs my efforts to engage by situating gender equality models, to explore how they are interpreted and practiced. In so doing, gender mainstreaming emerges as a process that reproduces wider relations of power, historical norms, fiscal arrangements and emerging forms of governing. Critiques (Nash 2002; Eveline and Bacchi 2005; Squires 2005) point to the need for an integrated approach to gender equality models, an insight my analysis supports. Moreover, Squires (2005) argues that a more deliberative approach to gender mainstreaming is necessary for it to be transformative. In Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada, feminists have lost their opportunity to deliberate at least through the women’s conferences that government used to support financially. These conferences drew women from across the province as they engaged in serious debate over both analysis and strategy. As the restorative justice example I offered suggests, greater deliberation over time may have produced a meaningful

framework, one that attended to the different narratives that flesh out gender and racialized norms in the province. Gender mainstreaming as it is practised, does not encourage this narrative process.

While I have focused here on the way gender analysis models are deployed by feminists it is clear that the analysis of gender mainstreaming must take into account the complex terms of political engagement. This includes a shifting political and economic context which has dovetailed with neoliberal governing in complex ways that speak to its uneven character. It is noteworthy that, while the fiscal crisis of the 1990s curtailed the resources available for meaningful gender analysis, the spaces for critical engagement with government were somewhat fluid and supportive. Alongside signs that the fiscal crisis was alleviated and Newfoundland was on the threshold of ‘have’ status, political opportunities became more closed than in the previous decade. A broadly construed understanding of gender mainstreaming – as more than the application of policies and procedures – is crucial to apprehend these conditions of possibility and foreclosure.

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