

Unlikely Bedfellows: The Harper Government and Homonationalism

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It is logical to assume that neoconservative governments would generally avoid aligning themselves with gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans and queer communities.¹ As we see the debates unfold in the United States over gay marriage and Don't Ask Don't Tell², it is easy to observe that the most vociferous opponents of legislative equality rights for queer people are generally Republicans or right-wing Democrats. The arguments of people like Sarah Palin about how granting equal rights to gays and lesbians will lead to the unravelling of society seem especially bizarre from a Canadian perspective, where no such Armageddon occurred after these rights were extended to LGBT people. A more controversial notion, however, is the idea that right-wing governments actually appeal to and rely on queer communities in order to maintain and consolidate power. This assertion is certainly counterintuitive, but an emerging body of scholarship on homonormativity and homonationalism is starting to explore this shift in the landscape of nation-building (Duggan, 2003 and Puar, 2007).

In Canada, the vast majority of the major political battles over formal legal equality rights concluded in 2006, when the Canadian government granted marriage rights to same sex couples. After nearly 30 years of court battles and political mobilization, gays and lesbians achieved what was lauded as the pinnacle of legal and legislative success. But shortly afterward, Stephen Harper's Conservatives were elected to power in a minority government, representing the most significant right-wing shift in the Canadian political

¹ For the sake of brevity, I will alternately use the terms "queer" or "LGBT" to include gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and queer communities. Queer is certainly a contested word with multiple meanings, but for the purpose of this paper, I will be using it as an umbrella term. In instances where I am making a distinction between mainstream LGBT groups and radical grassroots queer communities, I will do so explicitly.

² Don't Ask Don't Tell is a policy enacted under President Bill Clinton in the U.S. military, forcing enlisted soldiers to either remain silent about their homosexuality or risk being discharged.

landscape in nearly 15 years. In April 2011, Harper was re-elected for the third time, this time given the mandate of a majority government. His party will now be free to govern without the support or consent of opposition parties. Moving to quell concerns that his new government would be beholden to the religious right, Harper took pains to re-assure the public that he planned to govern according to his party's election platform and avoid debates on controversial topics such as same sex marriage and abortion (Chase, 2011).

Academics including Jasbir Puar and Lisa Duggan write extensively about the Bush government in the U.S. and the ways it appealed to queer communities with notions of national inclusion, patriotism and the supposedly "liberal" nature of American society (Duggan, 2003 and Puar, 2007). This often involved championing individual rights and liberties, characterized by small government, low taxes and a focus on fighting "the terrorists of elsewhere" (Puar, 2007). Both Duggan and Puar argue that queers are inculcated into racist, colonialist and neo-conservative state narratives – whether wittingly or not.

The Harper government is often criticized for courting and hiring prominent members of the evangelical right or "Christian nationalists" (McDonald, 2010). This includes Darrel Reid, former chief of staff to the Prime Minister's Office and Doug Cryer, an immigrant and refugee board member – both are outspoken evangelicals with a record of homophobic public statements. But as I will argue in the paper, the Conservatives have also taken pains to connect with both gay and immigrant communities, thereby broadening their appeal and voter base. In doing so, they have both obscured their connections with the radical right and lulled progressive-minded voters into complacency. This helped the

Conservatives win a majority mandate in 2011 and it will contribute to shaping the responses of both mainstream LGBT activists and radical queers to the next four years of Tory rule.

Will mainstream LGBT organizations attempt to use the government's homonationalist appeal to extract small victories from an otherwise hostile power base? Will this bring them closer to or farther apart from the views of grassroots queer activists? Will queer communities break with identity politics, reject the Harper government's agenda and join broader movements for social and economic justice? The answers to those questions remain to be seen. A close examination of the Harper government's contradictory and seemingly counterintuitive relationship with Canadian queers will help us understand the ways that the Conservatives are incorporating certain segments of the gay and lesbian population into their political project. While it may be easy to paint Harper's Conservatives with a singular homophobic brush, it may actually reveal more if we read their actions "against the grain" and like Jasbir Puar, look for moments of conviviality rather than wide scale contempt. The concept of homonormativity encourages us to look for instances where LGBT communities have aligned themselves with right-wing governments and political priorities, seeking mainstream acceptance instead of widespread liberation (Duggan, 2003). Homonationalism goes a step further as an analytical tool, looking for the places where self-described radical queers have also become inculcated into racist and colonialist narratives, whether they intend to or not.

For the purposes of my analysis, I will be looking at two case studies: the "outing" of a gay Canadian Conservative cabinet minister and a scandal that broke out in 2010 over the

exclusion of gays and lesbians from a study guide for new citizens. I believe that these two political moments provide important insights into the careful balance that the Harper government has managed to achieve in order to gain power – appealing to Christian fundamentalists while also deploying homonationalism at the same time.

Research questions and method

In this paper, I seek to find out what the Harper government's relationship is with the religious right and whether or not it is complicated by its need to appeal to a broader voter base. Has the Harper government made conciliatory appeals to queers? If so, how has the community responded? I am interested in seeing if Lisa Duggan and Jasbir Puar's research on homonormativity and homonationalism can be applied to the Harper government in Canada. Has the government incorporated certain segments of the LGBT population into its political project? If so, which queers have been included and which ones have been rejected? What does this say about the Harper government's visions of nationalism and sexuality?

I hope to help reveal the strategies that the Harper government is using to both build its base and erode opposition. I anticipate that this analysis will reveal instances of conviviality between the Conservative government and queer Canadians – whether intentional or not. I will also analyze how queers have been inculcated into a neo-conservative vision of citizenship that relies implicitly on whiteness, racism, colonialism and Islamophobia. By revealing these seemingly unlikely instances of complicity, I hope contribute to a growing body of scholarship on the convivial relationship between LGBT communities and right-wing state power. My major sources will include media reports,

transcripts of government debates as recorded in Hansard, as well a close examination of the 2002, 2009 and 2011 editions of the government guide for new citizens. My primary research method will consist of content analysis, while also drawing significant insights from theorists and writers such as Jasbir Puar, Lisa Duggan, Patrizia Gentile, Gary Kinsman and Marci McDonald.

Sexuality and Canadian nationalism

The last 10 years have been remarkable for gays and lesbians in Canada. After decades of struggle – including street protests, formal lobbying and court challenges – gay and lesbian Canadians now benefit from the same legal rights and privileges as heterosexuals. This includes the right to adopt children, to inherit property from a same-sex spouse, to share health benefits, to marry and to divorce. Gays and lesbians are constitutionally protected from discrimination, thanks to sexual orientation provisions in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, in provincial human rights codes, in the *Canadian Human Rights Act*, and in federal hate crimes legislation.

While transgender and transsexual Canadians are implicitly included in human rights legislation that protects gays, lesbians, and couples in same sex relationships, they have been excluded from explicit legal reform. The Canadian Human Rights Act and federal hate crimes laws include protections under the auspices of “sex” and “sexual orientation,” but they don’t mention “gender identity” or “gender expression.” The situation is the same under provincial laws, with the exception of the Northwest Territories which provides protection for gender identity in its territorial human rights act. Shortly before the 2011 federal election was called, a private member’s bill sponsored by NDP MP Bill Siksay that

would have added protections for trans people to the Canadian Human Rights Act and federal hate crimes laws nearly made it into law. Bill C-389 passed Third Reading in the House of Commons by a margin of 143 to 135, but it failed to make it through the Senate before the election was called (Smith, 2011). Siksay chose not to run in the 2011 election, but other NDP MPs have pledged to reintroduce a similar bill in the near future. But while it was significant to see that C-389 garnered support from MPs in all four political parties – including Tory cabinet ministers John Baird, Lisa Raitt and Lawrence Cannon – a similar private members' bill would face a tougher audience with Conservatives now dominating the House of Commons.

Despite the unresolved issue of explicit human rights protection for trans people, many would argue that the queer community achieved the pinnacle of sexual citizenship over the last decade – legal recognition, social acknowledgment and protection from the state. However, Gary Kinsman, Patrizia Gentile and Brenda Cossman remind us that civil recognition does not represent the end of the queer struggle in Canada given that LGBT youth continue to be bullied in schools and queer literature continues to be seized by border guards (Kinsman & Gentile, 2010 and Cossman, 2002). If anything, as Kinsman and Gentile argue, it serves to obscure the Canadian government's history of purging gay men, lesbians, and other perceived "security risks" from the ranks of the federal civil service, the military and the RCMP. In their book, *The Canadian War on Queers: National Security as Sexual Regulation*, Kinsman and Gentile document how thousands of gay men, lesbians – and those suspected to be so – were targeted by the Canadian state and purged from their jobs. In many cases, people's careers were ruined and their family lives were significantly

affected by the RCMP's threats to expose their sexual orientation to their parents and co-workers:

Hundreds (if not thousands) of others were purged, demoted and forced to inform on friends and acquaintances. Of this number, many were forced to resign or were transferred. At the core of this screening program was the belief that gay men and lesbians suffered from a character weakness that made them vulnerable to blackmail and subversion, thus rendering them susceptible to the machinations of Soviet agents (Kinsman and Gentile, 2010, p. 2).

The anti-gay screening program was introduced in 1959 and RCMP surveillance activities continued well into the 1980s. As Kinsman and Gentile explain, queers and Communists were lumped together by the Canadian state, considered suspicious for transgressing social and political norms. Their visibility also challenged "moral and political constructions of homosexuality and heterosexuality," where "heterosexuality was associated with the normal, clean, healthy, and pure," and "homosexuality was associated with sexual weakness or degeneracy" (Kinsman and Gentile, 2010, p. 8). The very existence of gays and lesbians in the federal public service undermined the heterosexist concept of the Canadian state. The military and RCMP sought to erase this reality through interrogations and purges. As Kinsman and Gentile point out, the machinations of the RCMP surveillance apparatus were largely hidden and not necessarily known of outside of Ottawa. Even the most committed gay activists living in other cities did not know that so many gay men and lesbians were being followed, forced to reveal information about their friends, and ultimately pushed out of their jobs. This allowed the Canadian government to be painted in a more positive light than the United States, where the McCarthy trials were

widely broadcast and discussed. And according to Kinsman and Gentile, this has served to erase the history of struggle that gays and lesbians engaged in during this period.

Steven Maynard picks up on Kinsman and Gentile's work in his 2001 essay, *The Maple Leaf (Gardens) forever: Sex, Canadian historians and national history*. In a wide-ranging piece on the history of Canadian sexuality he spans the sexual abuse scandals at the Maple Leaf Gardens in the late 90s, the purging of gay and lesbian workers from the federal civil service and the sexual abuse at Aboriginal residential schools, making the case that "the history of sexuality is national history" (Maynard, 2001, p. 72). The key criticisms in Maynard's article are directed at Michael Bliss and Jack Granatstein, historians who have argued against the study of social history and in favour of military recognition and Canadian "heroes" (Maynard, 2001, p. 96). Granatstein's work is widely contested by feminist, post-colonialist and queer historians who reject the idea that a focus on social history somehow contributes to the "killing" of Canada's national narrative (Maynard, 2001). Maynard's piece is remarkably prescient. It was written 10 years before the federal government re-wrote the study guide for new citizens with significant input from Granatstein. As I will argue later in this paper, the new guide contains several pages devoted to military history, downplaying other subjects such as environmentalism and the status of First Nations communities as Canada's first peoples.

Taking a broader look at the relationship between sexuality and national belonging, Maynard argues that it would be insufficient to use the term "homophobic" to describe the historical relationship between queers and the Canadian state. As he writes, "homophobia reduces the historical issues at hand to "misguided prejudices" and "irrational fears," thus

failing to capture the more structural features of lesbian/gay oppression ... The national security campaign was about much more than homophobia; it was a crucial moment in the manufacture of the Canadian nation as heteronormative, a historical process that relied on the exclusion of sexual dissidents (Maynard, 2001, p. 75). Much like Kinsman and Gentile, Maynard stresses the fact that homophobia is an insufficient term that has the effect of hiding institutionalized heterosexism and heteronormativity. Explaining a massive state apparatus as “homophobic” seems to imply that only a few individuals are involved and obscures the ways that heteronormativity shapes and surveils the boundaries of Canadian citizenship.

David Bell and John Binnie conceive of the relationship between sexuality, nationalism and citizenship in a similar way – in fact they argue that all citizenship involves a form of sexual citizenship. They maintain that notions of citizenship are equated to the public sphere, so when people are forced to keep their sexuality private, they are actually being denied the right to full participation in society. Bell and Binnie see marriage as a form of privatization that absolves the state of its responsibility for taking care of its citizens. Given that marriage carries an air of respectability with it, it allows those in power to distinguish between “good” and “bad” queers. Bell and Binnie say that this only serves to prop up Conservative agendas that would domesticate homosexuality such that it would virtually disappear. They say this is akin to the U.S. military’s Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell policy – rewarding queers who keep their sexual orientation private while continuing to promote the country’s imperialist agenda (Bell and Binnie, 2000).

Legal theorist Brenda Cossman agrees with Bell and Binnie, arguing that the achievement of constitutional equality rights for gays and lesbians in Canada was a major accomplishment, but it has come at the expense of less socially acceptable queer struggles. She says that, “the claim to sexual citizenship is both transgressive and normalizing; it simultaneously challenges and transforms dominant modalities of citizenship while incorporating sexual subjects into its disciplining folds” (Cossman, 2002, p. 488). In an article titled *Sexing Citizenship, Privatizing Sex*, she takes a close look at the recent history of legal challenges taken up by the gay and lesbian community in Canada. She argues that the court cases that eventually succeeded were ones based upon mainstream, privatized notions of marriage, monogamy and spousal support.

In comparison, the owners of Little Sisters bookstore in Vancouver were ultimately unsuccessful in their fight with the Canadian Border Services Agency over the repeated seizure of homoerotic, sexually explicit and BDSM³-depicting literature at the border. For Cossman, this is evidence that public expressions of queer sexuality – a manifestation of cultural citizenship – are considered unacceptable by the Canadian government and by the judiciary. She sees this as part of the spectrum of normalization inherent in civil rights struggles.

When queers become incorporated into social and political norms, it becomes easier to ignore those who live on the margins. Cossman maintains that, “normalizing has the effect of de-radicalizing claims for social transformation by incorporating sexual minorities into dominant political and social norms and institutions” (Cossman, 2002, p.

³ Bondage, domination, sadomasochism: a form of sexual and/or erotic practice that involves the consensual use of restraint, intense sensory stimulation and fantasy power role-play.

486). Still, Cossman acknowledges that the last decade of legal activism has had a tremendous impact on the lives of queer Canadians, given that, “to a very considerable extent, sexual citizenship in Canada has been transformed. It is no longer exclusively based on heterosexuality” (Cossman, 486). The complexities in Cossman’s argument certainly hold when we take a closer look at how the Harper government has used both covert and overt measures to signal its disdain for queer rights.

The achievement of constitutional rights for gay and lesbian couples allowed many more individuals to be formally recognized by the state. And yet, it also could be undercutting the potential for the radicalism that might be needed to fuel present-day struggles. Some would argue that the achievement of basic civil rights has made it more difficult for the LGBT community to convince politicians and the general public that they still suffer from oppression. Has gay marriage had a pacifying effect on the gay community, leaving them unprepared to fight the most right-wing Canadian government in recent memory? This question is especially pertinent when examining the influence of the religious right on the Canadian government, particularly since the election of Stephen Harper’s Conservatives in 2006. And the issue seems all the more urgent given that Harper is now in a position to appoint at least four judges to the Supreme Court of Canada in the next few years.

Harper and the theocons⁴

When Stephen Harper first won the leadership of the newly-merged Conservative Party of Canada in 2004, activists and critics immediately questioned his roots within the Reform Party and his connection to the religious right. After his election as Prime Minister in 2006, Harper re-introduced the same sex marriage question in the House of Commons as promised⁵, but it was largely seen as a gift to his right-wing base. When the vote was defeated, he stated that the question and the issue had been put to rest. But in the meantime, his party appointed a number of influential advisors and staff people with deep roots in the evangelical movement. Harper quickly developed a reputation as a Prime Minister with a tight rein on his MPs. The responsibility and authority for government communications – on any issue – was quickly transferred directly to the Prime Minister’s Office (Canadian Press, 2009). Conservative MPs such as Cheryl Gallant, who is famous for off-the cuff statements comparing gay people to pedophiles and abortion to the be-heading of prisoners in Afghanistan, fell strangely silent (CUPE, 2004). And yet, the power and influence of the religious right continued to grow in Ottawa. This was no accident.

It was jarring to many Canadian ears when Stephen Harper ended his 2006 election acceptance speech with the words “God bless Canada.” At the time, the newly minted Prime Minister suggested that the statement did not foreshadow any nefarious intentions. However, according to Marci McDonald, it sent a direct message to evangelical voters that they had hired the right man for the job. (McDonald, 2006) In a 2006 article for *Walrus*

⁴ Marci McDonald coined this term in an article for *Walrus* magazine in 2006 and in her 2010 book, *The Armageddon Factor: The rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada*. See bibliography for full references.

⁵ On December 6, 2006, MPs voted on a motion put forward by the Conservatives, asking if the Canadian government should re-open the issue of same sex marriage. It was defeated 123 to 175.

magazine, McDonald reveals that Harper cultivated a close relationship during the election campaign with Charles McVety, founder of the Defend Marriage Coalition and president of the Canada Christian College. During the 2006 election, McVety bought up the rights to unclaimed Liberal websites such as josephvolpe.com and stacked a handful of Conservative nomination contests in favour of evangelical candidates who opposed to same-sex marriage (McDonald, 2006).

In addition to de-funding the Court Challenges Program⁶ – an item that was at the top of the religious right's wish list, the Harper government spent the early part of its first term in power dismantling the universal child care program that the Liberal Party had begun to institute across Canada. The Conservatives replaced it with a \$100 per month, per child subsidy that represents only a tiny fraction of the real cost of quality child care. The move was a boon to McVety's supporters, many of whom home school their children, out of a belief that public schools infect their children with secular values. In fact, shortly after taking power, the Conservatives held a private meeting with members of the REAL Women of Canada, the Canadian Family Action Coalition and the Focus on the Family-funded Institute for Marriage and Family Canada. According to McDonald, MPs such as Jason Kenney were present, and the discussion focused on how evangelical groups could help the Conservatives sell their child care subsidy (McDonald, 2006).

By beginning with a seemingly innocuous issue such as child care, the Harper government was able to involve the religious right in public policy advocacy in a way that

⁶ The Court Challenges Program provides funding to equality-seeking groups to bring forward court cases to test the equality provisions in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In 2006, the Harper government cut the majority of the funding to the program, only maintaining a small pocket of money to fund complaints related to language rights. The program was successfully used by Egale Canada to help pay for landmark cases that granted rights to gays and lesbians, including inheritance, adoption and civil marriage.

didn't necessarily register opposition from the Canadian electorate. This early form of evangelical advocacy on behalf of Harper's policies also neatly fell into the Conservatives' privatized, patriarchal notions of citizenship and the family. According to Harper, McVety and the REAL Women of Canada, child care is an individual family's responsibility – generally the domain of women. The argument in favour of a small subsidy versus a universal program is couched in language focusing on "choice in child care." Universal social programs are characterized as being forms of "social engineering" designed to punish women who choose to take care of their children, instead of handing them over to supposedly factory-like child care institutions (McDonald, 2006). By choosing the child care program as one of its first targets, the Harper government appealed to economic conservatives and evangelicals at the same time. The Conservatives put forward a heteronormative vision of the family, but did so in a subtle way that could easily be excused by queers and self-defined progressives. What appeared to be a primarily financial decision actually spoke volumes about the Conservative vision of a patriarchal household, where women do the vast majority of the child-rearing and men work outside the home.

According to George Lakoff, this kind of framing fits neatly into the Republican and Conservative vision of a father-led, tough-love, individualistic family model. Lakoff, a prominent Democrat strategist and cognitive linguist in the United States, says that right-wing politicians have been so successful in selling their issues in part because they are able to frame complex problems as moral imperatives. Lakoff maintains that effective right-wing communicators rely on deeply entrenched metaphors such as the "strict father" which resonate strongly with many segments of the population. According to Lakoff's research,

this framing actually changes the way that people think. He says the challenge for the left is to begin to re-frame issues from a “nurturing family model” – one that incorporates feminist principles, but does so in language that is accessible to people (Lakoff, 2004). Yasmin Jiwani makes similar observations about the way that racialized people are framed in the mainstream media. She argues that major media organizations draw from a “common-sense stock of knowledge” when they tell stories that are “seen from the perspective of the White eye” (Jiwani, 2006, p. 39). The Harper government’s messages resonate with Canadians because they draw on stereotypes and metaphors that are deeply entrenched in the national imaginary. On the surface, they may seem to be rather benign and this may be one reason why (presumably white) queers are not especially alarmed by this discourse. In any case, McDonald believes that the evangelical right is getting Harper’s message loud and clear:

They see him as an image-savvy evangelical who has been careful to keep his signals to them under the media radar, but they have no doubt his convictions run deep—so deep that only after he wins a majority will he dare translate the true colours of his faith into policies that could remake the fabric of the nation. (McDonald, 2006).

McDonald’s 2006 article proved to be remarkably prescient. Rona Ambrose, then the Environment Minister, hired Darrel Reid as her chief of staff in 2006. Reid is the former president of Focus on the Family Canada, the most prominent right-wing anti-gay group in the United States. Its founder James Dobson maintains that gays can be converted through therapy and his group sponsors controversial “Love Won Out” gay aversion seminars throughout the United States. Before accepting a staff position within the Conservative Party, Reid used to “shoot from the lip.” He told the website CanadianChristianity.com, “I think every Christian is under an obligation to change laws to reflect biblical values,” and he

is also on the record saying, "Only God can make Canada a truly Christian country." Still, as the *Toronto Star's* Linda Diebel points out, Reid went "stealth" after taking a job in Harper's government. And his tactfulness was richly rewarded. He was promoted twice in a short period – first to chief of policy within the Prime Minister's Office and then to the top job as the PMO's chief of staff (Diebel, 2009). These appointments were not widely reported in the media and it would be fair to assume that the majority of Canadians had no idea that a prominent figure from the religious right was running the PMO.

After accepting the promotion, Reid appointed former Christian educator Paul Wilson, who shares Reid's history of religious activism, to his former job as PMO director of policy (Diebel, 2009). Also in 2009, the Harper government appointed Doug Cryer to the Refugee and Immigration Board. Cryer is a former director of public policy for the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada who was widely quoted in 2006, defending churches' right to denounce homosexuality as "sinful" and "part of God's teaching" (Thompson, 2009). In August 2010, Reid left the PMO and was appointed Executive Director of the Manning Centre for Building Democracy – a right-wing think runs a "school of practical politics" as well as networking conferences for young evangelicals. According to its website, the Manning Centre sees its mission as seeking "common ground, resolving contradictions, and finding ways for conservatives of all ideological and regional backgrounds to work together toward common objectives⁷." In her 2010 book *The Armageddon Factor: The Rise of Christian Nationalism in Canada*, McDonald quotes Manning telling anti-abortion activists to "ditch the God-talk and avoid the temptation to play holier-than-thou." Speaking at a

⁷ <http://www.manningcentre.ca/>

2006 seminar called Navigating the Faith/Political Interface, he said, "You have to advocate righteousness, without appearing to be self-righteous" (McDonald, 2010, p. 107). The Harper government follows a similar script, refusing to make public statements on controversial issues such as same sex marriage and abortion. As McDonald and others have observed, much of the government's appeal to fundamentalists has occurred in a stealth fashion while maintaining an outward image of centrism to the general Canadian population.

While it's true that the religious right may seem like an amorphous category comprised of several religious groups that may have little in common, McDonald sees the threat against progressive values in Canada as coming from what she calls Christian nationalists. She defines Christian nationalism as, "a militant charismatic fringe with ties to Harper's Conservatives that has gained influence out of all proportion to its numerical heft." She says that this category "embraces a much larger body of believers who parrot the same brand of hyperpatriotic religiosity and share many of the same aims, but have only the haziest grasp of any defining theology" (McDonald, 2010, pp. 10-11).

Given that the Harper government appears to have deep ties with the fundamentalist community it seems counterintuitive to imagine that his government may also be making a play for the queer community – one of the chief targets of Christian nationalists. But as the next section of this paper will reveal, Harper's consolidation of political power rests not only with evangelicals, but also with gays and lesbians as well as other "socially progressive" voters. This makes for some unlikely bedfellows.

Homonormativity and homonationalism

While it may seem farfetched to imagine that queer Canadians would want anything to do with the Harper government, this reality is that the LGBT community is far from homogenous. People take any number of issues into account when they reach the ballot box and it is plausible to assume that other factors would take precedence for queer people, especially if the Conservatives did not appear to present a clear and present danger to gay rights. Also, as Brenda Cossman and others argue, the fight for same sex marriage was a fundamentally conservative struggle. While gay marriage has altered notions of queer citizenship in Canada by granting civil rights to same sex couples, it has also created the false perception that the fight for gay rights is over. Meanwhile, organizations that serve marginalized queer populations are struggling with funding cuts, gay erotica and films continue to be held up at the border, high school students in Ontario are being blocked from forming gay-straight alliances and queer refugees are being deported with the orders coming from homophobic Immigration and Refugee Board members.

Lisa Duggan defines homonormativity as, “a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2003, p. 50). In her book, *The Twilight of Equality?* Duggan observes that earlier gay liberation movements positioned themselves within anti-racist and feminist struggles. She says that in contrast, today’s “official” queer organizations are controlled by and cater to a white, male clientele. Duggan says this leads to a depoliticized, conservative form of gay activism – one that does little to challenge the status quo and

virtually nothing to oppose the problematic actions of the nation state (Duggan, 2003, p. 65). She traces the history of welfare state liberalism and social democracy in the United States, arguing that the politics of race and class have intersected with sexuality and gender throughout these struggles. Set against the backdrop of a growing American and global imperialism, Duggan argues that the gay rights movement abandoned its roots as a multi-issue social justice movement. According to Duggan, the split between economic justice and identity/culture didn't appear until the 1980s. She points out that gay liberation newspapers once published anti-imperialist manifestos, an analysis of the racist prison system and expressed clear solidarity with feminist movements. The shift to identity-based single issue gay activism has been to the detriment of queer and of all oppressed people, according to Duggan:

The Achilles' heel in progressive-left politics since the 1980s, especially, has been a general blindness to the connections and interrelations of the economic, political, and cultural, and a failure to grasp the shifting dimensions of the alliance politics underlying neoliberal success (Duggan, 2003, p. xvi).

Duggan maintains that single-issue gay activism only serves to prop up conservative governments and does nothing to change the conditions that oppress marginalized people, whether queer or not.

Jasbir Puar takes Duggan's concept further by sketching out the ways that right-wing governments rely on "homonationalism" in order to prop up the other racist and colonialist elements of their national projects. Though it may seem counterintuitive, she argues that the George Bush government appealed to gay voters in the midst of post-9/11 "war on terror." Despite his government's egregious treatment of homosexuals, Puar maintains that

Bush was still able to rile nationalist sentiment among queers, even if he didn't explicitly speak to them. She writes:

National recognition and inclusion, here signalled as the annexation of homosexual jargon, is contingent upon the segregation and disqualification of racial and sexual others from the national imaginary. At work in this dynamic is a form of sexual exceptionalism – the emergence of national homosexuality, what I term “homonationalism” – that corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire (Puar, 2007, p. 2).

In the face of a terrorist “threat,” it is understandable to imagine that many queer people, especially those who consider themselves to be part of the nation, would see themselves as citizens who need protection and who are clearly distinguishable from the “terrorists of elsewhere” (Puar, 2007). Queers who are not racialized and not targeted by the state are more likely to assume that the government and the police are there to protect them. According to Puar, this means they are more likely to become inculcated into imperialist and nationalist projects. Responding to the threat of a dark and frightening “them,” queers are able to see themselves as part of a collective nationalist “us.”

While Puar draws from a wide array of thinkers from different fields – including Michel Foucault, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak – she works within a framework that is both derivative and critical of intersectionality and post-colonial theory. Puar refers to this as “queer assemblage” – a temporal analysis of both resistance and complicity that is not tied to the specific identities of individuals. While her theoretical approach can sometimes appear dense and hard to distinguish from other similar methodologies such as queer theory, it has allowed her to introduce perspectives on power and complicity that would seem counterintuitive at first glance. Duggan aims her criticism at right-wing mainstream

gay activists, but Puar focuses her analysis on discourse that may otherwise be regarded as radical. Mainstream gay organizations seem like easy targets when it comes to constructing an analysis of homonormativity because they tend to focus on incremental political change and legal reform, rather than a more radical re-making of society. Puar targets groups that claim to be radical and demonstrates how they become inculcated into racist nationalist discourses, whether they mean to or not.

We see homonationalism reproduce itself in both Canada and the U.S., when governments defend the war in Afghanistan or condemn the actions of the Iranian government. While the Taliban and Iranian fundamentalist forces are undoubtedly hostile and violent toward women and sexual minorities, there is a tendency in North America to portray the West as more tolerant and liberal, compared to the barbarians *over there*. This creates a sort of sexual exceptionalism, according to Puar, that sets up a dichotomy between mild-mannered (presumably white) queers and the monstrous, failed heterosexuality of the Muslim terrorist. It also helps justify scenarios where the state suspends the rights of people who are labelled as “terrorists” (Puar, 2007). Kinsman and Gentile remind us that people from Arab and Muslim communities are being treated as if they are in a “state of exception.” The authors see echoes of the way queers were treated by the Canadian security state until only recently and warn that:

Under the cover of national security, we have seen the mobilization of racism and the continued denial of human and civil rights. The targets of these most recent national security campaigns are once again defined as enemies of Canada, are denied citizenship, and are identified as national security risks (Kinsman, 2010, p. xiii).

As Puar points out, “the contemporary U.S. heteronormative nation actually relies on and benefits from the proliferation of queerness, especially in regard to the sexually exceptional homonational and its counterpart, the queer terrorist of elsewhere” (Puar, 2007, p. xxv). In other words, homonationalism has the affect of bringing certain queer people into the fold of state recognition. It accepts that the heterosexist norm allows room for certain deviations, providing they don’t disrupt the economic and political status quo. It mobilizes queer identities when they are convenient, often appealing to economic self-interest or a liberal notion of “tolerance.”

One recent example of homonationalism at play is the way that conservative Jewish organizations such as B’nai Brith have attempted to ban the group Queers Against the Israeli Apartheid from the Toronto Pride parade. While B’nai Brith, a national Jewish human rights organization, did not publicly support same sex marriage during many years of court challenges and legislative debate, they have been quite concerned over the last couple of years about “anti-Israel” agitators who are supposedly “hijacking” gay pride (Halfnight, 2009). This abrupt association with the gay community only developed when the organization became uncomfortable with the ties being forged between queer activism and Palestinian solidarity. Much of B’nai Brith’s plea to parade participants focused on the fact that Israel is the only country in the Middle East that grants constitutional rights to gays and lesbians. The organization accused members of Queers Against the Israeli Apartheid (QuAIA) of supporting terrorism and warned them that if Israel didn’t exist, that gay rights would be threatened everywhere. (Halfnight, 2009). The debate over Toronto Pride continues, and as of the writing of this paper, the City of Toronto is considering pulling

funding from the parade if organizers don't agree to permanently ban QuAIA from marching.

Another function of homonationalism is that it makes governments look much more "progressive" on the world stage than they actually are. In both Canada and the U.S., we see the federal government justify the war in Afghanistan by claiming that soldiers are "saving women" (Persinger, 2010). This effectively re-positions war as a feminist act and conscripts liberal-minded voters and activists into the war on terror. It reinforces the idea of an enlightened "us," versus a dark, backward "them." This is a fundamentally racialized discourse that positions "Canadians" as being white and excludes immigrants and people of colour as from the bounds of Canadian nationalism. This dynamic was clearly evident when Prime Minister Harper spoke out at the Commonwealth Conference in November 2009, criticizing a bill in Uganda that calls for life sentences for gays who "touch another person with the intention of committing the act of homosexuality," and the death penalty for "aggravated homosexuality," such as having sex while HIV-positive or being a "serial offender." While it's admirable that Harper took this stance, what many people don't realize is that it's made him a hero to queer Ugandans. In an article for *Maclean's*, Kaj Hasselriis spoke to Ugandan gay activists who characterized the Canadian Prime Minister as a "human rights activist" and a "Liberal kind of guy" (Hasselriis, 2010). That is pretty incredible, given that Harper voted against gay marriage and continues to hire senior officials with track records of homophobic statements.

Thus, how is it possible that a Prime Minister with an intimate connection with the religious right is gaining credibility on the world stage as a champion of queer rights? A

closer look at the “outing” of cabinet minister John Baird and the scandal over the study guide for new citizens helps answer that question. It also assists us in uncovering the ways that homonationalism may have contributed to the Conservatives’ most recent electoral victory.

Angry Baird⁸

On February 2, 2010, political candidate Pamela Taylor accidentally “outed” John Baird, a Conservative cabinet minister and close stalwart of Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper. When pressed by a CBC Radio interviewer to name one openly gay member of the Conservative Party of Canada, she mentioned Baird’s name. What followed was a deafening silence from the official party ranks. Baird’s office neither confirmed nor denied the rumour and the mainstream media did not mention the story. An article describing the incident in the gay and lesbian publication *xtra.ca* garnered dozens of comments from gay men in Toronto and Ottawa, who commented about the “fact” that Baird’s sexual orientation is common knowledge in the LGBT community. As one commenter posted:

Too funny, really. He cruised me at a bar in Ottawa a few years ago. His sexuality is widely known, but not "public." I feel (sorta) bad for Taylor spilling the beans, but if Baird would have only manned up and come out, he'd be stronger for it. (McCann, 2010)⁹

⁸ In the midst of the 2011 federal election, someone posted an online game called “Angry Bairds,” a spoof of the highly popular game Angry Birds. It ridicules John Baird, by allowing you to fling a cartoon version of him at various targets, including health care, women and the public service. It lampoons his reputation as a loudmouth, angry politician. You can view – or play it – online here: <http://www.angrybairds.ca/>

⁹ The issue of whether or not “coming out” is a necessary emancipatory moment for the establishment of queer identity is a hotly debated issue within academic and activist circles. Jasbir Puar has tackled this issue, along with Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan and many others. I won’t be discussing this debate in any detail, but it is worth noting that the idea of “coming out” is a contested ground and an unstable concept.

An online debate ensued in the comments section of the article, about whether Baird should be compelled, as a prominent Conservative politician, to reveal the “truth” of his sexuality. Days later, Xtra editor Marcus McCann wrote a follow-up piece titled, “So much for John Baird's reputation as a gutsy brawler.” He pointed out that there is not a single member of Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s caucus that is openly gay. The Taylor “outing” incident was a gaffe, not because Baird is heterosexual, but because he refuses to talk about his sexuality. McCann expressed frustration and disappointment over Baird’s refusal to speak publicly about his sexuality:

I sound glib, but this morning, I’m feeling kind of glum about the whole thing. That’s partly because, when he’s not answering media questions, he is pretty frank about his sexuality (officially: whatever his sexuality is). And as he’s become more comfortable with the gay people in his life (officially: including or not including himself) over the last decade, his public record has shifted.

I guess I had hoped that yesterday would be the final step in a long journey for Baird (officially: whatever direction that journey is headed in) and the results would be good for public policy in the country (McCann, 2010).

Baird was President of the Treasury Board in 2006, when the Conservatives decimated the Court Challenges Program. At the time, he defended the decision by saying, “I just don't think it made sense for the government to subsidize lawyers to challenge the government's own laws.” (Walkom, 2007) He was the key figure in the Harper administration that defended the cuts to the program, never acknowledging that the “subsidy” he was publicly deriding had been used to secure significant rights for gay men. In the meantime, he continued to fraternize with the gay community, attending Egale Canada galas and remaining quiet about his own orientation (Raphael, 2009). Dubbed “Harper’s pit bull” by media commentators, Baird entered federal politics after more than a decade as a

provincial cabinet minister in the Mike Harris government in Ontario. He was the youngest member of the Harris government when he was first elected in 1995, and was responsible for the province's controversial welfare-to-work program during his tenure as Minister of Community and Social Services. At the time he unveiled a 1-800 number that people could call to accuse others of defrauding the welfare system (Anello, 2003). He introduced new rules that permanently cut off anyone convicted of welfare fraud from ever receiving assistance again. And even though his monthly government expense allowance far exceeded the average monthly benefits received by a single parent on social assistance, Baird continued to ramp up rhetoric about welfare "cheats" versus "honest folks" (Anello, 2003).

When Baird moved over to the federal Conservative Party, he chaired Stephen Harper's 2004 campaign for the party leadership and quickly earned his trust. Described by one commentator as a "loud-mouthed hothead, too often just screaming his head off in the House of Commons, looking wild," Baird is generally seen as the best candidate to deliver bad news. "How's he done it?" asked Linda Diebel in the Toronto Star. "Ability, energy, intelligence and a solid work ethic, sure. But he's also close to the boss. Arguably, Baird is Harper's cabinet favourite. A leader seen as prickly and aloof is described by Baird as sharing a 'strong relationship' with him." (Diebel, 2009)

Baird certainly does not embody any stereotypical attributes of gay men or liberal urbanites. His political persona fits into the mold of the feisty, red-necked, masculine brawler. He maintains loyalty to Harper, relishes slash-and-burn economics, and does not speak about his personal relationships. Baird is often seen in Ottawa as Lauren Harper's

substitute date at galas, when the Prime Minister is unavailable. (GlobalTV.com) If anything, he embodies Bell and Binnie's picture of a neo-conservative, privatized sexuality – one that stays conveniently hidden and doesn't interfere with his appeal to a right-wing, conservative voter base. In the article quoted above about the "outing" incident, McCann says that Baird's public record has shifted. A look at Baird's voting record on federal government legislation does not bear that out. As Government House Leader in the most recent session of Parliament, Baird was the chief defender of the Harper government's policies, most often designated as the one to speak on behalf of the Prime Minister during Question Period. His rhetoric was as aggressive as it had ever been and he always defended the policies and political priorities of the Conservative party. Baird distinguished himself from the majority of his fellow caucus members only twice in recent memory and both were during free votes where the Conservative caucus vote was not whipped. The first time was in 2006, when he voted against re-opening the same sex marriage question and the second was in 2011, when he voted in favour of Bill Siksay's trans rights bill at Third Reading. The rest of his affinity for and connection with Canada's queer communities has happened at a covert level, on the cocktail party and fundraiser circuit. So far Baird's presence has earned him votes, but has not translated into any new rights for queer people in Canada.

The mechanism of homonationalism in Canada can help draw a straight line between the Harper Conservatives and the official gay establishment. Again, it seems

counterintuitive that an organization such as Egale Canada¹⁰ would have anything to do with a government that continues to appoint prominent members of evangelical organizations to government jobs and slash funding to programs that advance gay rights. As I will discuss in the next case study, the Egale's conciliatory reaction to the 2010 citizenship guide scandal points to a broader problem. The group came under fire in 2009 for granting a major human rights award to Jaime Watt, a conservative political strategist and one of the chief architects of Mike Harris' Common Sense Revolution in Ontario. When queer activists objected to Egale's decision, executive director Helen Kennedy claimed that the organization was "non-partisan." She was quoted in the media crediting Watt with convincing the Harris government to pass Bill 5, which granted partner benefits to gays and lesbians in Ontario. But as Andrew Brett points out, Kennedy perhaps gave Watt too much credit:

All right, but let's get the history straight. The Harris government was forced to pass Bill 5 after it appealed a same-sex alimony case all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

In May 1999, the court ruled that the definition of "spouse" in Ontario's family law was unconstitutional and gave the provincial government six months to change it, as Brett points out. Five months later, the Tories introduced Bill 5, passively named *An Act To Amend Certain Statutes Because Of The Supreme Court Of Canada Decision In M. v. H.* (Brett, 2009). In other words, the Harris government was forced kicking and screaming into adopting same sex partner rights only when the Supreme Court gave the province no other choice.

¹⁰ In the interest of full disclosure it should be noted that I was a board member of Egale Canada from 2005-2006. I have had no formal affiliation with the organization since then.

In addition to his previous connection to the Harris government, Jaime Watt is close friends with John Baird. The two were photographed together at the 2009 Egale gala, when Watt accepted his award (Raphael, 2009). In addition, Watt spoke glowingly of Baird in a profile written about him in the Toronto Star (Diebel, 2009). To make things even cosier, Egale's office was until recently located within the offices of Navigator, the public relations firm that Watt owns. He donated the space rent-free to the organization when it ironically had to give up its Ottawa office after Baird cut funding to the Court Challenges program. As Corvin Russell observed in an article for rabble.ca, Watt played a key role in advancing policies that actually harmed queer people in Ontario, not to mention immigrants, welfare recipients, AIDS patients and racialized communities:

The "Common Sense Revolution" he engineered slashed health care funding, closing hospitals, like Toronto's Wellesley Hospital, that housed AIDS patients; it defunded sex reassignment surgery; it cut social assistance and social housing and removed rent controls, disproportionately hurting people living with AIDS and other vulnerable queer populations. Mental health facilities were slashed, and in schools, anti-racist and anti-homophobia educational programs were targeted. In the areas of AIDS treatment, education, and risk prevention, the government's record was one of inaction (Russell, 2009).

Baird's association with the gay community would be a relatively benign issue if he was not such a central player in the Harper government. His profile within the party and on the political stage has continued to grow in recent years and he was promoted to Foreign Affairs Minister following the 2011 election. In the lead-up to that election, the Conservatives ran television and radio ads attacking Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff. They accused him of being an out-of-touch academic who only associated with elites and didn't understand every day Canadians. In September 2010, Baird's rhetoric about "Toronto elites" was too much for Glen Murray, Ontario's Research and Innovation Minister, the

former mayor of Winnipeg and an out gay man. He posted a message on Twitter, saying “Funny Baird attacking Toronto elites. Who are they? I imagine given the # of cosmos I have had with Rusty¹¹ at Byzantium he qualifies.” The Ottawa Citizen ran a news article about Murray’s quip, not mentioning that Byzantium is a restaurant frequented by gay men in Toronto, instead describing it as a “glittering setting for the city’s glamourati ... a hot spot for Toronto’s elite” (Capstick, 2010). Media pundit Ian Capstick took issue with this mischaracterization and attacked the Ottawa Citizen for obscuring the true meaning of Murray’s tweet by dancing around the issue of Baird’s sexual orientation:

Stereotypical euphemisms like “glitter” and “glamourati” aside; the *Byz* – as us gays call it – is really just a nice restaurant where a bunch of men can feel comfortable touching one another while talking. You know, being able to act like straight couples do in romantic restaurants everywhere else?

John Baird is gay. But that’s not what makes him “elite.” A lot of LGBT Canadians live in poverty. What makes him an elite is, as Rick Mercer put it on CBC: “He has a chauffeur” (Capstick, 2010).

While it may be a stretch to suggest that Watt and Baird are controlling Egale’s political agenda, it is useful to observe the seemingly comfortable relationship that the organization maintains with two key figures associated with the Harper government. As I will explore in the next case study, this could have influenced Egale Executive Director Helen Kennedy’s conciliatory reaction to Jason Kenney over the citizenship guide scandal. Could John Baird’s proximity to the organization be giving Egale a mistaken sense of its own influence on Parliament Hill? This is certainly a rhetorical question at this point, but it does bear further examination. I would maintain that Baird’s position as a “secret” dispatch to

¹¹ Rusty is John Baird’s nickname.

Canadian queers creates a point of conviviality between the official gay establishment and the Conservative party. It seems unbelievable to me that Egale would welcome to its yearly gala the cabinet minister responsible for cutting a major source of its funding. The fact that the organization gave its inaugural human rights award to a major Conservative lobbyist points to the ways that homonationalism creates unlikely bedfellows. While it is certainly true that Tories span the spectrum of sexual orientation, the truth is that there is not a single elected Conservative MP who is out in the media as being gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans. Baird's "in and out" status allows the party to maintain its appeal with religious fundamentalists and Christian nationalists, while continuing to court the urban gay vote in cities such as Toronto and Ottawa.

The existence of closeted gay male politicians within neo-conservative governments is nothing new and on its own is not particularly noteworthy. And yet, Baird's ambiguous status allows him to deride "elites" during his day job and then drink cocktails with them on weekends. He is able to maintain the veneer of a private, undefined sexuality as he promotes his party's ultra-right-wing policies. At the same time, he makes a homonationalist appeal to the gay community, attending their cocktail parties and voting in favour of their discreet, identity-based priorities. He represents the epitome of homonormativity as described by Lisa Duggan – masculine bravado, robust support for neo-conservative economic policies and single-issue support for gay marriage. If anything, the hypocrisy of a politician like Baird points to the need for a broad-based economic and social justice movement, rather than a single-issue gay rights agenda. As Lisa Duggan writes,

... homonormativity comes equipped with a rhetorical recoding of key terms in the history of gay politics: "equality becomes narrow, formal access to a few

conservatizing institutions, “freedom” becomes impunity for bigotry and vast inequalities in commercial life and civil society, the “right to privacy” becomes domestic confinement, and democratic politics itself becomes something to be escaped (Duggan, 2003, p. 66).

“Uncle Jason”

Weeks after John Baird was outed on CBC, Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, came under fire for altering a guide for new immigrants, erasing any mentions of same sex marriage or constitutional rights for gay and lesbian Canadians. A year later, literally on the eve of the 2011 federal election call, Kenney announced \$100,000 in funding to support persecuted gay and lesbian refugees who flee to Canada (Lindell, 2011). And a few days before that, Citizenship and Immigration Canada quietly released a reprint of its 2009 study guide for new citizens – this time including a short paragraph mentioning that gays and lesbians have “full protection of and equal treatment under the law, including access to civil marriage” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). Kenney and the Conservatives came under fire in 2010, when it was revealed that someone at the ministerial level had removed the controversial paragraph in the 2009 edition, despite repeated attempts by public servants to have it included. Kenney is well-known among ethnic and cultural communities in Canada. Even before being appointed to a cabinet position in 2008, he acted as the unofficial government dispatch to “ethnic” communities in his role as a parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister. He was credited with helping the Conservatives improve their seat count in the 2008 election, largely in the cultural enclaves that he had so tirelessly visited. As a 2009 article in the *National Post* described:

Before being elevated to Cabinet last fall, Mr. Kenney spent two years shuttling between community halls, temples and church basements, building support networks in Sikh, Hindu, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, Jewish and Arab communities, as Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity. His mission: to break a near lock his Liberal opponents have had on ethnic support since Trudeaumania.

Come last October's election, the payoff arrived: The Tories upset numerous Liberal strongholds surrounding Vancouver and Toronto by converting Asian, East Asian and Middle Eastern voters from red to blue (Libin, 2009).

Kenney was also given credit after the 2011 election for helping the Conservatives scoop up much needed seats in the Greater Toronto Area, largely by appealing to the Jewish community, promoting the party's hawkish and unequivocal support for the Israeli government.

The scuffle with the citizenship guide in 2010 took place only weeks before Kenney announced drastic changes to Canada's immigration and refugee system – changes that refugee advocates say will have a particularly devastating impact on queers seeking refuge in Canada. The new rules create a two-tiered system, where some applicants deemed to be from "safe" countries will not be given the right to appeal. The government also says it will expedite the vast majority of refugee hearings to within two months of peoples' arrival. The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR) argues that this will make it difficult for many refugees to make their cases – particularly queer claimants who may have trouble "proving" their sexual orientation or building enough trust to speak freely about their experiences (Canadian Council for Refugees). To make matters worse, Kenney announced that the government would be removing the ability for refugees to make a final plea to stay in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. In announcing the changes to the program, Kenney indicated that one of the motivations behind the changes is that fact that

many refugee claimants currently spend more than four years waiting to have their case heard and sometimes remain in the country for many more years, even if their claim has been rejected. Instead of characterizing this as an inherent flaw in government processes, Kenney placed the blame on people seeking asylum, saying:

Our generosity is too often abused by false asylum claimants who come here and do not need our protection. They're misusing the asylum system to jump the queue rather than waiting their turn like everyone else (cbc.ca, 2010).

In October 2010, the Harper government introduced Bill C-49, the *Preventing Human Smugglers from Abusing Canada's Immigration System Act*. As the CCR argues, "Despite the title, most of the provisions in the bill punish refugees, not smugglers. The people who will suffer if this bill is passed are people fleeing persecution, including children" (Canadian Council for Refugees, 2010). According to the provisions of C-49, migrants arriving on boats could be thrown in jail for a year or more without review, and barred from becoming permanent residents for five years – regardless of whether their refugee claim is accepted. The bill was introduced only two months after MV Sun Sea, a boat carrying nearly 500 Sri Lankan refugee claimants landed on the coast of British Columbia. Even though the Conservatives lauded this bill as a necessary step to prevent "queue jumpers," all three opposition parties opposed it (Minsky, 2011) and it didn't make it past second reading before the 2011 federal election was called. Still, Harper has made it clear that his party intends to introduce the bill in the next Parliament. With a newly elected majority in the House of Commons, the Conservatives have promised to introduce a similar bill early on in their mandate and it is sure to pass.

Despite the fact that the Conservative government has introduced legislation that has had a harmful impact on immigrants and refugees, Kenney is still used as the party's chief dispatch to ethnic communities. His website features hundreds of photos of him, posing with people of colour. A 2009 profile of Kenney in the *National Post* describes how he once boarded an entire family from India in his Calgary home, while they worked their way through the immigration process. Apparently, the children who stayed with him still call him "Uncle Jason" (Libin, 2009). Still, the last few months put a dent in Kenney's reputation. In March 2011, only two weeks before the federal election was called, Kenney found himself in hot water after one of his staffers mistakenly sent a fundraising letter on official MP letterhead to NDP MP Linda Duncan. The letter detailed the Conservative party's outreach strategy in "ethnic" communities, particularly focusing on Chinese and South Asian people in suburban Vancouver and the Greater Toronto Area. The letter said the party was looking for \$200,000 in donations by March 11, 2011 in an effort to flood ethnic and community media with Conservative ads, just before the writ dropped and election financing rules were enacted. Key bullet points from the memo are revealing, including comments such as, "They Live Where We Need to Win," "Data Proves Hunch: We Are Losing," and "We Are Losing Less Badly Now: Need to Positively Brand Conservative Party in Target Communities" (ctv.ca, 2011).

In the heat of the 2011 federal election campaign, the Conservatives' "ethnic"¹² strategy came under fire once again, when an email sent from a campaign worker for Etobicoke Centre Conservative candidate Ted Opitz was leaked to the media. It sought 20

¹² While the term "ethnic" is generally rejected by immigrant and racialized communities, the Conservatives' use of the term is another indicator that the party sees these communities as votes to be won – an easy category in which to slot "non-white" people.

people in “national folklore costumes” to sit behind Harper at the rally at a Toronto airport-area hotel for a “great TV photo op” (Shepard, 2011). Opitz is a lieutenant-colonel reservist in the Canadian military and also happened to be Jason Kenney’s senior regional multicultural advisor. In response, activists dressed in outfits that depicted their ethnicity and protested at a rally for Opitz on April 14, holding signs with slogans such as, “I am very, very ethnic.” In addition, representatives from the Toronto-based group Colour of Poverty – Colour of Change responded to the Conservative “ethnic vote” strategy with a music video parody of Michael Jackson’s Beat It (cbc.ca, 2011). But despite the resistance from anti-racist activists, Opitz won the election, defeating Liberal incumbent Borys Wrzesnewskyj by just 26 votes.

Kenney’s deep roots with the religious right¹³ also came under fire during the 2011 election campaign. H  l  ne Buzzetti published a piece in *Le Devoir* titled “Des fous de Dieu chez les conservateurs”¹⁴, tracing the Harper government’s connection with Christian nationalists and digging up letters that Kenney wrote to a campus newspaper when he was president of the student union at the Catholic University of San Francisco. At the time, he was specifically objecting to a pro-choice student group being allowed to distribute literature on campus. Mocking the concept of free speech, he argued that this was a slippery slope that could open the door to the Klu Klux Klan. In the online version of the article, Buzzetti linked to a YouTube video where Kenney was interviewed by a local television station, suggesting that the Vatican should revoke the university’s Catholic

¹³ It is worth noting here that the so-called religious right is not necessarily homogenous. As Andrea Smith describes in her book *Native Americans and the Religious Right*, some evangelical groups support indigenous land claims and campaigns against the oil industry. Other groups incorporate charitable or social justice projects that may espouse progressive values. “The right” is just as diverse in its opinions and contradictions as is “the left.”

¹⁴ Rough translation: “The Jesus freaks in the Conservative Party.”

affiliation for allowing student groups that contradict the church's teachings to advertise on campus (Buzzetti, 2011). Even in the face of these recent gaffes, Kenney's name is being floated in the media as a possible successor to Stephen Harper, proving that the Conservatives place a lot of stock in his ability to reach out to ethnic constituencies – even if his professed support for immigrant communities is being exposed as duplicitous and insincere (Simpson, 2011). The question is how does Kenney's role as Conservative dispatch to immigrant communities relate to the Harper government's homonationalist appeal to queer communities? Last year's controversy over the study guide for new citizens and the muted reaction from Canada's national LGBT rights organization helps make this connection.

The citizenship guide scuffle

In March 2010, the Conservatives found themselves under fire, after it was revealed that someone in Jason Kenney's office specifically ordered references to same sex marriage to be removed from a study guide for prospective citizens. The 2009 document, called *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship*, represented the first major revision to the study guide since one was published in 1995 called *A Look at Canada*. According to a report by Canadian Press, senior departmental officials at Citizenship and Immigration Canada only cut out the gay-related sections of the guide after making multiple pleas to Kenney's office and sending back several drafts for approval (Canadian Press, 2010). At the time, the reaction from Egale, Canada's national LGBT rights organization, was lukewarm at best. Helen Kennedy, the organization's executive director, told the media that she had met with Kenney in December 2009. At the time, she complained that gay rights

were not mentioned in the guide, and she said that the Minister claimed that LGBT issues were “overlooked.” When asked by CP for her comments on the citizenship guide scuffle, she said, “I am hopeful and optimistic that we're going to get it fixed because we're not happy with it” (Canadian Press, 2010).

Queer activists did not share Kennedy's optimism, and many argued that Egale's reaction should have been one of rage, not accommodation. Toronto activist Justin Stayshyn mockingly posted the message, “We're here, we're queer, we're negotiating inclusion in the second printing!” on Twitter (Creelman, 2010). More than 7,000 people joined a Facebook group demanding Kenney's resignation, and the public sector unions CUPE and PSAC launched online petitions demanding that gay rights be re-written into the citizenship guide. When the guide was re-printed with little fanfare in 2011, the government acquiesced to public pressure and included the following sentence recognizing the existence of same sex marriage: “Canada's diversity includes gay and lesbian Canadians, who enjoy full protection of and equal treatment under the law, including access to civil marriage” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011, p. 13). The only other reference to queers is in a caption under a photo of Olympic swimmer Mark Tewksbury, describing him as a gay activist.

While much of the criticism in the media and in the House of Commons surrounding the citizenship guide focused almost exclusively on the omission, it is useful to take a broader view when comparing the new citizenship guide to its predecessor. Taking a close

look at the two documents – one produced under Jean Chrétien’s Liberal government¹⁵ and the other under Stephen Harper’s Conservatives – helps reveal significant insights about the relationship between the Harper government’s appeals to religious fundamentalists, new Canadians and the LGBT community. My first impression when looking at both documents is that the earlier version is much more pedagogical in nature. The text is written in plain language and the font size is fairly large. The margins are filled with key words and prompts that summarize the content and explain what information applicants will need to know when they write the citizenship test. The 2009 guide is much denser and is 67 pages long, compared to the earlier version, which was only 46 pages long. The text size is much smaller and the document is densely packed with information, including a significant section on military history that did not appear in the older document. At first glance, the Liberal version of the guide strikes a less paternalistic tone and seems to be designed to guarantee or at least encourage success. The Conservative document is certainly more comprehensive, but reads more like a tome than a study guide.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada published a backgrounder on its website when the new guide was launched, containing a chart comparing the two documents¹⁶. In the backgrounder, the government lauds itself for including more information on Canadian history, the Québécois nation, the equality of men and women, Aboriginal peoples, residential schools and Canadian heroes and sports figures, among other categories (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). But what it doesn’t account for is the striking

¹⁵ For the purpose of my comparison, I used the 2002 edition of *A Look at Canada*, but from all accounts, this was simply a re-print with no significant changes from the version launched in 1995. I also used the 2009 and 2011 versions of *Discover Canada*, but the only change made to the 2011 edition was the addition of the one line on same sex marriage on p. 13.

¹⁶ The backgrounder was updated in March 2011 to include the reference to same sex marriage.

difference in tone between the two documents. For example, the earlier guide's answer to the question, "what does Canadian citizenship mean?" is that "Canadian values include freedom, respect for cultural differences and a commitment to social justice. We are proud of the fact that we are a peaceful nation. In fact, Canadians act as peacekeepers in many countries around the world." It lists key Canadian values as equality, respect for cultural differences, freedom, peace, and law and order – in that order (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002).

In comparison, the new edition describes Canada as, "a constitutional monarchy, a parliamentary democracy and a federal state." It says that "Canadians are bound together by a shared commitment to the rule of law and to the institutions of parliamentary government" and lists "obeying the law" as the first bullet point under a list of "citizenship responsibilities" (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011, pp. 3,7). While it's true that the new version of the guide mentions equality rights and Aboriginal issues in much more depth than the previous edition, the way that it frames the issues is quite striking. Each time that Aboriginal peoples are mentioned in the earlier guide, their status as Canada's first peoples is highlighted quite strongly. An example:

The only people originally from Canada are the Aboriginal peoples. They lived in Canada for thousands of years before the first immigrants came here (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002, p. 8).

In contrast, this is how the new edition of the guide describes Aboriginal peoples' origin:

The ancestors of Aboriginal peoples are believed to have migrated from Asia many of thousands of years ago (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011, p. 10).

In an astounding act of revisionist history the Conservative government has managed to cast doubt on the indigenous nature of Aboriginal peoples. While it may be

tempting to disregard the sentence as an awkward turn of phrase, it is reminiscent of comments that Tom Flanagan, former campaign director and chief of staff for Stephen Harper, made in his book, *First Nations? Second Thoughts*. In the book, he specifically referred to North America's First Nations as its "first immigrants." In a 2004 article for *Walrus* magazine, Marci McDonald called this a "rewrite which neatly eliminates any indigenous entitlement ... invoking the spectre of a country decimated by land claims, [Flanagan] argued the only sensible native policy was outright assimilation" (McDonald, 2004). While the government deserves credit for including a description of the residential school system and its abuses in the new guide, it seems like cold comfort, given the ways that it undermines Aboriginal history and casts doubt on the veracity of First Nations' land claims.

The second area where the tone of the two guides is strikingly different is in their descriptions of equality rights. The earlier version states under "equality":

We respect everyone's rights. Everyone has the right to speak out and express ideas that others might disagree with. Governments must treat everyone with equal dignity and respect – two other fundamental Canadian values (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2002, p. 7).

The new edition of the guide introduces "The Equality of Women and Men" by saying:

In Canada, men and women are equal under the law. Canada's openness and generosity do not extend to barbaric cultural practices that tolerate spousal abuse, "honour killings," female genital mutilation, forced marriage or other gender-based violence. Those guilty of these crimes are severely punished under Canada's criminal laws (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011, p. 9).

Again, this dramatic shift in focus is no accident. In a December 2009 article for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, historian Jack Granatstein lauded the new citizenship guide's change in perspective. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, Granatstein was a prominent consultant

on the creation of the new guide. He is also known for his condemnation of social history and his support for placing military “heroes” at the forefront of history education (Maynard, 2001). In the article, Granatstein suggests that the citizenship guide has a role to play as a key assimilationist tactic for immigrants from “non-traditional” areas:

In fact, our newcomers have not come from the traditional areas for years. Instead, Canada's immigrants will be Asians and Africans, people from the Middle East and Latin America, and we will need to consider carefully how we integrate them into our liberal-democratic and secular society, how, in other words, we make them into Canadians (Granatstein, 2009).

This type of discourse plays directly into Jason Kenney and the Conservative government’s courting of “good” immigrants and condemnation of bad, queue-jumping potential terrorists. This is the right-wing hawk vision of citizenship, all wrapped up in a dense package that is less accessible and more difficult to study. And by introducing equality rights in the guide with an angle reinforcing how Canada is clearly more progressive than an immigrant’s home country, the document plays into the homonationalist courting of queer communities and other self-defined progressives. As Sherene Razack, Yasmin Jiwani and other anti-racist theorists have written about, the strategic deployment of so-called “honour killings” and female genital mutilation are often used to make the West appear as a beacon of democracy, neatly erasing colonialism, Islamophobia and racism as perpetrated by the state.

It is telling that of all the egregious mischaracterizations present in the citizenship guide, the only one that was corrected in the 2011 printing was the omission of same sex marriage. While Kenney and the Conservatives were certainly hostile to the inclusion of even one sentence on marriage equality, the fact that they acquiesced to quiet diplomacy

by Egale Canada and an outcry in the House of Commons is telling. As Brenda Cossman and Lisa Duggan argue, same sex marriage is an institution that ultimately benefits a right-wing state. It effectively privatizes the state's responsibility to citizens and lets governments off the hook for supporting low-income spouses and dependent citizens. It also encourages a whole cycle of Conservative values, including the owning of property, the purchasing of consumer products and a general desire to keep tax levels low. In the midst of the 2011 federal election, "middle class families" was the buzz phrase du jour, with all parties seeking to woo voters with promises of boutique tax breaks (from the Conservatives) and new social programs (from the NDP and the Liberals).

Even if the Conservative vision of a family does not explicitly include same sex couples, it seems logical to assume that many queers see themselves as being part of middle-class families. Whether intentionally or not, politicians are speaking directly to gay people when they promise tax cuts, smaller government and protection from "terrorists." At the end of the day, the Conservatives were able to consolidate political power and earn a majority in the House of Commons. As Marci McDonald and others have argued, they couldn't have been done with the Christian nationalists alone. Statistically speaking, there are too few religious fundamentalists to ensure a Tory majority. The Conservatives needed to appeal to the centre in order to attain mass appeal. This included a homonationalist appeal to queers and their allies. Unfortunately, the muted response to the initial scandal by Egale Canada points to the fact that the Harper government's homonationalist rhetoric may be having a pacifying effect on the gay and lesbian community. In media reports after the omission was uncovered, Egale's executive director Helen Kennedy revealed that she

had met with Kenney privately, that he had apologized and that he had promised to include a mention of gay marriage in the 2011 edition (Creelman, 2010). As it turns out, her prediction was correct: the controversial sentence was added to the 2011 reprint. But is this really a victory for queer equality? Or is it simply a smokescreen that allows the Harper government to continue congratulating itself for being concerned with human rights and less scary than the media makes it out to be?

Carol Johnson would likely argue that John Baird and Jason Kenney's success could largely be attributed to their success in "passing." Baird passes as straight in the eyes of a Conservative voter base and as gay in queer urban enclaves. Kenney passes as a friend and ally to racialized communities, even though he often acts against their interests. His sexual orientation is also ambiguous, as he has never been pictured with a spouse and has never made a public reference to his own sexual orientation. Again, I maintain that the "truth" of these two politicians' sexual orientation is unimportant. What concerns me – and Johnson – is the ways that politicians are able to use both heteronormative and homonormative tropes to act in duplicitous ways and largely escape criticism from the communities they are targeting. Johnson argues that "gays and lesbians are being asked to perform not what heterosexuals *do* – touch the other sex sexually – but to perform what heterosexuals *do not do* – not touching same-sex bodies sexually. In effect, same-sex couples are being asked to pass as heterosexual friends, not same-sex lovers." (Johnson, 2002, p. 328) She maintains that the "closet" is alive and well in institutional life, and criticizes politicians and other public figures for muting their sexuality. She says that this serves to repress gay and lesbian difference, giving governments free reign to act against queer interests (Johnson, 2002, p.

330). While Johnson supports queer theory's ability to de-naturalize identity categories, she maintains that identity-based outing strategies, originally advocated by gay liberationists in the 1970s, may be a strategy that is worth re-introducing today.

If Baird and Kenney do inhabit the private space of "the closet", they certainly pass well. In addition to their virtually identical bait-and-switch tactics, both Baird and Kenney physically resemble each other, embodying a similar image of masculinity and political power. Both are poster children for normalization and class privilege – they are generally seen wearing a suit, they are careful to pose for photos with the "proper" elements of marginalized communities, and they keep their personal lives private. Neither of them has been photographed in public with a spouse or common-law partner. Both Baird and Kenney are staunch supporters of Prime Minister Harper and his ideological agenda. And so far, their devotion has been rewarded with escalating political portfolios and tremendous media visibility.

But despite the party's glad-handing among queer and immigrant communities, Harper's government has solidified an increasingly intimate relationship with the religious right over the last several years. This is bolstered by the party's outward image of a more compassionate conservatism. If anything, the stealth nature of this political influence is the closet that queers should be most concerned about. Brenda Cossman is certainly correct in her assertion that legal advocacy and legislative change have transformed the nature of sexual citizenship in Canada. But Kinsman, Gentile, and Puar remind us how easy it is for formerly oppressed people to become incorporated into the machine of the nation state. Both Kenney and Baird represent the public face of Harper's hetero and homonormativity.

Their very presence in queer and in immigrant communities provides an effective smokescreen for the Harper government's egregious actions. In some cases, this has helped to mute opposition, lulling the gay establishment into submission. And that is precisely how the double-edged sword of normalization works. It accepts certain people into the fold, based on their similarities. It divides populations into "good" and bad," and gives the chosen community members impression that they are being listened to. This makes it easier for politicians to turn around and enact policies that stand in stark contradiction with marginalized people's interests.

Election 2011: new considerations

When I first started writing this paper, Canada was in the midst of a federal election. The results were shocking to most media pundits and quickly re-drew the political map for years to come. The biggest story during the last two weeks of the election was the "NDP Surge" or the "Orange Crush" that effectively destroyed the Liberal Party and vaulted the New Democratic Party to Official Opposition status. In the week leading to voting day, some polling companies predicted that an NDP minority government was in the realm of possibility. Overwhelmed at the meteoric rise of the NDP in Quebec, the media seemed convinced that the most likely result of the election would be another Conservative minority. Election night proved to be a shocker. The Harper government gained a solid majority with 166 seats and the NDP vaulted to an unprecedented 103 seats. The Liberal Party and the Bloc Québécois were eviscerated, dropping to 34 and four seats respectively. While it could be argued that all of the political parties have drifted to the centre over the last few years, the ruling party and the Official Opposition stand in starker contrast to each

other than they ever have. Neo-conservatives and social democrats will face off in the House of Commons for the next four years, though the Conservative majority ensures that the Harper government will have free reign to pass laws and make major policy changes, without the consent of opposition MPs.

The day after the federal election, Egale Canada released a statement commenting on the results. Rather than expressing concern or trepidation over the reality of a majority government imbued with fundamentalist and homophobes, the organization signalled support for the party's "tough on crime" agenda. In what I can only assume is an attempt to cajole the Conservatives into including queers in their policy considerations, Egale challenged the Harper government to make good on its promise to bring a "swift return to the business of government" and take action to "reduce crime and make our streets and neighbourhoods safer" (Egale Canada, 2011). Using this framing, the organization called on the government to enact legal human rights protections for trans people. But in doing so, the organization expressed its approval of the Conservatives' plan to introduce more mandatory minimum sentences for minor crimes, crack down on drug use in prisons and build more super jails to accommodate the influx of new prisoners. This is despite the fact that according to Statistics Canada, crime rates have been trending down for over 20 years, including the violent crime rate (CCPA, 2010). Instead of slamming the Harper government for its inaction on trans rights and its fear-based rhetoric on crime rates, Egale employed a homonationalist appeal to try and convince the Conservatives that queers deserve state protection, writing:

For members of Canada's diffuse and diverse LGBTQ community and their allies, the first litmus test of this and the Prime Minister's promise to "stand on guard for all,"

will be the explicit inclusion in the crime-prevention agenda of measures to protect trans Canadians from hate crimes, hate speech and discrimination by continuing the unprecedented work of the outgoing Parliament toward recognizing equality rights based on gender identity and expression. A bill comparable to C-389 must be re-introduced, and it is the responsibility of any government truly invested in representing all Canadians to show leadership on this front. (Egale Canada, 2011)

Trans legal scholar Dean Spade argues against the adoption of trans-specific hate crimes, maintaining that these measures only serve to bolster the prison industrial complex. He argues that hate crimes laws do nothing to stop transphobic violence and only increase the likelihood of queer and trans people being thrown behind bars. He writes that “hate crimes laws enhance the punishing power of the criminal justice system, which targets people of colour and poor people and disproportionately punishes queer and trans people” (Spade, 2007, p. 246). Spade maintains that “the campaigns to pass these laws promote the idea that homophobic and transphobic violence is primarily an issue of individual violent people, rather than systemic conditions of oppression that result in widespread violence in our communities at the hands of the state, especially those who are targeted by police or are incarcerated” (Spade, 2007, 246). Spade suggests that trans and queer communities should be deciding on which political campaigns to support by asking themselves how the most vulnerable people in the community will be affected by their outcomes. According to his analysis, the push for hate crimes provisions does not pass the test.

In making its post-election statement, Egale signalled that it is willing to “work with” the Conservative government to advance LGBT rights, effectively undercutting any potential for an oppositional, grassroots political strategy opposing the prison industrial complex. This seems to follow the organization’s previous actions in courting support from neo-conservatives such as John Baird and Jaime Watt and discussing the citizenship guide

matter “behind closed doors” with Jason Kenney. Though Egale has always focused on lobbying and legal reform, it seems politically naïve to imagine that the Conservatives, a party so beholden to Christian fundamentalists and right-wing ideologues, would take Egale seriously. The political dynamics of Parliament Hill have changed dramatically since the 1990 and early 2000s, the period when Egale had the most success using “inside” tactics. While a combination of lobbying and court interventions contributed to the achievement of a wide range of civil rights for Canadian queers in the past, similar tactics have yielded little more than a one-sentence mention in a government citizenship guide in recent years. Egale’s post-election statement bears all the hallmarks of homonormativity and homonationalism – it practically begs for queers to be included in the Conservatives’ vision of a low-tax, law-and-order, neo-conservative state. The implications for racialized queers, trans people in prison, single lesbian mothers and other marginalized members of the LGBT community is chilling.

Conclusion: new alliances

Even though it may seem counterintuitive at first glance, both John Baird and Jason Kenney play an important role as dispatches to queer and racialized communities. Using subtle and overt discourses of nationalism, belonging and economic self-interest, they help pacify opposition by making people feel like they belong in the national imaginary. Casting out “welfare cheats,” “queue jumpers” and “terrorists,” they promote a form of sexual and cultural exceptionalism that is fundamentally racist and homonormative. While a less nuanced view of neo-conservatism would assume that queers and immigrants have no place in the Harper vision of Canada, homonationalism allows us to see that certain morally,

politically and economically acceptable segments of those populations are imagined as being appropriately “Canadian.” This helps obscure the Conservative Party’s deep roots in the evangelical Christian nationalist community. While the evidence of fundamentalist interference in Conservative policy and lawmaking is abundantly clear, a few token gestures such as inclusion in the citizenship guide, a small amount of money directed at queer refugees and a series of appearances at gay galas seem to have effectively pacified opposition from the gay political establishment.

Given the Harper government’s explicit connection with the religious right, it seems counterintuitive to suggest that it is making a play for queer voters. But I would argue that it’s these convivial connections that allow us to glimpse at how the machinations of right-wing power really work. Throughout his political career, Stephen Harper played a cat and mouse game with the religious right – handing them discrete gifts like the child care tax credit, but then refusing to budge on issues such as abortion and same sex marriage. In the 2008 election, he famously donned a sweater, in an attempt to soften his image as a scary right-wing hawk with women voters. As he made a play in the 2011 election for areas near Toronto and throughout Quebec, he needed to appear more progressive than he actually was – and this meant courting queers and “ethnics.”

In a stroke of what I can only call Machiavellian genius, Jason Kenney has managed to both antagonize and pacify members of both groups. In the 2004 and 2006 elections, he toured synagogues, mosques and temples to whip up fear about gay marriage among immigrant and religious groups. And in advance of the 2011 election, he added gay marriage to the citizenship guide and announced \$100,000 in funding to support LGBT

refugees. In doing so, he ramped up his rhetoric about “good” versus “bad” refugees and attempted to re-frame his right-wing government as being a bastion of progressive values. His strategy was effective, increasing the Conservatives’ vote count in four elections among traditionally Liberal-voting ethnic strongholds. This strategy is credited with handing the Conservatives its coveted majority mandate in 2011. Meanwhile, John Baird remains one of the most vocal and prominent members of the Harper government. Despite being publicly outed by another Conservative politician, Baird’s sexual orientation has never been mentioned in the mainstream media. Even though his status as a gay man is well-known in urban centres and in LGBT circles, it is entirely plausible to imagine that the majority of his constituents assume that he is heterosexual. This creates a double bind. Certain gay people assume that Baird is an ally and organizations like Egale Canada continue to invite him to their fundraisers. Meanwhile, his quasi-closeted status does not ruffle the feathers of his party’s evangelical base.

If anything, a close look at the homonationalism of the Harper government exposes the limits of identity politics in opposing a wholesale right-wing attack on progressive values. A close look at the “new and improved” citizenship guide does little to assuage concerns about Harper’s vision of Canadian nationalism. If anything, the inclusion of one small mention of gays and lesbians effectively incorporates queer identities into a racist, war-mongering colonial narrative. And inviting John Baird to a gay human rights gala only rewards him and his party for cutting the Court Challenges program – the only source of federal funding that was available for marginalized groups to seek redress in the courts. After suffering decades of oppression by the state, queer Canadians are well-placed to be at

the forefront of a struggle against the Canadian government's imperialism, racism, Islamophobia and colonialism. Identifying and resisting the homonationalist tendencies of the Harper government and of organizations like Egale Canada allows us to imagine political possibilities that move beyond the goal of state acceptance and aim instead for social and economic justice.

It has been encouraging to see a groundswell of opposition emerge from grassroots activists and through social media, in response to the immigration guide scandal and other violations of immigrant and refugee rights. Foucault reminds us that power is not simply oppressive – it also produces identities and helps bring together new alliances. And while Canada's national gay and lesbian organization was busy making excuses for Kenney's "oversight," young queer activists joined with members of No One Is Illegal, to confront the Immigration Minister at speaking events in Montreal and Ottawa. They shouted, "Racist, sexist, anti-gay, Jason Kenney go away" – demonstrating that resistance is indeed fertile and the Egale doesn't speak for all Canadian queers (No One Is Illegal, 2010).

Less than two weeks after the 2011 federal election, a young undocumented queer artist named Alvaro Orozco was arrested on his way to dinner with friends. A refugee from Nicaragua, Orozco first fled to Canada when he was 12 years old, after being severely physically abused by his father for being gay. In 2007, his case gained national prominence when a refugee adjudicator denied his claim, based on the assertion that Orozco was not "gay enough" to be in real danger. As I began writing this paper, 25-year-old Orozco was being held in the Toronto Immigration Holding Centre, awaiting imminent deportation to Nicaragua. Egale Canada did not make a public statement in support of his case, but queers

in Toronto mobilized to stop Orozco's deportation. They demanded that Jason Kenney allow him to stay on humanitarian and compassionate grounds. In early May, activists took to the streets of Toronto in a "flash mob," singing the song, "We are family," in an effort to establish the fact that Orozco has deep roots in the community and is loved by his queer chosen family (Toth, 2011). Their demands were connected to the broader migrant justice movement and their actions were led by queer activists who are young, racialized and not connected to organizations with the same funding or clout as Egale. On May 31, Orozco was granted permission to stay in Canada on humanitarian and compassionate grounds, a huge victory for Orozco and for the people who supported him. In an article published just three days before Orozco's release, activist Syed Hussan explained how the case hinged on more than one government official's "homophobic" actions:

Too many people are intent on supporting Alvaro because they believe that Canada is a queer-friendly country, one that welcomes refugees. If his deportation is stopped, it will be seen as a victory for justice, rather than an exception to the exclusionary and exploitative immigration system that exists.

The issue here is not that Alvaro, and millions of others like him around the world, break immigration laws. Or that one IRB judge was homophobic and therefore denied his refugee claim because he did not "look gay enough" to her. The issue is that the law itself is broken (Hussan, 2011).

By rejecting the allure of homonationalism and refusing to be hoodwinked by token actions, activists such as Hussan are rejecting identity politics as a singular basis for political solidarity. Their goal is not to be "included" in the national imaginary, but to seek justice for queers, migrants and other groups being targeted by the onslaught of neo-conservatism. I take great comfort in this.

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