

Pick Your Battles: Activism, Politics, and Voice in a Changing World

Editor's Note: by Lynda L. Hinkle, Editor in Chief

In his Inaugural Address, the new United States President, Barack Obama, called for a

"...a new era of responsibility-- a recognition on the part of every American that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept, but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character than giving our all to a difficult task."

The speech hearkened back to other great speeches in American history that call for people to be accountable, such as the famous "ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country" or the less famous inaugural address of Theodore Roosevelt who said:

"Much has been given us, and much will rightfully be expected from us. We have duties to others and duties to ourselves; and we can shirk neither. We have become a great nation, forced by the fact of its greatness into relations with the other nations of the earth, and we must behave as beseems a people with such responsibilities. Toward all other nations, large and small, our attitude must be one of cordial and sincere friendship. We must show not only in our words, but in our deeds, that we are earnestly desirous of securing their good will by acting toward them in a spirit of just and generous recognition of all their rights. But justice and generosity in a nation, as in an individual, count most when shown not by the weak but by the strong. "

But what about other nations with less power, less voice, less buying power than the United States? What about people all over the world, in first and third world countries, whose voices are raised and whose hands are engaged in the work of change?

Recently in a law class I attended, there was a heated discussion of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. One student proclaimed "it has no teeth...what good is it to have these lofty goals if you can't enforce them." It is true, the Declaration does not require compliance. It does not demand. It does, however, provide standards for justice that international activists have looked to for decades as evidence that yes, there is a better way. In Article 1 it tells us that " All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood [and we would add...sisterhood!]"

Human rights, it seems, have become a passé cause. We don't talk about them as much as we once did. We have not always reacted with the same shock when human rights violations happen...after all, even the most civilized countries are doing it now aren't they? But that Declaration stands, a reminder of our highest activist ideals.

In this issue of MP Journal, we asked writers to consider what activism means now and what voices they thought needed to be heard. But, perhaps equally importantly, we challenge our readers all over the globe to listen to the voices local to you...who needs your efforts to help them be heard? How is your unique voice silenced and how can it be revealed to a world in need of your best and highest self? What is your battle? Whatever it is, pick it....

Fight it.

Win it.

More “Us” Than “Them”: Welfare Reform

According to Congressional Hearings and the Welfare Mothers Voice

By Shihoko Nakagawa

1. Introduction

In 2005, Congress passed and President Bush signed the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) that reauthorized the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which is the federal assistance program for the families with dependent children. TANF replaced the previous program, called Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), through the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, which changed welfare from an entitlement to a temporary assistance, and introduced stiffened work and child support requirements, preventing out-of-wedlock births, a block grant, a five-year time limit of aid, states' flexibility, and denied coverage to many immigrants. The reauthorization was enacted, based on a great deal of assessments of welfare reform of 1996¹ and nine years thereafter.

Feminist analysts point out several issues that have received less attention in other welfare reform literatures.² According to Karen Christopher, there are five fundamentals of feminist research of welfare reform: 1) the research questions are drawn from women's lived experiences; 2) the research addresses the influence of social, economic, and political institutions on women's everyday lives; 3) the research uses feminism as a theory of action; 4) the research acknowledges and accounts for women's unpaid work; and 5) the research highlights power differences between women and men (153-154). As Sandra Harding points out, introducing the “subjective” element into the analysis is critically important for feminist analyses, because it increases objectivity and decreases the “objectivism” (9). Therefore, some feminists analyze welfare reform by examining the recipients' experiences and/or articulating single mothers' voices by interviewing them (e.g. Edin and Lein; Naples; Seccombe; Seccombe, Walters, and James). Moreover, there are many literatures that focus on the political discourses of welfare reform from feminist perspectives (e.g. Mink; Hancock).

However, not enough attention has been paid to what the gaps between congressional discourses and welfare clients' discourses indicate about the goals of welfare reform, and how they affect the policy making process, in either feminist analyses of welfare reform or other welfare reform literatures.³

If the “facts” in the welfare system are challenged by single mothers, we need to reexamine what are regarded as “facts” and discursive framework itself for more democratic justice, since single mothers are excluded for articulations of “rationality.” DRA and PRWORA rely on what is regarded as “rational” choice in the framework of social welfare policy. However, this “rationality” is no more than what is constructed and confirmed by political discourses in the process of policy making. Nevertheless, this value of what is “rational” or not, controls us to figure out the shape of the “real” world, and endorses knowledge and “facts.” Nancy D. Campbell clarifies it as a mechanism of “governing mentalities,” and claims, this “(d)iscursive framework shapes which facts are considered credible, and hence what policy alternatives are considered realistic” (36). Even if single mothers are not excluded formally, single mothers' voices and situations have been understood in the framework of those who are regarded as

“experts” such as legislators and public officials in the welfare system. When those “experts” claim that they know welfare best, they fail to see single mothers as the “experts” in the welfare system. Who the “experts” are has already reflected on the shape of the “real” world. It links to feminists’ claiming the necessity to look at the women’s lived experiences. Unless we focus on the gaps between the dominant “real” world and the experienced real lives, we cannot find clues to resisting the dominant ideology.

The purpose of this paper is to reconsider the “rationality” of welfare reform by examining the gaps between congressional discourses and welfare clients’ discourses from 1995 to 1996. My data includes the congressional hearings and the Welfare Mothers Voice (WMV), the quarterly newspaper of the Welfare Warriors.⁴ I searched for congressional hearings including the phrase “welfare reform” between 1995 and 1996. Then, I narrowed them down to nine hearings which include 54 testimonies, by focusing attention on the hearings regarding parenting and children.⁵ In addition, I analyzed ten quarterly issues of the WMV from Spring 1995 to Summer 1997. My data analysis method consisted of coding those two sets of data, based on a grounded theory approach, and then developing concepts and theories by sorting codes of memos into categories.⁶

In this paper, I compare the congressional hearings and the WMV on three key points: characterization of single mothers; the problems they identify that should be dealt with in welfare reform; and their policy proposals for welfare reform. I then articulate the gaps between understandings illustrated by the congressional hearings and the WMV. Next, from those gaps, I analyze three questions. Why is single mothers’ dependency only seen as the problem of “dependency”? Why cannot single mothers take care of their own children? Why and how do single mothers resist their character assassination? By answering these questions, I make it clear that: 1) the “rationality” of welfare reform brought by the discussions in the congressional hearings is only for the witnesses and the privileged because of its partial interpretation of single mothers’ voices; 2) this partial interpretation justifies the witnesses’ context of the myths of dependency; and 3) poverty is attributed to single mothers themselves because of those myths.

Finally, I conclude that welfare reform is an injustice to single mothers. In the policy making process, single mothers explicitly and implicitly lack the opportunities to have their voices interpreted in the context of their lived experiences. Such policy making process enables the witnesses in the congressional hearings to set the goals of welfare reform as enforcing work (at wage labor), not ending poverty. Instead, I suggest my own policy proposal for another welfare reform which includes democratic agenda setting in the policy making process, so that single mothers’ voices can be interpreted in their contexts.

2. Characterization of Single Mothers: The Myth of “Dependency”

The witnesses in the congressional hearings and the Welfare Warriors are at loggerheads with the characterization of single mothers, whether they are dependent or not. While the witnesses regard single mothers as dependent mothers, the Welfare Warriors regard single mothers as independent mothers. Some single mothers in the WMV claim that we are all interdependent (Barrett 6; Gowens “Editor’s Tidbits” a, 2; see Kittay 180). From the perspective of interdependency, we can see the structural settings for dividing people into “dependents” or not.⁷ Why is single mothers’ dependency only seen as the problem of “dependency”? Above all, it strongly connects to racism. AFDC was established in such a way that single mothers stay away from work in order to take care of their children

at home. However, they are no longer allowed not to work, because the main populations on welfare came to be seen as not white women left destitute by a husband's death, but instead single, divorced and never-married poor black women (Meyer, Herd, and Michel 165). In fact, the percentage of blacks among AFDC recipients in 1995 was 36 percent (Gilens 105). However, the racialized images of welfare recipients help to create the stereotype of "welfare queens," and even "have played a key role in shaping the ways states set the terms of public relief after 1996" (Soss, Schram, Vartanian, and O'Brien 230).⁸ In addition to racism, there is the logically linked distortion between dependency and marital status with motherhood.⁹

2-1. The Ideal of the Family Wage and the Normative Model of Motherhood

The ideal of the family wage has regulated the standard of family, a "real" family, and reinforced women's "dependency" on men. In the ideal of the family wage, the man would be paid a family wage, sufficient to support children and a woman as a full-time wife-and-mother, who performed domestic labor without pay (Fraser 41). Based on the ideal of the family wage, "independence" became to be understood as manly independence, economic independence, and wage labor, and it was constructed by determining "dependency" as those excluded from wage labor, primarily women (Fraser and Gordon 127-128). This functions as "ideological code" (Smith 159)¹⁰, and forces us to take for granted that "women" are "dependent" on "men" and that paid-labor means "independence." It leads to the normative model of motherhood, in which women should be "dependent" on their husbands.

The ideal of the family wage and the normative model of motherhood provide the contexts in which I analyze the hearing witnesses' understanding of the welfare system. For example, in the congressional hearings, welfare dependency is linked to father absence (Horn), and single mothers are forced to establish paternity.¹¹ The witnesses' context is to define the families headed by single mothers as "deviant" fatherless families and it has the implication attributing poverty to "fatherless" families. Deborah Kelly, one single mother, claims that paternity establishment is a hidden law which affects all unmarried mothers and all women ("State Attacks" 18). In its assumption, women are seen as those who cannot and should not create an independent household.

The ideal of the family wage and the normative model of motherhood link not only single mothers' but all mothers' care-giving work to "dependency." This discourse rests on denying care-giving as work, and it derives from sexism. Women are expected to do mother work. However, not all women are mothers, and "mothering as nurturing and caring work is not inevitably the exclusive domain of women" (Arendell 1192). Nevertheless, mothering and care-giving work are intertwined with femininity. According to Pat Gowens, the founder, director, and editor of the Welfare Warriors, care-givers are not recognized as workers, because their work is not paid, so that it is also not valued ("Work Ethic Debate" 9; "Editor's Tidbits" b, 2). Sexism and the unpaid characteristic of care-giving work lead to undervalued care-giving work, motherhood, and womanhood.

Contrastively, the central opinion of the Welfare Warriors is that care-giving/mother work is work. Single mothers already work as care-givers inside the home before they are forced to work outside the home by work requirements. Lucky Jean, a member of the Welfare Warriors, removes gender specific sense from motherhood and redefines motherhood as the job of care-giving (14). She argues that mother work is defined as the job which does not need to be done, because it is done by females (14). Once we regard care-giving as work, we find that the word of "dependents" used in the congressional hearings means "those who work as care-givers" instead of "those who do not work." Therefore, in the

context of single mothers, single mothers can be understood as not “dependents,” but independent workers.

2-2. Non-Allowed “Dependency” by Marital Status

Marital status divides women who are allowed to be “dependent” or not. Only in a standard nuclear family, are women allowed to be “dependent,” because they fit the normative model of motherhood. Other mothers are marginalized and their “dependency” is not allowed.¹² Motherhood has long been seen as women’s “natural” function and even duty, but the right to mother is not firmly established in the law (Michel 37). Mothering is considered as a natural obligation for married and widowed mothers, since they are/were “dependent” on their husbands, but mothering is a luxury for single mothers, since they are regarded as mothers who do not want to be “dependent” on men. Those women’s dependency on anything but men is not allowed, and then, only this form of dependency (on the state) came to represent “dependency.” Here, the ideological code of the family wage and the normative model of motherhood justify the double standard that women are supposed to be “dependent” on men, but at the same time, single mothers’ “dependency” is not allowed. In other words, the only problematic dependency became to single mothers’ “dependency.”¹³ This discourse, the myth of “dependency,” enables the witnesses in the congressional hearings to attribute poverty to “dependent” single mothers. The problem in the welfare system becomes not poverty but single motherhood.

In the congressional hearings, the witnesses demonize never-married mothers more than divorced mothers (Mclanahan), because “(m)arital status determines whether a woman entering AFDC will become a long-term recipient” (Besharov).¹⁴ In the logic of the witnesses, never-married mothers tend to “depend” on welfare long-term. However, this tendency also shows inequality of distributed resources. We have to consider why never-married mothers find it more difficult to leave welfare compared to other mothers. It is clear that mother’s poverty is disproportionately affected by their marital status. If we reconsider such disproportionality in single mothers’ contexts to regard single mothers as independent mothers, based on the perspective to regard care-giving as work, poverty can no longer be attributed to single mothers’ “dependent” characteristics but the structural outside forces. Kate Williams, a remarried mother, writes in the WMV, “I’m a housewife now, NO DIFFERENT than I was while getting a check. But now, I am assigned ‘dignity’ being this kind of dependent rather than that. Who needs it? I don’t. I like my poor friends best of all” (14). Her story reveals that “dependency” is not a single mother’s “characteristic,” but her marital status decides whether she is allowed to be “dependent” or not. However, due to the framework of the myth of “dependency,” the congressional witnesses cannot take it into consideration that not out-of-wedlock births but poverty stuck to out-of-wedlock births causes fewer opportunities of good education and jobs, and force them to stay on welfare. For example, Patricia Franagan points out that those girls who become teen mothers are at greater risk than the general population to be poor as adults, even before they have children (241).

2-3. Women’s Rights to Care-giving/Mothering

Contemporary society has never recognized women’s rights to care-giving. To the contrary, the writers for the WMV claim that care-giving is a mothers’ right. They claim that the right to mothering is based on children’s rights, because mother work “maximize[s] the development of children” (R.B. “Strong-Families” 3).¹⁵ If we give the highest priority to children, mother work should be valued. However, the witnesses in the congressional hearings separate childhood from motherhood. Thus, the conundrum for welfare reform for them is to provide a safety net for children but to promote work for parents (Bane 11; Gueron). In contrast, the writers for the WMV claim the importance of mother work (WMV “Rational

Fight-Back” 21), and assert “the same privilege of motherhood, even if poor and single” (Myers “Find Someone” 7). Therefore, welfare is a child support and a right for both children and mothers for them. The right to mothering is based on women’s rights as well as children’s rights. To value mother work is critically important for regarding women as working individuals.¹⁶ Women (and men also) have the rights to become mothering workers. However, this never means that all women should become mothers. Rather, this assures women the option not to choose mother work among all other kinds of work. Therefore, to affirm single motherhood closely links to women’s rights to become autonomous individuals.

2-4. Single Mothers’ Citizenship

Finally, the writers for the WMV claim that motherhood includes activism. Their priorities are for children to be safe and beloved (Myers “Don’t Just Blame” 7), and they believe that children without community support are children in danger (Gowens “Interview” 20). Thus, their mothering includes taking care of their communities. For them, to create and grow children and their community links to their resistance to their status as single mothers (e.g. WMV “(No Title)” 13)¹⁷. They link mothering to social activism and define themselves as activist mothers. Activism is one aspect of their mothering and it redefines motherhood as political. The political has historically excluded care-giving, and what is the political has regulated who are citizens or not. When the writers for the WMV insist that mother work contributes to society (Gowens “Interview” 15),¹⁸ they argue that mother work is “both individual and universal, both personal and political” (Feeney “No Nation” 18). Thus, mothering/care-giving work is political, “civic work” (Naples 129).¹⁹ It shows that all care-givers, and hence all mothers, are citizens who work for society. “Beliefs that women are natural care-givers and that care is a female way of being instead of every citizen’s social obligation” (Cancian and Oliker 111) are common in the U.S., as is illustrated in the congressional hearings. However, the conception of activist mothering in the WMV discloses that care-givers are citizens who engage in civic work. Thus, the writers for the WMV claim, care-giving is a civil right (R.B. “Moral Choices” 8; Feeney “No Nation” 18). Single mothers are deprived of citizenship by the undervaluing of care-giving/ mother work and womanhood in the congressional hearings.

3. The Problems That Should Be Dealt with in Welfare Reform: The Myth of “Welfare Dependency”

The contributors to the WMV define the problems that need to be dealt with in welfare reform as poverty among families headed by single mothers is caused and reproduced by 1) the power structure, 2) “slave jobs” imposed by work requirements, and 3) the lack of “real” jobs that pay a living wage. In contrast, the witnesses in the congressional hearings argue that the main problems that should be dealt with in welfare reform are 1) welfare dependency and 2) out-of-wedlock births, which cause long-term welfare dependency. The witnesses discuss how welfare reform can prevent those, and their most common answer is work requirements. The witnesses focus on child care issues in order to make single mothers available for work outside the home. Then, child care is situated as the essential support service encouraging single mothers on welfare to work (Maynard).

However, the prototypical, white, middle-class, “good mother” is not supposed to work “in a job that take her away ‘too much’ from her parenting responsibilities” (Weingarten, Surrey, Coll, and Watkins 7).

Moreover, mothering for their own children is seen as “natural” as it is taken for granted as unpaid (work). Nevertheless, why cannot single mothers stay at home and take care of their own children?

First, when single mothers hope to take care of their children, this hope is equated with “the lack of their motivation to work outside the home.” This equation derives from denial of both 1) care-giving as work and 2) single mothers’ rights to care-giving. Once we regard care-giving as work, we notice that “mothers’ hope to take care of their children” means “impossibility to work outside the home,” because they already have a job, care-giving work. In fact, the discussions over “child care for work” in the congressional hearings partly admit care-giving as (even paid) work. Someone needs to do care-giving work for children instead of their mothers who work outside the home. Why cannot single mothers hire themselves as child care providers? R.B., who is a member of the San Diego Welfare Warriors, proposes this exactly, to set up her own non-profit business called “the Family Co.” Its purpose is to take care of her own children and she invests the AFDC grant in the business for providing food, shelter and clothing for her children (“Strong-Families” 3). Equally important, unless the witnesses admit single mothers’ rights to care-giving, their mothering is just a luxury, so that bread-winning is prioritized over care-giving, and their mother work is seen as replaceable with child care by others, based on the normative model of motherhood (and the capitalist wage model of labor).

Second, equating “mothers’ hope to take care of their children” with “the lack of work motivation” produces a discourse, the myth of “welfare dependency,” that regards single mothers on welfare as people without desire to work.²⁰ The witnesses then focus on how to change such behavior in single mothers. Like the discourse of the myth of “dependency,” this discourse also attributes poverty to single mothers themselves. The hidden assumption is that they are on welfare because they do not want to work. Accordingly, the problem in the welfare system becomes not poverty but lack of work motivation. Therefore, the witnesses in the congressional hearings expect that they must force single mothers to work, even if child care costs more than single mothers’ caring for their own children.²¹ However, they actually succeed in hiding the need to solve the problem of poverty among single mothers by examining availability of real jobs, working conditions, and hierarchical working structure.

3-1. Slave Jobs

Work requirements brought about by this perspective justify what the contributors to the WMV call “slave jobs.” The perspective to see single mothers as “welfare dependents” enforces the positive value of employment by putting the negative value on receiving welfare (see Albelda 88). This negative value on receiving welfare makes the witnesses understand welfare as disincentive to work (Greenberg; Henry). Therefore, the most important point for the witnesses is to increase the participation rate among the recipients of work requirements (Gueron). For this purpose, the witnesses assess the Job Opportunities and Basic Skills Training (JOBS) Program and states’ various work-related programs after their waivers,²² especially in Wisconsin, and try to figure out more effective ways to be based on the myth of “welfare dependency.”²³

If we reconsider the option for single mothers to stay at home to take care of children in a context that recognizes care-giving as work and the rights to care-giving, we can see that this need has no relation to work motivation. The writers for the WMV also assess the JOBS Program and states’ various work-related programs. They argue that minimum wage laws do not apply to them in JOBS Program (Penn 14), and that the purpose of the JOBS Program is “to funnel women into low-paying jobs which have traditionally been held by women, and deny women the opportunity to pursue ‘non-traditional’ professions” (Kelly “Feminist Professional” 20). The most important point for them is not increasing

participation in work requirements but creating opportunities to work at a living wage. In the WMV, Nancy Penn claims, “the one thing that will make me competitive in the labor market is a ‘degree.’ . . . An education is the only viable alternative to a life of poverty and welfare” (14). Desiring education is not the lack of work motivation.²⁴ What is more, Sharon Holmes, one single mother, points out that workfare programs ignore unemployment rates, pay rate scale, types and numbers of available jobs, cost of living compared to wage scales and income resources available, housing, child care, health insurance, and transportation (2). This is because those programs prioritize requiring work over ensuring real jobs. Penn claims that the programs also force single mothers to leave or “neglect” children (14). “They expect moms to work for no Social Security for no tax breaks, no pay. No one else works that way. It’s slave-labor, you know and no one can deny it if we work for no pay [and] send our children away” (WMV “Just Learn” 12), the Welfare Warriors argues.

The conflicting assessments of the JOBS Program show gaps in understanding between congressional witnesses and single mothers. These gaps are caused by conflicting conceptions of dependency and of the goals of welfare, and the rights of its recipients, as I discussed earlier. In the congressional hearings, requiring work at any job is prioritized over ensuring real jobs that pay a living wage, but conversely in the WMV.

3-2. The Power Structure

The writers for the WMV insist that the myth of “welfare dependency” strongly connects to their conception of the power structure. “The power structure” is not used with specific definition in the WMV (e.g. Scott 4). However, WMV writers clearly analyze the strategies of the power structure, and argue that the power structure is benefiting the privileged and exploiting less powerful people, especially the poor, care-giving workers, women, and single mothers. They claim that the privileged such as the rich, corporations, politicians, public officials, and governments secure and enhance their vested interests by blaming poverty on the poor, hiding social and economic inequality that their wealth produces.²⁵ They point out that Wealthfare (government welfare checks to corporations) (WMV “How Do The Rich” 16), income inequality (WMV “The Earth” 20), and “class hatred of poor women and their children which comes under the guise of welfare reform” (Wink 5) drive changes to welfare policy, not single mothers’ “dependency.” Rather, single mothers are changed into “slave” workers. In this context, one factor to keep them in poverty and on welfare is the power structure, and it relies on the denial of care-giving as work. Therefore, the writers for the WMV describe welfare reform as a form of the “feminization of poverty” (Ray “Oprah Betrays” 19). However, the witnesses in the congressional hearings do not need to deal with the outside forces, because the myth of “welfare dependency” hides the power structure.

3-3. Women’s Mothering Work and Mothers’ Work Motivation

Finally, let me clarify whether single mothers really lack work motivation or not. I believe that we do not have a framework to judge mothers’ work motivation, because “work” in the setting of this question only means “work in the context of the male-dominant hierarchical work structure” (see WMV “New Hampshire Mom” 19), which excludes mother work. The meaning of work can be transformed, once we regard care-giving as work. “We will educate ourselves and the masses to understand the meaning of work. Work is raising and educating children. Work is providing a comfortable, cultured life for us all. Work is teaching youth, healing and caring for the sick, rebuilding neighborhoods, harvesting and distributing the food. Work is organizing for social justice” (WMV “A Call for Social Justice” 13). Here, work is no longer a concept that excludes women’s care-giving. It demands a change to the hierarchical

work structure underlying women's "dependent" care-giving work. Thus, at least, the answer to the question whether single mothers lack work motivation or not should be based on the claim that "I am a mother first" (Ray "I'm a Mother First" 19).

Nevertheless, they actually have already had even such "work motivation" because of extraordinary stigmatization of not working.²⁶ The contributors to the WMV argue that the biggest problem they face in trying to escape poverty is that there are no "real" jobs for them. Single mothers are forced to work despite "a desperate lack of real jobs" (Holmes 2), so that the only actual option for single mothers is to work at "slave" jobs. Gowens claims, "True work ethic is forgotten: the right to work!" ("Work Ethic Debate" 9) The right to work must be separated from whether single mothers should work or not, and guaranteed regardless of it. If the government assumes that single mothers should work, it must assure job availability. But the government shirks its responsibility by claiming the problem is only "welfare dependency," and requiring single mothers to work at any available job.

4. Policy Proposals for Welfare Reform: Difference as Political Resources for Democratic Justice

In the congressional hearings, welfare should be transformed from an entitlement to a transitional/temporary system as a result of the witnesses' judging welfare in their context, the myths of dependency.²⁷ The myths of dependency enable the witnesses to focus on work requirements as their primary policy proposals. Therefore, their policy proposals mainly consist of mandatory work requirements and child care for work.²⁸ On the other hand, single mothers' ultimate goal for welfare reform is ending poverty.²⁹ In the WMV, welfare is understood as primarily a means of providing support to children,³⁰ and a right of care-giving workers. For example, Lucky Jean proposes calling welfare a care giver grant in order to recognize motherhood as a profession (14). Based on children's and care-giving mothers' rights, they propose that welfare should be replaced with a guaranteed annual income (Alice 6).³¹ The second main policy proposal of the writers for the WMV is to create real jobs, jobs that pay a living wage, based on a right to work.³²

To fully understand single mothers' policy proposals, we have to consider why and how they resist their "character assassination" in the welfare system. Carol Feenway, one single mother, claims, "Welfare Reform treats poor, single mothers as the cause of all of our country's woes. This is character assassination. This is violent" ("Open Letter" 13). The character assassination, the denial of single motherhood, is a partial interpretation of single motherhood in the context of the myths of dependency, which leads to the hearings witnesses' policy proposals. Single mothers need to provide the possibility of another interpretation of single motherhood by redefining themselves to resist their character assassination and its consequences. For example, men and women in the National Welfare Rights Organization had different rationales for wanting a guaranteed income in 1960s: "the male staff emphasizing the lack of employment opportunities and the female constituency framing the guaranteed income as necessary because of their work as mothers" (Nadasen 158). This shows that single mothers demand not only a guaranteed income but also the recognition as care-giving workers. Even if they are guaranteed an annual income, they are still "welfare dependents," and their needs are only interpreted as "dependents'" needs. Consequently, their needs are given less priority and welfare is labeled as not a right but a charity. In the same way, even if there are available real jobs, they still do not have the right to mothering. Without recognizing care-giving/mother work, single mothers are still the central targets to be fixed in the welfare system, because the context to understand single mothers' voices is the myth of dependency, based on their character assassination.

However, single mothers' self-defined characteristics and needs never emerge in the congressional hearings. The meanings of their voices are always interpreted in the myths of dependency, and transformed differently from their understandings. It is a partial interpretation and representation of single mothers' voices by the congressional witnesses' "othering" single mothers through internal exclusion. This is an injustice. If we interpret democracy as "a philosophical concept meaning that people are really free and empowered to make collectively the decisions that affect their lives" (Horton 169), we need to use social differences as political resources (see Young *Inclusion* Ch. 3). Single mothers' voices *interpreted in their contexts* are political resources for democratic justice, in order to avoid such unjust partiality.

4-1. Internal Exclusion

When single mothers' voices are represented, their voices tend to be interpreted only within the dominant political discourse, the myths of dependency in the public sphere. As I argued in the previous sections, their hope to do mothering in an independent household is interpreted as a lack of motivation to "depend" on men, based on the normative model of motherhood. Likewise, their preference to take care of their children at home is interpreted as a lack of work motivation, denying care-giving as work and the rights to mothering. Such interpretations intensify the myths of dependency in the congressional hearings. However, if we interpret single mothers' voices in their own contexts, acknowledging care-giving as work, mother work as a women's right, and motherhood as including activism, then the meaning of their voices is interpreted as the indispensable needs of mothering by independent mothers. Nevertheless, their voices are deprived of their own contexts, and are put on the contexts of the myths of dependency. This causes the gaps between single mothers' and others' understandings of single mothers' voices and experiences. Iris Marion Young reveals such gaps as internal exclusion: people "may find that their experiences as relevant to the issues under discussion are so different from others' in the public that their views are discounted. . . . People lack effective opportunity to influence the thinking of others even when they have access to fora and procedures of decision-making" (Young *Inclusion* 55; see Sparks 175).

The writers for *the WMV* suffer from similar internal exclusion. For example, Lillian Hanson, a member of the San Diego Welfare Warriors, describes the gap that she felt between her internal understanding of herself and her case file's description of her, when she attended Greater Avenues for Independence (GAIN) Program³³ and looked at her case file:

A strange feeling emerged as the dates, events, and encounters blended into one long continuum, gauging a comparatively small portion of my life—by GAIN's standard. It was disconcerting to view my life through the eyes of GAIN caseworkers: a bland colorless summary of a subject under constant scrutiny, like that of a lab rat. For a brief moment an involuntary thought stirred, 'So what have you been doing all these years?' as if I were holding myself in contempt. Reality crept back in—what about the years devoted to the love and care of two precious children, which no one of this world has deemed worthy? The endless rounds of maintaining a home, nurturing two important lives, and the character, values, and resources needed to perform those tasks were not noted anywhere in the sheaves of papers before me. . . . By day's end, I met two other moms and I gave them a lift home. As they chatted and I drove, I returned to the real world where I was a vital part of caring, sharing, doing for others. And no case file could attest to that. (1)

In the arenas of policy decisions and implementations, single mothers' care-giving work is interpreted only through the myths of dependency. The writers for the WMV unveil that such discourses amplify stigmatizing and stereotyping single mothers as "welfare dependents" by mainstream media, cause prejudice and jealousy, keep people from uniting to fight for justice in their community,³⁴ blame and punish mothers, and treat mothers like criminals.³⁵ In fact, many single mothers themselves believe the myths of dependency,³⁶ feel isolated, and are deprived of dignity and self-worth. They are forced to see themselves through the myths of dependency, and to fix themselves to comply with the dominant social culture.³⁷

Internal exclusion not only perpetuates the dominant discourses but also attributes the problems to the oppressed, single mothers. According to Campbell, "The translation of the self into an object of knowledge—or of an identity into an object of study—is central to the 'deflection dynamic' that assigns blame or cause not to social-structural conditions but to the character and behavior of individuals who embody those conditions" (116). Similarly, since the characteristics—the self—of single mothers is the object of knowledge in order to assess the welfare system, "truth"—their self-defined needs—is translated into the dominant cultures as "dependency." Thus, single mothers' characteristics that do not fit such cultures become problematic. Consequently, the problems—staying on welfare—are attributed to such characteristics—"dependency."

4-2. "Othering" Single Mothers

Internal exclusion in the welfare system derives from "othering" single mothers. "Othering" is to differentiate the self from "others," and hence is based on self-definition. In other words, self-definition is to understand the self and also "others," in one's own contexts. Accordingly, "otherness" itself is one contesting interpretation, because self-definition always includes the definition of "others" and the border between them is not self-evident. In "The Future of the Past: Jane Addams and the Social Work of Politics," Sanford F. Schram analyzes the concept of the "other" in Addams' feminist theory of democracy. He insists that encountering "others" leads us to "the possibility of appreciating 'otherness' on its own terms" (Praxis 42), since recontextualizing "otherness" in "others'" contexts is critically important for reconfirming the border between "us" and "them." If the witnesses in the congressional hearings encounter single mothers' "otherness," it requires the witnesses to reconsider why "we" (the witnesses) regard single mothers as "others." It can lead the witnesses to reexamine the border defined by them between "us" and "them."³⁸ As long as the witnesses take this border based on the myths of dependency for granted, unless they interpret single mothers' voices in single mothers' contexts, they cannot inspect and reconfirm their "values" and "facts." Encountering "others" is to value "otherness" on its own terms, and importantly, "more about 'us' than 'them'" (Schram Praxis 41, 45), because it requires "us" to inspect what determines "us."

I insist neither that single mothers' voices interpreted in their contexts and the self-definitions of single mothers are immediately correct, nor that the witnesses in the congressional hearings should not define single motherhood. Rather, the witnesses may also define single motherhood as a reverse side of their self-definitions. However, the problem is the partial interpretation of single mothers' voices. When the witnesses deny single motherhood in the congressional hearings, the negative images/positions of single mothers inevitably supports and reproduces the affirmative images/positions of the privileged witnesses. The witnesses negatively define single motherhood as if they were not connected to such representation at all. In reality, only the witnesses can affirmatively define themselves by using single mothers as their foils, "othering" single mothers. Such one-sided "othering" preserves power for the privileged who can do "othering" in the public sphere.

To avoid such partiality, democratic justice demands that the privileged interpret the voices of those who have less privilege, in those people's contexts. According to Young: "Those in structurally superior positions not only take their experience, preferences, and opinions to be general, uncontroversial, ordinary, and even an expression of suffering or disadvantage, as we all do, but also have the power to represent these as general norms. Having to answer to others who speak from different, less privileged, perspectives on their social relations exposes their partiality and relative blindness" (Inclusion 116).

In the welfare system, the myths of dependency function as "general norms." For example, in the congressional hearings, the witnesses discuss how they can "improve" the welfare recipients' "dependent" characteristics by welfare reform. In the WMV, Steven P. Barrett claims, "Folks on welfare don't need the rich folks or more 'successful' people lecturing them on the work ethic. Dreams, support systems and loving friendships will do far more to spur folks out of poverty than a chorus of bootstrap lectures" (6). To force single mothers to follow such "successful" ways means to impose single mothers on "the norms," which construct single mothers as "welfare dependent" "others" of the privileged witnesses, who can interpret single mothers' voices in the witnesses' contexts. In this case, what is "successful" rests on the witnesses' "othering" single mothers, namely, the denial of single motherhood. Terri Farrow insists, "My success will be measured by my love for my children. I want to be my definition of 'a real woman' for awhile" (8). However, the witnesses never encounter single mothers' voices in single mothers' contexts, and can keep their normative status. Thus, I argue not that single mothers' voices interpreted in their contexts are necessarily more correct, but that it is an injustice that single mothers' voices have never been interpreted in their own contexts.

Once the witnesses in the congressional hearings completely separate themselves from their own contexts, and encounter single mothers' voices interpreted in their own contexts, the witnesses should notice the existence of another interpretation of single mothers' voices, and what could make it invisible, the myths of dependency. Then, when the witnesses return to and reconsider the witnesses' own contexts, these contexts are reexamined from a new perspective. This provides a possibility to create the contexts to unite both congressional and single mothers' discourses, "our" new contexts, which introduce more democratic justice

4-3. A Policy Proposal for another Welfare Reform

Obviously, there are partial settings of communicative arenas in the congressional hearings as for both external and internal exclusion, which ensure the partial interpretation of single mothers' voices between single mothers and the witnesses in the congressional hearings.³⁹ For example, among 54 testimonies in the congressional hearings I examined, there are only two (former and present) welfare recipient single mothers. Most of the witnesses are those who are regarded as "experts" in the welfare system such as public officials, policy analysts, and researchers. There are some witnesses from the organizations such as the National Governors' Association, the National Fatherhood Initiative, and children's rights organizations, but no witnesses from welfare rights organizations like the Welfare Warriors. Furthermore, there are almost no frameworks other than "welfare dependency" to communicate with single mothers' voices in the congressional hearings.⁴⁰

Therefore, my policy proposal for another welfare reform is to create democratic settings to use single mothers' voices interpreted in their contexts as political resources in the congressional hearings. Spaces for transforming values must be assured to protect diversity and justice (see hooks). In addition, I suggest increasing the number of recipients among the witnesses in the congressional hearings. If there

were democratic settings in the decision making process, the myths of dependency would be exposed. With this exposed the goal for welfare reform could be to end poverty, not to enforce work.

As one example of such democratic settings, I want to propose to set “Walk a Mile in Your Sister’s Shoes” for all legislators engaging in welfare policies. Before welfare reform in 1996, in Washington D.C., 21 government officials participated in the month long “Walk a Mile in Your Sister’s Shoes,” paired with AFDC single mothers (off our backs 17).⁴¹ In this setting, the legislators can find the gaps between the dominant political discourses—the myths of dependency—and single mothers’ discourse, and single mothers’ voices can be more interpreted in their own contexts. Moreover, single mothers also can encounter their “others” in government-related meetings. In addition, the legislators must “not only see the world through the eyes of those who are marginalized, but also come to see how they themselves are seen by those marginalized” (Schram Praxis 45), because the welfare problems should be “more about ‘us’ than ‘them’” for the legislators.

5. Conclusion

This paper attempted to reconsider the “rationality” of welfare reform by analyzing the gaps between congressional discourses and welfare clients’ discourses from 1995 to 1996. We can use such gaps to provide opportunities to encounter “others” for democratic justice. However, only congressional discourses are currently represented and adopted in the process of policy making. This partial agenda setting justifies the myths of dependency, attributes poverty to single mothers, and sets the goals of welfare reform as enforcing work. Thus, “rationality” in welfare reform creates welfare reform that causes an injustice to single mothers, in spite of an irrational process for democratic justice.

It was found that single mothers’ voices interpreted in their contexts are political resources for democratic justice. Thus, future research is needed to clarify their voices in their contexts specifically with their diversities, because single mothers are not able to be assimilated into one category. Their circumstances are highly varied especially in regard to their races and classes. As Dorothy Roberts claims, the U.S. inadequate welfare system stems from a racist refusal to include Blacks to full citizenship rights (243). Stereotyping welfare as a Black program links to limiting variation of motherhood, and such welfare systems perpetuate racial and gender inequality. However, if we place the experiences of women of color to the center of theorizing motherhood and welfare systems, it should lead to recontextualizing those and “point us toward feminist theorizing that embraces difference as an essential part of commonality” (Collins 62).

Encountering “others” is the experience to find commonalities, differences, and the self in “others,” and urges us to reconsider the position of the self and the relationships between “us” and “them” (Nakatani). There is no one who does not connect to the oppression of single mothers. This also means that we can reform welfare for social change which all people regulated by this society can have.

Notes

One important aspect of welfare reform is expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the EITC. See Strach and Sullivan as disclosing that the EITC was already began to expand before the 1996 welfare reform passed.

² To assess welfare reform, caseloads advocates of welfare reform mainly focus on 1) the decline in TANF, 2) the increase in employment rates of single mothers during the 1990s, and 3) the decline in child poverty during the 1990s. In contrast, the opponents of welfare “reform,” those who view welfare reform of 1996 as welfare “destruction,” mainly focus on 1) the recent increase in child poverty, 2) the decrease in employment rates among single mothers since 2000, 3) increasing the number of people receiving neither work nor welfare, and 4) the steep decline in TANF participation among eligible families (Nathan 369-385).

³ See Jimenez; Gring-Pemle as feminist analyses of the congressional hearings of welfare reform.

⁴ The Welfare Mothers Voice is the quarterly newspaper of the Welfare Warriors. From the issue of Winter 2002, the Welfare Warriors changed the name of their newspaper from the Welfare Mothers Voice to the Mother Warriors Voice. The Welfare Warriors is a nonprofit organization of mothers and children in poverty, established in Wisconsin in 1986. The newspaper consists mainly of the letters from mothers from around the U.S. in addition to the world, and includes a part in Spanish.

⁵ Nine hearings include: 1) Implementation of Welfare Reform and Child Support Enforcement; 2) Welfare Reform; 3) Causes of Poverty with a Focus on Out-of-Wedlock Births; 4) Teen Parents and Welfare Reform; 5) Impact of Welfare Reform on Children and Their Families; 6) Child Care and Development Block Grant: How Is It Working; 7) Child Care and Child Welfare; 8) Child Care and Child Welfare; and 9) Child Welfare Programs.

⁶ I coded them by focusing on four conceptual frameworks: 1) dependency, 2) care-giving as work, 3) politics of difference (Young Justice), and 4) self-definition.

⁷ For example, fathers doing wage labor are not regarded as “dependent” on mothers doing care-giving work. Care-giving work is linked to “dependency,” because women do it and it is unpaid labor.

⁸ For example, “(b)etween 1997 and 1999, the percentage of TANF families that identified themselves as white dropped from 42 to 33 percent, while percentage that reported their race as black rose from 34 to 46 percent” (Soss, Schram, and Fording 18). Sanford F. Schram reveals that “the prejudices of the culture not only reinforce negative views of welfare-taking by person of color but also necessitate the greater frequency with which persons of color are forced to rely on public assistance” (“Putting Black Face” 215).

⁹ Pat Gowens unveils it and claims:

Moms who depend on the man (welfare) instead of a man, for our dependent minors’ child support are criticized for being ‘dependent’ and not ‘self-sufficient.’ That is not true. Over 90% of moms receiving AFDC are single mothers. And we are some of the most independent mothers in the nation. We not only raise the children alone, we also bring in all or most of the money for the entire family (whether by welfare, work, studying, or a combination of all three). Few parent[s] in the country, even white males who earn more than all other adults, manage to support an entire family on one income. Few mothers support children solely on their own earnings. The work of child rearing takes time away from paid employment, and women’s wage[s] are not enough to support a family. Married mothers depend on a husband to help support the children. Widowed mothers depend on the government to help support their children. Divorced mothers depend on a former husband to help support the children. Only welfare mothers are held to an impossible standard and expected to do it all alone. (“The Myths of Dependency” 13)

¹⁰ Dorothy E. Smith focuses on the language of typification of “man” and “woman” set in the Standard North American Family (SNAF) (159).

¹¹ Surely, in the WMV, the writers also claim that “the person who is actually ‘on welfare’ is the absent parent” (Briarmoon 12) and criticize the ignorance of fathers’ responsibilities in the welfare system (Proctor 11). However, the context of single mothers claiming fathers’ responsibilities is obviously different from the context of paternity establishment claimed by the witnesses in the congressional hearings in the point to regard the families headed by single mothers as independent households.

¹² This is one way of marginalizing mothers in relation to other mothers. “Those at the center tend to be mothers with economic resources, social and community support, and a view of themselves and mothering that fits the dominant ideology” (Weingarten, Surrey, Coll, and Watkins 6).

The marginalization of single mothers has been partly practiced through public policies. Until the late 1960s, “Social policy [Aid to Dependent Children and AFDC] aimed at women has been designed to benefit them in their capacity as wives and mothers only in a limited sense. Its intention has been to enable them to care for their families and not, by and large, to provide for them in the sense that is expected of a breadwinner” (Sapiro 45). Because the women “covered” by this policy were those at the center, married or widowed mothers, who fit the dominant ideology, the policy re-inscribed the normative model of motherhood. In so doing, welfare policies came to deny single mothers’ care-giving work.

¹³ “Post industrial culture has called up a new personification of dependency: the black, unmarried, teenaged, welfare-dependent mother” (Fraser and Gordon 139).

¹⁴ “Forty percent of never-married mothers will receive AFDC for 10 years or more, compared to 14 percent of divorced mothers” (Besharov).

¹⁵ “Children cannot survive without mothers. Mothers are not a luxury for children, but a right. Mothers must be respected, honored, and paid. Mother work must be acknowledged and valued” (“Are the Warriors” 13), Adele McCrank, a member of the Welfare Warriors, writes.

¹⁶ According to Schram, even attempts to shift from welfare to assured child support will not address “the resistance to supporting mother-only families that is grounded in the prevailing cultural anxiety about women acting in autonomous fashion, . . . for they tie assistance to the needs of children rather than legitimate and support women in the important work they do as mothers and nurtures in the realm of reproduction” (Words 159).

¹⁷ The Welfare Warriors claims, “Remember, as mothers under attack by our government, we must survive and resist. But we must also continue to create and grow” (WMV “(No Title)” 13).

¹⁸ See Naples; Sapiro 41; Mink 151, as feminists’ analyses claiming that care-giving is a contribution to society.

¹⁹ Nancy A. Naples also suggests the concept of “Activist Mothering.” She points out that community workers’ care-giving in Community Action Programs (CAPs) brought the concept of “civic work,” which means “doing just what needed to be done to secure economic and social justice for their communities” (129). For those community workers, political activism is a central component of mothering and community caretaking of those who are not part of one’s defined household or family (11). Therefore, it connects the concepts of care-giving and mothering to paid work, the public sphere, and the political. Rather, it redefines those concepts.

²⁰ The myth of “welfare dependency” also persists in the discussion over work incentives in the congressional hearings. The witnesses can focus on not solving the problems of the working poor, no real jobs, and minimum-

wage jobs, but giving work incentives to single mothers due to the myth of “welfare dependency.” In other words, single mothers on welfare are required to become the working poor by welfare reform, in the congressional hearings.

²¹ For example, in the graph of income distribution with all benefits for a family of three in New York City, we can see NYC spends much more money on child care than Temporary Assistance, and also the huge cliff of child care when earned income reaches \$32,180 (NYS Division of the Budget).

Source: NYS Division of the Budget (2006).

²² In 1988, Congress passed the Family Support Act (FSA), and work requirements had been provided by the JOBS Program instead of the Work Incentive (WIN) Program. The purpose of the JOBS program is “to assure that needy families with children obtain the education, training, and employment that will help them avoid long-term welfare dependence” (Codified at 42 U.S.C. 481(a)). However, because of highly increased caseloads, many states initiated more restrictive policies under waivers, especially approved by the Clinton administration.

²³ For example, in the congressional hearings, Mary Jo Bane, Assistant Secretary for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, admires the Wisconsin Works Program and claims “the concept of the Wisconsin waiver request, which is to replace a welfare check with work, to require welfare recipients to work and to ensure that they have the supports to do so, is a concept that this administration enthusiastically supports” (21). However, the Representative Pete Stark questions her about 1) its legal implications; and 2) job availability and unemployment (36).

²⁴ Kahn and Polakow insist that, without a postsecondary education, recipients and those leaving the welfare rolls are employed in jobs that pay on average \$6.61 per hour, do not raise families above even the poverty line, and do not provide health insurance (159).

²⁵ “When did the welfare rolls begin to soar? It began when millions of Americans lost their jobs as the ‘Fortune 500’ companies shipped our jobs overseas for slave jobs. . . . It began when one salary could no longer support a family and mothers were forced to work outside the home” (1), Holmes argues. The wealthy classes need “slaves” to work for them also in the U.S. In the WMV, John Cassella claims that the corporations keep the people fragmented and divided for their two goals: to make money and to keep the people under control (5). Then, the power of propaganda (Gowens “Editor’s Tidbits” b, 2) spreads welfare myths. Moreover, people’s own difficulties paying their bills enable society to blame single mothers as welfare dependent tax-receivers (Lercher 7). However, as McCrank writes, “for every \$100 we pay in taxes, \$1 goes for AFDC. Of this \$1, only 33 cents gets to poor moms and their children. The other 67 cents goes to administer ineffective programs” (“Punishing” 9). This 1% in taxes supports 5 million moms and 10 million children (WMV “Ten Facts” 13). Furthermore, the Welfare Warriors points out that AFDC costs taxpayers \$15 billions a year, while rich corporations receive \$104 billion a year in government welfare (WMV “Ten Facts” 13). Nevertheless, single mothers are blamed and punished for “welfare dependency,” and “politicians can avoid creating jobs for dads by attacking and forcing moms to support families alone” (WMV “Not All Dads” 7). Then, corporations can hire single mothers at lower than minimum-wage through workfare programs. Finally, the privileged succeed in controlling the poor instead of ending poverty. Therefore, the goal of the writers for the WMV is to stop “the war against the poor” (WMV “Nationwide Day” 1) and to bring families out of poverty.

²⁶ “Many women have work histories and/or they work while receiving benefits” (Sparks 223). Kathryn Edin and Laura Lein measure the material hardship of groups of welfare-reliant single mothers and wage-reliant single mothers under AFDC, and reveal that “wage-reliant mothers reported experiencing more material hardship than welfare-reliant mothers” (Edin and Lein 7). Nevertheless, the virtue of “self-sufficiency” force single mothers to opt

for working outside the home in addition to working inside the home, and to sacrifice some of their standard of living on welfare in order to live by the mainstream credo (Newman 111). Single mothers try to work outside the home in order to emerge from the strong stigmatization as “dependents” despite their working as care-givers. Moreover, Seccombe, Walters, and James point out that “work requirement reform received overwhelming support among the welfare recipients interviewed” (201). Differently from the writers for the WMV, most single mothers interviewed by them in 1995 in Florida endorse work requirements. However, this is because “(m)any were visibly delighted by the prospect that that the government would help them find a good paying job” (Seccombe, Walters, and James 202). Thus, this shows not their supports to “slave” jobs, but their work motivation.

²⁷ In fact, all of the witnesses no longer regard welfare as an entitlement, except Audrey Rowe (Rowe), the present and former recipients Tamara Elser (Elser) and Gladys Marisette (Marisette).

²⁸ For example, Lawrence E. Townsend Jr., the director of Department of Public Social Services of Riverside County, Calif., proposes requiring all able adult AFDC recipients to participate in the JOBS Program, to set clear performance standards, based on outcomes rather than processes, and to secure AFDC recipients paid employment as quickly as possible (Townsend). The witnesses in the congressional hearings never focus on the job availability, except only one witness, Sister Mary R. Mcgeady, the president of Covenant House, who claims the need for real jobs (Mcgeady). Additionally, only one witness, a single parent recipient, Elser, focuses on educational programs (Elser) in the congressional hearings.

²⁹ The Welfare Warriors claim that most of welfare reform legislators do not want to end poverty and that they are only interested to ending welfare support to mothers and children in poverty (WMV “Ten Facts” 13). Accordingly, welfare reform bills are depicted by the writers for the WMV as destroying the safety net for vulnerable children and families (WMV “Just Say” 15), describing this as “character assassination” (Feeney 1996, 13), “economic and social violence” (WMV “Nation Divided” 8), and punishment of children for being born (poor) (WMV “Just Say” 15), that takes race in the welfare system.

³⁰ “AFDC is a necessary child support program. It supports 9 million children and 4 1/2 million mother workers. Without the assistance, most would receive NO other child support” (WMV “Our Children’s” 2). All dependent minors should be guaranteed adequate support, whether their mothers are in the workforce, the home, or remarried (WMV “Make Politicians” 12), the Welfare Warriors argues.

³¹ One of their main policy proposals is to extend the Social Security Program to all single mothers and their children. “Single mothers whose husband/partner has died get guaranteed government child support (Social Security) till their children are 18. They do not lose it if they work outside the home nor are their children taken from them if they don’t” (McCrank “Punishing” 9). As I argued earlier, the writers for the WMV believe that there is no reason to divide the rights of mothers and their children by mothers’ marital status.

³² For them, the crucial need is to “REFORM the business community to create safe and sane, full-time, family-supporting jobs” (WMV “Make Politicians” 12). In addition, the Welfare Warriors proposes “legislation to require that all caregiving jobs (. . .) MUST pay family-supporting wages” (WMV “Make Politicians” 12). The devaluation of care-giving work connects not only to the devaluation of mother work but also their low-wage employment conditions.

³³ In 1985, California adopted a major welfare-to-work program called GAIN Program, “(o)ne of the programs often referred to as a forerunner of JOBS, GAIN called for a large state funding commitment and, initially, a five-year period for phasing in the program for all mandatory participants across the state” (Sherwood and Long).

³⁴ “The tendency to view oneself as an atypical recipient, disassociating oneself from other recipients, was identified as a coping mechanism for dealing with stigma” (Seccombe 78).

³⁵ We must pay attention to that racism affects the stigmatization of the recipients. “Young African American women are actually more likely to be blamed for their economic circumstances than are their white counterparts, and they are considered less worthy of government assistance” (Seccombe 33).

³⁶ For example, Anna Dillane writes, “You [the Welfare Warriors] finally freed me of the belief that I am a lazy drain on society” (Dillane 5).

³⁷ This is one way of cultural imperialism, one face of oppression, which Young points out (Young Justice 58-59).

³⁸ For example, the witnesses can consider “why ‘we’ (the witnesses) believe that ‘we’ are ‘independent,’ while single mothers on welfare are ‘dependent.’”

³⁹ Furthermore, the partial interpretation of single mothers’ voices in the congressional hearings also derives from gender inequality in articulating rationality. “The feminine character was ontologically defective; she could not be trusted to observe, recollect, or narrate the truth of her experience” (Campbell 115). In the WMV, Jean Backmann discloses that “(w)omen speak, argue, persuade differently than men—which doesn’t by any means make it ‘less than’ men’s” (4). It is not coincident that most of the legislators making welfare reform bills are white middle- or upper-class men. Single mothers’ voices are discounted partly because they are women. Therefore, for gender equality, single mothers’ voices also should be interpreted in their contexts, in women’s lived contexts, in the public sphere.

⁴⁰ One witness, Kim Bell, although she is not a single mother but a mother of a disabled child, claims, “Language is pretty important in politics, and I have not seen language I am comfortable with yet that assures me” in the congressional hearings (124).

⁴¹ The officials fed their families for one month on \$274, the food stamp budget for a typical family of four, talked on the phone weekly and discussed the past week’s events, and participated in at least one joint welfare-related activity. Moreover, politicians took their partners to at least one government-related meeting. The Representative, Suzette Cooke, who sponsored a welfare reform bill which outlined timeline goals for leaving welfare, learned that “when you need to concentrate on just surviving, setting long-term goal[s] is nearly impossible,” and said “(t)he whole experience made me wonder why we don’t deliver our services in a way that confirms individuals self-worth” after experiencing sitting in the welfare office for hours with 150 people (off our backs 17). Also, “Rep. Julia Patterson witnessed how embarrassed and humiliated her 3 children felt shopping with food stamps and eating on \$274 a month” (off our backs 17).

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A Brief Evaluation of the Notion of Honor and the Issue of Honor Crime

Organizational Dimensions and Women's Activism

The Case of Turkey

"The state and politicians continue to be the guardians of the virtue of women in Turkish society" stated a Turkish state official.

In contemporary Turkey as well as in the Middle East, the issue of honor crime is much discussed among the representatives of the government, non-governmental institutions and women's organizations. Briefly, within the media and government discourses, honor killing is commonly considered as the murder of a woman by one of her male family members in the name of 'protecting the honor of the family'. Rather than just focusing on the loss of virginity as the main reason of honor killing, I generally want to shed light on how of the notion of honor and issue of honor crime has to be evaluated in relation to the multiplicity of actors who take place in the cases of "honor" crimes—such as the family members, the relatives, the residents of neighborhood, government officials, parliamentarians, the judges, the lawyers, doctors and so on—and to the multiplicity of the discourses which are produced and reproduced through the media, the state and non-governmental institutions. This article reflects my long term study on honor killing, in which I examined a collage of official discourses about women, family and honor crime by referring to the parliamentary records, and the changes in the Civil and Penal Codes.

In order to understand the scope of the legal changes, I conducted in-dept interviews with lawyers who were actively involved into the process of legal changes made in 2005, which become useful to illustrate how multiple actors play different roles at distinctive levels through the production of discourses on honor killing. In the first part of the article, I will reconsider the construction and reconstruction of honor at national and governmental levels. And in the following section, I will explain the organizational dimensions of the honor crime by paying attention to the local/international activism of women.

The Articulation and Rearticulation of the Notion of Honor in Turkey:

Elvin Hatch categorizes the theories of social honor into two forms: "materialistic approaches" and "non-materialistic approaches" (343:345). Whereas materialistic approaches evaluate the social honor as a material symbol of status, depending on the place of an individual in terms of the distribution of wealth, money or property (material assets), the non-materialistic ones appear to claim that social honor cannot be defined through the material assets, but through social prestige and status which cannot easily be translated into the materialistic terms. Herein, I intend to focus on non-materialistic aspects of honor and I approach the notion of honor as something, going beyond the borders of the conjugal space and beyond individual manifestations. In this respect, I will analyze how the notion of

honor is used as a 'strategy' by the state to govern and to control the behaviors and sexuality of women and it is striking to point out how the operation of honor is enforcing the conditions of honor killings.

While searching for the reasons behind the honor killings, there is a common tendency to see 'the loss of virginity' as the main cause of the honor crime. Nebahat Akkoc argues that the issue of honor crime cannot be reduced only to the loss of virginity, for what is striking that the cases of honor crime are related with whole set of attitudes of a woman (125-127). In this sense, the control of the attitudes and of the bodies of women both in the 'public/private' realms is the main reason behind the honor crimes, which cannot be considered as independent of the patriarchal system(s). Honor crime should be evaluated as a specific form of sexual violence which brings many discourses with it. Although in the 'West' there is a tendency to see honor crime just as a form of violence related with 'cultural patterns', it is actually a specific form of sexual violence operating through codes of honor that is legitimized through tools of patriarchal mechanisms directly targeting women's bodies.

Yet, the important point for the cases of honor killing is the idea of 'the protection of family honor' functioning along with the protection of 'honor of the society' and although these two forms of honor seem as different sites, they are so intertwined within multiple codes of honor. So what is common about sexual violence is the possession of men over women's bodies, however the specificity of honor killing comes not from the cultural features, but it comes from the possession and control of men over women's bodies operating on the basis of the codes of honor not only through husband, father, or brother, but also through the society in general. 'Stain on family honor/women's honor' is turned into 'stain on honor of society' with 'stain on honor of nation'.

From a historical point of view, nationalist/modernist discourses were quite important in term of grasping the atmosphere of the more recent debates about the honor crime. In the 1900s, modernist and nationalist discourses of the Turkish nation state presented women ambiguous roles in terms of their sexuality, which oscillated between being 'honorable' and 'dishonorable'. So as to exemplify the nation state discourses, it is really crucial to accentuate the role of law and state reforms about women and family. The 'new' Civil Code in 1926 compromised of many conflicting, paradoxical reforms and articles in itself in terms of gender equality and inequality both in 'private/public' domains. The enactment of Turkish Civil Code in 1926 played an important part in the construction of this so-called equality between men and women, which was based on the 'denial of female sexuality'—valid only in the public sphere; however, in the private domain, legal equality was much more difficult to trace.

According to Ursula Vogel, there was nothing new about the Code Civil; but what is new is that marriage emerged as the only domain where these *gendered feudal type of relations* between men and women are codified (29-44). Husband within the conjugal domain became the representative of the state and the policeman of the family. The 1926 Civil Code gave these men the right to get married combining it with the right to be the head of the family. In a way, family is presented as the essence of the nation in the nationalist discourses and honor was an important discourse with regard to defense of the family and nation. Honor cannot be considered in individualistic terms, but it is a rather relational conception: one's honor is defined in reference to others and most of the time in reference to family and nation. What is important is honor of the family and honor of the nation rather than the individuality of honor.

Honor operates like an invisible cover over the bodies of women and which fixes, controls and disciplines each and every activity of women and men in different ways; in this regard, honor functions like a code for both men and women in the society through the governmental and nation state

discourses which enable the production and reproduction of honor; it is like a code, in the sense that it is not questioned, it is taken for granted and it goes without saying. Different codes of honor—honor of women, honor of family, honor of nation and society— cannot be evaluated independently of gender implications; they are central to social meanings of gender in terms of constituting not only what it means to be a woman but also what it means to be a man.

Michel Foucault's framework is very illuminating in terms of understanding how the disciplinary mechanisms function differently over the bodies of men and women. While these disciplinary mechanisms operate over the women's bodies, the construction of feminine body differentiates from the construction of masculine body. In the case of the production of femininity, patriarchal forces function by means of the disciplinary practices to oppress women (McLaren 97). "Foucault's conception of power as not simply juridical and prohibitive, but also as productive and as exercised on bodies through social norms can account for the ways that oppression can construct identities" (McLaren 97). One of the most important ways of the operation of power over bodies is through the social norms such as honor.

Nation state *per se* creates "docile bodies" and produces certain mechanisms, controlling the sexuality of women on the basis of the discourses of 'being a honorable woman' in which the aim is to control the sexuality of women by only attributing to their 'reproductive functions' for the continuation of the society, revolving around the idea of creating obedient citizens for the nation (See Michel Foucault). Deniz Kandiyoti calls this process of control as the "corporate control" over female bodies (325). This is called "corporate control", since this control not only comes from the state, not only comes from the society in general, but also comes from the parents and relatives. In this context, honor functions as a patriarchal control/power mechanism which regulates all kinds of relations between men and women.

In Turkey, honor crime can be seen as the most extreme effect of power over the women's bodies. The corporate control over the female sexuality displays itself within the honor crimes through the government discourses about the honor crime and family relations, because the cases of honor crime show how multiple actors can play different roles in the murder of a woman in the name of 'protecting the honor of the family'. With respect to recent discussions on honor killing, it is possible to argue that the modernity is not a finite process; it is a process happening at any moment, then the so-called break up between modernity and tradition—by repeating and reproducing itself in line with the modernist paradigm—reflects itself in distinct and contingent discourses about honor killing in the contemporary era.

Honor killing is a specific form of crime against women which is directly targeting the body of women and right of livelihood of them. By reflecting on the citations that I gave at the top, I mainly tried to unmask the gender aspects of what we call 'honor' and examine the significance of the fact that honor is closely associated with women and their sexuality and their relation to their body. Different forms of so-called 'dishonorable conduct', based mainly on multiple norms on how a woman's body and sexuality should be controlled; all of them serve to the rejection and restriction of women's visibility (the woman's body) in the 'public sphere'. Honor cannot be considered as only located within the body of women; honor is targeting both the bodies of men and women and it regulates the relations between them and honor constructs different forms of hierarchical relations between men and women, so the notion of honor operates over two sides: over the body of woman who is considered as 'dishonorable' side and over the body of man 'honorable' side. Honor killings should be evaluated and accepted as 'the one of the most brutal forms of violence' against women—enabled through the patriarchal relations—which transgresses the sexual and bodily rights of women.

The law *per se* is one of the important mechanisms in which both regulation and discipline works together. Especially starting with 1926, as a result of the codification of marriage under the new Civil Code, family was constructed as a 'modern' institution where men, as the representative of the state in private space, were given the right to have direct control over the reproduction and women. By accentuating the historical construction of honor, from the time of the establishment of the nation state till now, family has been imagined as a universal and instinctual unit; but in fact, family has been constructed and maintained as a tool of power relations to manage populations through the codes of honor.

Organizational Dimensions of the Phenomenon of Honor Killing:

In this section, I will present a brief analysis of the issue of honor crime with respect to the organizational actors and the activism of women both at local/global levels. Honor crime is discussed and problematized not only by the governmental actors, but also by the non-governmental organizations. All these actors at local and global axes produce different discourses on honor crime, leading to the emergence of "an area of struggle", which appears to be a site of conflicts, negotiations and contestations (See Dicle Kogacioglu 2007).

In the cases of honor crime, from a Foucauldian perspective, the actions of professionals enable the functioning of *governmentality* by engendering specific forms of knowledge on the issue of honor killing and creating a specific arena of discussion in which honor crime turns out to be a "space of struggle", and here the conception of *governmentality* functions as a disciplinary power mechanism that is used to create subjects of governance which signifies the governance and control of the women's sexuality at institutional and daily levels (See Michel Foucault). I posit that 'technologies of self' and 'governance of self' are realized through internalization and normalization of governmental tactics and the notion of honor becomes part of internalization and normalization processes through which women are 'policed' by other selves. The notion of 'honor' turns into a 'governmental tactic' to govern individuals and to create specific sites of bodies where all behaviors and attitudes of men and women are regulated and conducted.

Honor crime as one of the most brutal forms of violence opens up a space where the tension between modernity/tradition, secularism and religion and local/global is unravelled. Through the activism, honor crime also constructs a terrain upon which the violence against women is condemned and 'patriarchal' rhetoric of the state is deconstructed. The conception of "patriarchy" can be delineated as a limited abstraction in terms of depicting women only as 'silent victims', giving no space for 'agency or resistance' of women. However, it is possible to overcome these limitations by way of focusing on relational aspects of patriarchal regimes together with thinking negotiations, everyday practices and empowerment strategies of women within the regimes of control and surveillance. The term "patriarchal bargaining", developed by Deniz Kandiyoti, is important to grasp how women are not that passive and silent as depicted within the state discourses and how women can develop different strategies through their everyday practices to deal with and to bargain with patriarchal regimes, which can also be articulated as part of "empowerment" strategies (274-290).

The conception of "the patriarchal bargains" is not only important for understanding women's everyday strategies, but also significant in order to grasp the relationship between non-governmental and governmental actors. Thus, both in everyday relations of individuals and in the relationship between the state and women, these negotiations and struggles bring forth a domain of struggle where women can resist by 'transgressing the boundaries of patriarchal forces'. "This process of negotiation transcends

the boundaries of the household and produces often contradictory ideas regarding what it means to be a man or a man" (Sirman 201). The notion of honor regulates the relations between men and women and among men and only among women not only in the private sphere but also in the public domain through bringing "the patriarchal bargains" into the social space. In this sense, honor crime as a space of struggle witnesses a real bargaining power of women where especially the women's organizations make important and strong claims to the governments while enforcing the state to make some changes in the law to prevent the sexual violence.

In Turkey, the years beginning with 1980s witnessed the flourishing of various actors in the 'public sphere'; women's organizations began to be set up by departing from the slogan of "personal is political" and they started to arrange sessions of discussion to solve the problematic of women's empowerment strategies/women's rights. One of the most important women's organizations is Purple Roof Women's Shelter which was founded in 1990. The activities of Purple Roof are really important in terms of dealing with the issue of domestic violence. Purple Roof, together with other organizations, made many activities to take the attention of the government to take some actions, to fight the crimes of honor and to prepare the conditions for making considerable changes in the law concerning honor killing, and generally domestic violence.

In order to perceive the scope of legal changes, I conducted an interview with a woman activist working in the Purple Roof who states, "First of all, we should question the honor itself, if we cannot question it, and the changes in the law do not make any difference." This entails that *honor* determines one's position within a social space in relation to other people in which honor operates through the complex set of 'internalized rules and regulations'. In this regard, honor arrives to be as a common sensical part of our lives in which nobody attempts to question and to oppose it.

In 2004, a tragic event of honor killing happened in Istanbul; in this case, Guldunya Toren was killed by her brothers, Irfan and Ferit Toren, with the reason of "cleansing" their family honor (Ceylan 2007). 22-years-old Guldunya was first raped by her cousin, and as a result she got pregnant. Subsequently, she was forced to marry with him by her family; yet she refused, since he was already married. So as to get rid of her family's pressure, she decided to run away from her brothers. When they first attempted to kill her, she was staying in the house of her uncle; fortunately she survived from their first attack. However, while she was receiving treatment in the hospital, unfortunately her brothers found her again and this time they killed her.

The life narratives behind the honor killings can be very complex, so it is really difficult to reduce one honor crime to one specific reason. The roles played by the government officials, the lawyers and the judges in terms of the legislation and by the doctors are really important. The lawyers of the accused brothers—Ferit and Irfan—claim,

According to the Turkish 'laws', the honor is a scared thing and honor is something that needs to be protected. However when you consider the notion of honor for women, in Turkey sexuality is not something free from restraint; it can even be considered as a reason for divorce. It is not true to say that I can live my sexuality however I want. It both concerns the family and society all together ("Tore Cinayetinde Akil Almaz Savunma" *Evrensel*).

As for the major dynamic of the codes of honor, it is vested in person, family, tribe, community, society, state and so on. The notion of honor is produced and reproduced by different actors in different settings and it circulates from one space to another by changing its meanings. Therefore, I propose that

it is necessary to look at how various foci talk about honor and honor crime, being indicative of their actions. The murder of Guldunya can be considered as a turning point with reference to the beginning of the campaigns against honor killing in Turkey and the world. The feminist activist lawyers set up an a platform called Women's Platform of Turkish Penal Code so as to involve into the process of the enactment of the new Penal Code. In 2008, I conducted in-dept interviews with these lawyers to give meaning to the changes in the Penal Code concerning the phenomenon of honor killing. According to the old Penal Code, killing a woman in the name of protecting 'the honor of the family' was considered a reason of extenuation, because this extenuation (reduced sentence) is given to murderers under the article of "Unjust Provocation" in which the "improper" behaviors of women can be a reason of unjust provocation. But what is evaluated as an unjust and improper action is still open to question and to the interpretations of the judges. For Sirman, "law sees the woman who is suspected of bringing dishonor to her family as having provoked her murderers unjustly" (41).

One of these activist lawyers, Esra, who works as a volunteer in the Purple Roof, utters, "Even after the change in the Penal code, the judges are still applying the article of "Unjust Provocation in the cases of honor killing, and they lead to the sentence reductions." According to the research conducted by the Women's Rights Centre in Diyarbakır Institution of Court, for the last five years, 46 cases of honor killings out of 59 are evaluated under the article of "Unjust Provocation". Therefore, this new Penal Law still continues to pave the way for the legitimization of these kinds of crimes. As Sirman expresses, "the legal institution recognizes the key role played by kinship and the family in the political order and organizes the clauses of the Civil and Penal Codes so as to protect the social and familial order rather than the rights of the individual"(51). The Civil and Penal Codes are interacting and talking with each other in terms of making a strong emphasis on 'inferior positionality of women' in the 'familial sphere/public domain'.

Another problem about law is that after the changes in the scope of the old Penal Code, the issue of honor crime was put under the category of "crimes of traditions". During our interview, Esra explained me about the underlying the distinction between the crimes of honor and crimes of tradition. She states that each crime of tradition can be considered as a crime of honor, but the honor killings are more comprehensive compared to the crimes of tradition. On the contrary to the view of Esra, from my vantage point, this is a useless effort to make a distinction between crimes of tradition and crimes of honor, in the sense that what make women exposed to the violence is the result of patriarchal relations, the institutionalization and mediation of hegemonic patriarchal discourses though law, making honor crime a problematic question. In the official discourses, honor crimes are primarily represented as part of traditional patterns (*tore*).The crimes of tradition is defined in the dictionary as, "In some regions, the killing of someone, usually a young girl or woman, by member of her family in accordance with a verdict reached by the *family council*, due to the girl or woman's failure to obey the dictates of *tradition*." (KA-MER Report)

In fact, discussion on honor crime turns into a discussion on 'tradition' rather than on women's rights in the society. In the new Penal Code, by transforming the crimes of honor into the crimes of tradition (*tore*), the gender implications of honor crime have been taken out of picture and then "what was at stake was not women, but tradition" (Mani 153). Even though there are different discourses on honor crime circulating in the society, there is a common and hegemonic/patriarchal discourse created through the mediation of these discourses, via the governmental apparatuses and technologies.

The murder of Guldunya can be evaluated as a turning point also because of another reason, since Guldunya Toren was killed in Istanbul, not in a rural part of Turkey; that is to say, the murder of

Guldunya has easily drawn attention from local women's organizations, and international associations such as Amnesty International and the United Nations. Local women's organizations mounted campaigns for Guldunya and the murder of Guldunya lays the ground for starting a 'resistance movement' in which the voice of women, coming from different ethnic, class and religious backgrounds, began to be heard. Amnesty International started a campaign, entitled "Call to Guldunya" which conveyed honor killing to the global terrain. It can be evaluated as a genuine struggle movement, because although women's bodies are always resisting and challenging the existing power relations, the body of Guldunya became a site for a 'collective struggle' to organize a movement against violence.

The European Union thus takes part in enforcing the Turkish government to assume responsibility against the sexual violence. Even in the movement of the women's organizations, as Esra states, "The women's organizations began to take support from the EU, so this brings vivacity to the activities of these organizations." The works of the local women activists is really important in terms of leading the changes in the Penal and Civil Code to prevent the discrimination against women. As Habibe K. - who is a lawyer actively took place in the movement of the platform of Turkish Penal Code- demonstrates, "Although we could not manage to be successful in reaching to all of our demands, the changes that are made by the contemporary Turkish government were done because of the pressure of women's organizations." As Yakın Erturk implies, "International women's networks can be instrumental in supporting local women's initiatives to resist violence and demand justice..." (174). Hence, the interactions and negotiations between the local and global associations are significant to combat the phenomenon of honor killing, to help individual women and to initiate a peaceful dialogue between women and their families in the cases of domestic and sexual violence.

Not only non-governmental organizations, but also the supra-national organizations at the global level function through governmentality. In this context, it is important to draw attention to the multiplicities and differences. In the terminology of Partha Chatterjee, what these various groups of people construct is the "politics of difference", this is the politics of difference in which governmentality functions and people make some claims from the government (See Partha Chatterjee). All different actors such as women, lawyers, international and trans-national organizations constitutes a space for politics of difference wherein it becomes possible to make different claims from the government, and then hegemonic patriarchal rhetoric of the state begins to be dissolved into the voices of women.

As a conclusion, the activism of women about the phenomenon of honor killing displays to what extent women's activism comes to be successful. Keeping the obstacles that these women face with, in my mind, rather than focusing on the particularity of honor killing, it is important to pay attention to the universality of violence. In different cases of honor crime and embodiments of the notion of honor, what is at stake that various meanings are attributed to the notion of honor, and in order to solve the issue of honor crime, it is necessary to clarify the multiple codes of honor operating in the society, while generating the dynamics behind the honor crime. So throughout this article, I showed how honor as a discourse interplays on different levels and interconnects patriarchal discourses on family and nation. However, it is the time for the activists to raise their voices, to speak unspeakable atrocities, to combat honor killing and also to question notion of honor. In the process of *politicisation* and *governmentalization* of honor crime and the appearance of honor killing as a "space of struggle", honor still continues to function as a normalizing tool over women's bodies (See Dicle Kogacioglu). While the state does not still deal with the issue of honor crime as a specific form of violence against women, the problematization of honor crime *per se* reveals the double-play of the patriarchal norms over the body of women: honor of the man and honor of the nation!

Appendix

Questions:

1. Can you explain the changes in the execution of the cases of honor crime that you encounter after 2005?
2. Can you compare the process beginning after 2005 with the process of old Penal Code?
3. What do you think if there is a reduction in the cases of honor crimes after 2005 and what are effects of the changes in the law? What is the role of state in these crimes?
4. Have you ever involved into a specific organization dealing with honor crime?

Interviews

I reached my interviewees through Vildan Yirmibesoglu who is a lawyer actively interested in the issue of honor crime and she also wrote a book about honor crime (See Vildan Yirmibesoglu). Although she was not in Turkey, via e-mail, she gave me some contacts numbers of lawyers who worked in the Women's Platform of Turkish Penal Code before 2005.

1. Esra H.: She is working as a volunteer lawyer in the Purple Roof Women's Shelter. We conducted an interview on 8 April, 2008 in Istanbul. I found her directly going to the shelter, because I knew that this organization took action during the changes in the Penal Code.
2. Ulfet K.: She is working in the Purple Roof Women's Shelter as a volunteer. I met her when I went to the shelter and I interviewed with her on 4th of April .
3. Canan A.: I contacted her through another activist lawyer. We met her on 17th of April, 2008. Canan A. is working voluntarily in the Purple Roof as a lawyer and she had an important role in the Women's Movement emerging after the 1980s.
4. Habibe K.: I conducted an interview with her on 18th of April, 2008. She was also one of very important lawyers who worked in the Women's Platform of Turkish Penal Code.
5. Ayten A.: We met on 21th of April, 2008 in her office in Istanbul.

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**Breaking the Boundaries of Activism: (Un)Engaging Elitist
Conceptions and (Re)Claiming Activist Histories of the Oppressed**

Nicole Garner

"They are condemned to poverty, decrepitude, wretchedness and despair. In the United States their lot is no happier. To reconcile this barbarous treatment with the humanist morality they profess to follow, the ruling class adopts the convenient plan of refusing to consider them as real people: if their voices were heard they would be forced to acknowledge that these were human voices"- Simone de Beauvoir, The Coming of Age

Activism is an important piece of social change, both in the sense that it conveys the message that change is necessary and because, in the case of oppressed persons, it allows engagement in active subjectivity, a sense of self-efficacy, and of having transcended the bad faith forced upon us by dominant culture. In short, it gives us both a voice and the confidence to use it. I would like to trouble the hegemonic conception of activism in order to show how academic elitism, epistemic ignorance and segregation, and theoretical apartheid contribute to the devaluation and erasure of the activism engaged in by women who live their lives in poverty. I would also like to trouble the ways that horizontal hostility is used within oppressed groups to both discourage and to socially sanction women who engage in any activism against authority. The devaluation and erasure of activism engaged in by oppressed women has an insidious effect on our ability to engage in resistant activity with efficacy and it attempts to put up an impenetrable boundary around us, creating, as de Beauvoir believes, "a situation in which people may be enclosed as narrowly as in a prison (7)". The oppression that cannot be seen, but only felt and lived, tends to make resistant actions more difficult to carry out. This is because "With the mechanism of symbolic violence, domination tends to take the form of a more effective, and in this sense, brutal means of oppression Consider contemporary societies where the violence has become

soft, invisible” (Bourdieu & Eagleton qtd in Charlesworth, 6). I will here define activism as any act of resistance, implicit or explicit, quiet or loud, that seeks to break down dominant society and create revolution.

The dominant group has used both epistemic ignorance and epistemic segregation to erase and/or appropriate the activism of the oppressed. For the purpose of this paper, epistemic ignorance will be seen as a construct intentionally held by the dominant group *about* the oppressed. It is a cognitive endeavor and is defined as any instance in which knowledge is withheld from certain groups, false knowledge about a group is disseminated, or when the dominant group purports an unawareness of the harm it is causing, in other words it is a refusal to acknowledge the relationality between groups. Sarah Hoagland’s idea of relationality can be defined as the idea that who we are as social beings is constructed through interaction with others (98). For instance, privileged women cannot exist unless disadvantage is intentionally and actively constructed, no one can preexist this relation of economic classes as privileged or disadvantaged. This intentional activity is made possible by the refusal to acknowledge connections with individuals who are different. Epistemic segregation is *how* the oppressed are affected, hence it has a behavioral facet. I define it as any instance of exclusion of oppressed groups from knowledge seeking, attainment, or cognitive authority. Including any instance of exclusion due to gender, race, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ideas, education, or vocabulary. Cognitive authority will be defined as competency to hold knowledge, and is ascribed by the dominant group (Garner, 2).

Academic elitism is a part of epistemic ignorance and segregation. In regard to activism, academic elitism can most easily be seen in scholarly works written by educated, upper middle class women who write about the activism of disadvantaged women without consulting them. In doing this they are denying their relationality with these women and denying the cognitive authority of these

women. This one-sided “study” of the activism of women who live in poverty and the appropriation of both their activist work and their ideas contribute to the erasure of the activism that has consistently been engaged in by this group. This allows for further oppression.

Simon Charlesworth has noted that it is quite hard in academia to have the lives and actions of the “lower” class recognized. Charlesworth believes that this results from both differences in comportment, embodiment, and communication, and because the world of academia “treats issues of deprivation with a quiet disdain issuing from an arrogance born of security” (14). Drawing on the work of Merleau-Ponty, Charlesworth has posited that the types of communication used by different economic classes result from very different ways of being-in-the-world. When one lives in poverty one's being-in-the-world is based in the present and the present past, not the future, one is forced to give precedence to survival, and to ways that one has learned to survive. As a result of this comportment and behavior will be based on this embodied need to focus on survival. This embodied way of taking in the trauma that comes from deprivation means that “The traumatic experience does not survive as a representation in the mode of objective consciousness and as a ‘dated’ moment; it is of its essence to survive only as a manner of being with a certain degree of generality (Merleau-Ponty 96). Since the deprived are forced to focus only upon the trauma that comes from survival, Merleau-Ponty believes that the “world loses its substance and eventually becomes no more than a *certain dread*” (96, emphasis, original). This means that one transitions from being-in-the-world to being-in-the-dread-world. Differences in types of communication stem from this because when one operates from an embodied state of being-in-dread one does not generally communicate in the same way that a privileged person who does not need to tend to the immediacy of survival can communicate.

When in a state of being-in-dread communication takes on a more visceral aspect than the form of “proper” speech that is generally recognized in the academy. The visceral language that is used

can, and does, lead academics to state that it is unintelligible (Lugones, 84). Charlesworth believes that this unintelligibility results in silence, I believe that it results in a refusal of types language and communication by the over privileged (Charlesworth, 144). The visceral language, bodily comportment, and action needed in communication is present, it is merely present in a way in which the dominant group refuses to engage with. When looking at instances of academic elitism about the activism of the dispossessed, one can readily see that activism is present in the language and behavior of these persons.

Theoretical apartheid was examined by Chela Sandoval in "Methodology of the oppressed (70). Individuals working in different disciplines have been theorizing about resistance to oppression for many years and, while these theories are similar, they are kept separate, between both disciplines and groups. When a discipline insists on closely guarding its hallowed, hegemonic canon and refuses to engage with other disciplines to maintain its self-proclaimed purity, theoretical apartheid will result. This division results in the individual study of intermeshed oppressions, as the oppression of privileged white women, women of color, the colonized, the poor, and nonheterosexuals to name a few. Since there are few oppressed people privileged enough to suffer a single type of oppression this causes particular tension for those of us who are told to choose which oppression to resist. For example a white lesbian who grew up in abject poverty will not fit exactly with hegemonic feminists, queer theorists, nor with Marxists. When recognition of the (disciplinary) multiplicity existent in the singular study of resistance to oppression is chosen, apartheid ends and coalitions can form that can make better use of existing knowledge. This work can then be compiled and extended by larger groups and each group can then bring their own disciplinary style to the table. Sandoval goes on to call for coalition building by positing that by allowing this division to occur we are playing into the relationship of power and knowledge and further entrenching the ideas of the dominant group. There is, I believe, no better way to do this than to use ones voice and to listen to the voices of others who have been oppressed, particularly if the voice

or the oppression is different. .

Horizontal hostility has been examined by Maria Lugones who believes that it is based on the need for oppressed groups to have a closed culture (152). This closed culture serves many purposes such as giving one a sense of belonging in a world of exclusion, facilitating the formation of identity, and allowing one to resist the identity imposed by the dominant group. Because the ability to form ones own identity and to belong to a group in a world where one has been assigned an “inferior” status is so important that any difference within the group will be looked at with suspicion, causing the Other within the group to be ostracized. Frantz Fanon also looked at horizontal hostility. He posits that much of the hostility within oppressed groups is caused by the tension one necessarily feels when one watches the Other have total control over her (54). Both the psychic and muscular tension from this is then taken out on those within the oppressed group. This is often seen within groups living in poverty when he hostility turns into murder. Horizontal hostility with regard to activism can be seen when women socially sanction members of their own group who are engaged in activism. For example a woman who engages in activism against sexual harassment by a man who is in authority over housing projects will be socially shunned by other women living there, and many times physical violence between the women will grow from this.

In this paper I am examining the ways in which these constructs are used to discourage women living in poverty from engaging in activism and how they are also used to erase the activism that has already been engaged in. I am also examining concrete examples of scholarly works, personal narratives of activism, and examples found in popular culture. I will examine ways of furthering activism within this group and ways to reestablish concrete histories of activism engaged in by women in poverty.

This paper began with my frustration over so very rarely being able to find a voice similar to mine in literature about feminism and/or activism. I am writing this for all of the people who have ever

been forced to live within the genocide of poverty and have resisted it, those who have gotten out and have turned to academia with all the hope in the world, only to be turned away by most, for those who have been turned away and have helped the next turned away as I was, and particularly for other women, like my mother, who would picket anything anywhere in order to try to make the dominant group listen and change. My friend Mariana Ortega had the same frustration for a different reason and began an article abstract with this passage *"The aim of this essay is to analyze the notion of "loving, knowing ignorance," a type of "arrogant perception" that produces ignorance about women of color and their work at the same time that it proclaims to have both knowledge about and loving perception toward them (56)."* I have had the same experience but with poverty, we are either excluded completely because the elites refuse to grant us cognitive authority or we are written about as if we are mold being observed by a scientist, spoken of as if we do not exist, as if we have no spaces, bodies, let alone voices, and judgment is passed on us, our activism, our feminism, and our academic ability as a direct result of our zip code, bank account, or lack thereof.

In one particularly frustrating experience I was reading a book about welfare written by women who knew nothing about living like that except how easy it is to force us to. I came upon these direct quotes from Mimi Abramovitz in this book. "We know very little about the ways in which low income women, the majority of social welfare clients, have tried, as a group, to shape social welfare policy on their own behalf" (214)- yes am certain you do not, you have failed to ask us, do we have power to shape social welfare policy, no, would social workers have jobs without us, again no. Then further on she denies our ability to "benefit from the sense of power that stems from knowing their own history" (215) - is this true? Is it not the knowledge of my own history that has lent me the fortitude to get through high school- the first person in my family to do this, then though college, then graduate school? Is it not the memory of my mother and her picket signs and crashing of town council meetings that made me believe that what I need matters too? Is it not the memory of my undergrad mentor being an

activist in the face of academic elitism that gave me the confidence to dare apply to grad school? She then goes on to state that aside from civil rights and the labor movement few women from these backgrounds have been activists- again, how many of us did you ask before speaking about us (215)? So, using my new found anger and sense of academic entitlement from being a graduate student I dared email her with these questions, I was summarily dismissed, as if because I was one of these women for 33 years I now have no right in academia to dare to question the great upper middle class elitist. This also shows the harm of theoretical apartheid, there are others who have spoken to the poor from different fields who were also erased.

So I will now leave the ivory tower for a hot second and talk about those I am giving voice to, because, as Jean-Paul Sartre said in his taped conversations with Simone de Beauvoir, the responsibility of the intellectual who chooses the people over the elites is to give them the chance to use their voices and to make their needs heard, that, in summary, is the aim of both this paper and my life (Adieux, 4). I will begin with a bit of humor from pop culture. On the show *Maude* there was an episode I could not grasp the importance of until I bought the series this summer. *Maude*, as a well kept upper middle class white woman with a black maid was giving a fundraising party for a black activist so that she could invite people with high social status to her party. However she decided only to invite one black couple who then canceled. She was frantic to find anyone who was not white to attend her party, and, with the wit only Bea Arthur can bring, said that she did not want to seem like a white woman with money who paid black women to do the things she did not want to do herself, she was told immediately by her daughter that that is all that she is, a well kept white woman paying a black woman to do the things she thought she was too good to do. The relationality so well-spoken of by Sarah Hoagland is apparent in more than one place here. First *Maude* was trying to throw this party, not because she cared about the movement, but because she so cared about what others thought of her, secondly it showed that even though she claimed she was helping others she was re-creating the torments of poverty and racism on a daily basis.

Maude ended by having everyone find out what she had done and was forced to acknowledge her part in oppression. In this way, long before people were writing about epistemic segregation, Bea Arthur was showing how to break it down (Maude).

My mother, although never having studied feminism or anything academic taught me to be an activist. She did this with her own activism. She was famous at the factory she worked at for many years for starting sit down strikes even over a tone of voice, she would walk out of any job, no matter the consequences, because she refused to be spoken to like she was trash, she fought for my rights at school as a troubled child who was very bright, she taught me that education is something useful, that one could use it to end the horrors of poverty. She fought for living wages, for my family members rights, and, at the end of her life for the right of sick people who have been tortured by physicians for years to choose when to end their lives and to have access to adequate pain medication, this was after 12 years of feeding tubes, tracheotomy tubes, no food or drink, endless surgeries, an eye that was stitched shut, and immense pain from her brain tumor. During this time I took up the fight for her as well, putting the activism I had watched my entire life into practice.

While my mother was growing up during the depression she learned early on that poverty was one of the worst ways in which one could be harmed, and, since there was little worse than starving, freezing, and being refused medical care, one may as well fight against it as live with it in passivity and assist the people who are doing the harming. She also learned that even though her mother could be very quiet and not speak back when she went to the country club to clean up after and wait on people that these people treated her just as badly, if not perhaps worse than, they would have if she would have spoken back to them. She, as I did many years later, had the experience of watching her mother be humiliated for a bit of food. The difference was that her mother would take it unspeakingly until she arrived home. Violence would quickly ensue, usually with the children being the recipients. My mother

decided that no matter what I would never watch her beg for food and take it home, she was sure that it was easier to be hungry than degraded. She would often have to go to the welfare office, it was not that she did not want to work, work she would beg for, it was, as it is now, that no work exists in Youngstown, Ohio. The first thing the social worker, who would not have work either if not for us, would say is still doing nothing? If it continued on like that we would leave with no food stamps, having told her everything that we do, better to speak back and leave hungry. That taught me that acting up does bring you something even if it is not the thing you had set out to attain, we may have left hungry but we had self respect and this is something that cannot be purchased. The epistemic ignorance here is blatant, false information was disseminated about the poor, i.e. that we did not want to work, that we deserved to be treated like dirt. By telling the truth and letting the work she did looking for work be known, and by letting it be known that we were not dirt, my mother was battling against the dominant culture- this is activism at its finest, even with no definition or degree to certify it.

Another example of my mother's activism and the violence that comes about horizontally began as an argument with the housing department over the roaches that our apartment was infested with. My mother scrubbed that house everyday with bleach and nothing could get them out. Though they came to inspect at will, every 6 months or so, to make sure that no one had any valuables, they continually insisted there were no roaches. Since we did not get to choose where to live and these men had the power to let us live anywhere at all this was a huge deal to make. One of the women next door was so frightened that he would, as he had the power to, simply throw us all out, that she started an argument with my mother about staying quiet. My mother asked her over what? An apartment with no heat that was crawling with roaches- we would be better off sleeping in the cars. The woman became so upset that she hit my mother and violence took the place of speech. In the end we still had roaches and my mother still bleached the whole house everyday but, again, at least she had tried to do something. In this case epistemic segregation was used- my mother was not granted the cognitive

authority to know a wall covered in roaches when she saw it. She was, again, battling false knowledge about the poor and forcing those in power to at least hear her and the results of their harm, even if they chose to do nothing. In doing this she kept a hold on her self respect and taught others like her that they also deserve it.

I will look at one final instance of my mother's activism. My mom had decided before I was born that I would be the one to leave, go to college, to have decent things, an enjoyable job. When I was young she taught me to read before I started school, I had to be better than everyone to get anywhere, that she was sure of. From the beginning of my education there was trouble. The system thought our family, no matter how bright, was a waste- no one had ever graduated. They refused to put me in second grade where my reading and math levels were, she picketed the school, while they made me be in with the other kids my age who couldn't read yet they did give me work suited to my abilities. Then in high school they told me I had to go to vocational school, it was ridiculous to say that I would go to college, no I could not take the academic classes, no my IQ score couldn't matter nor could my grades, I was from my family, we amount to nothing because in this country we are nothing, as de Beauvoir points out so well in my epigraph. My mother, again, picketed the school, the board meetings, and any town meetings that went on. She fought nose to nose with the superintendent, adamant that no matter who liked it I would go to college. Though they did not wish to listen to her reasoning her decibel level won out in the end. While this is just a blatant case of refusing to allow one access to knowledge my mother battled it and in this case won, I had the few academic classes offered in small schools in the 1980's. This again, is activism- she forced them to educate me so that one day I could, instead of spending my entire life in the projects as she did, speak at academic conferences and teach my own college classes. In what seemed like a small battle to some, and was ignored by others, she gave me this chance for a decent life in one fell stroke of a very loud voice.

In a final piece of pop culture I will share a piece of my favorite show- *Good Times*. The character Florida was given the choice between helping a crooked politician or being evicted and she packed her things. In the end she found a way for her son JJ to speak on television about the politician, to show what the man was, while looking as if he were trying to help out. The politician was forced to be ridiculed and to let them keep their apartment. At the end he thanked her and said that as long as someone like him had power there would be people like her in the projects, she told him he was right, but, that in using him to speak out as she did, hopefully soon no more men like him would have power, unfortunately 30 years later I am writing about this as it is probably happening in real time. The lesson that she taught was one that cannot, must not be overlooked, that we can and will speak out and after enough of it we will no longer be the Other (*Good Times*).

This voice, these voices, starved, frozen, abused, battered, living in abject poverty with no way out, yet still speaking, then yelling, then screaming, are the voices that need to be acknowledged by academia. These voices teach us the most important things that are withheld by the dominant group, without which we cannot get out, these things are that we matter, that we deserve decent lives, that we cannot and will not tolerate the way we are treated, that we will change things, and as my mother always said, that paybacks are hell. Without her voice and the voices of the women I have met in academia, DOING activism, acting up, acting out, no matter the consequences, I would be sitting in the hood instead of speaking at conferences, freezing and starving instead of sitting in my office in new clothes having just been fed, degraded and humiliated instead of using my voice and being listened to. This is my proof that is not only the upper middle class who can learn from or be impacted by their history. I have learned to force others to give me my due, good or bad, to know that I can, and that I have to make a difference so that hopefully not many more will have to live the life I have lived.

Thus far I have examined some theoretical work about oppression and looked at both actual activism and at elitist concepts held about activism and the dispossessed. I will now attempt navigate

ways to reestablish the concrete histories of our activism and to further activism within groups of women in poverty. The first goal, at second glance is not a goal. Women in poverty have concrete histories of their experiences with activism; one cannot reestablish a history that exists. It is the oppressor who refuses to hear us, leading back to my epigraph, if they refuse to hear us they do not have to deal with us as human beings, or so they believe. Still, here, there is no question of reestablishing our activism, it has yet to be established, the problem here is to force recognition of it. It seems that the second goal falls to the same fate, women living in poverty engage in activism as a piece of survival on a daily basis, when a young woman with a baby demands the means with which to care for the baby, when a young woman caring for an ill mother has to hustle ways to get the needed medical necessities by going against the "laws" of dominant society, by showing her refusal to internalize the "values" of a society that withholds necessities. Activism in these women is engaged in in a myriad of ways every day.

It seems that the real goal here is to force the acknowledgement of these types of activism in order to end the deprivation that causes the need for it. One could try to work within the system to make this happen, but because the system has been set up to cause the deprivation of some for the benefit of others it seems as if one cannot use it to acknowledge and end deprivation because in doing so the system would be annihilated and those benefiting from it will not willingly be a party to that. Frantz Fanon believes that there can be no working from within, that the only way to end a harmful system is to annihilate it in much the same way it annihilates the Other on a daily basis (58). This, I believe, can be done only by continuing to resist dominant culture and its harm and by gathering together, as Maria Lugones suggests, to teach and to learn more forms of resistance (209). If enough of us come together loudly enough for long enough I believe that we can force the needed change. As my mother often said if you are loud enough for long enough they will finally relent, if only to shut you up. There is a problem with though and that is that we do not have a long time to work with, concrete

people are suffering in the present. Perhaps the missing link here is, as Lugones says, to come together in numbers, to form communities of resistance. I believe that if we come together both in the streets and in the academy in groups with loud voices perhaps the needed change can come about in an expedited fashion.

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