

AGAINST THE ASSEMBLAGE OF POSTPOLITICAL GLOSS  
AND RADICAL FEMINIST POWER*A reply to Rajas<sup>1</sup>*

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Jarmila Rajas presents in her article that 'state feminism', behind the façade of integration, uses 'pastoral power' to construct immigrant women into the same as men, particularly by stressing the importance of employment. Deriving from Foucaultian governmentality blended with radical feminist underpinnings she leans on postpolitical outlooks stressing the subjective role of 'identities' and claims that the obsessive view of gender equality as sameness is preventing immigrant women to be what they 'really' want, ostensibly something different from westernised idea of 'unisex' citizens. In addition to the subjective advocacy of immigrant women's 'rights', the article's main message revolves around an assertion that feminism in Scandinavia is not sufficient or suitable. My critique here focuses mainly on theoretical and normative aspects, but some points in relation to Rajas' reading of 'empirical' discourses are also made.

To start with, it is easy to find both explicit discursive support and more robust evidence on the economic rationales for immigrants' integration and employment in general, swallowing the gender perspective in relevance (e.g. Intermin 2010; Joronen 2007; Koikkalainen *et al.* 2011). In Finland the administration of integration is nowadays within the sphere of authority of the ministry of employment and economy. The ongoing economic crisis, external and internal pressures and challenges confronting the Nordic model, recession and population ageing are significant factors behind the need to check the fundamentals of immigration policies (e.g. Greve 2011). In addition, the focus on women's integration is justified from a social liberal perspective. But even here, it is difficult to see integration policies as

guiding immigrant women to be *the same* as (Finnish) men. More like, it is the equal standing among humans on which any subsequent agency can be built. Furthermore, at the very moment, there is a politicised discourse of the need to get mothers quickly back to work after having children: arguments stressing either elements of gender equality or any rationales of 'being the same as men' are mostly silent in relation to the ubiquitous neoliberal trajectory also in the category of non-immigrants. An option of voluntary staying at home is much more a class-related issue than one which separates either opposing culture or gender ideas (see Sipilä; Repo & Rissanen 2010).

Overemphasising gender-related conditions trivialises the high rates of unemployment among immigrants in general as well. Outside the discourse of humanitarian duties the employment of immigrants as benefiting the state has been the main focus of authorities. Moreover, a libertarian suspicion of state interventions collides with feminism both normatively and practically. Both the Nordic model and *any* equality need the state to intervene. However, Rajas' reasoning is theory-driven: identities remould historical and societal fundamentals. It is only through politics of diversity and postpolitical subjects that reversed images of liberal understandings urge the identity of the 'self' above the formerly sacred 'gender equality'. But why should we treat immigrant women differently, more poorly, than ethnically Finnish women in the past? When, and why, did the normative need for *making equality* of this kind end?

Postliberal identity claims remove politics from the functioning of the community. The role ascribed to individuals turns extremely hollow

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as well. This is particularly pernicious for those whose engagement with the society is perhaps still wavering in general – immigrants. In addition to compounding irrelevance of political action at large, the view presented in the article also freezes possibilities for progress, as there is no difference between internal and external realms of identity. An endless list of needs for recognition and ‘autonomy’ ensures that discourses evolve and interact in a normative arena filled with moral rights claims but no politics whatsoever to hold them up (see Furedi 2011). Detaching ‘immigrant women’ from the category of ‘immigrants’ is a method of constructing again a new object of depoliticised unit of ‘human beings’. Breaking the link between referents and the political level leaves individuals floating in the air, free to be retrieved and labelled by any political argument or interest, supported by state feminists, multiculturalists or academics. But individual is a rights-bearing subject only as a participant and a member of his/her society (e.g. Chandler 2009). ‘Immigrant women’ cannot be removed from the domain of their new community. Outsourcing progress to individuals is at best idealistic, at worst immoral.

Grading the road for equal opportunities is for the benefit of both individuals and the society. Equality in Finland is based on a liberal idea of autonomy and freedom, both in positive and negative forms. This is fundamentally different from both moderate feminist discourses on sameness and radical dogmatic discourses on ‘difference’. Hence, as a rationale of the society, it is the equality of rights-bearing subjects that should inform both theoretical aspects of immigration and involvement of the state. There are no feminist structures without state interventions, no woman-friendly achievements without strong societies. The opposite usually holds – and that is why many immigrants often lack ideas of embedded ‘equality’ as valued in our societies. Equality is not a universally existent commodity to be consumed from this or that ‘identity’ perspective, but a result of spatial and temporal social and political struggle, worth the effort of support and promotion.

Without any solid ground where to stand – no state feminism, no integration motives, no directives for favourable engagement in and with the society – the most intimate threat we can encounter is ending up being essentialised, as ‘immigrants’, ‘immigrant women’, or simply ‘women’, which is also Rajas’ concern. Similarly, immigration politics turns out to be a contest over popularised meanings, tuning of concepts and responding to various moral emergencies caused by different actors. Any deeper ideas about human mobility, multiculturalism or immigration policies turn irrelevant. Presenting one’s intentions at the realm of subjective moral claims seems more relevant than scrutinising political, societal, social or international bases of these claims. The perspective is incapable of seeing past historical processes and events as constitutive and meaningful – and lacks a reasonable perception of the future as well. In this vein, we are perfectly confident to judge if some policy is emancipatory or pastoral and if some actors of the society are morally legitimate or not. Stimuli are already there, there is no need for politics. It is here,

where Rajas’ critique towards dominating state structures and essentialisations of gender and culture will evidently navigate us.

What Rajas seems to suggest is a kind of ‘laissez-faire’ of integration: let ‘them’ decide what equality is, according to their ‘identities’. If ‘immigrant women’ are as free as maintained in the article, they are certainly able to pierce the lines of state feminism’s hegemony as well and argue for their own existence and aspirations. Should we then trust blindly to avoid the dis-empowering trap of using ‘pastoral power’? In the meantime, multiculturalism as a practice, not perhaps as an ideal, continues its crisis partly due to the fact that liberal, Western systems, with all their detriments as well, cannot leave undetermined the limits for their inclusion, neither for humanitarian, gender-related nor economic reasons (see Vertovec & Wessendorf 2010; Purra 2012). The desire for laissez-faire is untenable, if not illegitimate.

However, after redirecting the feminist lens, Rajas does see the issue differently: the problem is no longer that of integration but of ‘wrong’ feminism, which ‘silences more radical feminist critique’ and ‘[affirms] gender equality as a lived fact turning patriarchal gender relations into matters of ‘immigrant culture’, into something supposedly alien and un-Finnish’ (p. 7). Forget the dis-empowered agency of immigrant women, the problem is that no one of us (women) *is* really equal enough. Then, the issue resumes its starting premise, the moral role given to identities, difference and ‘humans’ as detached from the realm of rights-bearing subjects. The modern referent of the ‘same’ was constituted through social progress and political ambitions, but the ‘difference’ in its comprehensive poststructural focus on infinite identities does not implicate any direction (Furedi 2011). Hence, it is possible to formulate a ‘consistent’ framework claiming *both* that gender equality (in Finland) is defective *and* that immigrant women should not be supported to be involved in revelling in the possibilities constituted by that particular society. Inherently, the ‘others’ *have* to differ from the Finnish (Western, Northern) conceptions to deserve the autonomous position (Badiou 2001). Identities of difference are envisioned as free-floating, while those of sameness are more like representations of false consciousness, dominated by structures, such as the wicked ‘nation-state’, ‘nationalism’ or ‘patriarchalism’.

Analytically, focusing on the gender discourses of complacent state elites tells us little about either the real connections between immigrants and society or immigrant women’s ‘non-essentialised’ life – they are excluded from the framework. Indeed, as ‘immigrant women are also rational human beings’ (p. 11), they should undoubtedly do the ‘empowering’ task themselves. However, this cannot occur randomly or independently but builds on one’s ideas of belonging, which are inherently social, historical, cultural, religious and ethnic. It is a task of the host society to provide and secure the sphere of being for its new residents and citizens alike to structure their ideational horizons as well as material possibilities. The political arena in Finland is relatively open to include various positions and antagonisms, with relation to immigration and gender as well. When

studying discourses, however, we should be careful not to meld external factors with political ambitions.

Immigration administration as well as many other elements of immigration politics may include simplistic, fixed and naïve assumptions concerning integration, multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-identity realities and desires, but this is (or it should be) a problematique in the kernel of immigration architecture as a whole, not a gender issue (see Huysmans 2006: 73). Furthermore, employment is one of the few ways to both build engagement and sidestep the 'pastoral power'

of the state (see Hämäläinen & Sarvimäki 2011), not only in Finland and certainly not only for women.

## Notes

1. Rajas, J 2012, 'Assemblage of pastoral power and sameness: a governmentality of integrating immigrant women', *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 5–15.

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## ECONOMICS, DISCIPLINE AND THE 'POSTPOLITICAL'

### *A political reply to Purra*

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Fundamentally, I find it worrying that an assertion that immigrant women should be treated with equality raises so much objection. Let me start with the easy part of the reply. My focus of discussion was not on the high unemployment rates of immigrants nor in the actual practices of integrating and integration. The attempt to decentre the common sense was aimed at the rationalities used in identifying immigrant women's integration problems. My participation in the discussion regarding immigrant unemployment is limited to analysing the culturalising discourses of explaining unemployment of immigrant women that resort to identity politics over a vast category of diverse women. That is, opposite to what Purra asserts, my objection is with identity politics – as used in the official discourses – and its marginalising effects. Liberal politics of recognition when used inside the culturalising logic only recognise essentialised and commodified figurines, on this we agree. What we disagree about is the cure for this supposed 'dilemma' of diversity.

The role of employment in integration is self-evident. My claim is not that immigrant women should/could/do not work or that they should/could not be(come) or are not gender equal. But I disagree that normatively employment as a means of integration should 'swallow the gender perspective'. This is a strategy of hiding technologies of normalisation, of making same. In my understanding, freedom of choice was fundamental to liberal thinking. That this freedom of choice has rarely been applied to the marginal, abnormal,

degenerate or lower-class citizens under liberal governmentality is a tiresome historical fact (Foucault 1974–75/1999; Helén & Jauho 2003). Liberal normativity easily becomes a question of normalisation through improvement and this is how Purra asserts it should be: "But why should we treat immigrant women differently, more poorly, than ethnically Finnish women in the past? When, and why, did the normative need for *making equality* of this kind end?" It is regrettable that feminism is used as a disciplinary technology, that freedom to define one's own mode of living is conceptualised as 'poor treatment'. Whilst I share Purra's desire to make women gender equal, normatively I do not think it is my job to tell people how to live their lives and I think we should be wary when assigning this power to the state. My insistence is that these choices should be left to the immigrant woman, that her agency should be recognised prior to defining what agency should be. Yet, with freedom of choice come consequences, and it is these consequences, the resulting relative poverty, that immigrant families should be informed about. We allow these choices to 'ethnic' Finns without dropping feminist leaflets on stay-at-home mothers urging them to realise their true desires and to return to work. Purra identifies this resistance to *making live* as a 'libertarian' resistance to state intervention, but this is a misdiagnosis. I do agree with Purra that there rarely is any equality without state intervention, that the structures that enable (immigrant) equality are better achieved through the state apparatus. My point is not, as

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Purra claims, that immigrant women should not be supported in their attempt to reap the benefits of the relatively gender equal Finnish society. But there is a difference between requirement and support. The difference is whether gender equality is a value or whether it is used as a disciplinary technology (Cruikshank 1999). I do not agree with Purra's vision of equality signifying *making* people equal. This problematisation is created by making immigrant women *a priori* unequal, by subjectifying them as not interested in reaping these benefits and then demanding that they reap these benefits. This problematisation focuses attention on issues that are quite marginal to the problems of immigrant women's employment and integration.

What is at stake is the legitimacy of criticising liberalism. Liberal normative discourses are capable of going astray. There is a difference between contemplation of god's will and the actions taken in god's name, so to say. Purra's objection relates to the old problem between liberal and post-structuralist thinking around normativity in which liberal thinkers think that criticising liberalism constitutes moral relativism and at worse nihilism, the modern equivalent of heresy. If religious thinkers are able to discuss and debate religious truths, it should not be so difficult for liberal thinkers to allow some room for self-examination – even about the use of culturalising discourses and technologies of improvement around the immigrant woman. For if we part from the point that the state can positively enhance the integration of immigrants, it does not necessarily follow that it is the state's duty to make the immigrant the same as the rest or that the state should control immigrants' 'ideational horizons'. In my understanding, pluralism and freedom of thought was integral to liberalism. Regarding this evident contradiction, Foucaultian thinkers have pointed out that liberal governmentality allows for a certain degree of despotism when the aim is the improvement of the citizens, the reform and re-education of their habits, thoughts and desires (Valverde 1996: 362; Dean 2010). This despotism of the Will to Improve is at the heart of the disciplinary technology of modernity designed to foster citizens wanting to conduct their own conduct in ways beneficial to the health and wealth of society. This is the source of the resistance to the rationality of *making live*; the impetus to improve that recognises few limits and eats away even at such supposed liberal values of freedom of choice and thought (whether executed through the state or through the civil society).

I also disagree with the assertion that the economic rationale behind the immigrant women's employment overpowers the freedom to choose a single-income family model. Equal opportunity is not the same as the duty to utilise opportunities. The impetus of having women participate equally in the labour market is not a matter of gender equality but of economic wealth, with this I agree with Purra. Fundamentally then it is a value choice that the 'ubiquitous neoliberal trajectory' disciplines us from recognising. It is a value choice that underpins the critique labelled 'radical feminist': Are wealth and success the values that we should lead our lives pursuing? Is this what life is about? Is wealth the thing that makes us happy? Is pursuing this wealth the only valid measure of immigrant integration? If with

"the ongoing economic crisis, external and internal pressures and challenges confronting the Nordic model, recession and population ageing are significant factors behind the need to check the fundamentals of immigration policies" one means that immigrants are required to work and lead their lives so that they maximise the benefit we can reap off them, then my 'postliberal' mind finds this illiberal and my 'postpolitical' mind find this void of politics – and not only in relation to how we conceptualise the immigrant but how we conceptualise the role of the 'indigenous' citizen and the role of the state. Fundamentally, the only 'politics' I find in Purra's reply is economics.

Consequently then, the major difference between what we envision as a cure for the integration of immigrant women comes down to how we conceptualise politics. Purra aligns herself with the (neo) liberal configuration of politics in which the means to an end, i.e. the economy, has become an end in itself. Under this definition of politics, it is evident that 'identity politics' cannot sustain itself, because it does not have the recourses to participate in politics defined in economic terms. Other dimensions of politics, politics as a means of ensuring 'good life', are overpowered by the neoliberal impetus of accumulating wealth. Yet paradoxically, when we are relatively speaking the wealthiest we have ever been, we cannot afford 'good life'. Whilst I completely agree with the vision of the impending structural and economic changes and the likely decrease in living standards (as this is embedded in the logic of global capitalism), I believe that these changes could be mitigated if we took a critical view of the current economic apparatus; if we actually analysed the economic crisis that is making itself continuous and allowed these analysis to enter the sphere of politics. However, in times of neoliberal hegemony, asking these questions about the structure of the economy and the rationalities of (tax) money flows are silenced. And the most important tool in this silencing is the (neo)liberal definition of politics as economics and the consequent conceptualisation of state and the citizens' prescribed modes of existence. Structurally, thus, I find this attempt to partly solve the economic crisis by making (immigrant) women equal workers wholly inadequate. Although logical, it is almost a farcical way of dealing with the economy: When we constantly pay profits for outsourced service providers from our tax monies, my mind fails to see the relevance of 'curing the immigrant women's presupposed "false consciousness" as a means of compensating for that? In this sense, this discussion touches upon much more fundamental issues at stake in contemporary society: the relative marginalisation of (plural) values in politics and the disciplining of these values with the 'we cannot afford them' discourses. The 'postpolitical' is searching for actual politics.

Purra's assertion that equality fundamentally relies on sameness and that this is a result of progress explains itself under the narrow, economic conceptualisation of politics. But equality cannot be reduced to resources. Certainly resources are fundamental, but equality remains fundamentally hollow if not combined with treating people with equality (which is free, by the way). Thus, we are at the heart of the problem. Purra thinks equality is to be earned by acting in

certain ways, by making certain value choices beneficial to the (host) society regardless of circumstances. I think there is a difference between earning resource equality and giving immigrant women agency without resorting to essentialising discourses of culture. At the heart of this issue is the trope of 'progress' that underlines the Will to Improve. 'Progress' is flaunted as a self-explaining concept that mysteriously applies to the direction that politics should take, but which fundamentally is an empty signifier void of (politically!) agreeable meaning. Akin to the use of economics, the trope of 'Progress' is used to freeze politics, to discipline and to mark as threat those

assigned as endangering it. Thus, rather than approach this problem through discourses about improving 'cultural backwardness threatening the Progressive notion of equality', we should heed the warning of the last time we started analysing economic problems according to a racialising logic. For solving the economic crisis we do not need a race theory about the 'immigrants' unwillingness to work' but a critical economic theory. For solving the problems of immigrant integration we need to look at structural discrimination instead of perpetuating it. Instead of willing the immigrants to improve, we need to look at the ubiquitous, common sense race theories in light of which the 'culturally different', i.e. 'non-white', immigrant cannot be the Same.

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