May Chazan
2006 Trudeau Scholar, University of Toronto

In collaboration with Laura Madokoro
2009 Trudeau Scholar, Columbia University

BIOGRAPHY

Dr. May Chazan is a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) postdoctoral fellow affiliated with the Department of Geography at the University of Toronto and a research associate with the Health Economics and HIV/AIDS Research Division at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. A 2006 Trudeau Foundation scholar, Dr. Chazan received her PhD in geography with a specialization in political economy from Carleton University in 2011. Her research is concerned with the contributions of older women in mobilizing for social change and in building transnational solidarity networks. In her PhD, she undertook a detailed examination of older women's roles in responding to the HIV/AIDS crisis in southern Africa, including the ways in which Canadian women have engaged in these struggles. She co-edited the recent volume *Home and Native Land: Unsettling Multiculturalism in Canada* (published by Between the Lines Press in 2011) and was the recipient of the 2012 Canadian Association of Graduate Studies/University Microfilms International Distinguished Dissertation Award, 2011 Royal Society of Canada Alice Wilson Award, the 2011 SSHRC Postdoctoral Prize, and the 2011 Carleton University Medal.

Dr. Laura Madokoro is currently pursuing research on the history of migration and medical exclusions as a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at Columbia University in New York. She completed her PhD in history at the University of British Columbia in 2012. Her research on migration policy, and refugee movements in particular, is animated by social justice concerns about the unequal power structures that governed trans-border movements throughout the 20th century. Dr. Madokoro is a 2009 Trudeau scholar.

ABSTRACT

This paper is a reflection on the theme of "Human Rights and Dignity"—its language, framing, assumptions, and contours—and suggests priority areas for the Foundation to support within the context of this theme. The paper is divided into two parts. The first is a conceptual discussion of the theme of "Human Rights and Dignity" and calls for a recasting of this thematic area to adopt a critical feminist social justice framework. This part argues, primarily, for taking (back) on board "social justice" and revising the title of this theme to "Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity." The second part proposes a research agenda within the context of this theme, calling for a focus on work that seeks to better understand and transform *processes* of discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and injustice, as part of a mandate to support struggles for a fairer and more just society.

Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity: A Call for a Critical Feminist Framework

Introduction

We took on the task of writing this discussion paper with some self-consciousness, as scholars who have never explicitly theorized either "human rights" or "dignity" in our own work, but as women whose research and personal commitments speak to everyday struggles for social justice.[1] Our mandate, as set by the Trudeau Foundation, was to provide a personal reflection on the theme of "Human Rights and Dignity"—its language, framing, assumptions, and contours—and to suggest priority research areas within the context of this theme.

Our own work and social locations undoubtedly influence how we have gone about writing this paper and the perspectives we bring to this dialogue. I (May Chazan) am a feminist geographer and mother of two; I have spent much of the last decade working with

1. Dr. Chazan would like to thank Dr. Madokoro for collaborating with her on and co-writing this paper, and for her invaluable enthusiasm and intellectual input. Both authors would also like to thank Stephanie Kittmer for her research assistance and to extend their gratitude to those members of the Trudeau Foundation community who offered their insights to the authors along the way. They are particularly grateful for the input of all those in attendance at the 2012 Summer Institute in Montebello, Quebec.

communities in South Africa and Canada to understand how older women are mobilizing around the profound and combined stresses of HIV/AIDS, violence, and poverty in southern Africa.

I (Laura Madokoro) am a socially engaged historian; I have spent the past few years exploring the historical development of structures and politics that govern the reception of refugees in potential countries of asylum.

In various ways, this conversation reflects our personal experiences and perspectives.

This paper marks the second time that the Foundation has engaged in self-reflection on this particular theme, and thus should be read in this context—it is both a stand-alone essay and part of an ongoing discussion. In 2007, our task was given to 2004 Trudeau fellow Roderick A. MacDonald, a professor at McGill University who teaches and writes in the area of civil law and access to justice. In many instances, we present MacDonald's arguments from five years ago in an attempt to pick up where he left off. Situating our intervention alongside his, we not only offer various extensions and rebuttals to MacDonald's (2007) paper, but also raise questions around how events of the past five years might converge with entrenched processes of injustice to shape what we now view as priorities for work on rights and dignity.

In Canada and elsewhere, scholars and public thinkers from a variety of disciplines have significantly contributed to how we understand human rights and to formulating rights-oriented policies aimed at improving people's lives. Some of the earliest and most influential thinkers in this area approached human rights from predominantly legal perspectives, for example, by focusing attention on the ways in which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms have, since their introduction in 1948 and 1982, respectively, opened new avenues for people to claim their political and civil rights (Gutmann, 2001; Lamey, 2011). Departing from this work, other scholars have sought

to broaden the scope of "human rights" to include not only civil and political rights, but also social, economic, and cultural rights, thereby beginning to link such conditions as extreme poverty and violence to rights abuses (Sepúlveda Carmona, 2011). Feminist scholars have added to this the need to understand the gender dimensions of rights abuses and rights claims, including the ways in which laws and policies continue to discriminate against women and women of colour (Agosín, 2002). Meanwhile, environmentalists have sought to add environmental rights—rights to land, to resources, and to the global commons—to the list of human rights concerns. Most recently, many critical social science and humanities scholars have questioned human rights as a discursive strategy, critiquing human rights as a particular cultural construct with limited salience in the Global South; examining the dissonances between human rights treaties and people's everyday lives; and probing the ways in which human rights discourses are drawn upon to mobilize different people and communities (Pangalangan, 2003).

While we acknowledge the important contributions of these and many other streams of scholarship, we have not undertaken an exhaustive review of the vast, multi-faceted, and contested literatures on human rights and dignity; this was neither requested by the Foundation nor possible within the time frame allotted. We have, however, appraised a number of sources, which we periodically reference throughout the paper. Thinking through the conceptual dimensions, we have considered certain key scholarly texts on justice, rights, and dignity, and consulted various scholars and practitioners working in these areas (these were largely selected from the Trudeau Foundation community of scholars, mentors, and fellows). In formulating suggestions of directions for future research, we have also examined the priorities and recent publications of many social justice and human rights organizations working in Canada, including Amnesty International, the Council for Canadians, the Polaris Institute, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternative, Voices-Voix,

and the Canadian Civil Liberties Association. In addition, we have scanned major national media outlets—the *Globe and Mail*, the CBC, and the *National Post*—some alternative media sites, such as The Mark and Rabble.ca and the writings and speeches of well-known Canadian social commentators, in order to further contextualize and situate our emerging arguments. Our discussion and analysis draw on this research as well as on our close reading of MacDonald's (2007) paper.

The Foundation's four themes reflect different but overlapping dimensions of a set of concerns central to the Foundation's mandate. We believe that, collectively, these themes speak to the Foundation's desire to support ideas, careers, and people committed to working for fairer and more sustainable ways of living, interacting, and organizing our world. While a detailed discussion of how the four themes are linked could prove fruitful for the Foundation's future visioning, such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, we will assume that the Foundation will continue to organize its mandate around some version of these themes; we will thus focus on bringing a critical and contextualized reading to the theme currently known as "Human Rights and Dignity."

This paper is divided into two parts. In the first, we guide a short conceptual discussion around the theme of "Human Rights and Dignity," raising questions about what is captured and what might be obscured by this particular language and framing. We then call for recasting this thematic area to adopt a critical feminist social justice framework that would include, but reach beyond, the purview of human rights and dignity as conceptual apparati. We argue primarily for taking (back) on board "social justice" and titling this theme "Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity." The concept of social justice was once part of the framing of this thematic area; its (re)inclusion would denote a framework that is, arguably, less narrow, more critical, and more socially located (MacDonald, 2007). This recasting would, furthermore, have the potential to bring

much-needed attention to the complex drivers of oppression and the kinds of exploitative relationships that uphold existing inequalities and inequities.

Following from this, in the second part of the paper, we outline priority research areas within the context of this theme. In addition to providing a critical reflection on specific areas and dimensions of social justice, rights, and dignity work, we argue for the Foundation to adopt a more *methodological* approach. This would mean thinking about work in this area not as an enumeration of social *problems* in Canada or elsewhere, but instead as a collective effort to better understand and transform *processes* of discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and injustice, and as a mandate to support struggles for a fairer and more just society. We offer this paper as an invitation to be part of this conversation and debate.

1. A Recasting?—Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity

The way that the Foundation casts its themes is integral to the issues, topics, and approaches it then chooses to support. The Foundation's four themes function as categories through which it fulfills its mandate; these categories, like all categories, favour some ideas and approaches while obscuring or silencing others. Moreover, the themes have been imagined by particular actors in particular political contexts. Thus, the Foundations' themes are not neutral, and, as MacDonald (2007) asserts, they must remain open to changing as the Foundation matures and the community shifts. The theme now called "Human Rights and Dignity" was not always framed as such. Prior to 2007, it was titled "Human Rights and Social Justice." What led to this change? What was the reasoning? What has been gained or lost by this shift in language? Where might we go next?

From Justice to Dignity

MacDonald's (2007) intervention acted as a catalyst for the shift in language that took place in the Foundation's thematic approach five

years ago. His overarching argument was that "human rights" is a narrow framework and that the Trudeau Foundation would benefit from broadening its scope significantly in this area. Unlike scholars and activists who have pushed for broadening what was historically encapsulated in human rights work through the inclusion of social, economic, and cultural rights (Roth, 2004; Robinson, 2004), MacDonald (2007) argued for the adoption of an entirely new language: a change in wording from "Human Rights and Social Justice" to "Imagining Social Justice and Human Dignity." MacDonald's approach therefore moved beyond rethinking the human rights framework to rethinking the relationship between human rights and the social context in which these rights are pursued and/or experienced. In order to contextualize the change that followed his paper, and in considering future directions for the Trudeau Foundation, it is useful to examine MacDonald's three-part argument in more detail.

First, MacDonald suggested that "human rights" as a discourse is overly narrow and that the theme as it then read—"Human Rights and Social Justice"—placed far too much emphasis on human rights, effectively obscuring many of the most important challenges to Canadian society (e.g., poverty, health, and education). Thus, in reframing the theme, he felt it appropriate to bring to the forefront "social justice" and to leave off "human rights." His reasoning drew from well-known critiques of human rights as a discourse that is narrow, abstract, legalistic, universalizing, power-laden, and infused with liberal, Western bias (Mutua, 2008). In his words:

> The structure of rights discourse…requires an identifiable interlocutor against whom one can make a claim (e.g. a claim that a recognized right is not being adequately respected, protected or promoted, or a claim that a putative right ought to be recognized)…When viewed through the lens of human rights, the problem of social justice appears simply as a matter of removing barriers to people's pursuits of their own self-interest. Human rights discourses run the risk of uncritically affirming that individuals in possession of legal rights already have the powers that these rights convey. (MacDonald, 2007, 8)

In recasting the theme to emphasize social justice, MacDonald was attempting to expand what was under discussion, working to "invite inquiry into relationships between diverse processes of social ordering that can be deployed to facilitate the pursuit of human aspiration" (MacDonald, 2007, 9). MacDonald's approach underscored the dynamism and fluid nature of social justice struggles.

Second, in a further effort to broaden the theme, MacDonald suggested replacing "human rights" with "human dignity." His reasoning was that there are many instances in which dignity is in jeopardy due to various kinds of deprivation and discrimination, but these do not necessarily fall within the purview of rights claims. While situations and processes that threaten human dignity are not always encapsulated in human rights work, he felt they were equally worthy of study and support. Thus, he called for adopting "a conception of human dignity that is grounded in relationships, not rights, and that gives as much weight to human quest for realizing common purposes as to the hierarchical organization of rights claims." He also asserted that "the language of human dignity allows for a richer conception of human beings as having complex desires and needs, rather than simply expanding the inventory of rights to include 'social and economic' rights" (MacDonald, 2007, 10).

Finally, MacDonald's recasting included the insertion of the participle "imagining." This insertion was intended to suggest that neither "social justice" nor "human dignity" is a fixed category. MacDonald framed both as research questions, or hypotheses for inquiry, not as fully defined concepts.

MacDonald's paper undoubtedly had a strong impact on the Foundation. However, it is noteworthy that none of his three key points were fully adopted: instead, "social justice" was replaced by "human dignity," leaving "human rights" as the dominant concept within this thematic area. It is also noteworthy, particularly as we re-engage with this argument, that there was some openness on the part of the Foundation to change. In other words, as Pierre-Gerlier

Forest, the president of the Trudeau Foundation, noted in 2012, MacDonald's intervention precipitated both a change in the theme's wording and, by extension, changes to some of the Foundation's activities.

In Favour of "Social Justice"

When we began to reflect upon this thematic area, this history—the suggestions made by MacDonald five years ago and the change that ensued—piqued our interest. This led us to seek input from others within the Trudeau Foundation community: What did they think about this change? Did the wording of this thematic area matter to them? What further changes might they like to see?

What emerged was that all of those with whom we spoke felt strongly that the Foundation should reconsider the concept of "social justice." Many read the shift from "social justice" to "human dignity" not as an effort to broaden the scope of the thematic area, but as an attempt to depoliticize the Foundation's language. While many believed "dignity" to be a worthwhile concept, the shift from "social justice" to "dignity" was viewed by most as an attempt to sound less political, less partisan, less radical, and less critical in an increasingly conservative and polarized Canada. Many scholars also noted that what was lost was a framework (i.e., social justice) that incorporates social location and relationality in its framing, favouring concern for individuals' struggles and claims over issues of collective struggle, inequity, and exploitation.

Yet, when asked specifically about McDonald's (2007) recasting—"Imagining Social Justice and Human Dignity"—many still felt strongly about safeguarding "human rights" as a central concept. One of biggest proponents of "rights" language was Alex Neve, a human rights lawyer, international activist, and the secretary general of Amnesty International Canada. Neve (2012) stressed the importance of keeping "rights" as a key concept within the Foundation's four themes, in particular because of how this language brings focus

and purpose to so many struggles for justice. He spoke from his own experience of witnessing people and groups becoming empowered by rights language and by the possibilities inherent in possessing "claimable," "enforceable," "tangible" rights. While he felt strongly that "social justice" should be the focal point of this theme, he pleaded to avoid replacing "rights" with language that is more diffuse and less concrete. He also noted that, while he understands the critiques of human rights discourse, these critiques tend to converge around legalistic and narrow approaches to human rights. Thus, as a proponent of an expanded human rights framework that incorporates social, economic, and cultural rights rather than a complete shift in discourse, he faulted lack of imagination, not rights discourse itself, for overly narrow approaches. He wished to see more imaginative approaches to rights work and, in particular, approaches that explicitly engage in gender analysis and that examine how human rights discourses function to mobilize struggles for justice outside of legal settings (Neve, 2012; see also Gutmann, 2001, Danieli et al., 1999).

What became evident in our conversations, then, was that members of the Trudeau Foundation community appeared to care deeply about the language used in framing the four themes. Most believed that this language directly influences who the Foundation supports and what work it pursues. It also became clear to us that there was some dissatisfaction with the current title, "Human Rights and Dignity," and with the change that ensued five years ago. We were privy to both overlapping and divergent perspectives on each of the three concepts under question—social justice, human rights, and dignity—and, given the importance of these debates, we decided that our central intervention in this paper would be to suggest a way forward. Our intervention reflects our belief that social justice, dignity, and rights are transformative and intricately interwoven concepts that have profound daily impacts on individual lives and collective struggles.

Personal Interjections

Before we elaborate our approach, we would like to pause briefly to interject some of our own thinking in the areas of social justice, rights, and dignity, based on our research and social engagements. This, in conjunction with the perspectives presented above, informs the critical (re)framing we suggest in this paper.

In my work, I (Laura) treat human rights as a discursive strategy that draws attention to injustices and inequities. I therefore take a broad-based approach to human rights and think not only about civil and political rights, but also about social, cultural, and economic ones. In treating human rights as a discourse that is referenced or produced in the pursuit of justice and equality, I nevertheless recognize that words alone cannot be a measure of human rights. Meaningful human rights must be experienced, not just discussed. I therefore seek to draw attention to the gulf between rhetoric and lived realities. This similarly informs my approach to the contested concept of dignity. While an individual may obtain asylum in a country of refuge, it seems to me that this comes at a tremendous cost if, in practice, refugees are vilified and treated as subhuman (Arendt, 1967). Where is the dignity in obtaining refuge if one's self-worth is undermined in the process? For me, social justice therefore means creating the context in which the realities of an individual's life experience are ones imbued with respect and dignity.

I (May) do not often write about any of these three concepts per se, but they figure in practical ways in my research. For example, my work on older women's mobilizations around HIV/AIDS has revealed the contextual and evocative nature of social justice. I have documented the perspectives of older women working "in solidarity" with African grandmothers. These women perceive their movement as a matter of social justice: their campaign, which now includes some 10,000 Canadian grandmothers, has been motivated primarily by a sense of the *injustice* of African grandmothers losing

their children to AIDS. The African counterparts of these Canadian grandmothers, however, describe a history of migrant labour in which grandmothers have long raised children with limited resources in remote rural areas while the parents of these children worked away from home. For grandmothers in Africa, raising grandchildren is not new or unexpected, and thus they do not perceive their situation—or even the broader impacts of AIDS—as unjust. They view their associations and linkages as responses to the daily stresses of illness, poverty, and violence, as a means of accessing support, and as a matter of survival. For the Canadian grandmothers, therefore, "social justice" is an evocative, emotional, and mobilizing discourse—in many of the same ways Neve (2012) described the discourse of "human rights." Yet "social justice" (just like "human rights" or "dignity") is clearly not a universal concept—one's sense of what is just or unjust is based in complex social, economic, and historical circumstances (Abu-Lughod, 2008; Mahmood, 2004).

Thus, we both take critical approaches toward these concepts. We move beyond abstract theorizing to understand what such concepts as social justice, human rights, and dignity mean in the lived realities of different individuals and groups. Following the works of Englund (2006) and others, we probe how social justice, human rights, and dignity—as discourses—are perceived, understood, and deployed by different actors in different contexts, and to what ends, rather than approaching any of these concepts as inherent to humans or as pre-given. Finally, our work forces us to recognize, in grounded ways, the relationships and overlaps between these three dynamic and contested concepts.

A Way Forward? Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity

Given the perspectives of many in the Trudeau Foundation community as well as our own personal locations, we urge the Foundation to (re)recast its theme from "Human Rights and Dignity" to "Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity." This reframing has the potential to

illuminate the complex drivers of oppression and the kinds of exploitative relationships that uphold status quo inequalities and inequities. It would also more explicitly articulate the Foundation's commitment to supporting innovative, relational, imaginative, dynamic, and critical approaches to social justice scholarship. Three aspects of this reframing are introduced below and are worth exploring beyond this paper.

Focusing on Relationships

First, we deliberately choose to frame three distinct concepts in an effort to structure a space in which the relationships between "social justice," "dignity," and "rights" could be explored. In doing so, we heed numerous interventions about the concepts' changing and contested nature. Rather than seek a firm definition of each term, we stress the constructed and situated nature of the concepts, the manner in which they link to one another, and their connections to other themes at the Foundation. For instance, how do culturally specific conceptions of social justice inform rights-based solutions to disputes over shared resources? How do we reconcile group rights and individual rights for the collective good? Is this possible? Feasible? Desirable? Similarly, how do concepts of human dignity as defined in various legal regimes play out in practice? Do they help or hinder the pursuit of social justice?[2] We believe that combining these

2. Our thanks to Lisa Kerr, 2012 Trudeau scholar, for drawing our attention to the important legal debate taking place over section 15 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which includes a requirement that a claimant in an equality case must show an injury to human dignity in order to establish his or her claim. In *R. v. Kapp* (2008) SCC 41, at para. 21-24, the Supreme Court of Canada noted that human dignity is an abstract and subjective notion that has "proven to be an *additional* burden on equality claimants, rather than the philosophical enhancement it was intended to be." (para. 22, italics in original) The court cautioned judges against further application in such a manner. Echoing our point about the subjectivity of terms such as "rights," "dignity," and "social justice," Kerr suggests "that the concept of

three interconnected but distinct concepts in a single theme will facilitate research into the relationships that inform each of these concepts, without limiting conceptions of each, nor assuming that they are mutually constitutive. Each concept becomes a question rather than a fixed category, so that the very concepts of social justice, rights, and dignity become the subject of further investigation.

We also seek to leave space for research that contests the very existence or quality of the bonds between the three concepts. Questioning the relationships between social justice, rights, and dignity allows for an exploration of the underpinning processes that structure privilege and oppression, and opens up critical avenues of investigation around how the pursuit of social justice, for instance, might in some cases come at the expense of rights and dignity. How, for example, might the provision of social welfare services create dependencies and perpetuate stereotypes about the recipients (Marshall, 2006)? In such instances, does the primary consideration become how to provide services that foreground the dignity of the individual? What are the policy implications of such formulations? What underlying processes need to be addressed?

We believe that focusing on the underpinning processes and the fluid relationships between concepts of justice, rights, and dignity will broaden the research horizon and encourage creativity. Thinking about relationships in different spatial frameworks, from the household to the local, national, and transnational, can shed further light on the contests, contradictions, and tensions inherent in the pursuits of social justice, rights, and dignity. Positioning these three concepts together, without attendant expectations about how, and if, they connect, would facilitate a more dynamic way of thinking about the

human dignity" has appeared to work best, or to have clear impact, on particular topics in history, such as the abolition of torture and slavery or the struggle against capital punishment and that "the concept of human dignity has worked less well in cases with an economic or commercial aspect."

significance of each one. This renewed thematic focus points toward new directions for future research and toward approaches that pivot on relationships rather than fixed categories of analysis.

Losing the "Human" in "Human Rights"

Second, we deliberately choose to remove the "human" from "human rights." While we concur with Neve's calls to retain a focus on "rights," given that word's rhetorical power, our concern is that the current discourse on "human rights" might silence scholarship on and mobilization around certain kinds of rights. Part of our discomfort is the manner in which the current focus on "human rights" is overarchingly framed by the rights agenda of the immediate postwar period, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Human rights, in this postwar conception, are deeply contingent on liberal political values (Ignatieff, 2007). The Declaration emphasizes the individual and political and civic rights; it leaves little scope for the protection and promotion of group rights for minority populations—indigenous people in particular—or for social and economic rights (Donnelly, 2003).[3]

Another concern is that the term "human rights" limits the focus of rights-based research to the human subject, whereas conceptions of "rights" can be interpreted far more expansively. As critical scholars have observed, certain issues are treated as "human rights" issues while others, such as domestic violence or the fallout

3. In practice, the existence of special legal regimes can complicate the exercise of human rights. In the Canadian context, the challenges of reconciling various approaches to rights are perhaps most obvious in the case of First Nations peoples. While the Charter of Rights and Freedoms was a major step on equality issues for indigenous people in Canada (Schwartz, 2012), only in 2009 did Canada's First Nations people begin to obtain recourse to the 1977 Canadian Human Rights Act (the Indian Act having been exempt from its initial provisions). Full repeal occurred in June 2011, so now federal government actions and funding under the Indian Act can be reviewed by this human rights legislation, as can the actions of First Nations governments.

of climate change, tend to be conceptualized as "women's rights" or "environmental rights" (respectively) and treated in these more limited frameworks (Shelton, 1991). While some scholars have suggested addressing this situation by re-conceptualizing human rights to include environmental degradation and violence against women (Bunch, 1990), we believe that there is much to be gained from framing the concept of rights more generally and giving researchers the opportunity to define and conceptualize the rights with which they are concerned. Teasing out the nature of the relationship, if any, between environmental rights (human rights as they relate to the environment), dignity, and social justice will necessarily lead to very different explorations than research framed around conceptions of rights as strictly political and economic in nature. We thus call for the adoption of concepts and terminology that encourage these kinds of wider, more innovative, and more creative explorations.

In making this recommendation, we would like to raise two additional points. First, we acknowledge that "human rights" is an important mobilizing concept and has been used as a rallying cry in some women's movements (e.g., movements in the Middle East and elsewhere have rallied around the notion that "women's rights are human rights," despite contention over the idea that "human rights" as a concept was initially imposed by actors, organizations, and scholars in the Global North). We are not suggesting that "human rights" language should be omitted from activism or scholarship. Rather, for the purposes of the Foundation's thematic framing, we are suggesting that adopting a language of "rights" could open up new spaces to include both more traditional "human rights" conceptions and multiple other meanings, diverse cultural contexts, and different approaches to justice, rights, and dignity research. Second, we also acknowledge that "rights" as a concept does not resonate with all people and communities. We raise the question of whether a different concept entirely—perhaps "responsibility"—might bring different, but more inclusive, meaning to this thematic area.

We recognize that a theme framed as "Social Justice, Responsibility, and Dignity" would engender different outlooks and processes. We therefore believe that further exploration of "responsibility" as a concept that links the Foundation's four themes is merited, although an exercise of this magnitude is beyond the scope of this paper.

Adopting a Critical Social Justice Framework

Third, and most centrally, we call for the Foundation to reintroduce the concept of "social justice" into this thematic area, and, by positioning this concept first, to emphasize "social justice" as the broadest, most inclusive, and most socially located of the three concepts, with "rights" and "dignity" as two particular ways of approaching related issues. In addition, we call not only for the re-inclusion of "social justice" as a core concept, but also for the adoption of a critical social justice framework. Such a commitment moves beyond focusing on any fixed set of social problems, to instead focusing on supporting work that strives for a critical approach toward issues of justice, rights, and dignity. What do we mean by a critical social justice framework?

Critical social justice scholars, many of whom draw extensively on feminist theory and scholarship, distinguish their approach as a departure from that of scholars who view social justice from a liberal social ontology that both "presuppose[s] and obscure[s] dominant social arrangements, processes, and norms" (Young, 1990, 18; see also Stanley, 2009). They recognize issues of distribution and redistribution as symptoms of injustice (i.e., they view material disparities as one outcome of injustice), but they move beyond analyses that focus on issues of distribution to instead look at *processes that underpin injustices* (e.g., discrimination, racialization, sexism, homophobia, and so on). Thus, they are primarily concerned with how power operates in societies to privilege some people and groups and, often by extension, to harm others. They seek to reveal the nature of exploitative relationships that uphold injustices and secure privilege.

Recognizing again the contributions of scholars from other streams of interrelated scholarship, we believe this shift to understanding what drives oppression and how people and groups are struggling for justice—rather than seeking to enumerate issues and situations in which human rights or dignity are compromised—could bring focus to the Foundation's work in this area, broadening the scope of its research significantly and building on its members' commitment to delving into some of society's hardest questions.

Critical scholars also commit to continuously questioning claims to universal truths, "common sense" assumptions, and categories that normalize certain identities and essentialize "Others" (Carroll, 2004). Critical scholars tend to be reflexive about how all knowledge is generated within complex social, institutional, and political contexts (Haraway, 1988); they recognize that power operates through the production, validation, and authorization of specific kinds of knowledge, with some ways of knowing carrying a higher status in society than others (Foucault, 1980). From the perspective of the Trudeau Foundation, this means supporting justice-oriented work that does not shy away from being provocative, asking difficult questions, destabilizing commonly held assumptions, and engaging with unconventional methodologies. It also means recognizing the power the Foundation and the Foundation's community have over the production and circulation of certain ways of thinking and indeed public discourse. Thus, as MacDonald (2007) suggested, the Foundation must strive to support high-quality, provocative research, including research that might not appeal to other funding bodies.

Summary

The language used to describe the four thematic areas of the Foundation is important: it guides how the Foundation's mandate is fulfilled and what research is supported. This language is also dynamic: it has undergone change before and it can be changed again. The previous review of this theme, five years ago, resulted in

replacing "social justice" with "human dignity." It manifested itself in tangible form at the seventh annual Public Policy Conference in Winnipeg, whose theme was "Equal in Dignity: Human Rights and the Passage of Generations." The conference was inspired by the idea that "affirming human dignity is an immense, daunting and never-ending pursuit" and that each generation learns "for itself how to defend and protect human rights and human dignity, forging its own tools and devising its own language—through laws, policies or direct action." Despite the rich discussions at the conference, and despite the excellent research supported by the Foundation under the thematic rubric of "Human Rights and Dignity," the emphasis on "human dignity" with simultaneous omission of "social justice" raises concerns for many in the Trudeau Foundation community, and indeed for us. After considering the reasons for the change and some of the reactions it precipitated, we therefore urge recasting the theme to "Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity." This language recognizes the value in each of these concepts while emphasizing "social justice"; it opens a space for a more critical, relational, dynamic, and socially located framework. Specifically, in recasting this theme, we call on the Foundation to take on board the important work of critical and feminist social justice scholars who seek to understand processes that underpin injustices.

2. Building a Critical Research Agenda

In the remainder of this paper, our aim is to outline and contextualize what we view as priority research areas (and, more specifically, approaches) under the theme of "Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity." Five years ago, MacDonald (2007) identified six priority issues: poverty, violence, health, education, employment, and intergenerational inequities. In considering whether these issues continue to pose key challenges for future research, and in investigating new and emerging areas for support, we will preface our proposed research agenda with a brief discussion of Canadian and world events over the

past five years. In so doing, we argue that there is increasing urgency for scholars to better understand social justice issues, focusing both on sites where justice is compromised and on the myriad ways citizens and non-citizens are mobilizing in the pursuit of a fairer or more just world. We ask our readers to consider the historical basis of contemporary social justice issues and the ways in which changing conceptualizations of rights, justice, civil society, government, and so on affect the tenor and substance of public policy debates, and the daily lives of people in Canada and around the world. We also raise important questions about how long-standing forms of oppression, recent trends and events, and various forms of civil sphere mobilization converge to influence people's lives and struggles. We follow up this discussion with our research agenda: both the crosscutting considerations and the specific research areas that we consider priorities for those wishing to critically engage in, or offer support to, justice, rights, and dignity scholarship.

Context

How historians will view the past few years in terms of social justice issues remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that salient debates and events in the recent past must be considered within the context of historic shifts in the global economic system, ongoing discussions about the nature of democracies, long-standing debates over the appropriate roles of government, and the changing contours of civil society and the public sphere. Writing with the activism of the Arab Spring (uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria) and the Occupy Movement still fresh in our minds, and with an awareness of the daily struggles of people around the globe to earn living wages, send their children to school, grow and purchase food, and care for their loved ones, we find it difficult to offer a simple characterization of contemporary social justice issues. We believe that the related, but divergent, extremes of the 2008–2012 global economic crisis and the 2011–2012 activism of the Occupy Movement and Arab

Spring suggest that rights are still contested and that social justice remains elusive for many. Simultaneously, these developments point to a robust global civil society that challenges the very political and economic processes that structure relations among citizens, non-citizens, states, and corporations. It is in this context that we offer our proposed research agenda.

In Canada, the global events mentioned above, along with growing conservatism and polarization in politics, policy, and public discourse, have had potentially profound impacts on issues of social justice, rights, and dignity. Following the election of two minority Conservative governments in 2006 and 2008, the election in the spring of 2011 produced a majority of seats—with 39.62 percent of the popular vote—for the Conservative Party. For the first time in history, the New Democratic Party obtained Official Opposition status with 30.63 percent of the vote, while support for the Liberal Party fell to an all-time low. Thus, in the most simplistic analysis, the 2006 to 2012 period in Canadian politics can be seen as an ascension of the political right (i.e., the Conservative Party), growing support for the left (i.e., the NDP), and a near-collapse of the centre. In reality, of course, these election results, like all election results, are the outcome of much more complex short- and long-term trends, events reaching far beyond Canadian borders, specific political personalities, and so on. What is important from our perspective is that, in this political moment, developing a social justice and rights research agenda is particularly contentious and complex—it must be carefully framed and contextualized.

Some Canadians, for instance, perceive this period as a time in which superfluous government spending is being curbed in order to protect the well-being of the Canadian economy and of Canadians (Clemens et al., 2011). They also see this as a time in which Canadians (and their government) continue to value rights issues, as evidenced, for example, by the Canadian government's 2006 apology to surviving Chinese Canadians who were subject to a punitive 1885-1923

head tax, and by the 2010 apology to former students of Indian residential schools. For others, however, the increasing conservatism of the last five years in Canada and elsewhere raises deep concerns—concerns over growing social and economic disparities and over the possibility that that the social justice and human rights gains of the last 30 years have been, and are being, undermined (Stanford, 2012). While these concerns are based in discursive and policy trends that clearly precede the 2006 Canadian election, many social justice and human rights advocates have issued warnings that cumulative policies and laws harm vulnerable groups (e.g., new immigrants, asylum seekers, at-risk youth), favour economic interests over environmental ones (e.g., the development of the northern pipeline and the tar sands, the withdrawal from the Kyoto Accord), and undermine the capacity for effective advocacy in Canada (e.g., by cutting funds to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Rights and Democracy, Katimavik, Kairos, and so on) (Gergin, 2011).

Long-standing debates over what government should fund and how government money should be spent reverberate ever more loudly. For those on the centre-left, these debates echo in their growing concern for the relinquishing of public funding for certain civil society groups and for increasing resources being allocated to civil liberty-limiting security efforts. Gerald Caplan and others point to the ways in which municipal, provincial, and federal authorities have regularly suppressed public demonstrations, such as the Occupy Movement and the protests at the G-20 summit meeting in Toronto in 2010, noting that in the case of the G-20 protests, the security price tag was estimated at $1 billion (CBC, 2010). On the right of the political spectrum, such intellectuals as Brian Lee Crowley, Ezra Levant, and Adam Aptowitzwer make a compelling case for smaller government, self-funded charities and public interest groups, tougher security measures, and economic conservatism—all in the name of protecting Canadians. This resonates with, and indeed is deemed self-evident by, large segments of the Canadian public.

Our proposed research agenda must grapple with, and will inevitably reflect, this polarization. As we consider some of the most pressing questions of the last five years, we ask whether we are witnessing an incremental undermining of social justice and a narrowing of avenues for effective opposition in Canada and elsewhere. Like Caplan (2012) and others, we believe there is a growing urgency for social justice work at this time, while we likewise have concerns about what might be an erosion of civil liberties and a shrinking space of opposition (Caplan, 2012). But we feel that our concerns must remain open to critical questioning and scholarly research. How are government policies differentially affecting communities across Canada? Who is most vulnerable to the adverse effects of changing laws, policies, and services, and why? Is civil society limited in its capacity to effect change? Would a cohesive civil sphere response in some ways subvert or limit an effective reform agenda? Have recent protests taken place through increasingly limited media channels? Is the activism of organizations such as Avaaz limited to a group of informed and engaged activists? In what ways are people organizing in their daily lives and around what key issues? These questions merit further attention.

Furthermore, we ask scholars to critically question not only the impacts of recent policy and government practice, but also their temporality and context. To what extent are recent developments the responsibility of the newly elected government? To what extent are these products of long-standing and far-reaching trends within and beyond the national context? What are the broader discursive and intellectual trends that inform dominant ways of thinking about social justice, human rights, civil society, government responsibility, and so on? What are the history and genealogy of these trends, and how are they playing out in contemporary public policy and in people's everyday lives? We ask scholars to continue to ask hard questions about the nature of structural inequities and the propagation of racialized and gendered discourses that consistently present

certain groups as problems or impediments to the overall health and welfare of society. Thus, we offer our proposed research agenda not only in light of the events (and divisive politics) of the past five years, but also with questions about the longer-term trends in thinking that have propelled these events, and with deep acknowledgement of the processes of injustice and exploitation that remain present in Canada and globally.

The pursuit of social justice is clearly complex and increasingly challenging, and it behooves us to think critically about how to study and address issues of injustice in ways that are engaging, effective, and inclusive. Given the events of the last five years in Canada and globally, and given the continued existence of racisms, sexisms, imperialisms, and other forms of discrimination, we urge the Trudeau Foundation to think about scholarship in this area as a dynamic between (at least) two types of endeavours: first, work that seeks to understand the processes that underlie injustice, indignity, and inequity; and second, work that illuminates the multiple ways citizens and non-citizens struggle for just and dignified conditions in their everyday lives. Where the latter is concerned, we embrace Jeffrey Alexander's concept of a civil sphere—a fusion of conventional understandings of civil society and the public sphere. Alexander (2006, 3) describes this as "a world of values and institutions that generates the capacity for social criticism and democratic integration at the same time," underscoring shared responsibilities for the pursuit of social justice and the promotion and protection of rights and dignity.

Focusing on Approach: From Problems to Processes

In his 2007 position paper, MacDonald recommended that in thinking about priority research under this thematic area, the Foundation focus on problems or issues that threaten justice and dignity (e.g., poverty or violence) rather than on essentialized identity groups of people who require attention (e.g., indigenous communities,

women, and so on). We agree, to some extent, with his approach, in that we would not advocate for essentialist groupings. However, we would like to suggest yet another way of thinking about directions for future research: an approach that embraces a critical feminist social justice framework and explicitly seeks to understand processes that drive injustices—thus, a shift *from problems to processes*.

By this, and following from our recasting of this thematic area as articulated in part I, we suggest that the Trudeau Foundation explicitly seek to support research into the underlying processes that drive rights abuses and social injustices. This approach means asking, and seeking to address, some or all of the following key questions:

- Where in Canadian society and globally do we see discrimination, oppression, impoverishment, vulnerability, marginalization, and exploitation, and why do these exist?
- Who benefits from upholding inequitable relations? Who is harmed by various processes, discourses, categories, policies, and laws, and who is privileged?
- How are social "problems" (like poverty and violence) gendered, racialized, classed, and so on?
- Where and how are people and groups resisting growing inequities and injustices, and where do we see mobilizations to improve people's everyday lives?

In considering this shift from problems to processes, we have benefitted tremendously from engaging with the works of certain feminist scholars (e.g., Kobayashi, 2001; Pratt, 2000). Indeed, feminist scholarship has contributed extensively both to theorizing what is meant by a critical approach to social justice research and to developing critical methodologies more broadly. We strongly urge the Foundation to actively engage with feminist scholarship as it considers setting its research priorities over the next five years, and particularly as it considers the approaches and methodologies it wishes to support.

This would entail some or all of the following:

- Supporting research concerned with justice, rights, and dignity that undertakes deliberate gender and *intersectional analyses*, thereby explicitly recognizing that the ways in which people identify and are identified shape their experiences of privilege and/or exploitation. The example Neve (2012) gave in his call for more gender-sensitive human rights research was that, to date, research on rights abuses associated with the "War on Terror" has been "almost gender blind." He encouraged the Foundation to seek out research that asks the questions that have so far been overlooked, such as these: What is the experience of women and families left behind when men are detained? How do intersections of race and gender affect how those left behind are treated in Canadian society?
- Supporting research that brings "Other" voices to the table, or research in which scholars commit to incorporating the perspectives often not sanctioned by the academy (i.e., *community-sanctioned research*). This means supporting research processes that are deemed sensitive and useful to different community groups (e.g., Tuhiwai Smith, 2005).
- Supporting *reflexive research* in which scholars examine their own positions of privilege and the complexity of their research relationships, and in which they remain aware of how power operates within all research endeavours to shape the knowledge produced (e.g., Rose, 1997).
- Supporting research that is *engaged*, resisting the idea that researchers should remain detached from, or minimize disturbance in, the lives of research participants. This means working with scholars who understand the complexities involved and yet are willing to blur the lines between their roles as researchers, advocates, and public interlocutors (e.g., McEwan and Goodman, 2010; Kobayashi, 2001).

To recap, five years ago MacDonald (2007) called for research into poverty, violence, health, education, employment, and intergenerational inequities. Given our discussion of recent events and on-going injustices, we concur that, five years later, these continue

to be issues of high priority. But we also wish to complicate his proposal. Indeed, in seeking a more critical, dynamic, theoretically informed, and forward-looking approach, we wish to focus our discussion on underpinning drivers and intersectional experiences of injustice, as well as on relationality, agency, and possible sites of social change. This shift away from a focus on problems to a focus on processes generates a more dynamic way of thinking.

Shaped by this critical shift, the remainder of this paper delves into our proposed research agenda. Given our focus on processes, what we are proposing is much more about approach or methodology than it is about enumerating a set of fixed issues or categories. We will discuss our proposed agenda in two parts, first outlining four crosscutting themes for consideration in all research in this area, and then discussing three sets of processes that we believe require immediate research attention and support.

Crosscutting Considerations for Research on Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity

Based on a sampling of current academic literature and a survey of policy positions put forward by leading think tanks and non-governmental organizations in Canada, we have identified four crosscutting themes that we urge scholars concerned with all areas of social justice, rights, and dignity research to consider: (1) destabilizing "structures," (2) inclusions and exclusions, (3) spatialities, and (4) temporalities. In explaining how we understand each of these crosscutting considerations, we are building on the theoretical considerations raised in the first part of this paper.

Destabilizing "Structures"

The operation of global capitalism, the mechanics of a functioning democracy, racialized and gendered discourses—these and many other routinized, dominant, and entrenched practices and discourses perpetuate and uphold inequalities and detract from individuals'

capacity to live full, dignified lives. Political, economic, cultural, and social processes and relationships function in various ways to shape our lives and structure our opportunities. We are referring to what are often called "structures"—yet, we prefer to think of these as routinized practices, dominant discourses, and particular policies and laws that uphold injustices, recognizing that while these may be entrenched, they are not fixed for rigid. We call for research that seeks to understand how these routinized practices and dominant discourses operate and, importantly, to complicate or challenge such inequitable "common sense" or "status quo" processes and conditions. We urge work that recognizes these so-called structures but also imagines possibilities for change. Building on interventions by 2003 Trudeau scholar Anna Stanley (2009), we also call for scholarship that gives serious thought to the purpose of these routinized practices in terms of whom they benefit and what they maintain.

Inclusions and Exclusions

Processes of inclusion and exclusion (specifically who is included, who is excluded, and why) are at the core of research into issues of social justice, rights, and dignity. In considering these processes, we urge researchers to remain critical to the categories they employ and how these might uphold hierarchical relationships and exclusions. Drawing again from feminist theory, we advocate for research that avoids essentialist approaches to social groupings. We call for intersectional analyses that recognize highly differentiated experiences and the complexity of multiple and dynamic social locations. For example, we urge scholars to ask not only whether women in Canada tend to be excluded from top government posts, but also, recognizing the huge diversity among "Canadian women," whether and how women's skin colour, class, age, marital status, sexuality, and so on cause such experiences of exclusion, and why. We propose that work in this area be concerned with the different ways people and bodies are identified (and discriminated against), as well as the

ways in which people and groups draw on multiple social locations in their struggles for justice.

In addition, we call for a focus on research that probes how relationships inform processes of inclusion and exclusion, which inform conceptions of social justice, rights, and dignity in turn. Paulette Regan, senior researcher for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, proposes that processes of inclusion are not the responsibility of a single individual or defined group but rather the responsibility of society as a whole (Regan, 2010). As part of this, we suggest, that the Trudeau Foundation specifically seek to support scholars who are critical and reflexive about their own roles, power, and privilege, about the situatedness of the knowledge they produce, and about who they include in their research and how they go about this inclusion.

Spatialities

Issues of spatiality—in terms, for instance, of the state's scope for intervention and the fluidity of social justice protests—are of wide concern for scholars in this area. There is indeed a need for critical awareness of how social justice issues play out in multiple spheres (and at multiple scales) and across porous borders. We urge scholars working in areas relating to justice, rights, and dignity to call into question categories or "scales" that are seemingly fixed—to recognize the important spaces between and outside, for instance, "the state" versus "civil society," and to grapple with the ways in which actors often move fluidly between different "levels" of government. We urge work that investigates the manner in which initiatives in one arena relate to, support, and/or contradict those in others. This includes, for example, engaging with how activities in Canada (such as the development of the tar sands) affect people in other parts of the world and how Canadian involvement abroad (such as mine development in Africa) relates to broader social justice issues for people in the Global South and the Global North. It also includes

looking at how struggles and mobilizations for justice often cross permeable social and geopolitical boundaries and borders, and the creative ways in which such actors forge these translocal and transnational connections.

Temporalities

When news of the terrible living conditions in Attawapiskat emerged in late autumn 2011, one of the concerns expressed by civil society actors was that the lack of adequate housing and basic life supports on the reserve should not be assessed as an emergency situation, but rather as one of persisting inequities. The same question can be raised of Canada's decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Accord, with which Canada had never complied, at the Durban conference in 2011. We therefore call for scholars to undertake critical analyses of the temporal nature of social justice issues. This means seeking to understand underlying processes of vulnerability, inequity, and oppression. It also means probing the ways in which particular events, situations, contexts, or policies function to improve these processes (as in, perhaps, cases where redress or reconciliation is taken) or to deepen them (as in, perhaps, sites where the uneven effects of global financial crises are most badly experienced).

Concern for the temporal nature of social justice issues also means adopting forward-looking approaches, considering, for instance, the ways in which processes at play and actions taken now might impede the capacity of future generations to live with dignity. While issues of intergenerational justice are paramount and have been clearly articulated in work relating to climate change, we feel that such a forward-looking approach can and should be applied to research in all areas. How will our current economic choices, policies, and ways of consuming affect different people, groups, and communities struggling for justice, rights, and dignity? What are the future implications of whether we choose to make medicines accessible to people in the Global South, particularly in areas with

massive HIV/AIDS epidemics? What are the future implications of our migration and immigration practices and policies? Scholars have a responsibility to at least raise these questions.

Priority Research Areas: Understanding Processes of Power and Resistance

With these crosscutting considerations in mind, we turn, finally, to a brief discussion of our proposed priority research areas. In the early stages of our research for this paper, we identified three overarching issues relating to social justice, rights, and dignity that we felt required immediate attention: (1) poverty (and its associations with skin colour, gender, age, and citizenship, among other factors), (2) inequality (especially, but not exclusively, as it relates to health, education, and the law), and (3) civil sphere responses. Based on our previous discussion, however, we have opted to frame our proposed research agenda in terms of processes rather than problems. Thus, we have organized our main concerns around a series of processes that underpin why some people live with an abundance of privilege, health, and opportunity while others experience disproportionate levels of exploitation, deprivation, and impoverishment. We therefore focus on processes of (1) impoverishment and discrimination, (2) unequal and inequitable access, and (3) mobilization. At the core, we are advocating for a better understanding of power—asking how power operates to privilege some and harm others, and how this power is resisted in multiple, complex, and creative ways. Our discussion is by no means exhaustive, and nor do we intend it to be prescriptive; rather, we identify certain key concerns and questions, which serve to illustrate our broader focus on processes and which we believe merit further exploration and elaboration beyond this paper.

Processes of Impoverishment and Discrimination

Poverty, livelihood insecurity, marginalization, and deprivation impede many people around the world and in Canada from living

full and dignified lives. Yet in considering, from a critical perspective, how poverty is a social justice issue, we must raise questions about underlying drivers: Who is most socially and economically vulnerable? Where in society do we see stark instances of deprivation, and why? Thus, we urge scholars to focus renewed attention on processes of impoverishment and, by seeking to understand underpinning causes, processes of discrimination. Key questions here might include the following:

- Where in Canada and globally do we see processes of impoverishment, marginalization, and/or discrimination taking place? What is driving these?
- Who is most harmed, or made most vulnerable, by particular practices, policies, or discourses? Who benefits or is left unharmed?

In other words, we believe that future research should attend to how and why certain groups become impoverished and how their vulnerabilities may be reinforced as a result of stigmatization, the unequal distribution of resources, sexism, racism, and multiple other forms of discrimination. Within the context of these key questions, areas of particular concern emerge for us. While we do not believe that future research should be confined to these areas, we suggest them as a means of illustrating the approach we are advocating and how it connects with a tangible research agenda.

- **Ageism and intergenerational inequities.** In 2009, child poverty in Canada was at 9.5 percent. The same year, poverty among the elderly was at 5.9 percent, with the highest concentration of poverty among single, elderly women. In thinking about issues of justice, rights, and dignity in Canada and globally, we believe that it is important to consider the needs of particular generations and how their relations to each other inform their capacities to live full lives. Why does child poverty persist? Why are the elderly, particularly elderly women, vulnerable to impoverishment and marginalization? What underlying factors and discriminations are at play?

- **Racialization and gendering.** It is critical that we ask the difficult questions about why certain groups, such as Canada's indigenous peoples or recently arrived migrant communities, often face endemic poverty, poor education rates, and the lack of proper health care, and that we move beyond homogenizing and static identifiers of these groups to understand who within them is most vulnerable and why. Heeding work on poverty reduction in Canada (Block and Galabuzi, 2011; Hay, 2009) and the campaigns of organizations such as the Colour of Poverty Network, we believe it important to support research that seeks to understand the processes that perpetuate linkages between impoverishment and racialization. We also believe this work should be subjected to intersectional analyses that ask in what ways that poverty might also be linked to gender, geography, ability, sexuality, age, and so on.
- **Citizens and non-citizens.** Given the growing numbers of illegal migrants in Canada and elsewhere, and the reformulation of temporary worker programs that recruit people for short-term residence but not for citizenship, we believe that future research must consider the implications of how citizens and non-citizens are documented in our transnational world. Following such campaigns as No One Is Illegal, we believe scholars should also explore the question of which bodies are allowed in which spaces and why. How do our policies, laws, and borders make some bodies illegal (and thus less able to claim certain rights and dignities), even as they require such bodies to uphold the privilege of those deemed legal? How do discourses and legal categories of citizenship function to discriminate against some people and deny their rights? Here, too, a careful examination of what is upheld by these practices and in what ways they are driven by underlying processes of racism, sexism, and so on, is critical.

Processes of Unequal and Inequitable Access

While poverty and processes of impoverishment impede many from living lives of dignity, material and symbolic disparities within and between societies often reflect underlying processes of exclusion, oppression, and exploitation. A critical social justice framework,

as discussed earlier, recognizes social and economic inequalities as a symptom of underlying injustices, but focuses attention on unravelling these underlying experiences and situations of oppression (Stanley, 2009). In this context, and building on repeated interventions by the Council for Canadians and others, we propose that researchers turn a critical lens on the processes that shape who has access to services, institutions, resources, and opportunities, who does not, and why. In other words, we call for future research aimed at understanding processes of unequal and inequitable access, while deliberately recognizing "inequality" as shorthand for experiences and situations of unfairness and oppression. Key questions here might include:

- Who has access to services, institutions, natural and symbolic resources, and opportunities? Who does not?
- Why?

In considering these questions, we ask scholars to investigate the complex processes that inform unequal access, in Canada and globally, to a number of different services, resources, institutions, and opportunities, including but not limited to the following: education, health care, justice, information, employment, livelihood security, environmental and symbolic resources, housing, and clean drinking water. We also ask scholars to consider the ways in which state and non-state (i.e., corporate, community, alternative institutions) practices inform access to material and symbolic power. Again, we will elaborate on only some of these areas, raising certain key questions and potential areas for research:

- **Education.** Amnesty International and UNESCO have both underscored education as a fundamental right, necessary for the exercise of all other rights. Access to education therefore remains a primary and fundamental challenge to the pursuit of social justice and the protection of rights and dignity. However, given the growing disparities within Canada and globally, the issue is not just about a right to education, but rather relates to fundamental

questions about what people are gaining access to, how, why, and to what effect. What socio-economic processes structure access to education in Canada? How does the lack of affordable and accessible daycare or early childhood education in Canada shape access to education in later years? How do we address the language and integration needs of children from immigrant families without fostering difference and discrimination? Who is harmed most by funding cuts to public education? Where are there barriers to accessing special education services and support for people with disabilities within our public schools, and what causes those barriers? How do intersections of gender, race, class, language, and so on affect children's success in school and access to higher education?

- **Health.** Disparities in health indicators within and between countries are symptoms of underlying inequities and differential access not only to health care, but also to healthy living and working conditions. In 2000, life expectancy at birth was estimated for males from First Nations in Canada at 68.9 years, compared with 77 years for males from the general Canadian population; in South Africa that year, life expectancy for males was estimated at 53.5 years. What causes these differences? What factors underpin unequal access to health and health care? Why do some people and groups systematically live in better conditions, with safer housing, cleaner water, less taxing work, more disposable income, and better nutrition, and what does this mean for their health? What drives differential access to primary health care, family doctors, specialists, and specialized diagnostic tests? In what ways are health inequalities related to race, gender, and class?
- **Justice.** While justice is often considered in terms of criminal justice systems, we encourage questions about how we can conceptualize justice to better understand the implications of access to different kinds of justice. How does the presence of Sharia law in Canada, for example, affect our conceptions of justice and how people access justice? What processes perpetuate the denial or realization of justice in Canada? In a world where borders are increasingly porous, should we reconceptualize justice in a more transnational manner? What responsibility do people in the Global North bear for ongoing inequities in the Global South?

How does a more holistic approach to justice, one that includes human and environmental concerns, transform how we think of justice and measure its existence?

Processes of Mobilization

Finally, picking up from our earlier contextual discussion, we call for critical attention not only to processes underpinning injustices in Canada and globally, but also to how and why people are mobilizing in their struggles for justice, rights, and dignity. These mobilizations probably take on many different forms—from an informal neighbourhood group working to support a neighbour struggling with cancer without adequate institutional or family support, to a church initiative to support an orphanage in Lesotho, to highly organized environmental and social movements. Key questions here might include these:

- Where and how are people collectively mobilizing in pursuit of justice, rights, and dignity? Over what key issues? To what effect?
- How do people organize in their daily lives to improve their living conditions and challenge norms?

Research in this area would include looking at the functioning, dynamics, networks, and impacts of non-governmental organizations (large and small), community-based associations, voluntary organizations, faith-based organizations, campaigns, movements, and all of the other associational forms that fall within Alexander's (2006) notion of the "civil sphere" as described earlier. While acknowledging the important roles that states play in perpetuating or altering inequities and establishing the legal contexts in which rights and dignity are experienced, we maintain that states alone cannot be held responsible for the promotion and protection of social justice. Future research must therefore focus on the civil sphere and the agency, creativity, and ingenuity of those who populate it. Such research should aim to better understand the roles of civil society actors at the household level through to the global level,

and to consider the ways in which the civil sphere currently operates and how it could be strengthened. We urge that research be done in the following areas:

- **Friction.** Scholars in this area could probe critically into what Tsing (2005) calls the "friction" that exists within all mobilizations, to recognize that mobilizations and movements are never homogeneous and to ask what perspectives are at play in any given association. This means examining both the overarching strategies of different associations, networks, and movements, as well as their contrasting and (potentially) conflictual internal dynamics—recognizing both as necessary for driving mobilizations, and critically examining the impacts of friction and diversity within mobilizations.
- **Possibility.** We suggest that scholars look into the ways in which mobilizations might open up possibilities for change by resisting or challenging certain norms, and the ways in which organizing can generate changes in people's everyday lives. We believe that much could be learned from these efforts about how social change can occur and what kind of change is desired, and we recommend doing research that examines different models of mobilization, cooperation, resistance, and association.
- **Porous borders.** Recognizing the intricate formal and informal links that exist across communities and geopolitical borders, we suggest that scholars interested in how people and groups are mobilizing for justice and dignity begin to unravel some of these complexities. This means gaining a better understanding of how people connect across distance and difference, and of how discourses, knowledge, information, resources, and people cross various social and geographical borders.

Summary

In the second part of this paper, we undertook an examination of the ways in which events of the last five years have converged with deeply entrenched processes of injustice to generate even greater urgency for critical research. Then, following from the framework outlined in part 1, we proposed a two-part research agenda that

emphasizes processes that drive injustices. This agenda suggests crosscutting considerations for all research in this area and proposes research questions pertaining to processes of impoverishment and discrimination, unequal and inequitable access, and mobilization. The questions and topics we propose within this research agenda are by no means exhaustive. Rather, they are examples that illustrate how focusing on underpinning processes promotes innovative, critical, and dynamic thinking about research on social justice, rights, and dignity.

Conclusions

We offer this paper specifically as an invitation to consider the framing of the Trudeau Foundation's "Human Rights and Dignity" theme and the research the Foundation will support within the context of this theme in the years to come. In undertaking this task, we have, in a broader sense, also grappled with certain positions, concepts, and questions, which are highly pertinent to any scholar concerned with social justice, rights, and dignity. While our analysis has been deliberately provocative, we remain conscious of the limitations of our approach. We acknowledge the breadth and depth of literature on human rights, social justice, and dignity accumulated from across scholarly disciplines, and we recognize that we have drawn on a sample of academic texts predominantly from critical and feminist scholarship on social justice. We have also drawn on conversations with other members of the Trudeau Foundation community and on the written materials of key civil society groups and actors.

Our principal message is that we need to think critically about what underlies issues of impoverishment and inequality, what drives people to organize and resist, and why relations of oppression and exploitation are perpetually upheld. We thus call for the Foundation to return the concept of "social justice" to its current theme of "Human Rights and Dignity" and to broaden this conceptual framework to read "Social Justice, Rights, and Dignity." We

believe that this framing, with an elaboration of the three concepts and the relationships between them, would foster important opportunities for research and dialogue relating to inequalities, inequities, and injustices in Canada and abroad.

In envisioning a research agenda on this theme, we also move beyond an enumeration of social *problems* that require attention in Canada or elsewhere, to instead frame a broader effort to understand underlying *processes* of discrimination, oppression, exploitation, and social change, with a view to working for a fairer and more just society. Thus, we call on the Foundation to adopt a critical feminist social justice framework, supporting work that is concerned, ultimately, with how power operates in societies to privilege some people and groups and, often by extension, to harm others, and how this power is always met with resistance. This shift to seeking to understand what drives oppression and how people and groups are struggling for justice—rather than seeking to enumerate issues and situations in which human rights or dignity are compromised—would bring a forward-looking focus to the Foundation's work in this area, broadening the scope of its research significantly and recommitting it to delving into societies' hard questions.

Bibliography

Abu-Lughod, L. (2008), *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories, 15th Anniversary Edition.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Agosín, M. (Ed.) (2002), *Women, Gender and Human Rights: A Global Perspective*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University.

Alexander, J. (2006), *The Civil Sphere*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Arendt, H. (1967), *Origins of Totalitarianism.* New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.

Block, S., and G.-E. Galabuzi (2011), *Canada's Colour Coded Labour Market: The Gap for Racialized Workers.* Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Bunch, C. (1990), "Women's Rights as Human Rights: Toward a Re-Vision of Human Rights," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 12, no. 4, 486-498.

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) (2010), "News," June 27. Available at http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/story/2010/05/26/g8-g20-security-summit-toews.html

Caplan, G. (2011), "More voices you won't hear in the election campaign," *Globe and Mail*, 22 April.

Carroll, W.K. (2004), "Introduction: Unpacking and contextualizing critical research strategies," in Carroll, W.K. (ed.), *Critical Strategies for Social Research.* Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1-15.

Clemens, J. et al. (2011), *Learning from the Past: How Canadian Fiscal Policies of the 1990s Can Be Applied Today*. Vancouver: Fraser Institute.

Danieli, Y. et al. (eds.) (1999), *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: Fifty Years and Beyond.* Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing Company.

Donnelly, J. (2003), *Universal Human Rights: In Theory and Practice.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Englund, H. (2006), *Prisoners of Freedom: Human Rights and the African Poor.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Forest, P.-G. (2012), Personal communication. March.

Foucault, M. (1980), "Two Lectures," in C. Gordon (ed.), *Power/ Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977 by Michel Foucault.* New York: Pantheon Books, 78-108.

Gergin, M. (2011), *Silencing Dissent: The Conservative Record.* Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Gutmann, A. (ed.) (2001), *Human Rights as Political Idolatry*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Haraway, D. (1988), "Situated knowledges," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, 575-599.

Hay, D. (2009), *Poverty Reduction: Policies and Programs.* Ottawa: Canadian Council on Social Development.

Ignatieff, M. (2007), *The Rights Revolution*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press.

Lamey, A. (2011), *Frontier Justice: The Global Refugee Crisis and What to Do About It.* Toronto: Doubleday Canada.

Kobayashi, A. (2001), "Negotiating the personal and the political in critical qualitative research," in M. Limb and C. Dwyer (eds.), *Qualitative Methodologies for Geographers*. London: Arnold, 55-70.

MacDonald, R.A. (2007), *Human Rights and Social Justice*. Montreal: Prepared for the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation.

Mahmood, S. (2004), *Politics of Piety. The Islamist Revival and the Feminist Subject.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Marshall, D. (2006), *Social Origins of the Welfare State Quebec Families, Compulsory Education, and Family Allowances, 1940-1955*.Waterloo, ON: Wilfred Laurier University Press.

McEwan, C., and M.K. Goodman (2010), "Place geography and the ethics of care: introductory remarks on the geographies of ethics, responsibility and care," *Ethics, Policy and Environment,* vol. 13, no. 2, 103-112.

Mutua, M. (2008), *Human Rights: A Political and Cultural Critique*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Neve, A. (2012), Personal communication. March.

Pangalangan, R.C. (2003), "Sweatshops and International Labour Standards," in Alison Byrsk (ed.), *Globalization and Human Rights*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Pratt, G. (2000), "Research performances," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 18, no. 5, 639-651.

Regan, P. (2010), *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Robinson, Mary (2004), "Advancing Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights: The Way Forward," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 4, 866-872.

Rose, G. (1997), "Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivity and other tactics," *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 21, no. 3, 305-320.

Roth, K. (2004), "Defending economic, social and cultural rights: Practical issues faced by an international human rights organizations," *Human Rights Quarterly*, vol. 26, 63-73.

Schwartz, D. (2012), "Six big changes the Charter of Rights has brought." Available at: http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/story/2012/04/17/f-charter-30-changes.html

Sepúlveda Carmona, Magdalena (2011), *Report of the Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Ms. Maria Magdalena Sepúlveda Carmona on the Penalization of People Living in Poverty*. United Nations.

Shelton, D. (1991), "Human Rights, Environmental Rights, and the Right to Environment," *Stanford Journal of International Law,* vol. 28, 103-138.

Stanford, Jim. (2012), *Canada's Incomplete, Mediocre Recovery*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.

Stanley, A. (2009), "Just space or spatial justice? Difference, discourse, and environmental justice," *Local Environment*, vol. 14, no. 10, 999-1014.

Tsing, A. (2005), *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2005), *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* New York: Zed Books.

Young, I.M. (1990), *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.