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CUST 898

30 June 2021

Beyond ‘Deserving:’ An Examination of the Moral Regulatory Function of Welfare Policing
During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Despite claims of cost savings, government initiatives to track, prosecute, and deter ‘welfare fraud’ come at an exorbitant cost, both socially and economically. Instances of welfare fraud represent a rate of less than one percent of the welfare caseload (Chunn and Gavigan 228, 229 Martin 82, 86, Mosher and Hermer 6, Varma and Ward 81). Why then, has the Canadian government demonstrated an enduring commitment to, and investment in, the over-policing of welfare recipients? In this paper I argue that the Canadian government’s disproportionate spending on the policing of ‘welfare fraud’ constitutes a fiscal investment in the moral regulation of the larger populous. I propose that by reinforcing divisive notions of deservedness, the government seeks to foster *capitalist subjectivities*, a term which I define as a complacency with limited social welfare and compliance with capitalist norms of exploitation and productivity. However, as my research findings suggest, governmental responses to the COVID-19 pandemic have undermined the regulatory function of the ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving poor’ metric, resulting in the expansion of anti-poverty discourse and calls for progressive social welfare reform.

Notions of ‘deservedness,’ and the criminalization of ‘welfare fraud’ in the Canadian welfare system, have been grappled with by feminists, legal theorists, and poverty scholars, among others, producing a rich body of scholarship on the topic of welfare policies in Canada.

As many have demonstrated, the moralistic conceptions of ‘deservedness’ that underpin Canadian welfare policies are fundamentally linked to intersections of gender, class, and race (Carruthers 1995; Crookshanks 2012; Little 1998; Mirchandani and Chan 2005). These invaluable works examine how the surveillance of welfare recipients, and criminalization of ‘welfare fraud,’ shapes recipients’ lived experiences within the carceral system, job-market, and in society at large. It is my hope that this essay can make a meaningful contribution to this field of research by providing a focused analysis of how welfare policing also serves to regulate members of the wider public, namely those who are *not* receiving social assistance.

Moral Regulation Theory (Corrigan and Sayer 1985) provides the principal theoretical framework of my research; however, I also draw on Social Exclusion Theory (Galabuzi 2008), and the indispensable work of Kimberlé Crenshaw on Intersectionality (1989). With a particular focus on Ontario, my paper uses primary and secondary sources to examine provincial welfare policy and pandemic-related federal programming. In the first section of my essay, “Moral Regulation Theory,” I provide a brief outline of my theoretical framework and its limitations. The second section, “Overview of the Existing Scholarship on Welfare Policing in Canada,” offers a literature review. In the third section, “‘Undeserving:’ Welfare Policing as a Function of Moral Regulation,” I examine the regulatory function of welfare policing in the fostering of capitalist subjectivities among those not receiving social assistance. In the fourth section, “Resistance and Reform: Changing Perspectives During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” I provide an in-depth analysis of the public’s reception of state-lead emergency responses, followed by my conclusion.

MORAL REGULATION THEORY

Marxist at its core and drawing on Foucauldian analyses of governmentality, as well as Weberian and Durkheimian notions of 'the state,' Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer (1985) theorize the concept of *Moral Regulation* in their "historical sociology" (11) of English state formation. The state, they argue, is a principal agent of moral regulation, while moral regulation constitutes the process by which a state's subjects take on a particular ethos (4). It is, therefore, the actions of the state that mobilize a specific set of values and beliefs, as well as institutionalize social classifications (4). The pervasiveness of what Corrigan and Sayer refer to as "routines and rituals of rule,"¹ legitimize and naturalize social order, giving the state its power and authority (5, 10). In this way, the moral authority of political elites is at once obscured and justified by the very forms through which their power is exercised (10, 197). Moral regulation, they suggest, is thus "as much a part of the sinews of legitimated power as monopoly of the means of physical force" (10).

Although lauded as a foundational work in the field of moral regulation studies, Corrigan and Sayer's work has been widely criticized for its state-centeredness² (Dean 145, 152, Ruonavaasra 277, 291, Valverde 215). Their work has also been faulted for lacking nuance and for not providing a clear definition of "what 'moral regulations' are" (Hunt 281). As Mitchell Dean (1994) contends, their theory insufficiently accounts for the wide dispersion of jurisdiction, as well as the blatant dissonance that exists within government policies, resulting in complex and contradicting outcomes (152,153). Furthermore, as Ruonavaasra (1997) suggests, moral regulation must not be understood as limited to the state or its elites (285).

Corrigan and Sayer admit that their "history from above" provides little discussion of any particular group's marginalization. However, they assert that those "outside" and "below" the ruling classes comprise the majority, and that the denial of their exclusion and suppression is

fundamental to capitalist social reproduction (4, 9, 12). They argue that by rendering subordinated perspectives, interests, and forms of expression illegal, immoral, and ultimately illegitimate, the state seeks to control the subjectivities and aspirations of the regulated (97, 98, 194-195). Corrigan and Sayer's study takes a particular interest in how the nation-state attempts to ignore material differences in an effort to create an idealized and illusory social unity, defined by bourgeois normativity and achieved through the disciplining of alternative modalities (4, 195, 197-199). However, as they suggest,

To define 'us' in national terms (as against class, or locality, or ethnic group, or gender, or religion, or any other terms in which social identity might be constructed and historical experience comprehended) has consequences (195) . . . bourgeois social integration needs always, as we have said, also to be understood as entailing the active disintegration - dilution, disruption, denial - of such alternatives, and it cannot proceed otherwise, because bourgeois society is factually not the unity it is claimed to be. (197, 198)

Social Exclusions and Intersectional frameworks bring much needed depth to this analysis. A Social Exclusions³ framework examines the nature of structural inequalities, suggesting that social exclusion is a form of alienation from the body politic which bars certain groups, or individuals, from full participation in society due to systemic barriers, including unequal access to social, economic, political, and cultural resources (Galabuzi 2008). Meanwhile, an intersectional perspective calls attention to how systems of oppression are interlocking and interdependent (Crenshaw 1989). The following scholarship provides crucial analyses of the ways in which Canadian welfare policies are inextricable from processes of moralization and the intersections of gender, race, and class.

OVERVIEW OF THE EXISTING SCHOLARSHIP ON WELFARE POLICING IN CANADA

The foundational work of Margaret Little (1998) provides an in-depth analysis of the moral regulation of single mothers under the Ontario Mothers' Allowance (OMA), and its legacy in shaping subsequent policy developments and reforms. Using a range of primary materials sourced from provincial and municipal archives, Little uses a combination of government documents, case files spanning from 1920 to 1955, and oral interviews with sixty-one OMA recipients from six different areas of the province from 1990 to 1996, to study the policy's origins, its impact on the welfare state, and its effects on recipients.

Although preceded by Workers' Compensation, war pensions, and the War Veterans' Allowance, the OMA constituted one of the first social assistance programs in Canada, providing regular and direct state payments to citizens, with the unique caveat of joint public-private administration (xii, 7). Since its inception in 1920, the OMA was concerned with providing subsistence funds to only those most 'deserving.' As demonstrated by Little's study, deservedness was first defined by the bourgeois women who lobbied for the policy's enactment. The OMA's Protestant Euro-Canadian middle-class model of morality provided bourgeois women a platform to assert moral and cultural authority (xii, xiv, xv). By using the avenues of charity and social work, considered to be women's domain, and employing essentialist notions of female maternalism, these lobbyists were able to establish positions of social influence without encroaching on men's political power or troubling notions of gender difference (xii, xv 5, 26).

Although the OMA benefited the few single mothers deemed eligible, insofar as it provided them with a meager means of subsistence thereby allowing them to retain custody of their children, the policy was ultimately exclusionary, moralistic, insufficient, and perpetuated women's economic dependence (xiv, 183). Originally, eligibility was almost exclusively

reserved for widows with “good moral character,” whose poverty was considered to be no fault of their own (xvii, 27, 51, 57, 58). The initial exclusion of unwed or deserted mothers, combined with invasive home inspections and the inadequacy of benefits, forced women to seek out part-time employment, but ultimately promoted marriage as the only appropriate and viable economic model for the family (xvi, 184).

Following a series of amendments to expand eligibility, the OMA was replaced by the Family Benefits Act (FBA), which was introduced alongside the Federal Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) in 1966 (194). FBA increased the age of dependent children enrolled in school from eighteen to twenty-one and reduced the waiting period for deserted mothers from six to three months (141, 142). While CAP’s formal elimination of moral criteria suggested the beginning of a rights-based model of welfare legislation, neoconservative criticisms about public spending began to take precedence by the late 1970s (144, 150).

By the mid-1990s, conceptions of deservedness narrowed at an alarming rate, and by the late 1990s, the federal government virtually renounced its responsibility to the poor by eliminating almost all national standards for welfare (185). In 1995, Ontario’s Progressive Conservative government cut welfare rates by a devastating 21.6 percent, and in the following year, CAP was replaced with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) (185). In contrast to CAP’s cost-sharing model, CHST provided lump sums of federal funding to the provinces for education, health, *and* welfare (ibid.). The following year, the Ontario government passed Bill 142 which further undermined welfare protections by incorporating disabled, elderly, single adults, and single parents under one welfare policy which linked all benefits to employment (189).⁴ Whereas whiteness, cleanliness, thrift, and the absence of alcohol were of original

importance to determining a woman's deservedness under the OMA, questions of sexuality, criminality, and employment status, gained importance in the neoliberal era^s (60, 62, 67, 184).

Drawing on the work of Little (1998), Dorothy Chunn and Shelly Gavigan (2004) argue for a renewed focus on the relationship between legal regulation and moral regulation. Turning their attention to state actors, Chunn and Gavigan contend that moral regulation must be situated within the context of capitalist class struggle (226, 227). Workfare programming and the increased criminalization of poverty, including the punitive treatment of 'welfare fraud,' they argue, have emerged concomitantly with the deregulation of corporate crime (236). Although single mothers on welfare were once considered to be civil servants tasked with the responsibility of raising 'good citizens,' women's unpaid labor became discounted with the introduction of neoliberal reforms (233). As they suggest,

The slight and grudging acknowledgement of social responsibility for the poor that marked the Keynesian state has been rescinded. Now, as in the nineteenth century, poverty is a problem of individuals in civil society and the solution to poverty is an individualized one to be found principally in the labour market and/or marriage. (233)

The Gendering and Racialization of Welfare Fraud. Errlee Carruthers (1995), examines the gendered perception of welfare abuse in Canada, and its impact on the criminalization of welfare fraud. Carruthers argues that the "welfare cheat," connotes a gendered and often racialized stereotype of an undeserving and irresponsible—often assumed to be racialized—single mother "who refuses to get a man or a job to ensure a good home for her child" (250). Carruthers contends that such gendered stereotypes have a direct influence on the investigation and prosecution of welfare fraud, which, disproportionately affects women and both assumes and perpetuates their dependence on men (251, 258, 259).

Carruthers analysis of Ontario's Enhanced Verification initiative reveals that three of the six factors used to identify "high risk" candidates effectively target single mothers. These criteria include the presence of an "older" child in the house, the use of seventy percent of disposable income for shelter, and earnings of over \$1000 (259). In addition, she suggests that the pressures put on single mothers to establish paternity, forces women to enter legal relationships of dependency with the fathers of their children (251). Lastly, the initiative's focus on tackling the issue of cohabitation predominantly effects women, because women are more likely to receive their benefits under the family benefit scheme, and it is therefore women who most likely face criminalization or financial penalties if found to have a "spouse undeclared" (252). In this final instance, the criminal sanction around a broadly defined "spouse" allows for the invasive regulation of women's private relationships under the highly sexist assumption that an intimate partner provides financial support, regardless of their actual contributions (253).

In addition to being highly invasive, investigations also subject recipients to information mishandling, threats, harassment, and physical intimidation by investigators, as well as payment deductions or cut-offs, even in instances where the Eligibility Review Officer (ERO) finds no intent to defraud (245). Furthermore, as Carruthers suggests, women who commit fraud intentionally, are likely to do so out of "need" as opposed to "greed," casting doubt on the effectiveness of sentencing practices premised on the notion of general deterrence (261). Yet, the harsh sentencing meted out for welfare fraud has its greatest impact on single mothers, who are most likely to accept early guilty plea bargains to avoid jail time, which could compromise their parental custody (247, 261).

Using feminist and anti-racist frameworks, Kiran Mirchandani and Wendy Chan (2005) expand on the question of the disparate impact of welfare policing in Canada through their 2002

to 2003 qualitative study. Investigating racialized respondents' views of, and experiences within, the welfare system, particularly with regards to its enforcement of anti-fraud policies in Ontario and British Columbia, Mirchandani and Chan used a snowball sampling method to conduct twenty-four interviews with racialized welfare recipients ages twenty-four to fifty-five across the two provinces (vi, 22). Attempting to justify dehumanizing surveillance practices, reductions in welfare eligibility, and the refusal or suspension of benefits, "anti-fraud" campaigns rely on myths and stereotypes of racial difference to construct racialized recipients as potential "cheaters" or "abusers" of the system (vii, 2, 38, 55). By constructing the poor and racialized as actual or potential criminals, they are, as Mirchandani and Chan write, "banished from the universe of moral obligation" (7).

The overstatement of fraud rates and the individualization of poverty work towards the stigmatization and criminalization of the racialized poor (10, 29). Rhetoric evoking symbols of warfare are used to position the interests of the taxpayer in opposition to those of the welfare recipient (8). The state and media's use of the terms "fraud," "welfare queen," and "benefit cheat" enable and promote economic policies that exacerbate systemic racism and legitimize the government's retreat from social programming (54, 55, 62). In addition, they argue that welfare policies actively ignore structural racism, and the racial discrimination that, combined with workfare policies, filter racialized and immigrant recipients into largely precarious and low-waged work (vii, 33).⁶

Legal Decision-Making and Discretionary Power. Dianne Martin (1992) provides an examination of Ontario's landmark report *Transitions* (1988), by the Social Assistance Review Committee. The report's underlying assumptions and recommendations, she argues, were not only nonsensical and ill supported, but actively perpetuated the stigmatization of welfare

recipients (52, 54). *Transitions* had conflicting messaging; although the report outlined that its guiding principle was to reduce stigma, and provide respect, dignity, and autonomy to recipients, it suggested the adoption of techniques to address welfare fraud that directly undermined their stated principle, including amendments to legislation that encouraged prosecutions, as well as the creation of a fraud unit (54, 55). Although the committee admitted to having no accurate data on rates of welfare fraud, the report claimed that its recommendations were justified in their efforts to ensure public confidence in the systems efficacy and accountability (54, 55, 82).

In her critique, Martin, contends that entrenched, negative, and distorted public attitudes concerning welfare and welfare fraud, exacerbated by periodic media campaigns, should never be allowed to decide policy (54, 55). The criminalization of welfare fraud and the harsh sentences meted out to those found guilty, are a by-product of larger societal stigma against social assistance recipients, which in turn, negatively influence government and legal actors' decision-making (78, 79, 83, 87, 93).

Through the examination of a series of legal cases, Eyal Kimel (2006) assesses 'need' as a mitigating factor in the prosecution of welfare fraud. Despite having many opportunities to narrow the scope of the term, welfare fraud is broadly defined in Canadian law and is therefore applied to a broad range of 'criminal' behaviours (773). In addition, while courts are typically required to acquit in the absence of *mens rea*, welfare recipients are often indicted and convicted of welfare fraud by Canadian courts, even without any demonstrated intent (774). In reality, those behaviors which are deemed fraudulent most often occur from a genuine misunderstanding of the system's many complex rules (769).

Despite the expansive criminalization of welfare fraud, judges exercise leniency in some instances. This discretionary power, Kimel argues, is moralistic and neoliberal in form.

Defendants who are off welfare, or are likely to be off welfare soon, and are deemed to have used their benefits 'responsibly,' by investing in their education or families, are more likely to be viewed positively by the courts (778, 784). Kimel also argues that although financial independence is valorized, neoliberal welfare reforms perpetuate recipients' economic dependence on the state through cuts to benefits, proving legal practice and welfare reforms to be both moralistic and counterproductive (787).

Kim Varma and Ashley Ward's (2014) analysis of the impact of the zero-tolerance policy implemented in Ontario in 2000, complicates questions surrounding legal actors' discretionary power. Using descriptive statistics obtained from the Research and Statistics Unit of the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, they examined official monthly data to track the number of social assistance cases active in the system, the total number and type of referrals for suspected misconduct or fraud, and the outcomes of those referrals at both the legal and social service levels in Ontario between April 1998 and March 2006 (82, 83). Their study identified a decline in the number of active cases of social assistance fraud during the zero-tolerance policy period, followed by a small rise in referrals and cases after its repeal (86). Their data also shows that a larger percentage of individuals referred for fraud were decided not guilty upon investigation in the pre-zero-tolerance period, than compared to those cases referred in the zero-tolerance and post-zero-tolerance periods (86).

Varma and Ward suggest that the severity of the policy, which was the permanent ineligibility for those convicted of welfare fraud, combined with an increase in eligibility requirements and administrative scrutiny, may have deterred some from applying for, or remaining on, social assistance. However, they also importantly suggest that the data may be indicative of caseworkers and other legal decision-makers increased judiciousness during the

zero-tolerance and post-zero-tolerance periods (81, 86). Varma and Ward's work, therefore, complicates questions surrounding the use of discretionary power and personal biases by considering how those who put policies into effect may use their personal agency to resist or compensate for welfare reforms they consider to be overly punitive.

'Deviance' and the Construction of the 'Good Market Citizen.' Krystle Maki (2011) uses feminist political economy and anti-racism frameworks, to problematize governmentality in relation to welfare surveillance practices in Canada. She argues that it is of critical importance to understand the surveillance of welfare recipients beyond a system of governance; to examine the ways in which state power relations shape public policy, and to consider the economic imperatives that underlie neoliberal welfare policies and surveillance tactics (56). Maki contends that the invasive and work-oriented regulation of welfare recipients under the 1997 Ontario Works Act, is explicitly intertwined with neoliberalism and the deregulation of corporate activities (ibid.).

Influenced by the research of the Chicago School, the Canadian government focused its policy efforts on decentralization, deregulation, and privatization in the 1990s (49). Welfare reform at this time reflected an ideological shift, which attributed societal problems to market forces, global competition, and individual responsibility, favoring the interests of businesses over citizen rights (ibid.). Workfare, she argues, transforms welfare recipients from "market deviants," to "good client citizens" by forcing them into precarious and low waged work (50, 56). Bolstered by gendered and racialized stereotypes of welfare recipients' criminality, Maki suggests that government spending on surveillance technologies, cuts to welfare benefits, and the privatization of social services were justified by the alleged need to ensure accountability and improve the systems efficiency (48, 56). However, as Maki concludes, the government's

misspending, its use of invasive surveillance practices, and its individualization of poverty, are economically driven, and constitute a direct assault on the poor (47, 51, 57, 58).

In a similar vein, Janet Mosher and Joe Hermer (2010), suggest that the Ontario Works Act marked a dramatic shift in the ‘social contract.’ A principle of entitlement based on need, they argue, has since been replaced with a narrow view of the entrepreneurial citizen (5, 10, 11, 18, 19). The prevalent myth of widespread welfare fraud in public discourse and government policy, has framed social assistance as a burdensome problem of regulation, policing, and crime control, rather than a necessary social protection for those most vulnerable (10). In turn, its recipients, the majority of whom are poor mothers, are construed as morally suspect, under the notion that they are “sitting around” and “doing nothing,” waiting poised to abuse taxpayer dollars and the public’s trust (9,10). Yet, as Mosher and Hermer point out, the complexity and vagueness of the approximately eight hundred rules and regulations that govern social assistance, make errors on the part of both recipients and administrators inevitable (5, 35, 123).

Furthermore, the criminalization of welfare fraud, they suggest, appears to be extra-legal, in the disparity between the regulation and prosecution of welfare fraud and other forms of economic misconduct, and in so far as the undisclosed use of informal supports, such as the provision of food or childcare by family members, are criminalized (15, 50, 123,124). As a result, recipients are not only positioned as outside of the principles of criminal justice, but outside of the protection of community support networks; often made to live not only in poverty, but in social isolation and under the suspicion of both public and private actors (9, 120, 121).

Research overwhelmingly suggests that the majority of welfare recipients want to get off welfare and find work and that a substantial number of welfare recipients are already employed in part-time or full-time work (22, 23). Yet, welfare recipients are increasingly re-positioned as

‘outsiders,’ who are at best partial or failed neoliberal citizens, lacking a ‘strong work ethic,’ and at worst criminals (120, 121). Therefore, as Mosher and Hermer suggest, not only is ‘welfare fraud’ made constitutive of a crime against the public but receiving social assistance has been re-constituted as itself a crime (14, 15).

The foundational works discussed in this section provide crucial analyses of how Canadian welfare policy is indissolubly connected to gendered and racialized notions of deservedness. They also reveal how Canadian welfare policies mobilize the neoliberal agendas of reduced social programming and increased market participation among welfare recipients. In the following section of my paper, I will build on the works discussed here to consider how the over-policing of welfare recipients is also used to morally regulate members of the wider public.

“UNDESERVING”: WELFARE POLICING AS A FUNCTION OF MORAL REGULATION

Neoliberal policy makers, Accenture and a conservative media bent on weeding out a tiny minority of fraudulent welfare claims should be charged with the real welfare fraud in Ontario as they are directly responsible for spending millions of dollars of taxpayers [sic] money on surveilling a crime that was largely based on misinformation and poor bashing. (Maki 54)

With fewer than four cases convicted for fraud per one thousand referrals (a rate of only point four percent) between 2001-2015 in Ontario (Varma and Ward 81), the government has invested millions of dollars into deterring and criminalizing a relatively non-existent crime (Maki 54, 59). When added to the costs associated with surveillance technologies, the expense of policing and punishing recipients far outweighs the monetary loss represented by the statistically insignificant cases of actual “fraud” (Maki 53, 54). The overstatement of fraud rates and the supposed cost

savings of rooting out fraud, may serve to maintain the legitimacy of a government unable to stem the rise of poverty and unemployment (Mirchandani and Chan 38), as well as to deflect the public's attention from the contradictions, inefficiencies, and inhumanity of the welfare system (Mosher and Hermer 35). However, such spending is most often rationalized by the supposed need to ensure the public's confidence that funds are being well spent and that abuse is being kept to a minimum (Chunn and Gavigan 228, 229, Crookshanks 106, Martin 54, 55, 82, Varma and Ward 80).

Yet, perhaps the punitive treatment of welfare recipients, and the government's overspending on control measures, has less to do with ensuring the public's confidence in the system's efficacy, and more to do with encouraging the public's compliance with capitalist norms. As I will argue in this section, the government's disproportionate spending on the policing and prosecution of welfare recipients, may represent an investment in the regulation of those *not* receiving social assistance. As an extension of Corrigan and Sayer's assertion that the primary project of the state is to construct the aspirations and the internalizations of bourgeois norms as "constitutive of personalities" (194-195), I suggest that by discrediting and criminalizing welfare recipients, as well as alienating them from the 'public,' the government seeks to cultivate and naturalize, what I refer to as, a capitalist subjectivity. I define capitalist subjectivity as a modality characterized by complacency with limited social welfare and compliance with capitalist norms of exploitation and productivity.

Despite the complex realities of citizenship, tax obligations, and benefit eligibility, welfare recipients and 'taxpayers' are positioned in juxtaposing categories, as either 'beneficiaries' or 'contributors.' This process of differentiation construes the welfare recipient as owing, or even exploiting the 'taxpayer,' rather than simply participating in a taxation system

premised on the very notion that resources should be pooled together for the purpose of redistribution.

Forms of welfare policing, such as community level reporting, legitimize and institutionalize the dichotomization of the ‘welfare recipient’ and the ‘taxpayer’ by providing individual members of the ‘public’ with an official forum to hold recipients ‘accountable.’ Welfare Fraud Hotlines were first introduced in Ontario in 1995 by the Minister of Community Social Services, David Tsubouchi, to enable members of the wider community, including employers, landlords, neighbors, and family members, to report suspected welfare fraud (Maki 55, Mosher and Hermer 6). Unless known to be spurious, every single call requires investigation (Carruthers 244), and yet, of the 26,214 allegations made in its first two years of operation, only thirty-six resulted in convictions (Mirchandani and Chan 10). The anonymity of this type of reporting heightens recipients’ vulnerability to abuse (Mirchandani and Chan 26) and has been found to overwhelmingly target single mothers who are suspected of having a “spouse not declared” (Little and Morrison 125, Maki 55, 58). While the cruelty and invasiveness of these control measures have been examined by many (Carruthers 1995; Chunn and Gavigan 2004; Little 1994; Little and Morrison 1999; Maki 2011; Mirchandani and Chan 2005; Mosher and Hermer 2010; Varma and Ward 2014), what remains underexplored is how these reporting practices shape the subjectivities of those who allege fraud.

To file an anonymous report of fraud on the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (2021) website, filers are only required to know the first and last name of the alleged, and the city they live in. Yet, they are given the right to identify the suspect’s spouse and children by name. Without providing any examples of what might constitute welfare fraud, nor discouraging false reports,⁷ the state effectively validates the ‘public’s’ myriad assumptions of

recipients' criminality, bestowing onto them the moral authority to surveil welfare recipients. This type of community-level reporting, therefore, not only perpetuates the myth that welfare fraud is rampant and that recipients require scrutiny (Chunn and Gavigan 229), but it also implies that members of the 'public,' presumably those not receiving social assistance, are qualified to make such assessments, merely *because* they are not receiving social assistance.

In her work "Moral Capital,"⁸ Mariana Valverde (1994) argues that the surveillance and policing of welfare recipients represents the need to verify a "return of investment," whereby recipients are expected to demonstrate "good character" in return for financial assistance (231). However, I would suggest that it is quite the opposite. Such policing may be better understood as a method of demonstrating recipients supposed 'poor character' as a means of sustaining capitalist subjectivities. By seeking out examples of recipients' alleged criminality, as well as recruiting and deputizing members of the 'public' with the power to surveil, assess, and report suspected fraud, the state systematically constructs and reinforces social divisions between a 'morally superior public' and 'morally suspect' welfare recipients.

The use of pejorative terms to describe welfare recipients, such as 'lazy,' 'unmotivated,' 'unambitious,' and 'immoral,' transform the use, or non-use, of social assistance into a matter of personal character. By extension, the notion of a 'culture of poverty' blames people experiencing poverty for their own economic deprivation by suggesting that 'the poor' have attitudes and values that perpetuate their poverty, such as a lack of work ethic (Harell et al. 2581). Accompanying this concept is the popular belief that welfare fosters dependency and exacerbates such negative attitudes and values (ibid.). Likewise, the assumption of intergenerational welfare transmission postulates that dependency is passed down from one generation to the next, as either a product of a learning effect or a conformity effect (Baker et al. 72, 75). Embedded in this

notion is the conviction that recipients “live by a different moral code than the rest of society” (Baker et al. 74). By framing poverty and the need for social assistance as a personal or cultural aberration, ‘non-state dependence’ and a capitalist subjectivity are implicitly normalized and valorized.

According to the Ontario Human Rights Commission (2017), Ontarians hold overwhelmingly negative views towards people in receipt of public assistance, with only thirty-nine percent reporting that they feel “at least somewhat positive” towards recipients (4, 11). Although some types of social welfare, such as Employment Insurance and Workers’ Compensation, may be less stigmatized because of their linkages to a history of paid employment, people receiving social assistance are branded as taking unilaterally from the system. “By giving people something for nothing, so it goes, they have no motivation to work and become a drain on the whole system” (Harell et al. 258).

In fact, as outlined in Noah Zon and Thomas Granofsky’s (2019) *Ontario 360* report, steep claw back rates and employment services with a “work first” approach impede recipients’ ability to get off welfare and find long-term employment. Yet, this myth continues to be perpetuated by government authorities, including Ontario Premier Doug Ford, who stated, “we don’t want healthy people sitting at home collecting off the hardworking people of Ontario,” on March 10, 2020 (Artuso *Toronto Sun*). By upholding this falsehood, those not receiving social assistance are encouraged to distinguish themselves as ‘productive members of society,’ and in turn, to identify with capitalist norms of productivity.

Although Canadian views on poverty are less individualistic when compared to those held by their American counterparts (Harell et al. 2586), an astounding sixty-three percent of Ontarians reportedly agree with the statement that “we do enough to help people on social

assistance, they could do more to help themselves if they wanted to” (Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) 32). Interestingly, support for social assistance spending has been found to be consistently lower when labelled ‘welfare’ rather than ‘services for the poor’ (Harell et al. 2586). Smith (1987) suggests that the term ‘welfare’ is viewed negatively because of its association with wasteful government spending (82), however, this difference may also demonstrate a relative discomfort with cash transfers, compared to the charitable donation of goods and services. Notably, ‘welfare’ suggests some degree of decision-making power by the recipient regarding how money is spent, while ‘services to the poor’ removes the recipient’s choice; as in the colloquial phrase ‘beggars can’t be choosers.’ By framing financial autonomy as a privilege reserved for ‘paid workers,’ those not receiving social assistance are positioned as members of a privileged class. Likewise, the profoundly sexist and heteronormative assumptions surrounding the regulation of ‘spousal’ arrangements in provincial welfare policies strip recipients of their personal autonomy by effectively criminalizing recipients’ private relationships (see Little and Morrison 1999), as well as their use of informal support networks (see Mosher and Hermer 2010). The relative freedom enjoyed by those not receiving social assistance is thus posed as just reward for market cooperation, encouraging both compliance and complacency with capitalist norms among those not receiving social assistance.

Morten Blekesaune and Jill Quadagno’s (2003) comparative study demonstrates that support for welfare policy is highest when directed towards the sick and elderly (423). This may be attributed to the universality of aging and risk to illness, aligning with the argument that welfare programs are viewed more positively by those who are most likely to become recipients (Blekesaune and Quadagno 416, 424). Conversely, heterogeneity and social diversification are

associated with diminished support for welfare programs, across national contexts (Harell et al. 2583, Luttmer 519).

Xenophobic and racist assumptions about immigrant and refugee populations have appeared prominently in discussions about provincial welfare spending. Danial Stoffman's (1995) highly controversial article, "Dispatch from Dixon," cast doubt on the legitimacy of Somali refugees in Toronto, often accused of defrauding the system. Quoting the president of a management company for a condominium development in Dixon, Ontario, with a high concentration of Somali refugees, he writes,

In a typical case, says Cianfarani, two single mothers, each with three kids, each get \$1,000 rent money from the welfare authorities. They decide to share a two-bedroom apartment for \$1,000. That means eight people are living in a unit designed for three, but \$1,000 in rent money is freed up for other things—nobody in authority ever checks to see that the rent allowance is actually used for rent. (8)

As Cynthia Wright (2000) points out, Stoffman's article problematically frames Canadians as "hard-working suckers" falling victim to the state's 'permissive' refugee determination system (42). Echoing this ill-founded 'fear,' Ontario's current auditor general, Bonnie Lysyk, has spoken out against the province's supposedly lackadaisical investigation system, suggesting that there are more than five hundred profiles that could be flagged with issues pertaining to reimmigration and refugee status (Dehaas *National Post*).

As Sherene Razack (2000) contends, the relationship between the white citizenry and immigrant and refugee populations is fundamentally colonial (187). By framing people of European descent as the "original" peoples of Canada, she argues, white Canadians can understand themselves as being solely entitled to "the fruits of citizenship" (183). Consequently,

discriminatory immigrant and refugee laws are justified by the notion that Canadians, “extraordinarily generous but gullible, have been tricked” by “Third World peoples out to take advantage of unsuspecting white Canadians,” resulting in an epidemic of welfare fraud (187).

Within this white settler-colonial context, Indigenous peoples are more likely than people of other origins to report discrimination for receiving social assistance (OHRC 27). Non-Indigenous Canadians perceive Indigenous peoples as being more reliant on social assistance, compared to any other group (Banting et al. 173, Wallace 301), and forty-nine percent of Ontarians hold the negative view that “Indigenous people receive too many government benefits” (OHRC 5). As Allison Harell, Stuart Soroka, and Kiera Ladner’s (2014) study demonstrates, anti-Indigenous stereotypes impact the way welfare programs and recipients are viewed, showing that overall support for redistributive policy is lowered when the intended recipient is believed to be Indigenous (Harell 2580, 2589, 2590).

In her investigation of news media representations of Indigenous welfare recipients in Canada, Rebecca Wallace (2021) explains that Indigenous recipients are more frequently described as “lazy” or “freeloading” relative to non-Indigenous recipients (308). Constituting a form of rhetorical colonialism, she suggests that “[t]axpayers” – read as non-Indigenous peoples – are habitually portrayed as the victims of perceived waste in social spending on Indigenous communities” (303, 304). The prevalence of this stereotype was recently exhibited on May 4, 2021, when Indigenous tree defenders were physically and verbally assaulted by white Western Forest Product industry workers at Walbran Camp on unceded Pacheedaht territory. Cellphone video shows one industry worker shouting, “maybe you should go home and collect your welfare cheque for [expletive] sake, that we pay for,” to a group of Indigenous youth, while another adds, “our tax dollars” (Fairy Creek Blockade 1: 24).

Broadly, these examples illustrate the ways in which racism, xenophobia, colonialism, and anti-welfarism are mutually reinforcing; negative beliefs about welfare bolster racist, xenophobic, and colonialist stereotypes, while anti-welfare rhetoric draws on racist, xenophobic, and colonialist narratives to undermine support for redistributive policy among Canada's white settler majority. By capitalizing on essentialist prejudices through the overstatement of race-coded 'welfare fraud,' the state entrenches social divisions and undermines cross-class solidarity in order to obscure the wider realities of capitalist exploitation.

If social assistance ceased to be moralized, and welfare recipients were deemed inherently deserving of financial aid without special conditions or restrictions, then the notion that all people, regardless of circumstance, are *entitled* to the means of subsistence would become less inconceivable. This ideological shift would destabilize many of the foundational workings of capitalism; namely, the belief that participation in licit paid work—as underpaid, ungratifying, or unsafe, as it may be—is the only legitimate means of existence. Therefore, in addition to morally regulating the poor, the stigmatization and criminalization of welfare recipients contributes to the construction and maintenance of a capitalist subjectivity among those not receiving social assistance. Despite the government's financial investment in welfare policing and its overstatement of fraud, there has always been resistance to the moralization of social assistance programs by welfare recipients, anti-poverty activists, and community members (See Little 1998), demonstrating that “sites of oppression are also sites of struggle” (Little and Morrison 115). As I will examine in the following section, such resistance is mounting, in part, due to the introduction of pandemic-related economic relief programming.

RESISTANCE AND REFORM: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES IN THE COVID-19 ERA

“...social integration within the nation state is a project; and one in constant jeopardy from the very facets of material difference...” (Corrigan and Sayer 197).

As of May 2020, the Canadian unemployment rate reached an all-time high of 13.7% (Tencer *Huffington Post*), with nearly half of those making less than sixteen dollars an hour having lost their jobs, or most of their hours (Evelyn *The Guardian*, Farha and Schwan *Policy Options*).

Race and class divisions have allowed some to ‘stay home,’ while workers in the gig economy, service, and delivery industries have been put at a disproportionate risk of becoming infected with COVID-19 while providing ‘essential services’ (Bowden and Cain *Global News*, Maynard and Ritchie *Vice*). Meanwhile, confronted with school and childcare facility closures, women have left the workforce in unprecedented numbers to close the gap at home (Deschamps *CBC News*). While the majority have suffered immense losses of both health and livelihood during COVID-19, the wealth of the world’s richest has increased by over fifty percent since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic (Picchi *CBC News*). As wealth inequity grows, the capitalist structure and the state’s responsibility to its lowest earners is coming under increased scrutiny.

Fearing the economic ramifications of mass unemployment due to a nation-wide lockdown put into effect to stem the spread of COVID-19, the Canadian government implemented a series of individual emergency supports including the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), the Canadian Student Emergency Benefit (CESB), and the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB), alongside a range of employer and business-oriented support programs. On April 6, 2020, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau introduced the CERB, providing direct payments of two-thousand dollars to all Canadian residents fifteen years or older with a monthly income of less than one-thousand dollars, who had earned at least five-thousand dollars in 2019 (Government of Canada (GOC) “Canada Emergency...”). Although originally intended

to be available for only sixteen weeks, it was extended for an additional eight weeks in June 2020, and then an additional four weeks the following month, for a total of twenty-eight weeks (ibid.). The CESB was then introduced on May 1, 2020, to address a lack of summer employment opportunities for Canadian post-secondary students and recent graduates, by offering a monthly payment of \$1,250 from May to August 2020 (GOC “Canada Emergency Student...”).

Beginning on September 27, 2020, temporary changes were also made to Employment Insurance (EI) programs to expand eligibility for one year. A minimum unemployment rate of 13.1% was applied to all regions across Canada and claimants were given a one-time credit of three-hundred hours, allowing people with as few as 120 insured hours of work to receive the weekly five-hundred-dollar minimum benefit (GOC “Employment...”). As of March 18, 2021, claimants could receive regular benefits for a total of fifty weeks, nearly doubling the originally intended twenty-six-week period (ibid.). On October 12, 2020, CRB was made available to provide support to people fifteen years or older who did not qualify for EI regular benefits for a lack of insurable hours but earned a minimum of five-thousand dollars in 2019, 2020, or the last 12 months (GOC “Canada Recovery...”). Those who had experienced a fifty percent or greater reduction in their average weekly earnings compared to the previous year, were also eligible for a weekly payment of five-hundred dollars for up to thirty-eight weeks between September 2020, and September 2021 through the CRB (ibid.).

The Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB) and Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB) were also introduced to offset the economic burden of at-home child and patient care during COVID-19 by providing an income subsidy to people who had to take time away from work due to COVID-19 related illness or care responsibilities (GOC “Canada Recovery

Sickness...”). CRSB provided five-hundred dollars per week for a maximum of two weeks to workers with a greater susceptibility to COVID-19, or have been advised to self-isolate, and who had earned a minimum of five-thousand dollars in the previous year but are unable to complete at least fifty percent of their scheduled work (ibid.). With an eligibility period increased from twenty-six to thirty-eight weeks, the CRCB provided a weekly income support payment of five-hundred dollars to workers who earned a minimum of five-thousand dollars in the previous year but are unable to complete at least fifty percent of their scheduled work due to care giving responsibilities (GOC “Canada Recovery Caregiving...”). Permissible care-giving responsibilities included providing care for a family member who contracted COVID-19, was displaying symptoms of COVID-19, was at risk of serious health complications if they contracted COVID-19, or was a dependant aged twelve or younger who was sick or could not attend school or day care because of schools and care centre closures (ibid.).

Recipients of federal pandemic-related benefits received an average weekly payment of five-hundred dollars, which is significantly more than the \$169 in benefits that a single person can receive through Ontario’s welfare program, Ontario Works (Income Security Advocacy Center). The application process for pandemic-related benefits was also markedly less onerous than that of Ontario Works. Ontario Works applicants are asked to provide the identification and banking information of every family member in their household, their housing costs, total monthly income, available assets, and personal or family expenses (Ontario, “Social Assistance”). After their application is reviewed, they then must complete an interview with a local caseworker given the discretionary power to request any additional documentation (ibid.) If approved, recipients are required to meet with a case worker to organize their participation in employment-related activities and then to meet again every three months to review their

Participation Agreement (ibid.) They are also subject to an annual review of their financial information (ibid.). In contrast, the CERB did not enquire about applicants' relationship status, household incomes, living expenses, or personal assets. Filers were also permitted to apply for benefits easily online or by phone, providing only their name, date of birth, Social Insurance Number, and the number from a government-issued identification (GOC "Validation..."). Furthermore, CERB applicants were simply asked to attest to their own eligibility (ibid.), an extension of trust that is never afforded to welfare recipients.

In keeping with provincial anti-fraud measures, the Canada Revenue Agency announced a tip line for reporting suspected CERB fraud in early June 2020 (Connolly *Global News*). However, the Liberal government's admission to providing unclear and inconsistent information about eligibility (Cullen and Zimonjic *CBC News*), coupled with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's reassurance that Canadians who made mistakes in "good faith" should not fear legal recourse (ibid.), has undercut ready assumptions about fraud. In addition, although the CRA and Employment and Social Development Canada have promised to spend the next four years tracking down "wrongful payments" (The Canadian Press), legislation proposed by the Liberal government to fine or imprison those found to have received CERB payments fraudulently, was blocked by opposition parties in the minority Parliament (Cullen and Zimonjic *CBC News*).

With much of the public now in receipt of pandemic-related benefits, tactics of criminalization have been rendered ideologically ineffective. While the 'welfare recipient' has long been made an example of 'non-productive citizenry,' the provisioning of pandemic-related benefits to members of the wider public has problematized the regulatory function of welfare policing. Reinforcing the notion that CERB recipients are 'regular Canadians,' and therefore exempt from assumptions of criminality, Employment and Workplace Development Minister

Carla Qualtrough, responded to the allegation that people had received CERB fraudulently, saying, “I kind of reject that. I really think that the vast majority of *Canadians* are honest” (Cullen and Everson *CBC News*, emphasis added). In addition, while the statistical rarity of welfare fraud in provincial contexts is often exaggerated to justify the extensive policing of welfare recipients, the federal government has touted the overall fraud rate of less than one percent, to ease concern about the CERB’s lack of control measures (ibid.). The blatant discrepancies between federally administered pandemic-related benefits, compared to provincial welfare programs, and their respective treatment of recipients, have thus proven welfare recipients to be inarguably underpaid and over-policed.

The federal government is now having difficulty walking back the temporarily expanded social security it has afforded many Canadians during the pandemic. The readily available and accessibly delivered five-hundred-dollar weekly income, deemed to be an appropriate minimum payment for pandemic-related benefits, is not only higher than most provincial welfare rates,⁹ but also equal to or higher than many hourly workers’ average pay for full-time work. Provincial welfare programs may have been able to coerce people into accepting the terms and conditions of Workfare by limiting assistance to those with fewer resources; however, by tailoring pandemic-related benefits to workers with a minimum of 120 insurable hours, or who earned at least five-thousand dollars in the last year, as well as post-secondary students and recent graduates, the federal government has made financial assistance available to people with greater social and financial capital. Expanded Employment Insurance and pandemic-related benefits have thus allowed recipients, with comparatively more resources at their disposal, to refuse, or leverage against, a return to low-wages and job-insecurity.

In the early months of the pandemic, Canadian employers reported having difficulty recalling workers who were collecting government pandemic relief benefits (MaLeod *CTV News*). As Dan Kelly, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, bemoaned in June 2020, “some people are doing a risk-reward calculation and comparing getting \$2,000 to stay at home or making \$2,500 to go to work full-time,” choosing not to return to work (*ibid.*).

The restaurant industry may have the most difficulty rehiring workers post-pandemic. Exacerbated by the destabilizing effects of the sudden closure and reopening of patio services, many restaurant workers have used pandemic-related benefits to seek out employment in more secure industries (Mintz *TVO*). In addition, despite having to interact with unmasked customers, restaurant workers were not included in Phase 2 of Ontario’s vaccine rollout plan (DeClerq *CTV News*). A lack of protection for service workers has also brought increased attention to the absence of a provincially mandated paid sick leave. More than a year into the pandemic, following mounting public pressure, Ontario finally announced its delivery of a plan to provide three paid sick days to workers through a temporary program ending in September 2021 (Nasser and Powers *CBC News*). Too little, too late, the program has been decried for not affording workers the leave necessary to stem the spread of COVID-19 (Mohamed *Global News*).

Although criticized by Ontario’s pandemic science advisory for placing the administrative burden on applicants and being neither sufficient, nor timely (Jeffords *Toronto Star*), Ford has argued that federal sick leave programs do not need to be subsidized, saying, “we aren't going to duplicate and waste taxpayers' money, double dipping into their pockets” (Nasser and Powers *CBC News*). However, as Green Party Leader, Mike Schreiner, has pointed out, although “the premier took taxpayer-funded paid sick days in order to isolate after a workplace

exposure... Ford's plan falls well short of providing the protection workers need" (Jeffords *Toronto Star*).

The mismanagement of COVID-19's impact on low-income and homeless populations has become ever more apparent. While some benefited from a provincial moratorium on evictions, the restrictions placed on the capacity of homeless shelters to ensure social distancing, forced many unhoused people onto the street. Concomitantly, municipal governments instituted the mass eviction of homeless encampments across the province. In response to the growing need for shelter, Khaleel Seivwright, a Toronto-based carpenter, began to construct tiny wooden structures to provide unhoused people warm shelter during the winter months of the pandemic (Draaisma *CBC News*). With the assistance of more than forty volunteers and over \$200,000 in donations, Seivwright erected about one hundred tiny shelters (Porter *The New York Times*). Yet, despite providing a smoke and carbon monoxide detector and a fire extinguisher in each unit, the City of Toronto argued that the structures are unsafe and filed an injunction ordering Seivwright to stop putting the structures on city-owned land (Draaisma *CBC News*, Porter *The New York Times*). In response, more than 98,000 people have signed a petition calling on the city of Toronto to reverse its stance on temporary shelters (Change.org "Demand...").

Domenico Saxida, who lives in an encampment in Alexandra Park in Toronto, has commended Seivwright, saying, "he made the Canadian government look stupid. One man on his own dime and time" (Porter *The New York Times*), and called on the mayor of Toronto, John Tory, to stop sending police into encampments, and to "start investing money in building affordable housing geared to income" ("The Homeless ..." 2:40). As Seivwright has pointed out, "the money the City is spending to attack me could be put into safe housing for those that need it" (Draaisma *CBC News*). However, as The Encampment Support Network (ESN) has

illuminated in statements posted to their Instagram account, Toronto’s “commitment to clearing encampments isn’t about safety and care for their residents. It is, and has always been, about invisibilizing poverty” (Encampment Support Network).

Yet, the costly and excessive use of police officers dressed in riot gear to remove an often proportionally small number of people from homeless encampments mid-day, has made eviction procedures a public spectacle. Like the over-policing of welfare recipients, the forced eviction of homeless people from public parks, alienates people experiencing poverty from the body politic, while simultaneously positioning the use of public spaces as a right reserved for ‘taxpayers.’ Conservative political columnist, Sue-Ann Levy, embodied this sense of entitlement when she reduced Toronto’s housing crisis to a matter of personal inconvenience, referring to one homeless encampment as an “eyesore” and stating that “some of our neighborhood parks have been turned into veritable s—holes not fit for use by families or children — and that’s unconscionable” (Levy *Toronto Sun*).

Although such insensitivity and intolerance persist, the wider economic impacts of COVID-19, combined with the mainstream media’s uptake of issues pertaining to unaddressed need, has forced increasing numbers of people to confront the realities of poverty in Canada and the contradictions in ‘support’ being offered across all levels of government. As Member of Parliament (MP), Leah Gazan stated in an interview with Nate Erskine-Smith in September 2020,

There’s a whole movement of people, that are choosing people, that are tired of corporations getting all these breaks, MasterCard 50 million bucks, Loblaws 12 million bucks. I mean, like, this is where *our* money is going. And in the meantime, people are falling in the streets, because they are not being looked after.” (20:33, emphasis added)

As Qajaq Robinson, former Commissioner of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) has stated “we have to recognize that the creation of poverty ... is part of the state violence, it’s not accidental,” suggesting that a guaranteed Basic Income would give people, especially those in marginalized communities, the “chance to move out of survival mode and live a life of dignity,” (Paling *Washington Post*). One of the “calls for justice” listed in the National Inquiry’s final report (2019) was for “all governments to establish a guaranteed annual livable income for all Canadians, including Indigenous Peoples, to meet all their social and economic needs” (182).

Although less inclusive than a Universal Basic Income,¹⁰ the CERB’s successful administration of standardized and direct federal government cash transfers to millions of individuals across the country, disproved the claim that a Basic Income could not be done, leading to revived public support for a Basic Income in Canada (Forget and Regehr *The Globe and Mail*, Razavi and Le Couteur *Global News*, Sandals *Canadianart*, Pate 18:35). As demonstrated by the Environics Institute (2020) survey, almost two-thirds of Canadians support replacing current emergency assistance programs for people impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic with a guaranteed Basic Income, representing a dramatic increase in support from before the start of the pandemic (2).

In May 2020, more than fifty senators endorsed a letter asking for the CERB to be evolved into a Basic Income to account for eligibility issues that excluded some, such as those receiving lesser amounts through disability benefit programs (Lum *Huffington Post*). As former executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association, Dave Nelson, has pointed out “[i]f you say people need \$2,000 a month to live (on CERB), how the heck can people on enduring disability be okay with \$1,250 a month?” (MacPherson and Vescera *Saskatoon Star*

Phoenix). Working with provincial and territorial governments and Indigenous peoples, Motion M-46, put forward to parliament by MP Gazan on August 10, 2020, would ensure a Basic Income for all Canadians over the age of eighteen, including single persons, students, families, seniors, persons with disabilities, as well as temporary foreign workers, and refugee claimants, without requiring their participation in the labor market, in education, or training programs (House of Commons). Bill C-273, an enactment requiring “the Minister of Finance to develop a national strategy to assess implementation models for a guaranteed basic income program as part of Canada’s innovation and economic growth strategy” was also put forward by MP Julie Dzerowicz on February 22, 2021 (Parliament of Canada), and has since gained the support of more than 28,000 signees (UBI Works). While these policy initiatives show promise, anti-poverty advocates caution that a Basic Income should be accompanied by policies designed to address Canada’s housing crisis, and to protect against the accelerated inflation of housing expenses (Sharp *Canada’s National Observer*).

The Parliamentary Budget Office has shown that Canada has the resources to pay for a Basic Income under normal conditions, and that a Basic Income would prove more cost effective than its alternatives during economic recovery (Forget and Regehr *The Globe and Mail*). Nevertheless, Trudeau has said that “it’s not something that we see a path to moving forward with right now” (Lum *Huffington Post*). Although there is no evidence to suggest that guaranteed Basic Income disincentivizes people from doing paid work (Dent *The Guardian*, Hagen-Zanker et al. 3, Gaskell *Forbes*, Power 10:22), it would provide people with the means to make decisions in their own best interest and to seek better employment (Power and Swift 107, 110), thereby threatening the supply of exploitable workers.

According to Jessie Golem, a former participant in Ontario's Basic Income Pilot Project launched by former Premier, Kathleen Wynne, Basic Income allowed her to stop working sixty to eighty hours a week at multiple "dead-end jobs," and afforded her the opportunity to invest her time in a career she was passionate about (Razavi and Le Couteur *Global News*). As Golem stated, "If the pilot hadn't been cancelled [by the Ford government], I'd be a full-time photographer right now" (ibid.). The Liberal government's reluctance to endorse a Basic Income, may reflect a fear that people will refuse underpaid, unsafe, or unfulfilling work, if given the financial security to do so. As a result, limited social welfare is exposed as having less to do with preserving the 'taxpayer's dollar', and more to do with protecting capitalist interests. By extension, the overstatement of 'welfare fraud' can be understood as a means of redirecting public attention away from the possibilities of redistributive policy, and towards the perpetuated falsehood of individual welfare abuse, in an effort to secure capitalist subjectivities. Ironically, however, a basic income may eventually prove to be the only way of sustaining consumer-based economies.

By providing social assistance to members of the recognized 'public,' including those with greater class privilege, many people who were unlikely to receive social assistance before the pandemic, now occupy a liminal space between the marginalized 'welfare recipient' and the illusory 'taxpayer,' complicating divisive notions of deservedness. Pandemic-related benefits have, therefore, inadvertently undermined the regulatory function of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving poor' metric used to foster capitalist subjectivities. The state will now have difficulty withdrawing its acknowledgment of a minimum weekly income of five-hundred dollars and the trust it has extended recipients of pandemic-related benefits.

CONCLUSION

The literature reviewed in this essay provides crucial analyses of how Canadian welfare policies and their administration are inextricable from the politics of moral regulation and the intersections of class, gender, and race. It is my hope that the theoretical insights provided in this paper contribute to this scholarship by considering the regulatory function of welfare policing among those not receiving social assistance. In addition to coercing welfare recipients to seek private solutions to systemic poverty through participating in low-paid work or finding economic security through marriage (Chunn and Gavigan 2004; Little 1998; Mirchandani and Chan 2005; Maki 2009), this essay has shown that the stigmatization, alienation, and criminalization of welfare recipients is also used to promote capitalist normativity among members of the wider ‘public.’

The overstatement of gender-coded and race-coded welfare fraud is used to rationalize the state’s lack of social responsibility to the poor, under the guise of ‘public accountability.’ Yet, as this essay suggests, investments in the over-policing of welfare fraud may have less to do with ensuring the public’s confidence that ‘abuse’ is being kept to a minimum, and more to do with ensuring the public’s compliance with limited social welfare and capitalist norms of productivity and exploitation; a modality I term *capitalist subjectivity*. However, as explored in the final section of this paper, the comparatively more generous and inclusive pandemic-related benefits introduced by the federal government to minimize the economic impacts of COVID-19, have destabilized the regulatory function of welfare policing, foretelling the possible end to the myth of the ‘welfare cheat.’

Notes

1 Corrigan and Sayer suggest that individual and group identification is “embodied” through mundane routines and “broadcasted” through rituals of the state (5). In other words, the routinized use of categorizing terms such as “taxpayer” combined with the periodic use of ceremony, reinforce, and perpetuate ideas of state citizenship and national belonging (4, 5).

2 As Alan Hunt (1999) suggests, the object of Corrigan and Sayer’s work is to provide an account of state-formation, therefore, it may be unreasonable to take issue with their focus on the state (15).

3 It should be noted here that the term “social exclusion” was first coined by René Lenoir (1974) to refer to the marginalization of specific groups in French society.

4 CHEST was later divided into the Canada Health Transfer (CHT) and the Canada Social Transfer (CST) in 2004 (Government of Canada “History...”)

5 See also Little (1994) to read more on the moral regulation of single mothers under the Ontario Mothers' Allowance and Family Benefits Act by government administrators, neighbours, and other welfare recipients.

6 Notably, Mirchandani and Chan state, “individual case workers are put in positions where they can exercise discretion and their racism appears to be merely an expression of their individual prejudice rather than of institutional discrimination” (64), a point that stands in contradiction to their main critique.

7 The Ontario Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services website (2021) states, “[w]hile there are many people who genuinely need our help, there are unfortunately some who take unfair advantage of social assistance programs. . . If you suspect welfare fraud in Ontario, let us know. We take reports of fraud very seriously,” followed by links to an online

form and email address that can be used to report suspected fraud. There are no examples of what may qualify as fraud nor any disclaimers against false reporting on the site. In addition, while the alleged is permitted to remain anonymous by using the online form, or calling in at 1-800-394-7867, filers are encouraged to provide detailed information about the alleged, including their first and last name, age, phone number, and address, as well as the names of their spouse and children.

8 As an extension of Bourdieu's Theory of Capital, Valverde calls for the addition of what she refers to as *moral capital*, defined as the cultivation of an "ethical subjectivity," achieved through processes of moral regulation (216, 218).

9 See Jennefer Laidley and Hannah Aldridge's (2020) for an in-depth study of the total welfare incomes of four example households living on social assistance across Canada.

10 As outlined by Chandra Pasma and Jim Mulvale (2014), Basic Income generally refers to government-funded income that is guaranteed to all citizens without means testing or work requirements, to ensure that every individual receives unconditional access to an income that meets their basic material needs (1). There are two main Basic Income models; the Negative Income Tax model, and the Universal Demogrant model. The Negative Income Tax model would provide a basic income to those below a certain income level, while allowing recipients to earn a "reasonably high amount" of additional income (2). Meanwhile, the Universal Demogrant model would provide a regular non-taxable payment to every citizen while taxing all additional income at a relatively higher rate, causing higher income citizens to pay the amount of their benefit back in their annual taxes (Ibid.).

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