Seen But Not Heard

The Construction of "Welfare Mothers" in Canada's Late 1960s/Early 1970s "War on Poverty"

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This paper explores the meaning that Canada's late 1960s/early 1970s "war on poverty" debate had for shaping policy discourses concerning poor lone mothers and "welfare mothers." The analysis illuminates both how contemporary policy and discourses about "welfare mothers" developed and critical activist and policy "paths not taken." It examines and contrasts the positions advanced on the "needs" of poor lone mothers and "welfare mothers" by two sets of actors: 1) mobilized "welfare mother" activists and feminists and 2) the official bodies making up the dominant poverty policy community. With respect to the positions of the former, the findings are twofold: that mobilized "welfare mothers" and grassroots feminists were fundamentally aligned in their positions and that the discourses of "welfare mother" activists were important and radical in ways that have never been recognized: they were effectively calling for a reworking of the very notions of social rights and human need. With respect to the positions of the latter, the findings are that despite the relatively "progressive" orientation of the poverty debate at this time, "expert" actors chose not to engage with this more radical thrust and to frame the needs of poor lone mothers in terms that reinforced dominant, and profoundly biased, assumptions and constructs. This act served to solidify a policy path that would consistently undermine the rights and integrity of poor lone mothers. Finally, the paper outlines the relevance of these developments both for understanding the present neo-liberal moment as it affects poor lone mothers and thinking about meaningful strategies for feminist and progressive change.

Cet article étudie la signification des débats canadiens qui ont eu lieu à la fin des années 60 et du début des années 70 autour de la "guerre contre la pauvreté" ainsi que leur importance dans le façonnement des politiques publiques sur les mères seules et les "mères assistées." L'analyse illustre comment les politiques contemporaines et les discours sur les "mères assistées" se sont développés et aussi comment le militantisme critique et leurs revendications de politique fut la "voie non suivie." Cette étude analyse et compare les orientations avancées par deux séries d'acteurs sur les "besoins" des mères seules pauvres et les "mères assistées": 1) les "mères assistées" militantes et les féministes et 2) les instances officielles dominantes dans la constitution des politiques de pauvreté. En ce qui concerne la première série, les résultats de l'étude sont de deux ordres: les "mères assistées" militantes and les féministes de base se sont alignées sur le fond quant à leurs positions. De plus, les discours sur des "mères assistées" militantes ont été à la fois importants et radicaux dans un sens qui n'a jamais été reconnu: elles revendiquaient une refonte de la notion même de droits sociaux et des besoins. En ce qui concerne les positions de la deuxième catégorie d'acteurs, l'étude démontre qu'en dépit de la relative orientation "progressiste" des débats sur la pauvreté à cette époque, les "experts" ont choisi de ne pas s'engager dans la même voie radicale et d'encadrer les besoins des mères seules et pauvres d'une manière à renforcer les préjugés et les construits particulièrement biaisés. Cette action a servi à solidifier la voie déjà tracée par les politiques et ce, de manière à saper les droits et l'intégrité des mères seules. Enfin, l'article expose la pertinence de ces développements à la fois pour notre compréhension du néo-libéralisme actuel, dans la mesure où il affecte les mères seules et pauvres et impacte également sur notre façon de penser des stratégies significatives pour une transformation féministe et progressiste.

This paper presents an analysis of how the issue of the poverty of lone mothers and the "plight of the welfare mother" figured in the "war on poverty" debates of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The purpose of the paper is not only to show how discourses about "welfare mothers"[1] developed in Canada but also to reveal activist and policy "paths not taken"—paths that have an important relevance

for contemporary feminist and progressive social policy struggles. The existing feminist literature has given little attention to *explaining* the dynamics of social policy change, and what attention has been given to this topic has tended to lack a focus on political agency, on the actions and choices of those engaged in the struggle. Moreover, most historical accounts of the "war on poverty" period have tended to give little attention to women as political actors, particularly in the case of mobilized welfare mothers. This paper diverges from these trends by presenting an account of the late 1960s/early 1970s debate on poverty that highlights the way key political actors engaged in the debate over lone mothers and poverty and by highlighting women's activism in the period. With respect to the latter, this paper treats both feminists and welfare mother activists as important participants in the struggle. As Linda Gordon has argued in relation to the U.S. poverty debate, the "welfare rights" movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s *was* a women's liberation movement, and "to ignore their specifically female consciousness is not to hear them" (624).

Much of the existing critical historical literature that has examined the relevance of this period for women has tended to do so through a political economy lens. These studies have tended to convey the impression that women were simply "left behind" in the war on poverty (See Struthers; Finkel). This paper provides a more nuanced understanding of this question by exploring the *meaning-making* implications of this period for women—by asking what did the "war on poverty" mean for shaping poor women's struggle to be recognized as equal citizens? In further conceptualizing this aspect, it draws upon Nancy Fraser's theory of the "politics of needs interpretation." Fraser presents politics as a struggle in which various "publics" are pitted against each other in a struggle to define the needs of particular social groups who are seeking to politicize their issues. I view the "war on poverty" debate as such a competition—one in which the "oppositional" voice of women-centred actors (namely, welfare mothers and allied grassroots feminists) came up against the more dominant voice of "expert" policy actors, in defining the needs and interests of poor lone mothers and welfare mothers. In this paper, I present a detailed account of the discourses of these two categories of actors and analyze how each of them understood the problems and solutions with respect to poor lone mothers, especially welfare mothers.

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The paper makes several claims concerning the meaning-making activities of these actors. First, with respect to the "oppositional" voices of feminists and welfare mothers, I point to the significant variations that existed between particular strains of feminism concerning both how they understood the issue of women's poverty and the poverty of lone mothers, and how they positioned themselves in relation to the cause of welfare mothers. I argue that while the mainstream strand of the women's movement adopted an analysis that ultimately reinforced the idea that welfare mothers were deficient individuals, *grassroots* feminists and mobilized welfare mother activists shared an alternative understanding, one that was grounded in the belief that lone mothers were equal and entitled citizens as any other. I also argue that the narratives of welfare mothers were significant, and in ways that have perhaps not fully been recognized. While these actors addressed the needs and interests of welfare mothers they also in many ways presented a broader and deeper understanding of human/adult need and daily realities, and, in so doing, subtly advanced the beginnings of a novel, and genuinely challenging, concept of social citizenship and social rights. Second, with respect to "expert" actors, I argue that despite the "social liberal" tone and rhetoric of the period and their ostensible concern about poor lone mothers, the central discourse and policy proposal of this period (i.e., the guaranteed annual income program) had hidden and devastating consequences for shaping the status of poor lone mothers. It served conceptually to render *technical* the needs of poor lone mothers and to de-contextualize their real lives. This reframing of their issues and subjectivities had repercussions for casting lone mothers as deficient and suspect individuals, and was the very antithesis of the approach that grassroots feminists and welfare mothers had sought to advance.

This paper casts some doubt on one other accepted analysis of this period. Political analysts have tended to describe the 1960s and early 1970s as marking a period in which Canada's welfare state and political discourse received a further injection of "social liberalism" which made it even more distinct from its purely liberal cousin (e.g. the U.S. case).[2] This paper argues that when we scratch the surface of the "war on poverty," we see governing elites working hard to *resist* claims to enhance the "social justice" in social policy. They chose to reaffirm and re-entrench the infamous neoclassical economic/male breadwinner model of liberalism (complete with its dominant patriarchal and class interests) as the foundations for social policy for the poor, especially for poor women. I also argue that these

events helped to lay the foundations for a policy path in Canada that led directly to the kinds of punitive and demeaning practices that currently characterize the treatment of lone mothers under "neo-liberal" social assistance regimes. In my conclusion, I argue that engaging in the kinds of deeper discussions concerning human/adult need and the meaning of social rights that welfare mother and grassroots feminist activists had begun to do during the "war on poverty" is precisely the strategy needed for challenging the current neo-liberal social policy agenda and establishing a path towards a new kind of *socially just* social policy.

The first part of this paper briefly describes the broader context of the "war on poverty" and women's participation in the debate and briefly outlines Nancy Fraser's theory on the "politics of need interpretation" which is used this paper. The next two sections examine how the needs of poor lone mothers were perceived, first, by feminists and mobilized welfare mothers, and then, by more powerful "expert" actors. The conclusions draw out the broader implications of these meaning-making events for structuring political debates surrounding welfare mothers and illuminating the lessons for contemporary feminist and progressive movements.

Background to the Late 1960s/ Early 1970s "War on Poverty" Debate

Poverty became an important political issue in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Growing economic prosperity, but also growing inequality and poverty, led to pressures from various quarters, particularly from the poor and socially marginalized, to end discrimination and bring about social justice. The response was a political shift to the left. The Liberal federal government in particular began to take an interest in the themes of social justice and equality and to promote a sense that Canadian identify hinged on these values. It moved to expand social programs and displayed a new openness to emerging social movements and collective interests, including a willingness to fund a variety of groups in civil society (Jenson and Phillips 119).[3] It followed the U.S. president's 1964 lead in announcing a "war on poverty" in 1965 and establishing a Special Planning Secretariat within the Office of the Privy Council. One of its first acts was to bring a number of responsibilities for social welfare under one program (the Canada Assistance Programs [CAP]) and, thus, to increase the federal role in social welfare. Expectations for change were built further with Pierre Trudeau's 1968 election campaign for a "Just Society," and his Throne Speech that promised to define "a minimum standard of satisfactory living—not a subsistence standard, but one which allows for dignity and decency" (Struthers 248). Interest in poverty was also generated by the 1968 Report of the Economic Council of Canada (ECC) and through the Special Senate Committee on Poverty, chaired by Senator David Croll (herein, referred to as the Croll Committee), which was struck in 1968 and reported in 1971.

Other conditions and events fuelled feminism and the emergence of women's activism on issues of poverty and welfare issues. Changes in society and women's growing participation in the labour market through the 1950s and 1960s created pressures for changes to women's roles and gave rise to the second wave women's movement. Further impetus for the women's movement was given by the process and report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women (RCSW) (1970). While this equality-focused movement became the "public face" of feminism in Canada, other important grassroots strands of the movement existed in the shadows. The latter included feminists having more radical feminist and anti-capitalist bents.

Poverty was also on the rise at this time and women were particularly vulnerable to being poor, not the least because many women were in part-time and precarious employment. Poverty also became an issue as the number of lone mothers grew. The poverty rates of female-headed families did not keep pace with the overall trend of income improvement in this period, and their poverty rate grew.[4] As a response to these trends, feminists became vocal on issues of poverty and welfare rights, and welfare mothers mobilized. "Welfare mothers" made up a good proportion of the anti-poverty and welfare rights activists who emerged at this time, and formed their own groups as well.[5] They were especially concerned with the desperate conditions women faced under social assistance, including such issues as inadequate benefits, strict regulations, and paternalistic treatment (e.g. the spouse in the house rule).

Various governmental bodies in fact largely orchestrated the public debate on poverty. The process and the final report of the Croll Committee were pivotal in many ways both in bringing the issue of poverty into public focus and shaping its terms. The Committee was generally seen to be taking a relatively softer and gentler approach to the issue of poverty. The poor were not to blame for their poverty but were seen as being trapped through no fault of their own in a "culture of poverty" or "the cycle of poverty"—that is, born into a certain kind of environment

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that caused them to end up without the skills and education that would enable them to take advantage of the opportunities that arose. This was seen as a self-perpetuating cycle, with conditions and deficiencies passed from one generation to the next. Certain "disadvantaged" groups were seen as having been "left behind" by the economic system.[6]

The Croll Committee saw as part of its a mandate to reach out to the poor and marginalized, to invite them to speak their truth, to bring them into the fold, as it were, and to try to convince them that Canadians cared. The Committee held hearings across the country in 1969 and 1970 to which a wide range of groups made presentations, including welfare rights groups and those representing welfare mothers.[7] The Croll Committee's final report in 1971 called for substantial changes, as did the "Real Poverty Report," a report that was written and published in 1971 by more left-leaning researchers who were renegades from the Croll Committee. The central proposal of both reports was for the elimination of the welfare system and the establishment of a guaranteed annual income (GAI) program.

Theoretical Approach

The existing "left" perspective on these events is perhaps best captured by social policy historian James Struthers' statement that lone mothers were "left behind" in the war on poverty. As he explains, "[f]or women on family benefits, the War on Poverty swelled their ranks but did not substantially alter their prospects for a better life" (245). Part of the point being made is that welfare mothers and welfare rights groups were simply too marginal to have made much difference to the policy developments of the time, especially in the face of the market orientations of such powerful actors as the federal Department of Finance. Another left-leaning social policy historian, Alvin Finkel, sees the "war on poverty" as having simply reaffirmed the view that "the market" provides the only viable solution to poverty. While these accounts are important, they tend to ignore the question of what long-term repercussions the political choices at this time might have had for structuring ongoing political debate over the rights of lone mothers in the context of poverty and welfare policy.

This paper focuses on the latter question. It does so by paying attention to the activities and voices of both women activists and "expert" policy actors. The analytical approach adopted here moves beyond a political economy perspective to embrace a post-structural framework that queries issues of meaning construction. One of the important insights of post-structuralism is that social reality is produced through discursive practices, and that, indeed, much of politics entails struggles over rival constructions of reality. Nancy Fraser's theory of "the politics of need interpretation" nicely elaborates on these notions. Fraser attempts to capture the dynamics of the struggle over the interpretations of people's needs in a way that takes account of the full range of voices involved. She highlights the existence of three key classes of discourses in the struggle over needs interpretation. They are: oppositional, re-privatizing, and expert. Oppositional discourses emerge whenever subordinate social groups seek to politicize their needs by opposing previously assigned interpretations and attempting to gain legitimacy for their own interpretations. Re-privatizing discourses emerge largely in response to such attempts, by opposing the politicization of needs and seeking to re-privatize the needs as rightly belonging to the realm of the family or the market. Expert discourses are encountered when specialized "expert" publics (for instance, from dominant groups such as planners, policy-makers, administrators, and institutions of the social state) attempt to shape the *content* of the politicized needs, often in order to contain costs.

Fraser's account of the actions of "expert" publics is particularly important. She stresses that "expert" publics routinely take runaway politicized needs and translate them into administrable needs—that is, needs that can be satisfied through a bureaucratic solution and specified as a general state of affairs that could, in principle, befall anyone (such as disability, death or desertion of a spouse, and unemployment). In this process, the needs at issue are *de-contextualized* and then *re-contextualized*. That is, on the one hand, they are represented in abstraction from class, race, gender specificity, and on the other, they are recast in relation to entrenched specific institutions such as wage labour, privatized child-rearing, and the gender-based separation of these roles. Fraser points out that, through this process, whatever politicized meanings the needs had been given, disappears, and the problems become individualized. When this happens, the people in question are repositioned as "cases" as opposed to members of social groups or movements, and are viewed as manipulable objects to be reformed (212).

This paper treats the late 1960s/early 1970s poverty debate as a critical instance of struggle over the interpretation of the needs of poor lone mothers/ "welfare mothers." The main contestants in this struggle were "oppositional" and "expert" actors.[8] In the next section, I examine the discourses of the "oppositional" voices

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of grassroots feminists and activist "welfare mothers," and ask how the various constituencies understood the problem pertaining to poor lone mothers and what new thinking they contributed to the topic. In the subsequent section, I examine how dominant "expert" actors, especially the Croll Committee and authors of the "Real Poverty Report," understood the problems and solutions pertaining to poor lone mothers and "welfare mothers" and what implications their ideas and policy recommendations had for constructing lone mothers and shaping the ongoing debate in this area.

The "Oppositional" Voice of Feminists and "Welfare Mothers"

The lack of attention to women's poverty and the plight of lone mothers living on welfare became a focal point for women's organizing and protests in the late 1960s, with various strands of feminists, as well as welfare mothers, entering the fray. Within this category, I have identified three main strains of activists participating in the debate at this time. One was the emerging institutionalized women's movement which formed in the late 1960s/early 1970s and was comprised of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women and the various provincial status of women offices that formed in its wake. This was the most influential wing of the women's movement. Another was the grassroots women's movement, of which there were two distinct strains: the women's liberation movement, whose primary influences were the Marxism of new left politics and radical feminism,[9] and the feminists who were often associated with women's centres and services and were concerned with women's access to continuing education and training.[10] The third strand was the movement of mobilized welfare mothers. Groups made up of, and representing, welfare mothers were active at this time in advancing the rights and dignity of poor women and their children. To be clear, these groups generally identified more as a part of the welfare rights movement rather than the women's movement.[11] All these movements, however, were concerned at this time with opening up the parameters of poverty debate, challenging its gender-blindness, and improving conditions for poor women, especially lone mothers living on welfare. The little that has been written about these activists, however, has tended to highlight two features: first, that feminists and welfare mothers had conflicting understandings of the issues, and second, that mobilized welfare mothers were particularly lacking in political legitimacy at this time. In fact, the picture is more complex and nuanced than these views allow. Below I make three critical observations concerning this snapshot of voices, pertaining specifically to the substance of their analyses and the relations that existed between feminists and welfare mother activists.

My first observation is that mainstream feminists within the institutionalized women's movement, and as epitomized in the RCSW's Report, had a somewhat limited and un-feminist analysis of the issue of lone mothers and poverty and this ultimately put them at odds with, and at a distance from, welfare mother rights groups. The RCSW Report was sympathetic to poor single mothers on welfare to be sure. It describes welfare benefits as "tragically inadequate" and, echoing the briefs presented to it on "the plight of the sole-support mother," speaks of the suffering and handicaps lone mothers faced because of financial insecurity and having to assume the responsibility of two adults while all the while suffering from the conditions "which handicap women in our society" (RCSW 323).[12] Nevertheless, this response hewed to the dominant "culture of poverty" analysis in which poverty was viewed as an effect of there being a subordinate class in society. As the Report put it,

> They grow up more frequently in homes without a father; they are part of a population group which includes more common law relationships, more early pregnancy, more illegitimacy. The daughters of the poor drop out of school earlier, marry earlier, have more children and, more often than middle class girls, are deserted by their husbands and left without support…. (RCSW 319)

While not suggesting that poor women were to blame for their poverty, this perspective inevitably encouraged the view that they were deficient in some way—were a social problem. In fact, the Report gave little close attention to the real issues facing poor women. While it insisted that they ought to have "choice" about staying home or going out to work—and saw the GAI as a mechanism for giving them that choice—it inquired little into the kinds of "choices" that were realistically available to poor lone mothers. It also implicitly assumed that the "family" was the relevant unit of analysis when it came to poor lone mothers, which meant they tended to view poor women as wives and mothers as opposed to individuals in need of autonomy and freedom as was the goal for middle-class women. This attitude can be seen in the Commission's view that lone mothers had a "tenuous relationship to the labour market" and that "work incentives for them is of little concern…" (325). It was also implicit

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in the Report's discussion of how much better women were than men in *coping* with poverty:

> Many women who are poor continue to cope with multiple problems under the most difficult circumstances. In many poor homes it is the woman who keeps the family together. A number of examples, as well as the statements of social workers, lead us to believe that this attitude of striving to meet difficulties is common among women…. A poor mother must remain a mother, keeping up her traditional functions of homemaking and childcare. This may account for her seemingly greater ability to undergo the many strains associated with poverty. (316)

In the end, and possibly without intending it, the analysis served to put a distance between women of their own class and poor women, especially lone mothers. Rather than seeing welfare mothers as allies in women's struggle, this sector of the women's movement constructed them as some distant "other"—as a race outside of its own community and moral universe.

My second observation is that, contrary to popular belief, grassroots feminists (including both strands) and activist welfare mothers had a substantially *similar* orientation to the issue of women's poverty and the plight of welfare mothers, and it was one that thoroughly rejected the "culture of poverty" analysis of mainstream discourse. To be clear, I am not arguing that there was a perfect fit between these two movements. Indeed, while grassroots feminists often tended to view welfare mothers as being caught up in a limited maternal ideology (one that they felt was reinforced by the welfare system), welfare mother rights groups were often alienated by the strategies of feminists and were more likely to see themselves as part of the anti-poverty and welfare rights movement. Yet, despite their differences, these movements ultimately shared the same position: that poor lone mothers were citizens[13] equal to any other, and that the problem lay in the systems and societal structures that systematically undermined the dignity and self-determination of lone mothers. Grassroots feminists, for their part, were less interested in *helping* poor lone mothers than they were in *emancipating* them from their subservient position in society. They passionately condemned the way poor lone mothers were treated under welfare policy and abortion services. They were incensed by the fact that the policies and regulations in these areas seemed to be set by elite men who had little knowledge or appreciation of the realities of the lives of poor women and poor lone mothers. As one activist speaking on abortion policy put it:

> What do you gentlemen know about what it is like to be a women, a mother of eight children, without $2.50 to buy pills when needed because her husband's pay cheque was garnisheed by the finance company and she got only $32 for two week's pay (and milk for her family costs $8.40 a week)?…We do not think you can understand this because you are not women and you are not poor. (Women's Liberation Movement 118,119)[14]

Feminists within the new left-oriented group, Women's Liberation Movement, vehemently argued that poor women deserved the same rights as wealthy women in planning their families and lives. In the case of abortion, they believed that the needs of poor woman should set the standard for deciding on the adequacy of the law. As one author put it,

> …any married woman should be allowed to do the planning of her family and life today. She is the one who has to take on the responsibility for that extra child that the family cannot afford… She is the one who worries about her children getting as much education as possible and about what necessities this new child might be taking away from the others…. (118)

They viewed the welfare system as a "more controlling provider than a man," one that it left women feeling isolated, parasitic, and shameful (Lang 157). They argued that poor mothers had a right to better treatment under welfare, including the right to be seen as whole people, as individuals in their own right with unique needs, as deserving of respect and dignity, and as having a right to an autonomous household. They also saw poor lone mothers as bringing important and unique value to society. For example, they argued that poor lone mothers often had a unique standpoint and knowledge about social needs that arose from their experience of struggling as lone parents with responsibility for their families and living in their communities and that this knowledge was one that male policy-makers often lacked. They argued that for these reasons, poor women should be made integral to decision-making affecting key areas of society and social life. As one grassroots feminist brief stated,

> …it is the women who by the very reason of the roles forced upon them by society will see certain areas more urgently and more clearly as an essential part of economic development than will many of the males in the community…these are the women who know what social infrastructure should be build into economic development plans. ("Our Story" 23)

Finally, unlike mainstream feminists, grassroots feminists viewed poor lone mothers as one of their own—as part of their own moral universe. As one concerned individual explained:

> …welfare funds should be channelled with a focus on society, rather than guided by tradition…the working mothers who

> pays into welfare funds would like to see the 'welfare mother' by her side on the labour-front, even if the latter's income must be supplemented to enable her and her family to maintain a desirable standard of living. (Bled)

Welfare mother activists often expressed themselves in different terms but their ideas meshed in many ways with those of the grassroots women's movement. They understood that the failure of the two-parent family was a risk any adult could face but held the view that when this happened, the individuals involved do not simply fade away, and it is wrong for society to attempt to simply sweep them under the carpet or to cast them as non-citizens. As a member of the group, More Opportunities for Mothers" (MOMs), put it to the Croll Committee:

> I say our greatest wish is to see funds made available to enable each and every person now living with the poverty cycle to at least have the chance to get out and take their rightful place in society…Just because we are on welfare we are still equal citizens with the rest of you in Canada… (Canada, Senate 1969a: 21)

They wanted to live on a par with other families and to not be made to feel different. They wanted to have the same sense of security as other families, to know that they had a possibility of a future of their own making and that their children had the same. They often drew upon a feminist sensibility in drawing attention to the structural impediments women faced in society, including low pay and inadequate access to good jobs and meaningful training and education opportunities ("Women's wages are usually considerably lower than a man's, which makes it very difficult…" [21]). Like grassroots feminists, they tended to see the welfare system as a trap for women in failing to provide them with the vital supports they needed for moving off welfare, and in treating them in ways that were paternalistic and demeaning. As one presenter from the group, Mothers on Social Allowance in Metro Winnipeg, stated,

> …there is no encouragement for the woman on assistance to better herself academically to prepare her for a suitable position after her children are in school or when they leave the home. (Canada, Senate 1969a: 1)

And, as a member of the group, MOMs put it,

> …It is beyond our comprehension to understand why the government insists on this waste of public funds as well as insisting that welfare recipients stay in their rut. (Canada, Senate 1969b: 22)

Both grassroots feminists and welfare mother activists believed that the proper role of government was to provide whatever positive accommodation and encouragement welfare mothers needed to give them the capacity to participate in society on the same basis as other families and citizens. Neither movement presented "all or nothing" or "magic bullet" solutions to the problems. Neither called for the elimination of the welfare system, nor were these movements particularly interested in the GAI as a solution. In fact, mobilized welfare mothers gave relatively little attention to the topic of the GAI, and to the extent that it was raised, it was just one strategy among many for addressing the problem of the insufficiency of income. It was also met with much scepticism:

> Premier Bennett mentioned a guaranteed minimum income for single parents. Of this, we would like to know more. Yet, it must be recognized that it is arrogant and unreasonable to legislate change without consultation with those whom the change will affect. ("Our Story" 50)

The solutions they tended to favour were multiple kinds of supports that responded more specifically to the real needs that lone mothers faced (a topic I discuss further below). For example, welfare mother groups such as Mothers on Social Allowance in Metro Winnipeg and MOMs advocated for such measures as a child benefit or increases to family allowances (which they saw as especially relevant for families with several children), changes to earnings exemptions so that women could have more access to part-time employment and keep more of their earnings, an entertainment allowance to aid "the mental and emotional well-being" of the family, small incentive allowances to encourage women to enter volunteer work as a step towards building confidence and skills; supplements to pay so that women could afford to take low paid but meaningful work, and, generally, increases to welfare rates and minimum wages. Other forms of "tangible and moral support" they sought were counselling services for their older children to help orient them to employment; support for children with behavioural problems; orthodontist services; assistance in finding decent affordable housing and legal aid and advice; access to information and advice on training, upgrading, and employment orientation; more effective, professional and supportive case-workers; and more effective and supportive manpower services.[15]

My third and final observation concerns the novel aspect of the narratives of activist welfare mothers based on an analysis of their presentations to the Croll Committee. For the most part, as indicated earlier, their presentations focus on their own needs and dilemmas and the ways government programs failed to give them an ability to live and participate in society on a par with others. On closer inspection, however, certain interrelated themes emerge as dominant in their presentations, themes that reflect basic "truths" that they want others in society, especially policy-makers, to understand. One

theme, for example, is that their lives are complex and involve a range of responsibilities and competing demands. They tend to perceive their situation as one in which life had thrust upon them the roles and responsibilities of both parents. Their own reality is one of trying to fulfill all of the crucial adult tasks involved in healthy and responsible living. This includes taking responsibility for the financial stability and healthy overall functioning of the family and each member within it, and for maintaining good relations between family and community. This is not a matter of wanting to be treated as workers equal to men or as a stay-at-home mother, but of being recognized for who they are: as adults with a full slate of adult responsibilities that include caring, breadwinning, and community and societal involvement. Another dominant theme is that these roles and responsibilities are not separate and discreet in their lives but intertwined and interrelated, both day-to-day and over their life span. Closely tied to these themes is the notion that the trade-offs in their lives are complex—more complex than is generally acknowledged. For example, their lives demonstrate that full-time paid work is not the easy answer for every situation and not everyone at all times can be in full-time employment. This idea is implicit in the comments of one welfare mother, for example, when she explains to the Croll Committee why she is not able to take a cashier job even though she needs the extra money. Three of her four children are deaf, and as she explains, she has to be home with them when they are home:

> …every word that is spoken to them at school has to be reinforced at home, evenings and weekends…Every time I open my mouth, every time I make a gesture, this is a training situation for my children. (Canada, Senate, 1969b: 24)

Another distinct theme is that a lack in one area of their lives affects all the other areas, and therefore to ignore one aspect has negative repercussions for all the others and jeopardizes the functioning of the whole. As welfare mothers often point out in their presentations, for example, the lack of sufficient income under welfare threatens the overall foundations of their lives, including their sense of self-worth, their children, family functioning, and their relationships within the community. This idea is implicit in the following statement by a member of MOMs:

> They get no assistance in raising the single-parent family so she ends up in many instances undermining her health because due to her low pay she may be unable to afford to miss a day if she is ill, and she will probably spend her annual vacation overhauling the house, doing a big clean-up, painting, et cetera, instead of resting up for the coming year's work. (Canada, Senate 1969b: 21)

Critical to this idea is the understanding that the social and emotional aspects of life are inseparable, and therefore, human dignity and self-fulfillment are crucial parts of the mix. As the welfare mother groups often stress, the demeaning and humiliating treatment they receive under welfare create a level of unhappiness that impairs their overall ability to cope.

These insights inform their understanding of solutions; the best solutions are the ones that attend to these realities, that understand the importance of building into programs sufficient flexibility to allow each adult to make their own decisions based upon their own particular circumstances at the time and reflecting their own needs and aspirations, and that provide benefits and services out of recognition of, and respect for, those receiving them. Again, these sentiments are expressed between the lines in their presentations to the Croll Committee:

> It is the utmost importance that we are given every consideration and help in order that we are able to fulfill our role as mothers. Not one of the points in our brief should be overlooked, as we are tired of being the forgotten women at the bottom of the economic pyramid. (Canada, Senate 1969a: 4)

and

> You do not just suddenly say to someone "oh, you need a job. We will train you for key-punching." Maybe she is no good at key-punching. Maybe she doesn't want to key-punch. Maybe she has a talent that must be discovered and developed and it is in our course we help each one know themselves, know how to work with other people and discover their own particular talent, which we hope they can get training in…She has to know how to plan her meals, how to budget her time to be able to spend time with her family as well as doing the job, and she has to know: what am I best suited for? (Canada, Senate 1969b: 27)

A final prominent theme in their presentations is that *parenting* is important and that, as parents, they are intimately connected to their children. They recognize their children's prospects for equality are tied to their own and that only by ensuring their own status and prospects for a future of their own making can they ensure that these things are also possible for their children.

Based on this analysis, I argue that while welfare mother activists were demanding to be treated as citizens like any other, they were also, albeit, in an understated way, calling for a new and deeper understanding of citizenship and social rights, and the responsibility governments have to their citizens.[16] Their implicit message was that "citizenship," "social rights," and "social policy" should be referenced to the genuine meeting of adult need—ensuring that adults have the ability to fulfill their adult respon-

sibilities. Their presentations can be viewed as providing a rich, nuanced, contextualized account of adult need grounded in what they knew to be true and important about their own lives. Their account recognizes the complexities and contradictions entailed in adults' lives. It insists upon a more comprehensive understanding of the dimensions of humanness than is generally found in mainstream thought, including the need for personal autonomy and dignity. Finally, it fundamentally challenges the norm of hard and fast binary thinking which is embedded within mainstream social policy models, including, the binaries of dependency/independency, employable/unemployable, and full time worker/"stay-at-home" mother.

Given this deeper understanding of the activities and discourses of grassroots feminists and activist welfare mothers during the "war on poverty," it is important to ask to what extent these voices were "heard" by "expert" actors, what discrepancies existed between the approaches of these two "publics," and what repercussions the chosen social policy solutions had for defining the needs and status of poor lone mothers and welfare mothers in social policy and in society?

The "Expert" Voice of Policy-Makers in the Debate on Poverty—Whither Lone Mothers?

Alice O'Connor's detailed discussion of the evolution of poverty knowledge in the U.S. context, particularly her focus on the war on poverty period, provides a useful point of reference for examining the voice of "expert" actors in the Canadian "war on poverty" debate. According to O'Connor, poverty in the U.S. was understood as an economic problem and was tied to a particular commercial Keynesian macro economic agenda and vision that placed emphasis on market-driven growth and "compensatory" social welfare policy (O'Connor 140). This approach went hand in hand with an emphasis on "human capital theory" which drew from neoclassical economics and explained the labour market in terms of human behaviour and rational choice. Within this view, workers (like employers) are seen as making rational choices actors, without constraints, to maximize their own individual self-interests (such as investing in education and training), and such personal investments are seen as serving to improve productivity and economic growth overall (O'Connor 141). These ideas encouraged the view that the causes and consequences of poverty can only be understood with reference to individual-level attributes. This served to put the focus on the characteristics of poor people, who were thought to reproduce poverty through their individual behaviour.

In Canada, poverty was less overtly defined in terms of *individual* deficiencies, and more in terms of a lack of "equal opportunity" in society and as a problem of "human resources." Key reports on poverty at this time, including that of the Economic Council of Canada, the Croll Report, and the "Real" Report,[17] adopted the view that the problems lay, at least in part, in the economic system itself as opposed to individuals. The solution to poverty was, as the Croll Report put it, "the creation of greater income-earning potential among the poor themselves" which would be achieved through the "efficient use of manpower, capital and other productive resources" towards building human resources (e.g. programs such as skills training and education, and a manpower system more oriented to a human resources or anti-poverty approach) ("we cannot expect major accomplishments unless we guarantee the necessary preconditions of sufficiency and opportunity.")[18] The authors of the "Real" Report adopted this analysis as well although they put a greater emphasis on addressing inequality by transferring real social power, by transforming economic structures and institutions. The Canadian debate was also more greatly influenced by social justice themes and social-liberal tones that pervaded federal level politics. Thus, the Croll Report, "Real" Report, and Swadron Report all professed a commitment to social justice, equal citizenship, and equal opportunity.[19] The Croll Report adopted the position that the poor were citizens like any other:

> [The poor]…have the right to lead their own lives in their own way without any other standards being imposed on them. The mere fact that they are economically underprivileged does not mean that they should be deprived of their rights as citizens, much less as human beings; for too long the poor have been people to whom and for whom things were done by others. We have been forever tightening the belts of the poor. The essence of a new program must be to help them help themselves; to give them a voice in what is to be done and how it is to be done. (Canada, Parliament: xviii)

Both of the Croll and "Real" Reports were likewise concerned with countering damaging social myths that people on welfare do not want to work and are merely taking advantage of the system in order to avoid it. In the words of the Croll Report: "All evidence demonstrates that they are poor not because they do not want to work but in spite of working" (Canada, Parliament 27). The authors of the "Real" Report argued that "man, by nature is not lazy, but on the contrary suffers from the results of inactivity. People might prefer not to work for one or two months, but the vast majority would beg for work, even if they were not paid for it (Adams, et. al, 192)." They contended that people should not be compelled to work in "ugly and degrading" jobs and that that kind of compulsion is out of place in a democratic society, and moreover, that people are not motivated by money alone, that other incentives exist, including "pride, social recognition, pleasure in work itself, etc.…" (192). The Swadron Report also put forward the view that individuals who are living on welfare

should be given some measure of choice in deciding on whether to take a job, and that "it is inappropriate to apply the moral judgements of the nineteenth century in the twentieth century" (Swadron 64).

Despite these social-liberal tones and the supposed lack of focus on individual deficiencies, it is nevertheless important to recognize the extent to which the Canadian debate was as equally invested in an economic standpoint—a fundamental belief in the market and a liberal emphasis on supply-side intervention rather than deeper structural change. Neil Bradford reinforces this view with his argument that the dominant economic perspective in Canada from the post-war period onward was one of "technocratic Keynesian" (as opposed to social Keynesianism) consisting of a supply-side focus and policies of "pump priming" through corporate tax cuts and automatic stabilizers such as unemployment insurance (see Bradford 61). In the Canadian debate, as in the U.S. one, neoclassical economic concerns about human capital and the concepts of rational choice and self-interest maximizing, were never very far away.

The latter concerns can be seen clearly in the way key poverty players in Canada embraced the themes of equal opportunity and enhancing human resources, and were attracted to supply-side solutions. The main preoccupations of both the Croll and "Real" Reports were the issues of work incentives, the work/welfare trade-off, and the "working poor." While these actors may have appeared to be trying to outdo each other in the describing the horrible treatment of welfare recipients, they did not, in fact, delve too deeply into the question of why the welfare system was so stigmatizing and punitive (see McCormack). Indeed, their major concern with the welfare system was its supposed "lack of work incentives" and the fact that it was "unfair" to the "working poor."[20] These actors spoke passionately about the plight of the "working poor" and went to great lengths to distinguish this population from the "welfare poor." The Croll Report describes the working poor as "the most invisible of all" and "the most unfortunate of the poor…in the sense that they cannot get ahead," and speaks of the "unfairness" (even, "dangers") of a system in which the "welfare poor" had advantages over the working poor ("Can we afford to maintain a system where going on welfare is more profitable than going to work?") (Canada, Parliament 170, 27).[21]

The language of the Ontario Department of Community and Social Service's brief to the Croll Committee was representative of the kind technical discussion that routinely took place in the context of the Committee hearings (Ontario). One of its central concerns was the possibility of someone working part-time while receiving social assistance could end up with more income than someone working full-time and not receiving assistance. As this brief stated: "This situation creates an economic incentive for male family heads or "single" mothers to trade-off full time employment for social assistance or a combination of social assistance and part-time employment" (43). Offset rates and work incentives were seen as "major public issues" (56). The offset rate for social assistance (at 75 percent) was seen as creating a "pronounced disincentive effect" because someone working full-time would receive only a small amount more in income than someone who "traded" full-time employment for part-time work and restricted his or her earnings to the annual exemption (52).

The solutions put forward by both the Croll Committee and the "Real" Report were also, for the most part, liberal, supply-side focused, technical, and oriented to "fine-tuning." Although these reports recommended services and a policy of full employment, their central proposal was the GAI, "with an appropriate incentive structure" (Canada, Parliament xxxi).[22] They viewed the GAI as a way to bring fairness back into the system, provide for those "unable to work" in a non-stigmatizing way, and supplement the incomes of those working in low wage jobs. Their main justification for the GAI, however, was the paradigmatically liberal concern with work incentives (Haddow 89, 90). According to Rodney Haddow, work incentives were also the main preoccupation of the 1973 federal Orange Paper proposal for a GAI plan for Canada. He describes this proposal as "an economist's idea, the product of the application of economists' skills" (118), and as grounded in the view that social security has to "operate in harmony with, not in opposition to, the motive forces of the economy," including "a greater emphasis on the need to get people who are on social aid back to work (Haddow 112)."

Where Did Women Fit in the "Expert" Discourse on Poverty?

For the most part, women are barely visible within mainstream poverty discourse—O'Connor describes them as an "after-thought" at best. Men are the central focus—they are the assumed breadwinners, the heads of working poor families, and the individuals destined for the labour market. Women are visible only as wives and mothers, and often only have an implied presence—for example, as an entity central to the proper functioning of the family ("the best answer to a child's need is a strong and supportive family able to provide the emotional nourishment so essential to full realization of potential" (Canada, Parliament 99). Women, as mothers, are often seen as having an ability to cope well under difficult circumstances—as in the Croll Report's statement: "It's a wonder how well women have been able to manage with so little, for the burden in the home usually falls on them" (86). This treatment stands in contrast to the sympathetic gaze that key reports often bestow upon men. For example, they often refer to the emotional strains and loss of identity that men experience from loss of employment and having to turn to welfare (e.g. "welfare robs the head of the household of *his* economic

function, and tends to make of him a "superfluous man" (Adams, et. al., 181,182) [original emphasis]). The Swadron Report raises similar concerns about issues of self-respect and emotional security in relation to (male) social assistance recipients.[23]

The one clear exception to this oversight is the attention these reports give to the issue of the female-led family and its particular reliance on the welfare system. This family type is viewed as one of the "disadvantaged" groups that made up the poverty population—as one of the groups that has supposedly been "left behind by the economic system" (Canada, Parliament xiv, 31). Brief mention is made in both the Croll and "Real" Reports of the issue of women's lower income compared with men's and that women suffered from employment discrimination (following on the RCSW's raising of these issues). The "Real" Report also mentions that female heads of families earned much less than male heads. These reports also pay some attention to the plight of those living on welfare assistance, discussing the inadequacies of benefits, the punitive treatment of recipients, the difficulties of being able to earn income because of high exemption rates, and the fact that a foster mother receives more money to raise a child than does a biological mother living on welfare.

In many ways, however, the issue of the "welfare mother" did not fit neatly into the overall "economic" enclave in which the larger problem of poverty was positioned, nor did poverty experts consider this issue to be part of their core business, especially compared to the problem of the "working poor." These actors ultimately addressed the issue by way of their GAI proposal—a solution that was designed primarily to address the issue of work incentives and "the plight of the working poor." Lone mothers were claimed to be suitable beneficiaries of the GAI on the grounds that they were "unemployable." It was seen as giving them a non-stigmatizing guaranteed income that would free them from the requirement to seek paid work. In reality, however, there was always pressure on lone mothers, even those with young children, to avail themselves of rehabilitative programs and services in order to become employable and secure employment).[24]

To be clear, the proposed GAI plan was never actually adopted. It was a central focus of debate through the 1970s, but in the late 1970s the provinces became concerned about its potential cost and ultimately chose to reject it. My concern, however, is less with the notion of a guaranteed income plan *per se,* and more with its underlying assumptions and rationale. I argue that the kinds of assumptions and values on which the GAI proposals of this period were based have lived on and have, in fact, been definitive in shaping dominant understandings of poor lone mothers and their needs. The question I address below is what kind of intervention was the GAI proposal from the standpoint of gender, the goal of women's equality, and, especially, the kinds of essential truths about human need and realities presented by grassroots feminists and welfare mothers in the context of debate?

What Were the Gendered Implications of the Proposed GAI Plan?

In order to analyze the gender implications of the GAI proposal I come back briefly to Nancy Fraser's framework for analyzing the discourses of "expert" actors. As we have seen, Fraser argues that "expert publics" routinely take runaway politicized needs and translate them into administrable needs—needs that can be satisfied through a bureaucratic solution and specified as a general state of affairs that could befall anyone. She also points out that this translation process entails both de-contextualization and re-contextualization activities which, taken together, serve to recast real substantive human needs in administrable and technical terms.

I argue that the GAI proposal of this period was just such a re-writing project—a project in which the needs of poor single mothers (among others) are rendered technical, to become a problem for which the GAI is offered an appropriate response. *De-contextualization* occurs when the situation of lone mothers with the responsibility for the care of young children in the home are reduced to the technical label: "unemployable." In doing so, their needs are cast in abstraction from many of the realities of their lives, including, for instance, the sense that welfare mother activists had advanced that their lives are complex and involve multiple roles and competing demands, and that their roles have positive value, and contribute to their communities and society. These interpretations are pushed from view with the institution of the concept of "unemployable." Other "truths" are obscured as well: that their responsibilities are interrelated and intertwined in their daily lives, that the trade-offs in their lives are inevitably complicated and cannot be reduced to simple choices between "staying home" versus "going to work," that being treated with dignity is important, that parenting is important, that relationships between parents and children and between family and community matter, and that there is a line (tangible and emotional) at which the stability of the whole is affected. Also lost in the translation are basic truths about the ways their lives are intimately connected to larger social structures and processes. The gaps in social supports, of which welfare mothers and feminists often spoke, become invisible. These include not being able to find jobs that pay enough to cover essential needs, or to find affordable, reliable, and quality childcare, or quality affordable housing, or to have access to local support services for parents, or to training programs and allowances. Essentially, all of the knowledge and specific insights that welfare mothers and grassroots feminists had expressed concerning the real substance and dynamics of the lives of poor lone mothers as they

struggle to conduct their lives within their communities, fade from view.

The GAI, complete with its terms and conditions, also served to *re-contextualize* the needs and lives of welfare mothers in relation to dominant institutions and ideologies Generally speaking, the latter are encapsulated in the notion of the neoclassical economic/male breadwinner model—the model that underpinned poverty "experts'" concerns about work incentives and disincentives, work/welfare trade-offs, and abuse. This model assumes the existence of a universal social actor who is a "possessive individual" or "rational economic man," and lives life devoid of social context or any responsibility lying outside of the realm of the market. Entailed in these notions are a number of additional assumptions, including, for example: that full-time paid work is the ideal and is of higher value than either part-time or unpaid work; that people live to maximize their self-interest and make choices based on income calculations; that the only relationships that matter in society are employer/employee, and male breadwinner/dependent wife-and-children; that people can be slotted into the hard and fast categories of "employable" and "unemployable" (with nothing in-between); and that there are two significant types of poor—the "working poor" and the "welfare poor"—who are fundamentally pitted against each other in a zero-sum game in which a benefit to one is a harm to the other.

These "neoclassical economic/male breadwinner" constructions clearly fly in the face of the knowledge and ideals advanced at this time by activist welfare mothers and grassroots feminists. Indeed, as a social theory, they represent the very antithesis of what would serve the interests of poor lone mothers or recognize and value their contributions as citizens. This de-contextualization results in a further obscuring of the real lives of poor lone mothers.[25] In the realm of welfare policy, for example, these principles become the only legitimate standpoint for interpreting recipients' needs, judging their behaviour, and regulating their activities. Under these circumstances, women lose all ability within this policy sphere to define themselves and to have their definitions recognized and socially validated. Moreover, without positive recognition of their contribution to family, community, and society, the political space that lone mothers have for making claims in respect of their real needs, shrinks. This includes their claim, for example, for changes to earnings exemptions rules to allow them to have the ability to work part-time in order to bring their income up to a reasonable standard. Indeed, under dominant constructions, the act of combining part-time work with receipt of benefits is deemed a form of *cheating* because that person would end up with more income than someone working in full-time paid work. Welfare mothers thus become prone to being seen and categorized as individuals who are "trading-off" work for welfare (or the GAI), or essentially, as "getting something for nothing," or abusing the system in other ways, such as having a baby just to get more welfare, or "shirking marriage."

Seen in this way, the "solution" of the GAI is a form of "anti-politics"—a sleight of hand in which lone mothers' needs lose what politicized meaning they had had (Li). Their problems are individualized. All that remains, and all that has legitimacy, are *individual* cases and stories, with no larger significance and no understanding of their larger contribution to society. Lost is any sense of them as valuable, or as full and equal citizens—the essence of what welfare mother activists and feminists had sought. The designation of lone mothers as "unemployable" is a simplistic misrepresentation of their subjectivity, one that renders them as "the other"—as deficient against the model of the full-time paid worker. This is to leave them in a social limbo, defining them as a "permanent absence" within "the social," a group for whom there is no solution other than being reabsorbed back into marriage or the functional equivalent. It also serves, conceptually, to hive poor lone mothers off from other "normal" women, and as outside the community of women for whom the feminism and self-determination are deemed relevant and important. It serves to define them as deviant, as victims (but also, potentially, as abusers of the system), and as state wards as opposed to free, self-determining individuals.

Conclusions

The late 1960s and early 1970s was a key moment of struggle in Canada over the interpretation of the needs of poor lone mothers. It involved two key political forces: the "oppositional" one of feminists and welfare mothers, and the "expert" one of dominant governmental players and policy-makers. This paper has attempted to uncover the deeper meanings embedded in the discourses of both sets of actors, to ask what discrepancies existed between them, and what the prevailing understandings that were achieved at this time ultimately meant for women, poor lone mothers, and the politics of the welfare mother in Canada.

One conventional view is that feminists and welfare mothers were not aligned in this debate, that they had quite divergent understandings of the problems and solutions pertaining to poor lone mothers. I argue that the reality was more complex. While mainstream feminism adopted an analysis that was less than helpful to poor lone mothers in that it positioned them as deficient and as outside of their own moral universe, grassroots feminists and activist welfare mothers, in fact, shared a more radical, politicized, and collectivist stance. They viewed poor lone mothers as equal and entitled citizens who brought value to society, and they wanted governments to act in ways that would give poor lone mothers access to these rights in practice. They were looking for solutions that understood and responded to the real context and complexities of their lives, recognized the contributions that poor lone mothers made to their

communities and society, and were grounded in a belief in social justice and equality.

These actors challenged conventional thinking in other ways as well, however. In addition to calling for equal citizenship for welfare mothers, grassroots feminists and the welfare mother movement in this period put forward the kernel of an important alternative concept of social citizenship. The narratives of activist welfare mothers, in particular, lent implicit support to the view that social policy and social rights should serve a larger and progressive *social* purpose: to support the ability of adults in society *to be adults*, to have the capacity and the expectations of being able to fulfill all of their adult responsibilities.[26] Their formulation in many ways marked a movement away from deeply gendered constructions of the "adult," towards an understanding of that category that was infused with women-centred perspectives on human reality and the things that count. Their assumed "adult" has responsibilities for breadwinning, caring, and participating in, and building, community and society. It understood human need and took account of, and attached importance to, the full dimensions of human existence and human activities/work, including the need for autonomy and dignity. It also understood the interrelated nature of adult responsibilities, including the interconnections between the social and emotional dimensions of life and the complexities and trade-offs thus faced by adults on a daily basis.

Dominant "expert" actors, however, seemingly had little real interest in the problems of poor lone mothers or in recognizing alternative concepts of social citizenship. Their main solution for welfare mothers was the GAI. Contrary to the view that the GAI proposal of this period was a positive and progressive solution for poor lone mothers, I contend that this measure served to entrench within social policy debate understandings about society and human need which were particularly detrimental to poor women, poor lone mothers, and others from historically marginalized groups. Indeed, while the GAI may have been a well-intended solution for lone mothers, it was a mechanism that rendered invisible and illegitimate the complexities of their lives, and that reframed their problems in narrow and technical terms. As a result of this conceptual realignment, the issues and subjectivities of lone mothers were recast to fit nicely into the categories entailed in the dominant neo-classical economic/male breadwinner paradigm, the overriding concerns of which were work incentives and transforming the "unemployable" into the "employable." In so doing, lone mothers were written into social policy (and society) as individuals who are unemployable, which also means abnormal, deficient, needy, and prone to taking advantage of the system. In other words, rather than offering real change to poor lone mothers (and women, generally), policy-makers in this period chose the path of "governing" this terrain—of containing and managing the problem, primarily by discrediting, controlling, and "improving" lone mothers as individuals.

Viewing this period more broadly, I argue that rather than it marking a high point in Canada's social-liberal welfare state experiment, the "war on poverty" was more realistically a moment of missed opportunity for (if not, concerted resistance to) expanding the breadth and depth of the "equality-enhancing" aspects of social policy in Canada, and therefore, of social citizenship and social justice.[27] While purporting to embrace feminist and poverty rights movements' calls for social justice, "expert" actors of the day chose to reaffirm and re-entrench the liberal economic/male breadwinner model as the foundations for social policy, especially, social policy for the poor. This model supports a profoundly distorted construction of "the social" and human existence, including, especially, the assumption (and prescription) that people are atomistic, independent, self-maximizing, market-playing, and, ideally, fully engaged in paid employment. With this move, policy-makers effectively reinforced the "inequality-enhancing" aspects of Canadian social policy, an event that would over the long-term reinforce the disadvantages and secondary status of those who are already marginalized, including women in particular. With respect to poor lone mothers, the effects would be to skew the foundations for debate in ways that ensured the continual undermining of their ability to gain recognition for their cause. It is also important to ask how these events would influence the kind of feminism that would become dominant within the mainstream women's movement, particularly, with respect to its analysis of, and its relationship with, the causes of poor lone mothers and welfare mothers.

This analysis sheds light as well on changes taking place in recent years under neoliberalism, especially with respect to social assistance policy. The restructuring of social assistance has meant a dramatic shift away from the concept of social responsibility for the welfare of citizens and embrace of the philosophy of employability and individual responsibility. Benefits have been severely reduced and new rules have been imposed that force recipients off welfare and into what are mostly insecure, poverty-level jobs. At the same time, supportive programs such as publically-funded child care and affordable housing have never sufficiently materialized or have been severely cut back. Feminist analysts have tended to describe these shifts as marking a fundamental change in the way lone mothers (among others) are defined. They have pointed out that lone mothers have gone from being labelled unemployable and deserving to employable and undeserving, and the approach of social assistance policy, generally, has gone from taking a gender-specific approach to a gender-neutral one (see Brodie; Baker and Tippen; Evans; Scott).

While these are important observations, my findings suggest that they give insufficient attention to the degree of continuity that exists

between Canada's "social-liberal" past and "neo-liberal" present. As this paper illustrates, the political choices of the past have in many ways *created* the very conditions upon which neo-liberalism has grown and flourished, with neo-liberal policies simply building on, extending, and further solidifying, the false and distorted constructs of the past. The "war on poverty" was a critical political step in establishing the policy path that has led to the current "war on welfare mothers," with its particularly dehumanizing and soul-destroying consequences for poor lone mothers and those belonging to other vulnerable groups. Recent feminist analyses show that changes taking place under social assistance are reflecting and fostering a concept of lone mothers as second-class citizens (e.g. Mosher). These changes are serving to jeopardize not only the health of lone mothers but also their ability to maintain relationships within their communities and personal networks, and to care for their children.[28]

Finally, it is important to recognize just how narrow the debate on women and social assistance has become. The challenge for feminists and progressives is to find ways, and a language, to make visible what has historically been rendered invisible through social policy and the debates over social assistance. Activists of the late 1960s and early 1970s pushed, albeit in a tentative way, for a concept of social rights that has both a *social* and *social justice* purpose. In struggling to define what that meant they brought forward the long lost voice of "women" in defining human need and determining what activities count. Their insights present an important and genuine counter to the prejudiced "truths" and conceits that currently underpin social policy for the poor. It is important that contemporary feminist and progressive movements pick up where these activists left off. The strategy of deeper questioning and of broadening out the realm of "truth" appear to be necessary and crucial to achieving fair and humane social policy for women and marginalized groups and to moving towards a truly just society.

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[1]This term refers to women sole support parents who received social assistance benefits. I use it in this paper because it was a popular term in this period and was often used by poor lone mothers themselves.

[2]See, for example, Mahon; McKeen; Jenson, Mahon and Phillips. The term "social liberalism" denotes a case of "social democratic" elements being added to an otherwise "liberal" welfare state and political discourse. As Jenson et. al. explain further, "while liberals place more emphasis on the individual than social democrats, social liberals recognize that individual freedom and equality require supportive collective institutions" (153, 154).

[3]This period witnessed the expansion of the universalistic and insurance-based elements of the Canadian welfare state (between 1965 and 1971), including universal health insurance, extended cost-sharing in health and education, major reform of social assistance (through the Canada Assistance Plan), substantial improvements to Unemployment Insurance, including the addition of sickness benefits and two new old age pensions (the Canada Pension Plan and Quebec Pension Plan), and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (McKeen).

[4]Women-led families did not keep pace with the overall trend of income improvement over the 15-year period, from 1951 to 1965. In 1961, female-headed families had a 42 percent chance of being poor and that dropped to only 40 percent in 1973, while the improvement for all other categories was significant—a 50 percent drop in poverty (Ross).

[5]According to Margaret Little, welfare mothers first began collective protests in 1966. It must be noted that Black lone mothers were relatively absent both within poverty debate and the institutionalized women's movement of this period. Possible explanations include the fact that Black women had little access to welfare benefits at this time, their voices were also suppressed generally due to the overall racism of the period, and they tended to identify their struggles more in terms of combating racial discrimination than gender discrimination (O'Connor; Daenzer; Thobani). For similar reasons, immigrant lone mothers were also virtually invisible in these contexts.

[6]While the politics of "race" (especially, prejudice against Black single mothers on welfare) was influential in shaping the U.S. poverty debate, there was a limited attention given to racialized groups in the Canadian debate.

[7]While women's groups tended not to present to the Croll Committee, they often raised the issue of poverty and the problems of welfare with the RCSW. Other women's groups held conferences, and published briefs and articles on the topic of women and poverty and the plight of the welfare mother.

[8]This paper is limited to considering

"oppositional" and "expert" publics. It is clear, however, that "reprivatizing" interests were often operating behind the scenes in the "war on poverty." This is clear, for example, in Rodney Haddow's argument that the federal Department of Finance, with its "market-oriented, laissez-faire accumulation strategy," "substantially weakened" at this time the federal Orange Paper commitments to reform and "circumscribed their possible directions" (118).

[9]See, for example, James;Lang; Power; Women's Liberation Movement.

[10]Their voice was evident in early and mid-1970s conference reports and briefs, including, for example, the Report of the Western Conference on "Opportunities for Women" held in British Columbia in the early 1970s (Report) Also see the brief to B.C. members of parliament by Women's Rally for Action, in 1976 ("Our Story").

[11]This discussion is based primarily on presentations made by welfare mother groups to the Croll Committee in 1969 and 1970. These groups were primarily made up of welfare mothers. They included: Mothers on Social Allowance in Metro Winnipeg (representing 5 groups and 165 women on provincial welfare), More Opportunities for Mothers, and Unemployment Citizens Welfare Improvement Council.

[12]The Report's discussion of the poverty of women and lone mothers draws from presentations made both to the Croll Committee and the RCSW. The Report cites three groups who presented briefs to the Royal Commission on "the plight of the sole-support mother." The three groups cited are "The Minus Ones," "Parents Without Partners" and "La Féderation Des Services Sociale la à Famille" (see footnotes 26, 27, 28 of the Report's chapter on poverty).

[13]My use of the term "citizenship" fits the notion conveyed in Isin et al. that it is the "fundamental right to have rights (see Arendt) by asking questions concerning social justice (6,7)."

[14]Doris Power of the Just Society Movement, expressed similar ideas to the abortion caravan, May 1970: "These doctors are hopelessly ignorant of the pressures and strains involved in maintaining a family on an income lower than the poverty level and how that affects a mother mentally and the relationship within that family (122)."

[15]See for example, presentations to the Croll Committee by Mothers on Social Allowance in Metro Winnipeg (Canada, Senate, 1969a) and MOMs (Canada, Senate, 1969b).

[16]This argument parallels in some ways the analysis Krista Johnston develops in her paper in this collection, in so far as activists in both cases were seeking more than inclusion within the existing citizenship paradigm. They were seeking fundamental transformation of the paradigm itself.

[17]My discussion of the Canadian debate on poverty is based mainly on the reports of key governmental and government-sponsored bodies (and one non-governmental body) involved in defining and publicizing the poverty issue in the late 1960s and early 1970s. They were the 1968 Report of the Economic Council of Canada, the 1971 Report of the Croll Committee (Croll Report), the 1971 "Real Poverty Report" ("Real" Report) issued by the renegade researchers of the Croll Committee, the 1973 federal Orange Paper entitled "Working Paper on Social Security in Canada," and the relatively lesser known 1972 report entitled "Report on Employment Opportunities For Welfare Recipients" prepared by Barry Swadron for the Ontario government (Swadron Report).

[18]See Canada, Parliament Special Senate Committee on Poverty, 1971: xvii and 61.

[19]See, Canada, Parliament, Special Senate Committee on Poverty, 1971; Adams, et al; Swadron.

[20]For example, see Canada, Parliament 1971, xv; and Adams, et. al, 181.

[21]This was so, despite the fact that there was some recognition by these actors that the real problem was the lack of adequate jobs (e.g. see, the discussion of the Croll Committee with Joe Willard, the Deputy Minister of the Department of National Health and Welfare), (Canada, Senate 1970: 42).

[22]The Croll Committee recommended improved service programs for the poor (Canada, Parliament 1971, xxx), including "preventative" services (i.e. pre and post-natal care, and services to children in early school years), child and youth services, services for the elderly, consumer services, education, health (including family planning), housing, welfare law, and daycare. Its proposed plan would effectively replace family allowances, Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement, and most of the other transfer payments programs now operated by the Federal Government" (Croll Report, cited in Haddow 90). The 1973 federal Orange Paper version would replace Family Allowances, Old Age Security and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (see Canada 1973).

[23]For example, the Swadron Report emphasizes that the individual welfare recipient (conceptualized as a male breadwinner) "should be made to feel reasonably secure and should not have to be emotionally and mentally preoccupied with concern over where the next meal is coming from" (98).

[24]According to Haddow, under the federal government's 1973 Orange Paper's GAI plan for Canada, work incentives for those deemed "unemployable" were to be given in the form of employment measures and services rather than in monetary form (114).

[25]This argument aligns with Catherine Kingfisher's argument concerning the impact of neoliberal welfare reform on lone mothers. She argues that the neoliberal welfare reform jettisons not only the sphere of the "reproductive" economy (as opposed to "productive" economy) but erases the subjectivities of all those who engage in this sphere and these activities (37, 38).

[26]This formulation strongly resonates with the one advanced in recent years by Janet Siltanen. She argues that social citizenship "concerns the ability to realize adult expectations and responsibilities in one's community," including, for example,

"the ability of individuals to form an "autonomous household" (Orloff) by providing for themselves and their dependents" (Siltanen 361).

[27]I am indebted to Janet Siltanen for this point. She has importantly clarified that social policy exists in both equality-enhancing and inequality-enhancing forms, and that only an equality-enhancing formulation of the social rights of citizenship can serve as a basis for an agenda for progressive change (370).

[28]A study of recent changes to social assistance policy in British Columbia, for example, found that program workers are giving lone mothers the message that they are nothing unless they are employed (Gurstein and Vilches). Also see, Pulkingham, Fuller and Kershaw.

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ANDREA S. GEREIGHTY

The Wet Coast

As usual, an active evening skies
pelicans onto the dock
  poetic inspiration dried like oversteamed
crab legs
so the coast skyline worth a look
trees pristine as in the time of Iberville
One pelican dips the estuary
fishes for a meal.

The coast looks different when it rains on the sand.
She emerges, molten liquid, fluid from the fire.
  Nothing but the wind to mark time as it slices her life.

Andrea Gereighty's poetry has been published in California Quarterly, Desire Street, Xavier Review, Gulf Coast, The Magnolia Quarterly, National Poetry Review, Negative Capability, New Laurel Review, New Orleans Review, San Francisco Quarterly, *and many others. She is the Director of the New Orleans Poetry Forum (NOPF), and an award at the University of New Orleans has been established in her name for young poets. Her chapbook,* Desire Street, *is available through the NOPF and Gris-Gris Productions.*