

“Canada in Aid of Liberalism: A Feminist Discussion of Cooperation and (Post)Colonialism in the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas”

Teresa Healy (Wilfrid Laurier University)

This paper offers a critique of the liberal project framing the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA) by linking analyses of marginalised women's experiences of new productive and reproductive forms in different places in the Americas with analyses of the gendered character of the ideal form of state that is being fashioned across the hemisphere. The minimalist liberal state has become the ideal form of state promoted by national governments through their domestic policy and through interstate agreements. This is a patriarchal form of state constructed through the extension of market relations in areas of social provision previously fought for and won by feminist struggle within social movements and the state. The economic marginalisation of women who depended on governmental intervention in social provision is one direct outcome. The increased expression of authoritarianism on the part of the state in instituting these marketized economic policies is another, political, outcome. Both are coercive, although obviously, the process is uneven, and does not happen in the same way in every country across the Americas.

Governments, including the Canadian state, are not ushering in a process of restructuring that has material dimensions only, however devastating they may be for many women. The patriarchal liberal state is being constructed discursively as the protector of liberal political freedoms, if not at the national level, then at the level of world order. International declarations in support of the human rights of the individual are the political counterparts to the supposed fairness and predictability of international economics under an open, transparent, rules-based trading system.

The international economic system is left unencumbered by these declarations because of the liberal requirement to maintain the separation of politics and economics. This has the effect of legitimising the institutionalisation of the minimalist state in international trade and investment treaties. In this way, the authoritarianism of the liberal state is brought together with a paternalist nod in the direction of the protection of women's human rights, along with the rights of others who need protecting, such as children and migrant workers. Such declarations are meant precisely not to challenge the imperialism of globalization. Authoritarianism and paternalism are two sides of the patriarchal liberal state and may be considered the gendered aspects of hegemony.

This theoretical critique is explored by examining the World March of Women 2000 against Poverty and Violence, and in particular, NAC's statements surrounding it, as well as the oppositional social movements which have formed a "Hemispheric Social Alliance" in order to protest the construction of the FTAA.