Political Discourses on Workfare and Feminist Debates On the Recognition of Unpaid Work

Jacinthe Michaud

ABSTRACT

This article proposes a feminist critical analysis of three series of arguments that shaped political discourses in support of Workfare legislations during the 1990s in Canada: the restoration of work ethic; the improvement of self-esteem among welfare recipients; and the deregulation of the welfare system by imposing compulsory measures that will determine who among the poor deserve public assistance, particularly Workfare policies aimed at youths and teenage mothers.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article propose une analyse critique féministe de trois séries d'arguments qui ont formé les discours politiques en appui aux lois le programme intitulé Workfare, au cours des années 90, la restauration de l'étique professionnelle, la hausse de l'estime chez les prestataires de bien-être social; et la déréglementation du système de bien-être social en imposant des mesures forcées qui vont déterminer qui parmi les pauvres, mérite l'aide sociale, particulièrement les politiques du Workfare qui visent les jeunes et les mères adolescentes.

INTRODUCTION

Like the Workfare laws adopted in other Canadian provinces and in the United States, the Ontario version of Workfare, passed as legislation in 1997, is not a simple addendum to a welfare system already in existence. "Ontario Works" transformed the principles and foundations of public assistance (Boismenu and Bernier 2000; Morrisson 1998;). This is one of the main arguments I would like to make in this article; I also highlight the sexist and racist preconceptions which support this welfare reform (Evans 1998; Fraser and Gordon 1997; Morel 2000a & b; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver 1999;). The adoption of Workfare policies by the Conservative government was justified by the argument that there was an "out of control" increase in the number of welfare recipients in categories such as youths and teenage mothers, mainly among immigrant women and/or among black women (Fraser and Gordon 1997; Morrison 1998). In addition, this policy on public assistance has introduced a paradigmatic change that was unthinkable before, specifically concerning single mothers who, like everyone else, are now subject to Workfare. Legislators justified this major transformation as a way of promoting "reciprocity" with every employed woman, including employed mothers. Of course, at the core of the preliminary debates, which led to current Workfare policies and programs, are more familiar notions, for example that workers' wages in exchange for their "contribution" to paid work are a measure of their "merit."

This article is a feminist critique of some of the major arguments found in the literature that either support Workfare policy or is critical of its main components. The first part of this article will focus on three arguments that shaped the political discourse in support of Workfare legislation during the 1990s in Canada. Conservative supporters of reform of the Canadian public assistance regime presented Workfare as the best measure that would first, restore a work ethic among welfare recipients; second, promote self-esteem among those who have been out of paid work for too long, and; third, simplify a bureaucracy bogged down by too many complicated rules and useless programs by instead selecting the most "deserving" among the poor. The final part of this article will be a discussion of major challenges facing the feminist movement in the present context of Workfare.

THE WORKFARE DEBATES AND FEMINIST CRITIQUE OF THE NOTIONS OF "DEPENDENCY," "RECIPROCITY" AND "CONTRIBUTION"

Workfare was presented by its supporters as a policy of "equity" and of "reciprocity." The

equation of these notions with Workfare was quite simple. Since employed workers received their wages in exchange for a certain number of working hours, it was only fair and just that all welfare recipients perform a certain number of hours of unpaid work in exchange for a welfare payment. Compulsory "reciprocity" became one of the best electoral platforms for politicians who pretended to listen to growing public discontent, to such an extent that almost all ideological discourses on Workfare were fueled by sentiments towards recipients of hostility, accusations of fraud and of abuses of tax payers' money (Noël 1995).

Among all publications supporting Workfare published during the last two decades, *Helping the Poor: A Qualified Case for Workfare*, edited by Richards and Watson (1995) from the C.D. Howe Institute, illustrates best the ideological discourse behind the reform of the public assistance regime introduced in Canada. Publications such as this paved the way for Workfare policies that were introduced at the provincial level first, which in turn forced the federal government to change its national norms and to replace the Canadian Public Assistance Regime with the Canadian Social Transfer in 1996 (Boismenu and Jenson 1996).

Overall, three types of arguments in support of Workfare policies in Canada can be identified within Richards and Watson's collection of essays: the restoration of the work ethic; the improvement of self-esteem among welfare recipients; and the restructuring of the system by imposing compulsory measures to determine who among the poor deserved public assistance. What connects these arguments on Workfare is the "welfare mother" figure. Without it, there would be no Workfare policy today. Without the conservative and neo-liberal discourses on "welfare mothers" which so obsessed many political decision makers and system managers, there would be no compulsory measures enforcing the notion of "reciprocity." Supporters of Workfare argue that too many welfare mothers are in the system permanently, thus raising their children in ways that put them on the same pathological path to state dependency. Supporters also argue that since social norms regarding women's autonomy have changed significantly since the 1960s, similar changes should be made to the welfare system to reflect women's increasing autonomy. Imposing a Workfare program was designed to make sure that all women were judged according to the same standard of autonomy and independence. Thus, "reciprocity" became the measure of equality among social categories of women regardless of their family situation (Morel 2000 a; b).

WELFARE MOTHERS AND THE IDEOLOGY OF THE WORK ETHIC

The most dramatic change in the underlying philosophy of welfare involves the ideology of the work ethic. In earlier periods, social norms valued mothers who were at home with their children full time. In the current period, welfare philosophy tends to advocate formal gender equality; like men, mothers are expected to be in the paid labour force, even when their children are young. Supporters of Workfare do not deny that changes in the economy and its adjustment to global markets have been very hard on women and men who have few or no job qualifications. They also recognise that if single mothers remain on welfare even during periods of economic recovery, it is because of their domestic responsibilities and the high costs associated with the care of children. Many of these mothers can get only part-time jobs at minimal wage and so cannot afford to go off welfare and lose benefits such as dental or drug care (Hagen and Davis 1994). Nevertheless, Workfare supporters have generated a moral panic about the numbers of mothers on welfare and about the ways they reputedly contribute to the decline of society.

Between 1983 and 1993 the number of mothers on welfare skyrocketed in Canada, especially in Ontario where the increase was by 144.5%. Other provinces, such as Québec (6.8%), British Columbia (22.6%) and Alberta (34%) (Brown 1995, 57), also witnessed important increases but the numbers in Ontario were particularly stunning for the conservative right - as well as for some segments among the progressive left - and explain the level of anxiety expressed almost everywhere *vis-à-vis* single mothers on welfare (Fraser and Gordon 1997; Morrison 1998). The authors of *Helping the Poor: A Qualified Case for Workfare* make frequent reference to the American situation, arguing that the number of mothers on welfare in the US, mainly young African-Americans, never seems to stop growing.

They reiterate conservative and racist US explanations that identify the causes of poverty as the individual failings of those who are seen as bearers of social, economical, cultural, even psychological characteristics which make them inclined to state dependency.

At first glance, the fact that in North America - where conservatives are eager to promote religious and family values - policy makers want to impose strict equality among men and women seems very surprising (Evans 1998; Fraser and Gordon 1997; Roche 1995). Yet, the motivation behind the Workfare programs has nothing to do with gender equality. On the contrary, Workfare reflects the fact that it has becomes less and less socially acceptable for some social categories of women to refuse to obtain their "autonomy" through paid work (Dechêne 1994). The question, then, is why a strict work ethic model has been applied to single mothers when in the past it was not considered proper to impose on them paid work requirements (Evans 1995, 83; 1998, 58)?

In order to understand how and also why single mothers on welfare, especially unmarried young women and particularly black women, have been so stigmatized, we will turn our attention to the "genealogy of dependency" proposed by Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1997). Fraser and Gordon made a compelling presentation of ideological discourses in the USA of the on-going changing notion of "dependence" starting with the model of patriarchy specific to the pre-industrial period up to the present. During the pre-industrial era, being "dependent" did not have any of the current negative meaning of deviance and did not result in any individual stigmatization. Just about everyone was dependent in some way. Women and children, as much as peasants and other subaltern categories, were acting within a social order where dependency was embedded in a set of economical, sociological and political relations. The labour of women and children was considered necessary to the economy of the family unit and recognized as such, even though women and children were dependent on husbands and fathers, who were themselves dependent on someone else (Fraser and Gordon 1997, 125).

With the industrialization period emerged a certain type of racial construction which characterized a dependent status as being abnormal for "whites," while situations of dependency remained normal for people of "non-white" races (Fraser and Gordon 1997, 127). Independence became characterized by the inscription of some civic and political rights that were, in part, established around wage work. Relations of dependency were defined as contradicting the notion of citizenship (Fraser and Gordon 1997, 127). The persisting dependence by some social groups, such as the pauper living on public charity, the slave and the native as well as the "new invention" of the housewife, could not be explained by the old economical, sociological and political relations at work during the preindustrial time. Those relations dissolved and disappeared almost totally in order to give way to a new moral discourse, composed this time from concepts borrowed from psychology and medical pathology:

> … the independence of the white working man presupposed the ideal of the family wages sufficient to maintain a household and to support a nonemployed wife and children. Thus, for wage labor to create (white-male) independence, (white) female economic dependence was required. Women were thus transformed "from partners to parasites."
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> (Fraser and Gordon 1997, 129)

After the Second World War, a whole set of dependency relations begin to aim exclusively - and hegemonically - at individuals living on public assistance (Fraser and Gordon 1997, 132). From then on, the image of the "welfare mother" revealed a series of cultural anxieties coming from dominant institutions. Today, it has become unpopular to insist that women continue to depend on the sole income of a male breadwinner. With the event of the post-industrial era, argue Fraser and Gordon, all forms of dependency, included dependency on a husband's wages, have become negative. All women, whatever their social status, are subordinated to the ethic of paid work which rejects domestic work. In regard to the new values which make paid work the sole guarantor of independence, women who persist in giving priority to their parental responsibilities rather than paid work - even if the job market does not give them enough resources for day care and other social benefits and

the state does not provide such services - have their relations with public assistance associated with pathology. Fraser and Gordon conclude that all causes of poverty are now explained essentially through social relations located outside the fields of sociology and economics.[1]

Current debates happening at all levels of the public/political spheres concerning welfare mothers are strongly influenced by discursive elements borrowed from medical sciences and psychology. More than ever, the focus is on the individual, who is assumed to be capable of making a rational choice between paid work linked to independence or public assistance, an existence marked by ostracism and dependence. Ideological debates on welfare "dependency" have also influenced progressive discourses of the left. The orientation of those discussions has even perverted ongoing feminist demands for women's autonomy in many ways. We will come back to this point during our final discussion. For now, let us say that in order to implement the compulsory components of Workfare, everything was done to make it difficult for welfare mothers to forego paid employment in favour of full-time parental and domestic work. By doing this, North America succeeded in a most difficult task where no other European countries have succeeded (O'Connor et al. 1999). Within only a few decades, North Americans have modified the rules that govern women's employment. Those who support similar policies argue that Workfare will have a positive impact as long as the program is aimed at the categories of welfare recipients most difficult to reintegrate within the job market (Dechêne 1994; Krashinsky 1995). In those terms, Workfare is presented as a benevolent policy that will be good for welfare mothers who do not know how to go to work the way so many other mothers do. Without Workfare, supporters endlessly repeat, welfare mothers will remain dependant on their welfare cheques and will continue to reproduce their children within the same "pathological crucible."

WORKFARE WILL IMPROVE SELF-ESTEEM BUT PROVIDES LITTLE ECONOMIC GAIN

It is not surprising that the second type of argument puts so much emphasis on the improvement of personal and individual characteristics. Enhancing self-esteem becomes the primary goal, especially when it is obvious that there are no substantial economic gains to be made with Workfare, and that such a policy cannot be the solution to the growing state deficit.[2] Supporters of Workfare have a lot of difficulty demonstrating that compulsory measures will improve welfare recipients' revenues or that it will reduce the costs of managing the system. That is why they have a tendency to rely on improving self-esteem of welfare recipients when promoting Workfare. Thus, it is important to analyse the economical aspect of cost reduction while looking at the second series of argument.

To begin with, the financing needed to implement Workfare cannot be debated without a discussion about the projected benefits for welfare recipients, in terms of an increase of income resulting from a Workfare placement. All references to the costs of Canadian social programs are forcibly linked to the level of income tax necessary for their financing. Given that the primary challenge for the system of public assistance is to preserve the work ethic (for those who already have a job) or to restore its fabric (for welfare recipients), one should be able to find some benefits in terms of lowering income tax at the same time that incomes increase. This goal is very hard to achieve with the current Canadian welfare program, even more so, supporters of Workfare argue, when there is such a strong resentment on the side of men and women who are low paid workers and who have been able to keep their work ethic against all odds.

The reason is that working for pay does not lift a family's income much above the support available to those on welfare. A Workfare requirement would eliminate the problem. Those receiving welfare would be forced to work outside the home; those working for pay would not see able-bodied people apparently not working while receiving welfare that made them almost as well off (Krashinsky 1995, 105).

Economically speaking, a level of income tax that is too high has the result of discouraging workers who try to maintain or to get employment. Analysts from the C.D. Howe Institute know very well that for a good number of welfare mothers, getting a paid job at minimum wage could mean a significant drop of income that is even more negative when it includes the loss of welfare social

benefits. It is not surprising, therefore, that most of them would choose to maintain their welfare status (Krashinsky 1995, 104-5).

For the supporters of Workfare policy, such resistance to paid work dangerously threatens all enticement mechanisms that favour paid work. However, the difficulty is to present a credible argument as to how the overall adoption of a compulsory program asserts pressure in such a way as to lower income taxes for ordinary tax payers. This is an even more difficult argument to make when the same experts insist on targeting categories of welfare recipients among the most resistant to the job market because of low economic gains. Too often in the past, some of these analysts argue, compulsory programs have been designed only for those who would have found a paid job, no matter what, and have succeeded in doing so when the economy improved. For this reason, the first generation of Workfare programs appeared to be cost saving and to have positive impacts although similar results would have been achieved without them (Dechêne 1994). The positive impacts that were to be found by implementing Workfare for categories of welfare recipients such as welfare mothers can only be described in terms chosen outside the economic parameters. That is because the increase of incomes is negligible, even nil, and the kind of jobs found are generally part time and do not required significant skills (Dechêne 1994, 51).

This suggests that, so long as the work ethic stays as it has been in the past, a work requirement will not be particularly useful when the economy is in good shape, since most of those who can work are already doing so. The largest group of welfare recipients who might be affected by "workfare" is welfare mothers. But even this group has in the past moved off the welfare rolls in significant numbers when jobs are available. Those who remain are likely to be particularly hard to place. Furthermore, when jobs are found for them, it is likely that little money will be saved (Krashinsky 1995, 109).

The expenses generated by a Workfare placement are of two types: expenses that cover the administration of Workfare and the costs attached to the placement itself. Administrative expenses include management costs of all programs aimed at the reintegration of recipients into the job market: training programs, follow-up procedures of Workfare placements, and other costs associated with equipment, supervision, health and security. In addition, if the program results in the displacement of paid workers, especially during economic recessions, those workers will also need public assistance (Krashinsky 1995, 110). The costs attached to a placement include direct expenses that every welfare recipient has to pay in order to go to work: items such as day care, transportation, clothing and so forth, as well as expenses relating to the loss of the health and social benefits provided by social assistance.

One of the measurements of the efficiency of Workfare programs consists of assessing the number of welfare recipients who, because of the existence of compulsory programs, quit the welfare system for good while benefiting from a higher level of income. Where such assessments exist, they reveal mediocre results most of the time, even when such results are measured only by judging the costs of managing the program or a decrease in welfare system expenses (Dechêne 1994; Krasinsky 1995). Consequently, supporters of Workfare tend to rely on moral rather than economic arguments. According to Michael Krashinsky, if cost savings cannot be evoked, then restoring the social capital becomes a valuable and necessary objective. For him, imposing a program of compulsory work in exchange for welfare payment for all welfare recipients, including welfare mothers, should not be perceived as a form of punishment but as a mean to improve their self-esteem (Krashinsky 1995, 112-116).

The discourse on "self-esteem" is used by experts who think they have identified the main reason why some people - women in particular - have difficulties adapting to, and fulfilling, their social and economic responsibilities by participating in the paid labour force. Such discourses circulate among the public and some women on welfare may even express those opinions themselves. Yet, for most women, it is not a lack of self-esteem that is their problem but of having a terrible sense of shame (Michaud 2000; 2001). While self-esteem characterizes a person's life, a sense of shame concerns the living conditions a person is forced to live (Michaud forthcoming 2004). There is also a suggestion that the major difficulty facing welfare recipients is their lack of education. However, if policy makers and supporters of Workfare were

serious about improving self-esteem, they would not have abolished the successful program that allowed welfare recipients to obtain the post secondary education that subsequently helped many of them to find permanent and well paid employment (McAll and White 1996; Morrison 1998). Replacing such a program with "learnfare" will not improve self-esteem. There is no guarantee that "learnfare," which forces people to go back to school in exchange for welfare, leads to employment nor that it persuades people of the benefits of a good education if the school system was precisely the first institution that failed them in their lives.

Furthermore, the self-esteem argument traps its supporters in a vicious circle. Restoring pride and enforcing motivation remain the sole goal of this mode of reasoning. The poor results obtained from Workfare, in terms of quality of employment, deflects attention from other realities. Most of these placements are socially useless and rarely help welfare recipients to qualify themselves for the job market. If self-esteem is acquired from an income that comes from paid work, then Workfare is the path to failure. In the case of the "Ontario Work" program, there was no increase in welfare payments with 17 hours a week of placement or 70 hours a month of compulsory work. That means that recipients receive an overall income that is two and half times less than the minimum wage. A Workfare placement does not bring the amount of public assistance to the same level of paid work, not even to the same level of legal protection voluntary workers enjoy in case of community placements. Some academic researches (McAll and White 1996) underline the fear expressed by many welfare recipients that they may be exposed to hostility from other employees on work sites. Women, in particular, are more vulnerable to abuse, sexual harassment and discrimination. Women of colour and older people are among the categories of welfare recipients most exploited, since unscrupulous employers have no intention of offering paid jobs at the end of a placement, even if they have the financial means to do so. If Workfare programs persist only to offer placements that have to be repeated by welfare recipients every six months, with no other possibility of a better future, then resistance to participating in such programs will grow even more in the years ahead (Jacobs 1995, 17; Lightman 1995, 154; McAll and White 1996).

WORKFARE WILL SIMPLIFY THE SYSTEM THROUGH A BETTER SELECTION OF THE DESERVING POOR

The third series of arguments insists on the compulsory nature of Workfare, which will determine who among the welfare recipients deserves assistance from the state. What Workfare supporters did not like about the former public assistance regime was the multiplicity of levels of jurisdictions; the incompatibility between services offered with very odd categories of clients; the confusion among eligibility criteria and their interpretation; in brief, the total disarray of the system itself (Hoy 1995, 187). The Canadian welfare system, critics argue, was originally based on the sole evaluation of needs of potential recipients, but it rapidly became a public policy that was too generous and ill adjusted to the needs of welfare clients, while also very costly to Canadian taxpayers. Based on voluntary participation in employment programs and professional training programs, the welfare system, they argue, has allowed an unprecedented increase of all categories of welfare recipients. Within years, a huge number of programs of all sorts have been put in place for different groups of people but without making sure that those programs corresponded to the needs of the national economy and of the job market. This situation created a heavy and complex government bureaucracy which did not respond to the primary goals for which public assistance was created originally.

These arguments complement perfectly the first two discussed above: the supposed erosion of work ethic and the lack of mechanisms to promote self-esteem. With such a generous welfare system that does not promote individual responsibility, recipients started to conceive welfare as a right and as a way of life. The perception among supporters of Workfare that there was an uncontrollable surge in the number of welfare recipients, especially among those most in need of services such as day care, health care and so forth, reinforces their argument of individual mediocrity, rather than exposing the contradictions of the market economy. Thus, supporters of Workfare emphasize the need for the

federal government to play a leadership role by bringing in necessary reforms. They call for reform from the federal level through the implementation of coherent employment policies to the local level with the adoption of contractual agreements imposed on welfare recipients, forcing them to accept a series of measures designed to ensure they exit the system for good.

With the introduction of new Workfare rules, the selection of recipients is organized locally and happens between the welfare agent and the welfare recipient. In addition to the extensive information and documentation required to evaluate each request for assistance, an agreement is established between each agent and her/his "client." This agreement is in fact a "contract of reciprocity" where the welfare recipient agrees to respect certain rules intended to ensure a quick exit from the system. Depending on the profile and background of the welfare recipient, she/he has to enroll in training programs to learn how to write a résumé, to look for employment, to improve skills and to understand the mechanisms of the job market. Yet such obligations on the part of the welfare recipient in no way require the welfare system to commit support to the recipient. The reciprocity agreement is one sided; only the welfare recipient has obligations.

Although the supporters of Workfare do not always agree on the principles and values of the Workfare policy and programs, they do agree on one thing: Workfare ought to be compulsory in order to determine who, among welfare recipients, deserves even meagre assistance from the state. According to them, all programs put in place to reintegrate people into the job market must be equipped with sanctions impacting partly or totally on the welfare payment. These are the only conditions in which motivation and work ethic will improve (Hoy 1995; Jacobs 1995, 18). Because poverty is understood as moral weakness and not as a social problem, the emphasis is placed on the individual whose personal correction can be imposed through some sort of reciprocity agreement.

DISCUSSION: CITIZENSHIP AND THE RECOGNITION OF WOMEN'S WORK

"Welfare is not a right" argue most collaborators of *Helping the Poor: A Qualified Case for Workfare*. Old principles such as the work ethic and merit (entangled with newer ones such as the improvement of self-esteem) are presented as fundamental for those accessing welfare. The denial of rights to welfare recipients becomes visible through a numbers of daily practices that are taken for granted by other citizens but are difficult or impossible for welfare recipients, from opening a bank account and having a private telephone number to having access to housing and health care.[3] The political claim of public assistance as a right has become practically invisible today within the public/political sphere. Only the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP), an activist group which is considered by some judicial authorities as a semi-criminal organization, tries to raise public awareness and to organize low income people to fight their poverty collectively. Today, the discourse on reciprocity in exchange for welfare occupies a hegemonic position. Even public/political actors who are considered to be from the progressive left in regard to the market economy and the preservation of social programs estimate that such welfare reform is necessary, so much so that their views helped the New Democratic Party, while in power between 1990 and 1995, to be the first Ontario government to adopt programs of public assistance based on the notion of reciprocity.

The historical evolution of the notions of dependency and obligation of reciprocity within new public assistance regimes raises several fundamental problems for the feminist movement, especially related to the meaning of women's work and to ideas of autonomy and economic independence. The first issue relates to feminist demands around recognition of women's parental work. Workfare has shaped this feminist discourse in different ways, especially around the notion of reciprocity. Many feminists demand that single mothers and welfare mothers be exempt from any (additional) work requirement in recognition of the value of their parental work and the work of caring for dependant persons. This argument is particularly well represented by Eva Feder Kittay (1998). For Kittay, the present model of citizenship, characterized by an autonomous individual who maintains his independence through paid work, is a masculine model. The reform of public assistance regimes represents a threat to feminist gains of the last decades because it undermines reproductive rights and the right to leave

an abusive relationship (Kittay 1998, 190) Within such a context, argues Kittay, Workfare is forcing women to give the care of their children to other child care providers at any time and regardless of the conditions and circumstances of the children's well-being. Therefore, paid work is not liberation for women but rather of a new kind of subordination. Kittay does not hesitate to argue that feminist gains may have impacted negatively on women in such a way as to marginalize their low social and economical conditions. Gains in terms of women's incomes, for example, may have contributed to discrediting those who require public assistance to feed their families (see Marks this volume).

In all the political debates surrounding Workfare, there is no recognition of the unpaid work of care women are providing to persons in need, including children, disabled people, or the elderly (Kittay 1998, 193). For Kittay, it is imperative that policies on public assistance recognize women's caregiving work. She goes well beyond the welfare situation and asks for this recognition to be provided to any person engaged in similar work regardless of their social and economic status. Kittay asserts that this requirement is a necessary condition for the consolidation of feminist gains and to achieve full citizenship for women (Kittay 1998, 201-03). According to her, the genealogy of dependency presented by Fraser and Gordon, with its sociological, economical and political registers, does not allow for the consideration of social relations involved in "dependency relations" (Kittay 1998, 197-198). Kittay proposes a new concept, "*doulia*," which defines interdependent relations among several people. It derives from the Greek word "*doula*" that describes the caring relation established between a woman and a mother who herself is caring for her newborn child. This concept, according to Kittay, justifies the support of welfare policies and the existence of a welfare state. Furthermore, a vision of public assistance based on the concept of doulia requires that all work of caring be recognized as a social contribution. The kind of reciprocity that is required here will not come from the persons who need care but from the entire social formation within which the dependency relation is taking place (Kittay 1998, 203-13).

However convincing these arguments are for the recognition of women's caring work, a second feminist tendency contradicts this position by reinstating that paid work and autonomy are still the best solution to resolve women's poverty. The article published by Francine Descarries et Christine Corbeil (1998) "Politique familiale et sécurité du revenu à l'aube de l'an 2000 : regard sur le discours féministe québécois," is a good exemple of this tendency. The tone of the text is analytical as well as polemical. It was written in response to core arguments made on the recognition of domestic and parental work as a motive for an exemption of Workfare. For Descarries et Corbeil, a feminist movement capable of distancing itself from the old sexist assumptions that were based on women's economic dependence and their responsibilities within the private sphere is powerless within the present context of public financial crisis and of employment. (Descarries and Corbeil 1998, 112). These two authors are particularly worried that the overall debate will dupe women, especially at a time when there are so few decent jobs, to exchange economic independence acquired through paid work for a withdrawal within the domestic sphere (115). They remind us that the so-called "choice" for women to stay at home has never been a truly consented choice and that it is illusory to think that mandatory compensation during a period of public financial crisis will be enough to guarantee independence for women. They also maintain that returning to the domestic sphere signifies nothing else for women than a submission to the economic power of their spouse (116). In addition, a prolonged withdrawal from the job market will impact strongly on the capacity of women to reintegrate the job market as well as on their level of exclusion, poverty and of self confidence (118-119).

Both of these two feminist positions, so contrary to one another, have significant support but neither represents for me a satisfactory solution. First, neither the argument on the recognition of parental work nor the one on the autonomy and economic independence produced through paid work questions the fundamental principles of Workfare. In the case of the first feminist position, if it seems reasonable to exempt single mothers due to their responsibilities towards members of their family, in particular those who have very young children, why should other social categories of women and men on welfare should be submitted to Workfare requirements? Why, for example, should a fifty five year old woman, who does not have to

care for anyone, but who has had low paid employment with no social protection all her working life and who has suffered from ill health or physical incapacities - without being declared legally disabled - should be forced to undertake an intensive search for paid work or be submitted to Workfare? If we take into consideration the various social categories of welfare recipients and the reasons why they are staying on welfare, the list of exemptions risks being a long one and would certainly go beyond the simple reality of single mothers. In addition, it is not only parental responsibilities and the work of caring which lack recognition. Kittay's position is somewhat restrictive for that matter. Even if it takes into consideration all persons engaged in a situation of "dependency relations" as a condition of access to full citizenship, it does not consider the social and the community sphere, where numerous hours of voluntary work are performed outside the domestic space and where the political and economical recognition of this type of work is equally deficient. I have already argued elsewhere how Workfare aims at controlling voluntary work (Michaud, 2000). That is why I agree with Descarries and Corbeil when they state that:

> Aux fins de l'analyse et de l'argumentation, il importe donc de dissocier la lutte pour l'obtention d'un revenu minimum décent pour chaque citoyen et citoyenne, la revendication séculaire du mouvement des femmes pour la reconnaissance du travail domestique et la remise en question du mythe de la libération par le travail salarié, de l'opposition à la prescription d'une obligation pour les mères monoparentales telle que prévue dans la réforme de la sécurité du revenu. Il nous apparaît, en effet, risqué et socialement peu pertinent de développer un discours "isolationniste" qui prend les mères monoparentales pour cible.[4]

However, with regard to the Workfare policy or any other programs including programs of employability which contain punitive measures for welfare recipients reluctant to participate, Descarries and Corbeil's position appears to be a partial solution as well. First, these two authors still maintain the quest for autonomy without providing an adequate critical analysis of the ways in which autonomy has been used and perverted by supporters of the neo-liberal economy. Over the last few decades, it has becomes more and more obvious that feminist paradigms which shape feminist demands in almost every personal and collective dimension of women's lives are now used against them. To reclaim feminist collective principles will not suffice if, at the same time, there is no feminist debate on the dynamic of the exclusion from citizenship and its renewed individualist principles based on, at least in part, the same feminist notions of autonomy and economic independence. Descarries and Corbeil's position is also partial because it does not question the aims and requirements of Workfare and other compulsory programs of job training and employability. Indeed, they insist on pursuing feminist struggles for the improvement of working conditions and better wages. Nevertheless, there too it is necessary to dissociate legitimate struggles from the compulsory components and coercive requirements contained in Workfare programs. How can such programs, which already appear socially useless to many welfare recipients, and have very little impact on poverty level, lead to what Descarries and Corbeil are seeking: autonomy, economic independence and the end of women's poverty? In fact, the introduction of Workfare policies in United States and in Canada contributes to lower salaries and worse working conditions. This alone should force us to reconsider the theoretical paradigms and political discourses of another legitimate demand: the "right to have a job." In the context of Workfare policies and programs adopted by several countries, Lucie Lamarche (1994) recalls recent juridical modifications brought to international covenants, such as the one governing employment. She calls upon union movements and other organizations to get involved within these international forums and warns against any new formulation of such demands unless the impact of neo-liberal policies on personal incomes and working conditions are taken into consideration.

These two feminist approaches - the recognition of all dimensions of women's work and autonomy through paid work - bring us to the issue of exclusion from the present citizenship regime. According to Uma Narayan, one of the dimensions of access to citizenship is defined by the dignity and

the social status acquired through contribution to "national life" (Narayan 1997, 48). Like Kittay, Narayan agrees that women's citizenship is acquired through a perversion of a feminist demand for autonomy in all aspects of personal lives. Translated into identical terms of social individualism and economic independence, the notion of autonomy is therefore placed in a hierarchical position *vis-à-vis* domestic and parental work, and we should add, towards social and community work. However, in spite of the problems raised by the non recognition of women's unpaid work, Narayan warns against any feminist discourse which claims public assistance on the basis of contribution (51-52) To define the right to welfare in terms of contribution, even if it is for the sake of rehabilitating domestic and parental work at the level of dignity, has the effect of placing outside the sphere of this contribution all of those (women and men) who are unable to provide such contribution for whatever reasons (52-53). To provide welfare on the basis of parental and domestic contributions - similar to the basis of contribution through paid work - comes from the same logic that determines the distribution of public assistance to the most deserving among the poor. Welfare should be provided on the basis of an individual and collective right and we should insist on the obligation of the state to provide anyone with the fundamental means of her/his well-being, dignity and social status (50).

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ENDNOTES

1. For an idea on how Workfare supporters present Welfare mothers' dependency, see Paul Dechêne (1994) and Michael Krashinsky (1995).

2. For models of economic simulation promoting Workfare program see Fortin et al. 1990.

3. Several provisions in the "Ontario work" policy support the further criminalization of welfare recipients as well. The Kimberly Rodgers' story is worth telling here. In the spring of 2000, this welfare recipient was found guilty of receiving two kinds of public assistance - welfare and student loans - a possibility which existed before the Ontario government abolished the popular program designed for welfare recipients enrolled in post-secondary education. However, the total amount Kimberly Rodgers received was more than the law permitted at that time. Not only was she ordered to pay back the full amount - while she was cut off from welfare entirely during the first judgment of her case - she also was condemned to house arrest for a period of six months. Pregnant, with no income and unable to provide for herself, Rodgers succeeded, with the help of her lawyer, in partially reinstating her welfare payments while her appeal for being barred for life because of fraud was still in the Ontario judicial court. However, she remained under house arrest. On August 9, 2001, Kimberly Rodgers was found dead in her apartment. She was eight months pregnant. (See the series of articles published by the *Globe and Mail*: June 2, 2001; August 15, 2001; August 16, 2001; August 18, 2001).

4. Francine Descarries and Christine Corbeil, 1998, p.119. "For the purpose of the analysis and the argumentation, it is thus important to dissociate the struggle for a decent minimum income for each man and women citizen, the century-old demand of the women's movement for the recognition of domestic work and the reconsideration of the myth of liberation through paid work, from the opposition to the prescriptive obligation towards single mothers like it is proposed within the reform of the security of income. Indeed, it appears to us risky and socially irrelevant to develop an 'isolationist' discourse which consider single mothers as the target" [author's translation].

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