THE ASCENDANCE OF NEO-CONSERVATISM AND ITS IMPACT ON

ABORIGINAL SINGLE MOTHERS OF SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of Graduate Studies

of

The University of Guelph

by

MADELINA SUNSERI

In partial fulfillment of requirements

for the degree of

Master of Arts

July, 1997

Canada

ABSTRACT

THE ASCENDANCE OF NEO-CONSERVATISM AND ITS IMPACT ON

ABORIGINAL SINGLE MOTHERS OF SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO

Madelina Sunseri   Advisor:
University of Guelph, 1997   Professor Belinda Leach

This thesis is an investigation of neo-conservative policies and their impact on the daily lives of Aboriginal single mothers in Ontario. Open-ended interviews were conducted in London and Windsor with twenty single mothers to examine their personal experiences in an effort to qualitatively analyse the effects of neo-conservatism on their standards of living. The argument of this thesis is that, for such women at least, the effects of neo-conservative policies are negative for the well-being of Aboriginal women. This thesis further argues that neo-conservative policies are not gender neutral and do have a racist undertone, as the conjunction of gender and race makes the impact of neo-conservatism particularly negative for this group.

Finally, but certainly not the least important, I want to thank Richard C.A. Patterson, who has been patient, caring and most helpful. I especially want to thank him for believing in me.

This thesis is dedicated to the Aboriginal women who shared with me their experiences, concerns and fears. They provided me with a knowledge which I couldn't have otherwise acquired. They have placed a great amount of trust in me. I hope that I have used it wisely and respectfully.

Megwich.

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Preface

July 8, 1997: It is a warm afternoon and I have decided to take a break from my research. I leave the McNaughton Library of the University of Guelph and head towards the Second Cup inside the University Centre. I order my mocaccino (if any of my friends reads this, they will correctly guess that I requested extra whipped cream). I then sit down and begin to enjoy my treat.

The cafeteria is busy, but I manage to release my tension which is caused by the inevitable stress that accompanies the last phase of thesis preparation. As I look around at the faces that surround me (again, my friends will laugh, as they know that I am a people-watcher), my ears hear a word that always catches my attention: "Indians". I look at a table across from mine, and see one woman and three men who are passionately discussing "Indians". I want to quickly find out if they are talking about Aboriginals, East Indians or West Indians. Soon I discover they are talking about Aboriginals.

Once again, I am put in the uncomfortable, yet privileged, position of overhearing a few non-Aboriginals talk about Aboriginals, unaware that a person of Aboriginal descent is nearby. Admittedly, I do not look particularly Aboriginal despite my Aboriginal and Italian heritage.

There have been many cases, in fact, where some non-Aboriginals have felt free to make blunt racist comments against Aboriginals in my presence, unaware that they are talking about me, my mother, my sister, my people. When I am in this position, a variety of emotions overwhelm me: pain, anger, sadness, and satisfaction. Why satisfaction? Somehow my anger abates when, after letting the perpetrators proceed with their

judgments and claims of knowledge about "them Indians", I reveal my Aboriginal identity to them. I do get a sense of satisfaction in witnessing their embarrassment from knowing they have been caught in their racist behaviour. Usually, I have to listen to their attempts to remedy the damage which they have caused to my soul: "Oh, but I did not mean it that way, really..." or "Oh, I know they are not all that way..." or my favourite one: "Don't think I am a racist. I am not, really! All I meant was..." At this point, I usually ask them to "Stop it, please. Don't try to make it better. Let's just change subject or listen to my response". One can not make it better and, most importantly, one should not try to take away my right to feel hurt and angry.

On the particular event at the coffee shop, I did not speak out. I just listened to their comments about "Indians", and then left. I was too tired, too stressed to engage in any emotional confrontation. It didn't matter to me that they knew who I was, not that day. I just listened, carefully, to four individuals describing what they "know" about "Indians", obviously feeling it was safe to do so, since it seemed that there weren't any Aboriginals to hear them. They didn't have to be careful to make 'politically correct' statements. Instead, they could proceed to say: "Oh, there are some good ones, but most of them are lazy. They just don't want to work." One of the men at the table knew that "white men can't go to the reserves, only white women can." Another member of the group knew that "some of their women don't care about their kids."

I went outside and headed home, rather than going back to the library. While I was walking home, memories of my fieldwork came to my mind: images of women who cared so much about their children, sometimes even to the point of starving themselves so

that their kids could eat. Those people back at the coffee shop could not possibly be talking about the same women! I wanted to run back and tell them that they were wrong, instead I kept remembering...

Jane, a 25 years old woman and mother of two young sons, Kyle (3) and Jason (6 months), was abused by her foster father, and then by her husband. During our interview she kept kissing her boys and hugging them. I remembered her anxiety throughout the interview. She was worried that her social worker might drop by her house to "interrogate me. She hasn't come for a while. I have this feeling that she might come soon. I don't want to miss her. That could be turned against me. They try anything to cut me off". I remembered her fear about not being able to make it on her own, because "now it is getting harder with the cuts. I really don't know how I am going to make it. What about my children? I don't want to go back to him [her husband], but I might do that, for the children".

No, those people at the coffee shop could not be talking about Jane! I want to believe that if they could have seen how her face lit up with joy when she looked at Jason and Kyle, they would know that she did care about her children. Finally they would truly understand how many Aboriginal women struggle everyday to provide for their families, especially now under a neo-conservative climate.

Chapter I: Introduction

> In Harris's Ontario the inability of individuals and their families to meet their subsistence needs is defined as a personal flaw when it is in fact the result of downsizing and restructuring. That Ontario, more than any other province, is caught simultaneously in a cyclical as well as a structural job crisis that has robbed families of their ability to provide for themselves in the labour market does not seem to disrupt the New Right's blind faith in the market (Kitchen:1997:103).

On June 8, 1995 the Conservative Party of Mike Harris won the provincial election by a large majority in Ontario. Its success was partly due to its ability to present itself as innovative and creative through the pronouncements of the "Common Sense" Revolution platform. But if one looked closely at the contents of the promises made during the election campaign and implemented soon after coming into power, the Harris Revolution does not appear as novel as at first glance. In fact, the Harris government has been following a socio-political and economic agenda similar to those of some other provinces in Canada and some other countries. In most Western industrial countries the past two decades have been marked by a shift to right-wing ideologies and practices.

This thesis will analyze the content of neo-conservatism and its impact on a specific 'visible' minority group in Ontario: aboriginal women. Many scholars have successfully documented the impact that neo-conservative policies, such as structural adjustment programs, have had on women of the South (Bakker: 1995; Vickers: 1991; Elson: 1987; Safa: 1992). These policies are "deeply gendered. [They are] based on a set of assumptions about women's time and labour" (Antrobus: 1995). I believe it is important to investigate the impact of neo-conservatism on women of the North, since this region has now also embraced the new right ideology.

This thesis argues that neo-conservative policies are having a negative impact on the well-being of Aboriginal women; these women are most unfavorably affected by the recent social welfare reforms adopted by neo-conservative governments because they depend on the State for the basic necessities of life. Statistics and the literature clearly show that Aboriginal women are the poorest of the poor in Canada and that a majority of them receive social assistance. This thesis will further argue then that neo-conservative policies are not gender-neutral and do have a racist under-tone, as the conjunction of gender and race makes the impact of neo-conservatism particularly negative for this group.

The terms used to describe these political trends are neo-liberalism, neo-conservatism and New Right. Neo-liberalism entails a return to a laissez-faire economics together with a positive value attached to individualism, the market system and minimal government. Neo-conservatism is characterized by a return to a hierarchical and subordinate system while promoting authoritarian populism and a disciplined society (Marchak: 1991: 94). The New Right, which flourished in Britain during Margaret Thatcher's leadership, is an 'uneasy' combination of neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism. While there are some contradictions within the New Right's ideology, the main goal shared by both neo-liberals and neo-conservatives is to dismantle the welfare state through such means as restructuring, downsizing and privatization (Marchak: 1991: 94-95).

Throughout the thesis neo-conservatism is the term applied most frequently in describing the nature and content of the ideology and policies analyzed. However, as previously outlined, there are some differences between neo-conservatism and neo-

liberalism. I have opted to use the term neo-conservatism because it implies a broader and more moral aspect of the new right. The term 'Aboriginal' women is the one I chose after a long and difficult internal conflict I experienced when presented with the list of nouns for categorizing my subjects of study: Indian, Native, First Nations and Aboriginal. I promptly discarded the term 'Indian' because of its negative connotation. Indian is a term given by Europeans to the original occupants of the Americas. It is a term which borders on the pejorative and is often disliked by my people (I am half Italian and half Aboriginal). However, Indian is still the legal term associated with a person who, under section 2(1) of the Indian Act is registered as an Indian or is entitled to be registered. Native is a term more commonly used now and one that a large number of my people are comfortable with. Why Aboriginal then? During the interviews that I conducted I raised the question of which of the available terms they (the people who are speaking in this thesis) felt most at ease with and the majority chose Aboriginal. Some of the women I spoke with made it clear to me that for them Aboriginal means the original people of this land, before the colonizers came and changed their societies. To them, reclaiming that name is a political action, a beginning step to self-determination. It is out of my love and respect for my people that I have decided to use 'Aboriginal'. I will also make reasonable attempts to name the specific nation and/or clan these women come from, without compromising their confidentiality. In this thesis, the term Aboriginal is used in a broad meaning and includes status Indians, non-status Indians, Metis and Inuit. The twenty women in my sample, however, are all status Indians.

Chapter two discusses the theoretical framework used in the thesis: new political economy. This framework allows me to integrate race, class and gender issues. This chapter also explores the literature on neo-conservatism, first looking at its global impact and ultimately analyzing its influence in Ontario.

Chapter three explores the methodology used in my project. I explain why I used an ethnographic method, why I chose London and Windsor as my two sites of fieldwork and why I chose Aboriginal single-parent women as my units of analysis.

In Chapter four I analyze the extent of neo-conservatism in Canada, particularly in Ontario by outlining the actual policies that the federal and provincial governments have implemented in the last ten years. The emphasis of the chapter is on the social assistance reforms in order to show how they impact the lives of single parents.

Chapter five, using a political economy perspective, is an historical overview of Aboriginal peoples and their relations with the Canadian State. It begins with a brief look at the situation of Aboriginal peoples prior to colonization and moves to the "new reality". The ramifications of neo-conservative policies are looked at and I show how they affect disproportionately the poorest in our country: Aboriginal women and how these policies perpetuate and reinforce sexual and racial inequalities.

In Chapter six I provide the findings of my fieldwork. First I outline the cutbacks in Aboriginal programs and services that are important for the well-being of urban Aboriginal women and their children. Second, I investigate non-Aboriginal cuts in other social welfare services which also affect the well-being of Aboriginal women. Third, I discuss the changes in the use of services and programs of the Friendship Centres in the

cities of London and Windsor noticed by the workers of these centres. Finally, I give many quotes from the women in my sample which reveal the devastating impact that neo-conservatism has had on their lives. My findings show that the arguments made by other scholars that neo-conservative policies hurt the people that are poor and most vulnerable are valid. Aboriginal women, and specifically single parents, have a long history with oppression, poverty and sexual and racial inequalities. Any small gains or remedies provided by a welfare system are now reversed under a regressive neo-conservative ideology. These women's incomes have dropped, the services that they relied on have been eliminated or drastically cut down, their poverty has increased and their emotional and physical well-being deteriorated.

Chapter II: Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the situation of Aboriginal women in a neo-conservative context as both women and members of a non-white culture, one needs to use a theoretical framework which studies race, class and gender relations as they interplay in any given historical context. Economic and political forces may not totally determine social relations, however they do play an influential role in the way groups interact with each other. Therefore, a perspective that places race and gender together with class in its central analysis can better construct knowledge and understanding of the impacts of neo-conservatism on women of colour. This perspective is referred to as the new political economy perspective.

New Political Economy Perspective

Prior to the development of a new political economy perspective social scientists relied on the Western feminist literature to study social issues related to women. Nancy Hartsock was one of the many feminists to reassess Marxism and be critical of its history of minimizing women's experiences or equalizing them to those of men's, when such was not necessarily the case. She, then, called for a feminist standpoint to clear the distortion of reality produced by orthodox Marxism.

According to Hartsock, the feminist standpoint portrays the multiple forms of exploitative and oppressive social relations. Because women suffer a special form of exploitation and oppression in patriarchal societies, a true Marxist liberatory process has to include the experiences of women (Hartsock: 1983: 10).

The feminist standpoint however, has also been criticized for not entirely portraying the total picture. The criticism has mostly come from women of the South and women of colour, who have argued that the Western feminist standpoint assumes all women suffer the same form and content of oppression and exploitation.

Kline states that the type of feminist standpoint followed by most Western women "claims a certain universal validity for the feminist standpoint"(1991). This dominant perspective advocates the generalization of women's experiences of oppression as the "ground for critique" and strives to find and focus mainly on the commonality of women's experiences (Kline: 1991).

Women of colour have been particularly critical of the Western feminist standpoint by arguing that

> much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin. As a consequence, feminist theory lacks wholeness, lacks broad analysis that could encompass a variety of human experiences (hooks: 1984: x).

Women of colour have indeed demanded that for feminism to truly liberate women and achieve an egalitarian system, differences in women's experiences have to be recognized and valued. Unfortunately, until recently, the field of Canadian political economy has been mostly devoid of a satisfactory content of race issue awareness(Bannerji: 1993). More recently, Canadian women of colour in academic disciplines, especially sociology, have been able to voice their concerns and issues. There are now a number of scholars who have published articles integrating race, class and

gender in their analyses. Some examples include Himani Bannerji, Tania Das Gupta, Roxana Ng, Patricia Monture-Angus, Lee Maracle and Sherene Razack.

Roxana Ng argues that gender relations change over time, just as ethnic and class relations do. Furthermore, all three arise "out of the processes of domination and struggles over the means of production over time" (Ng: 1993: 236). When looking at the lives of Aboriginal women in Canada through the lens of a feminist perspective which incorporates race, class and gender, it becomes evident that the experiences of Aboriginal women have gone through several unique transformations since the colonization of America. As Roxana Ng points out, colonization "destroyed, re-organized, fragmented, and homogenized the myriad tribal groups across the continent" (1993:234). In fact, with colonization, racism and sexism have become real conditions; our country, Lee Maracle argues, is one still divided along racial lines, because the injustices done to Aboriginals have not yet been redressed (Maracle: 1993: 152)

A central issue taken by early Western feminists was the ideological foundation that justified the subordination of women to men. Patriarchy is the term early feminists referred to as the hierarchical system in which men dominate women and have more power than them in both the economic and social spheres of society (see O'Brien: 1983 for more reading on patriarchy).

Many Marxist and socialist feminists have rejected the notion that patriarchy is a historically universal phenomenon. They have argued that, in fact, patriarchy emerged in the Western civilization as a "form of consciousness that defines material reality through dichotomizing people, their relations to nature and to each other" (Muszynski: 1991: 78).

Patriarchy has a different meaning for Aboriginal women, and acknowledging this difference is exactly what distinguishes a new political economy perspective from the dominant Western feminist discourse. Monture-Angus, a Mohawk scholar, points out that "understanding how patriarchy operates in Canada without understanding colonization is a meaningless endeavour from the perspective of Aboriginal people" (Monture-Angus: 1995: 175). Aboriginal women, as Monture-Angus rightly states, do not share the same patriarchal experiences of non-Aboriginal women. In fact, she argues that "violence and abuse (including political exclusion) against women was not tolerated in most Aboriginal societies" (Monture-Angus: 1995: 175).

Moreover, the complexity of the interpenetration of racism and sexism faced by Aboriginal women is very problematic. Whenever an act of discrimination is manifested against an Aboriginal woman, or any other woman of colour, it is difficult to accurately point out if the act occurred because she is a woman or because she is Aboriginal. Perhaps it is impossible to separate race and gender, as they are interconnected and overlap in the experiences of women of colour.

It is imperative for feminists to come to terms with the diversity of women's experiences and to include the voices of women of colour in their agenda. Only when both similarities and differences of all women are seen as the foundation of unity can Aboriginal women feel that the feminist movement can serve their interests.

The Spectre of Neo-Conservatism

In 1997 Tania Das Gupta wrote that racism increases during economic recessions, as people of colour become a convenient scapegoat for the problems faced by society.

She also makes a convincing argument that restructuring, an important component of neo-conservatism, affects people of colour differently and more negatively (Das Gupta:1997:113). Chapter four and chapter five of this thesis will deal in more detail with the sexist and racial elements of neo-conservatism. This section will mainly focus on the historical context of the neo-conservative ideology.

Neo-Conservatism beyond Canadian borders

The new right ideology became popular in the 1970s, when corporations and other elites took aim at obtaining hegemonic control globally and at reducing the power of the states. Patricia Marchak (1991) gives us an informative examination of the rise of the new right. She argues that it was a response to economic changes already underway by the 1960s: the United States lost its economic power, Europe was reconstructed, Japan became a strong economic force and technological innovations changed the relations of production so that capital could now move more freely and establish a global marketplace (Marchak: 1991: 3).

The new right then was a response to the turmoil and instability that these changes had caused. This ideology was able to achieve legitimacy and popularity partly due to the fact that it was well-funded by the corporate elite (Marchak: 1991: 9). The Trilateral Commission was founded in 1973 by David Rockefeller and became the most powerful voice of the new right. Its members saw "excess of democracy" as the barrier to economic prosperity and within two decades they influenced most of each nation's political leaders to significantly reduce the welfare state (Laxer: 1995).

Unfortunately the prediction Patricia Marchak made that the new right was on the wane has not taken place. In fact, one could say that neo-conservatism is even stronger today, especially in Canada where most of the political parties have incorporated the beliefs of the new right and translated them into policies.

Neo-conservatism became a major political force in Britain during the years that Margaret Thatcher governed and continued to be afterwards. In that country Thatcherism translated economic doctrine into the language of experience, moral imperative and common sense. Neo-conservatism, under Thatcher, truly became a new form of hegemonic politics in Britain (Hall: 1988: 84-85). Thatcherism anti-statism meant the rejection of the Keynesian welfare state, but in the social sphere of the British society Thatcherism was very interventionist (Hall: 1988: 85). Neo-conservatism should not be mistaken as a complete rejection of the state, but as a doctrine that prefers the dismantling of the welfare state in the economic sphere of a society, while maintaining a strong role in the moral regulatory policies of it, even as it argues that the state should itself reduce in size and power (Hall: 1988: 152).

This bifurcated discourse was shared by most American intellectuals and politicians during the 1970s and 1980s. The prevailing themes of the American Right were similar to those of the British Thatcherism, and were intended "to restore the market and free enterprise and to abolish Keynesianism as a legitimate policy option"(Chorney, Hansen & Mendell, as cited in Regimbald: 1997: 45). The American Right argued that government should intervene less in the economic area of the nation, enabling individuals to take full responsibility for their successes and failures (Regimbald: 1997: 53). As mentioned the

new right is completely blind to the fact that some groups in a capitalist system cannot sustain themselves, especially when they are restricted by structural barriers caused by neo-conservative policies (Kitchen:1997:103).

Poor countries have been disproportionately victimized by neo-conservatism because structural adjustment programs have placed a great burden on them. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have enforced these policies on the governments of poor countries and the consequences of such neo-conservative policies have been: reduction in health and child care, education and food subsidies. In Mexico, for example, neo-liberalism harshly exploits the workers by reducing their wages while suppressing any form of protest. Foreign and domestic neo-conservatives have put tremendous pressure on the Mexican government to suppress the Zapatista uprising of January 1, 1994 whose significance was a struggle about justice in Chiapas and an opposition to the new right ideology (Duffy & Benjamin: 1995: 1).

The new right is currently the predominant ideology in most parts of the world. Neo-conservative leaders have successfully obtained their much desired hegemony, to the point that now their "deficit-leaves-us-no-alternative-but-to-cut-social-spending theory" is one not longer limited to an elite: it is even shared by some of the people it victimizes (McQuaig: 1995: 13). As Gramsci argued, hegemony is, in fact, achieved when "the spontaneous consent is given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group"(1971:12).

Neo-Conservatism in Canada

Politicians in Canada also became infatuated with neo-conservatism and by the mid 1980s, under the leadership of Brian Mulroney, neo-conservative politics had arrived in the Parliament. The strategies used by the Mulroney's conservative government in the economy of the country included facilitating the movement of capital (the Free Trade Agreement and the North America Free Trade Agreement are clear evidences of this strategy), weakening the labour movements, focusing on the deficit and privatizing Crown corporations (McBride & Shields: 1993: 30; Allen & Rosenbluth: 1992: 12-13). On the moral component of neo-conservatism, Canadian neo-conservatives dictated a social traditionalism parallel to the authoritarian populism of the Thatcherite doctrine Hall outlined (McBride & Shields: 1993: 33).

In Canada the moral aspect of neo-conservatism meant an assault on universality because by the mid 1980s universalism was believed to undermine "both the stigmatizing nature of poor relief and.....the self-reliance mechanisms of the private insurance" (Esping-Andersen as cited in McBride & Shields: 1993: 34).

The legacy of Mulroney's policies has been an extremely important one as it increased the power of the business elite to such heights that any meaningfully alternative democratic process is undermined. The Canadian population has been led to believe that there is no other choice to the dismantling of the welfare state and that such a move would eventually lead to prosperity.

In 1993 it appeared as if there was still some hope to repair the damages that the neo-conservative policies implemented under the government of Brian Mulroney had

inflicted upon the Canadian population. When Jean Chretien came into power with the Federal Liberal party on a strong mandate to create jobs, some social activists believed that the neo-conservative discourse was losing ground within the circle of politicians, at least within the newly-elected ones (Barlow & Campbell: 1995: 8).

By the time Finance Minister Paul Martin delivered the first budget neo-conservatism had even surpassed the dominance it gained during Mulroney's years.

> The Liberal government under Jean Chretien, like the Tories under Brian Mulroney, has become the political agent of big business interests and the neo-liberal ideology that sustains them (Barlow & Campbell: 1995: 42).

Not only did the Liberals continued with the same cut-spending policies initiated by the former Conservative government, they actually did away with the universality principles held by the country. The federal Liberal economic policies were conceived by neo-liberal economists and business leaders who believed that deficit reduction should be the priority of any budget and also that the best way to arrive at a balanced book is through spending cuts (Barlow & Campbell: 1995: 130-131). The pinnacle of neo-conservatism was achieved through the reduction of transfer payments to the provinces by the current Liberal federal government. Not only did this change mean a loss of revenues for the provinces, most importantly it gave each province more autonomy over its own economic and social policies, and it also created the potential for greater regional inequality.

In 1995, Ontarian neo-conservatism gained its momentum with the victory of the Progressive Conservative Party under Mike Harris. As Diane Ralph, a professor at Carleton University, argues:

the Tories have promised to create a "favourable climate" for investment by wiping out democratic rights, protective regulations, advocacy, funding and social supports (Ralph: 1997: 14).

The neo-conservative ideology Mike Harris and his followers practice resembles that of Margaret Thatcher. The neo-conservatism of Ontario combines neo-liberal economic policy with authoritarian populism. Mike Harris shares with the British neo-conservative doctrine the same goal: opening the door to business, while tightening the powers and options of workers and other "special interest groups", as the Premier himself openly calls any group who oppose his Common Sense Revolution (Browne: 1997: 37).

The Tory neo-conservative rhetoric, stating that the social assistance system had created dependency and that in Ontario there was a need to restore work incentives, has its roots in the American and British new right. Like the American Right, Mike Harris was able to persuade the majority of the electorate that the government should not be expected to readily give help to those who cannot succeed in the market system. The responsibility to help those in need would have to be left with "neighbours" and charities (Regimbald: 1997).

Honourable Ernie Eves made it very clear to the people of Ontario that the aim of neo-conservatism is to dismantle the welfare state when he claimed that

> we live in a province whose potential is unlimited. We have skilled and hard-working people, abundant resources, and innovative entrepreneurs. We have every reason to expect a future that is better than today-with better jobs, greater prosperity, a better life for ourselves, and real hope for our children. But we can't get there with the size of government that has been built over the years. Government is bigger and more costly than it needs to be (Eves: 1996).

After seeing the similarities Ontario's neo-conservatism shares with the earlier versions of this new right ideology, the Common Sense Revolution is obviously not a new phenomena, but part of a right-wing shift in ideology and policies which has become dominant in many countries. In Ontario, Mike Harris was able to convince a majority of the population that there was an urgent need to reduce the cost of the social welfare programs because they resulted in dependencies and increased the debt. Along with this neo-conservative tone, Harris, like other political leaders elsewhere, attacked the labour unions and removed any progressive legislation so that, neo-conservatives have argued, the province could become more economically competitive. After refueling at the different stops it made along the way, neo-conservatism had finally arrived in Ontario.

Chapter III: Methodology

Within a few months of taking power in 1993, the Liberal federal government changed the political discourse it had maintained during the campaign and continued, instead, the same neo-conservative agenda that the former Conservative government had initiated. In fact, the Liberals abandoned the promise to make job creation their main focus and began a series of cutbacks, eliminating about forty-thousand public sector jobs and, under the Canada Health and Social Transfer, gave the provinces more control over social assistance, health and education, while reducing its portion of the cost sharing.

These federal neo-conservative polices gave the province of Ontario in 1995 the excuse and opportunity to carry through drastic social welfare reforms under the committed neo-conservative Mike Harris. As Barlow and Campbell point out:

> As a consequence, the most vulnerable people in our society have lost their safety net of last resort. In the grab for shares of the single shrinking pot of money, health and education programs, which have a much larger political constituency, will get the lion's share. Welfare will get only the scraps, if there are any (Barlow & Campbell: 1995: 153).

Soon after coming into power, Mike Harris announced a 21.6% cut to welfare recipients and introduced the "man-in-the-house" rule which affected single mothers[1]. I felt it to be very appropriate then for me to investigate the kind of impact these policies have on single mothers in Ontario.

In order to remain committed to my feminist political economy approach I ensured that the topic of my research and the subjects I chose allowed me to study how gender,

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[1] In 1995, the "man-in-the-house" policy was revised. In its reincarnation, the definition of spouse was no longer bound by a minimum period of cohabitation. This brought judgement to bear on single parents dwelling with a member of the opposite sex for any period of time. If deemed to be dwelling in a heterosexual relationship, social assistance could be denied.

class and race intersect in a specific historical context. For this reason I felt that looking at the situation of Aboriginal single parent women in a neo-conservative context would make it possible for me to accomplish the task. I also have personal ties to the topic for two reasons. First, I have felt driven to unmask the impact that neo-conservatism has had on the less fortunate. I believe that as a social researcher I have an obligation to gain valuable insight into a popular ideology that has much transformed the economic, political and social spheres of our lives. Second, my Aboriginal roots give me both the inspiration and the need to talk to my people about issues that affect their lives, and to ultimately serve them in their struggles in any way I can.

I agree with Hedican that social scientists "are in an advantageous position in addressing significant policy issues" (Hedican: 1995: 98-99). I intend to provide assistance and serve as an advocate for my people; I would feel honoured and privileged to do it.

Ethnographic research gave me the opportunity to become directly and personally involved in the community. An exclusively quantitative analysis would not have allowed me to gain the in-depth analysis of the daily experiences of the women I interviewed.

Different from a mainstream quantitative method, a feminist ethnographical method allows a "discursive space for the subjects of the ethnography and as such is simultaneously empowering and destabilizing" (Bell: 1993: 31). Ethnography is a type of research which requires that the ethnographer becomes involved with the people he/she is studying. Again, in contrast with most of the researchers who only engage in quantitative

methods, ethnographers associate with the people of their study over long periods of time and in different and more intimate contexts (Agar: 1996: 120).

In my specific research, the ethnographic method provided me with direct exposure to the experiences of the women who are impacted by neo-conservative policies. This method of social research also gave the voices of twenty Aboriginal single mothers a rightful place within my work.

I conducted semi-structured interviews in March and April of 1997. I chose London and Windsor as my two sites for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to specifically study urban Aboriginal women because I was interested in off-reserve individuals and their unique needs and concerns. Urban Aboriginals do not have the same amount and quality of resources that on-reserves individuals do. They rely more on the provincial government to cover their basic needs. However, they use programs and services offered by the Friendship Centres and some of these programs are funded by the federal government. Second, London and Windsor share many features tied to Aboriginal peoples: they have a large population of urban Aboriginal women, some of whom have migrated from the reserves, both cities have well-recognized Friendship Centres that provide support to their communities. Finally, London and Windsor belong to the same region of Ontario, therefore they share similar social and political forces, as both cities have experienced plant closures and/or downsizing.

I chose to do in-depth interviews with twenty single parent women. Ten of my sample live in London and the other reside in Windsor. Each of the women has at least one child under the age of five and is the sole caregiver of her children, which limits her

ability to find regular full-time employment. Appendix B gives a brief biography of the people interviewed: the names, ages and other particulars have been changed to protect their identity.

On June of 1996, I initiated informal contacts with some workers of the Native Friendship Centres and other Aboriginal organizations in London and Windsor. My sister helped greatly, as she has been actively involved in the Aboriginal community for a number of years. She gave me the names of some individuals whom she knew had been working with single mothers. I contacted those workers and they agreed to help me when I would be ready to do my fieldwork.

On February of 1997, I called back the workers who had agreed to help me and I provided them with a letter which stated my research problem and invited any aboriginal single mother to contact me. I also personally knew some aboriginal single mothers and they helped me to locate other potential interviewees. I visited the Friendship Centres of London and Windsor in a number of occasions and had the opportunity to talk to both workers and clients. Some of the clients were single mothers and agreed to be part of my sample, and they also volunteered to give my number to some single mothers whom they knew.

The average age of my sample is 26 years old, and the average number of children in each household is 1.85. Each of the women in my sample has Indian status; the majority of these women has regained status after the enactment of Bill C-31 in 1985, which will be discussed in chapter five of this thesis. The majority of the women have

lived in an urban setting for a minimum of five years. Nine of my sample has emigrated from their reserves, either for economic and/or other personal reasons.

In-depth interviews with this marginal group gave me a chance to uncover their suppressed living conditions and gave them a chance to tell their stories by revealing any issue, concern and fear they had. I originally went to the interviews with a well-prepared schedule of questions I felt needed to be addressed in order to adequately analyze the impact of neo-conservative policies on this specific group. However, it became evident that not only were these women prepared to answer these questions, but they added some of their own. Each interview therefore was unique and lasted from a minimum of twenty-five minutes to one hour. The interviews covered any changes in the women's income levels and what the source of that change was. We also discussed issues related to day-care facilities, health, quality and cost of housing, social services and whether they have been directly affected by either or both the provincial and federal cutbacks and restructuring. They brought up issues of increased stigma and how this increase has affected their emotional well-being. They also spoke of increased racist attitudes and behaviour they have perceived or experienced.

I was very fortunate to receive the valuable help and support from the staff of the two Friendship Centres. These people took some precious time from their very busy schedule to assist me in my research. They provided me with detailed information on their services and programs. They contacted me with the appropriate individuals to interview. I provided the staff with my research proposal and they circulated it. Their action stimulated interest and I was finally able to connect with the women who eventually agreed to speak with me.

This qualitative method of analysis permitted the women I interviewed to construct their social world, to be active in the formulation of themes and to provide me, the researcher, with what the meaning and consequence of neo-conservatism consist of for these women.

I believe that the informal structure of the interviews and my own aboriginal ethnic background helped me to establish a positive and trusting rapport with these women. However, I did encounter some initial hesitation from some of the interviewees who questioned my motive for choosing to study Aboriginal women. My revealing to them that I was partly Aboriginal seemed to me to gain their trust, although some of the women were correct to remind me that "the fact you don't look very Native and have an accent makes it possible for you to choose when to be Native and when not to be". They are absolutely right. As I explained in the Preface, my invisible identity has its own advantages, but also some disadvantages. I feel disadvantaged when I have to frequently prove my loyalty to either my Italian or Aboriginal community.

Chapter IV: Restructuring Canadian Society

One of the major components of neo-conservatism is the belief that governments should remove their intervention in the economic sector and cut their social spending. Proponents of new right ideology believe that the private sector and/or family members ought to provide for the needs of the less fortunate. Neo-conservatives also say that the necessary restraints endured now will ultimately bring about a fruitful future for society. The fact that after two decades of such rhetoric in most countries the bright prediction has not come true has not convinced the New Right that restructuring the welfare state might not be the answer to the current crisis. This chapter will reveal how neo- conservative policies have a disproportionately negative impact on women, though the neo-conservative discourse is often conferred with a gender-neutral tone.

This chapter will first investigate neo-conservative economic policies recently implemented in Canada and their impact on women. Secondly, the chapter will outline social policy reforms legislated by both the federal and Ontario provincial governments. Again, the impact of these reforms on women will be analyzed. Finally, this chapter will reveal how single mothers have been targeted by the Ontario social assistance reforms.

The literature and statistics discussed in this chapter are intended to demonstrate that neo-conservatism is not gender-neutral because women are the ones who are paying the highest price of a reduction in social services, either by increasing their unpaid labour or by becoming poorer (Bakker: 1996; Evans: 1996; Duffy and Benjamin: 1995; Armstong: 1996). In this neo-conservative climate, as Katherine Scott points out, governments are abandoning any notion of entitlement based on citizenship and women

who depend on governments to assist them are "being abandoned to struggle for survival at the margins of the economy and the polity" (Scott: 1996: 33).

Women and Neo-Conservative Economic Policies

Feminist economists argue that neo-conservative economic policies "while appearing to be gender-neutral, put a disproportionate burden on marginalized citizens" (Bakker: 1996:31). More importantly, they claim that these policies have "disproportionately harsh effects on women and the poor and, therefore, on human development overall" (Bakker: 1996:35), because they perpetuate the inequities between men and women in both the paid and the unpaid labour. As Bakker accurately argues, neo-conservative policy-makers assume that women will "take up the slack" which results from downsizing and restructuring (Bakker: 1996:35).

This expectation is rooted in the assumption that women's primary role is in the home, an ethic which assigns men to work in the public sphere and women in the private one (Evans: 1991: 176). This assumption has led to the marginalization of women in the labour market and the devaluation of their unpaid domestic labour (Evans: 1991: 177). Women are, in fact, more likely to work part-time and to interrupt their paid-labour participation to take care of their families.

When women have entered the paid-labour force their inclusion has not always meant a progress in their living conditions. In fact, Bakker relates most of the progress women have achieved in the workplace to the decline in men's own economic situation often resulting from neo-conservative policies (Bakker: 1996: 36). Any progress women have made is now threatened by neo-conservatism as policy changes implemented under

the new right ideology are dividing women within themselves and with men, in order to compete for the few available resources in the market (Bakker: 1996: 37).

Pay equity and employment equity legislation were introduced after successful pressuring by feminist and social activist groups to alleviate the structural barriers that the marginalized groups, including women, faced in the workplace. However, economic restructuring has undermined these progressive processes and increased competition among women and other vulnerable groups. New economic forces have dramatically changed the labour market by reducing the size of firms and polarizing the work force. Leach and Winson's examination of the long-term effects of economic restructuring in a Canadian context supports the claims that there has been a "growth of "nonstandard" work form - those that do not conform to full-time, full year work" (Leach and Winson: 1995: 347). As Leach and Winson point out, the emerging new types of employment are mostly non-unionized, have few fringe benefits and have low wages (1995: 347). Additionally, Leach and Winson argue that the economic restructuring has deteriorated the lives of workers, as restructuring has meant a drop in income earning and an increase in income inequality (1995: 348). With these changes pay equity and employment equity policies are not adopted as originally planned, because they are limited to a small diminishing proportion of the public sector (Fudge: 1996).

On December 13, 1995 the Ontario conservative government repealed both the Employment and the Pay Equity Acts, stating that this move would remove business-inhibiting employment legislation in Ontario. For the most part, the abolished employment legislation represented a genuine attempt to reduce gender inequities in the workplace.

The neo-conservative move to repeal these acts, by introducing Bill 26, Section J, will increase women's vulnerability and weaken their efforts to gain self-reliance by giving up any economic power and control they might have recently gained (Kitchen: 1997: 105).

The federal Liberal economic policies have been fixated with reducing the deficit. The strategy to achieve this goal has been to cut social spending and reform social security programs. Other progressive changes in the tax system which could lead to a more redistributive just society have not been considered. In fact, finance Minister Paul Martin has "left virtually untouched almost $40 billion of tax-delivered social spending" which benefit the business elite (Barlow & Campbell: 1995: 161). Moreover, the Liberals have done very little to create jobs, as they promised they would during the 1993 election campaign, and today the nation is still left with approximately the same mass unemployment as the day Jean Chretien became Prime Minister for the first time.

The Liberal agenda has been a corporate one and has not justly addressed the needs of women. In fact, the Liberal government terminated its funding to the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, reneged on creating 150,000 child-care spaces, and by ending the Canadian Assistance Plan transferred responsibility of funding for battered women's shelters to the provinces (Barlow & Campbell: 1995: 218).

In light of these recent events, Canadian neo-conservative economic policies cannot claim the gender neutrality professed by the neo-conservative leaders. While not directly causing gender inequities, neo-conservative policies perpetuate and even accelerate these inequities by reducing any progress women have achieved.

Canadian Social Policy Reforms

Similar to economic policies, Canadian social policies have also undergone a shift towards neo-conservatism. As mentioned, neo-conservatism involves, on the economic level, a minimal intervention by the government. On the social-moral level, however, neo-conservatism demands that governments maintain a strong role in the regulation of the morality of society.

Neo-conservative proponents recognize that the success of their economic agenda cannot depend only on economic policies. Leach argues, in fact, that the success of neo-conservatism depends "largely on establishing a hegemonic concept of reality in the sphere of the family" (1997:35). By recognizing the interdependence of economic policies and social morality, the New Right identifies the family as the central institution of society. The only acceptable definition of the family for the New Right is the patriarchal, nuclear one, where men are the breadwinners and women the dependent spouses (Leach: 1997: 36). The New Right sees, in fact, the moral decline of our society to be caused by alternative forms to the ideal nuclear family. In turn, according to the New Right, the moral decline of society is one of the major causes of the economic decline, as governments have to spend on welfare programs (Leach: 1997: 37). Hence, the need for neo-conservatives to demand that governments regulate the morality of society.

In practice, the social component of neo-conservatism is characterized by a return to the traditional familial ideology of the bread-winner husband and economically dependent wife (Teghtsoonian: 1995: 417). Additionally, neo-conservative social policies have accomplished a radical transformation of social rights by redefining and limiting the

power and rights of citizens. Access to state operated social services and programs is no longer an entitlement of citizenship. Access to health care, affordable housing and basic income can no longer be taken for granted. As Janine Brodie explains, recently implemented social policy reforms have ended Canada's commitment towards social assistance entitlement based on need (Brodie: 1994: 57; see also Little: 1995).

The federal Liberal government's decision to dismantle the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP) and to replace it with the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) is a good example of a change in social policy which ignores the specific issues of women.

> The CHST as it now stands has every potential to worsen the social and economic circumstances of low-income women in Canada, and so to increase the relative inequality of Canadian women as a group (Jackman: 1995: 373).

The Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), although not perfect, ensured that women received some national standards and funding for services such as legal aid, subsidized child-care, health care and counseling programs. Together with the dismantling of the CAP came the uncertainty of a long-term commitment to the programs which are needed by women, as each province faces additional financial hardship caused by the termination of the CAP. Here are some of the specific challenges that provinces faced in 1996 alone:

- Newfoundland lost $73 million.
- PEI lost $17 million.
- Nova Scotia lost $118 million.
- New Brunswick lost $94 million.
- Quebec lost $1.1 billion.
- Ontario lost $1.4 billion.
- Manitoba lost $139 million.
- Saskatchewan lost $123 million.
- Alberta lost $330 million.
- British Columbia lost $471 million.
  (Barlow & Campbell: 1995: 155).

The accessibility and quality of welfare programs which are necessary for the well-being of women, especially for low-income and single mothers, now rest on the hands of individual provinces, which now have arbitrary power to promote or ignore gender-specific needs and issues. The promotion of women's programs has consequently become particularly vulnerable in this neo-conservative climate. Katherine Scott points out that welfare reforms are not only reminiscent of the nineteenth century, but they also "may result in a roll back of social citizenship rights in the name of equality" (1996:29).

The gender-neutrality discourse endorsed by neo-conservatives ignores the fact that women's experiences in both the public and private spheres of society are constrained by structural inequalities which are connected to their expected role as care-givers. Neo-conservative policies fail to acknowledge these barriers faced by women and this failure prevents them from implementing policies that take into account the burdens faced by women in an unequal gendered-based system. Consequently, neo-conservative policies will only decrease a woman's chance of having desirable options and achieving a status more equal to men.

In Ontario social assistance programs came under scrutiny prior to the Progressive Conservative (PC) government of Mike Harris. In their first two years of governing, the Ontario New Democratic Party (NDP) attempted an attack on poverty by investing money and effort in the welfare system. The devolution of the Canada Assistance Plan and the severe economic recession of the early 1990s influenced New Democratic Premier Bob Rae to cut back his earlier investment on progressive social assistance policies. In the last two years of their mandate, the New Democrats concentrated on moving welfare

recipients into employment and initiated a program of "enhanced verification" to counter claims that there was a high rate of welfare fraud in Ontario (Moscovitch: 1997: 83).

The redefinition of social citizenship originally planted by the later part of the New Democratic government was pursued by the Tories with tremendous enthusiasm. The Conservative agenda clearly outlined in the Common Sense Revolution document fully intends to do away with a social safety net which recognizes that, as citizens, people in Ontario have a right to depend on the government to meet their needs when the market system has failed them (Moscovitch: 1997: 90).

Shortly after coming into power, Premier Mike Harris implemented neo-conservative policies which totally redefined who is entitled to receive benefits in Ontario; the 'deserving poor' as it were. The criterion of need was no longer followed by the Tories as "benefits were reduced for the able-bodied unemployed and for single parents since, in the view of the provincial Conservatives, they are not deserving" (Moscovitch: 1997: 85).

Classifying single mothers as a group not deserving of assistance is not a novel phenomenon, and one not restricted to a neo-conservative discourse. In fact, in Canada single mothers' eligibility for social assistance has had shifting conditions and terms attached to it (Evans: 1996: 151). In Ontario, public policy has "never viewed the single mother as either a mother or worker" (Evans: 1996: 153). Single unwed mothers were included in the Ontario Mothers Allowance policy in 1955, although they were considered the least worthy of all categories of mothers and have had to constantly prove that they are both morally and economically deserving of their allowance (Little: 1994: 236).

Feminist scholars have connected the stigma attached to single mothers to the failure to recognize and/or value the unpaid labour women do (Evans: 1996: 164). As Diana Pearce states, "as long as we accept the denigration of women who take care of dependent children as 'dependent', and as long as the welfare problem is termed one of 'dependency', then the policy choices are constrained to a set of equally impossible choices for the single mother" (Pearce, as cited in Evans: 1996: 165). Patricia Evans suggests that welfare policies have to support both paid and unpaid labour, and have to ensure adequate levels of social assistance benefits, while promoting and creating training for 'good' jobs (1996:167).

While the stigmatization of single mothers is not restricted to neo-conservatism, this new right ideology has accelerated their de-moralization. As explained earlier, neo-conservatives view forms which deviate from the ideal nuclear family as moral deficiencies of society, and one of the major causes of economic decline. Not surprisingly then, neo-conservative policies have redefined the eligibility of single mothers in Ontario. Another step to reshaping the social assistance system was the new Eligibility and Entitlement Initiatives manual given to social workers for detecting, at their own discretion, if a welfare recipient was living in a spousal relationship which would result in the termination of benefits. Under the new rules, eligibility for social assistance has become very tight and harsh (Moscovitch: 1997: 90).

In order to clearly show how the Conservative provincial government has redefined social citizenship and attacked the most vulnerable people in doing so, the following list of events which occurred in their first year of office is helpful:

- July 1995: 2 billion dollars in cuts announced.
- August 1995: Harris warns municipalities of 20% cuts.
- September 1995: Minister of Social and Community Services David Tsubouchi issues a welfare diet of $3 per day for welfare recipients to live on.
- September 1995: spouse-in-the-house rule reinstated, which would cut single mothers off welfare if it is alleged they live with a man.
- October 1995: 21.6% cut to welfare rates.
- October 1995: 390 co-op and non-profit housing are canceled.
- November 1995: child-care subsidies eliminated; pay equity rolled back.
- December 1995: Employment Equity Act repealed.
- June 1996: Ontario Works introduced (workfare).
  (Dare: 1997: 20-26)

Evidently the neo-conservative agenda of the current government of Ontario has transformed the welfare system. Presently in Ontario, welfare recipients are experiencing a large reduction in their incomes, an increase in the rules applied to their eligibility, and with the workfare project, are being forced to take any job to receive benefits. For women in Ontario, in particular for those who are poor and are members of a visible minority group, the future does not look bright; the social safety net they heavily depend on to sustain themselves and the limited protection women who work outside the home enjoyed are disintegrating.

Targeting Single Mothers in Ontario

In the spring of 1997, the National Council of Welfare released a report on the poverty profile for the year of 1995. In this publication the members of the Council commented that "the poverty statistics for 1995 turned out to be shockingly high" and that "the number of poor Canadians was higher in 1995 than it was during the depths of the last two recessions" (National Council of Welfare: 1997). The statistics showed that women have higher poverty rates than men; women's poverty rate was 18.2% and men's was 14.3%. Moreover, the statistics showed that as in previous years the highest rate of

poverty belonged to single mothers with children under the age of 18. Below, figure 1

shows, in fact, that in 1995 57.2% of those single mothers lived in poverty in Canada,

compared to 33.2% of unattached men under the age of 65.

Poverty Rates By Family Type, 1995
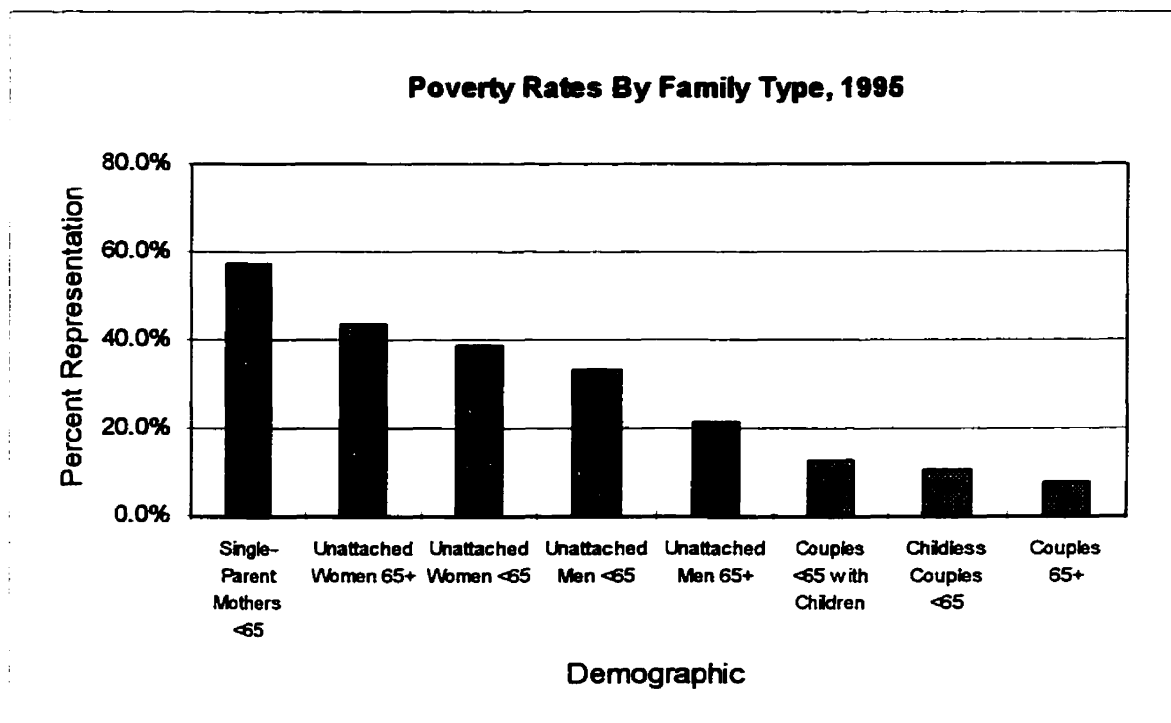
Figure 1: Poverty rates by family type, 1995.
Source: <u>Poverty Profile 1995</u>, National Council on Welfare, 1997.

Figure 2 suggests that the poverty rate for single mothers increases with the

number of children but decreases once the youngest child reaches school age, since

mothers are more likely to join the labour market once their children are old enough to

attend school.

Poverty for Single-Parent Mothers Under 65, by Number and Age Group of Children Under 18, 1995
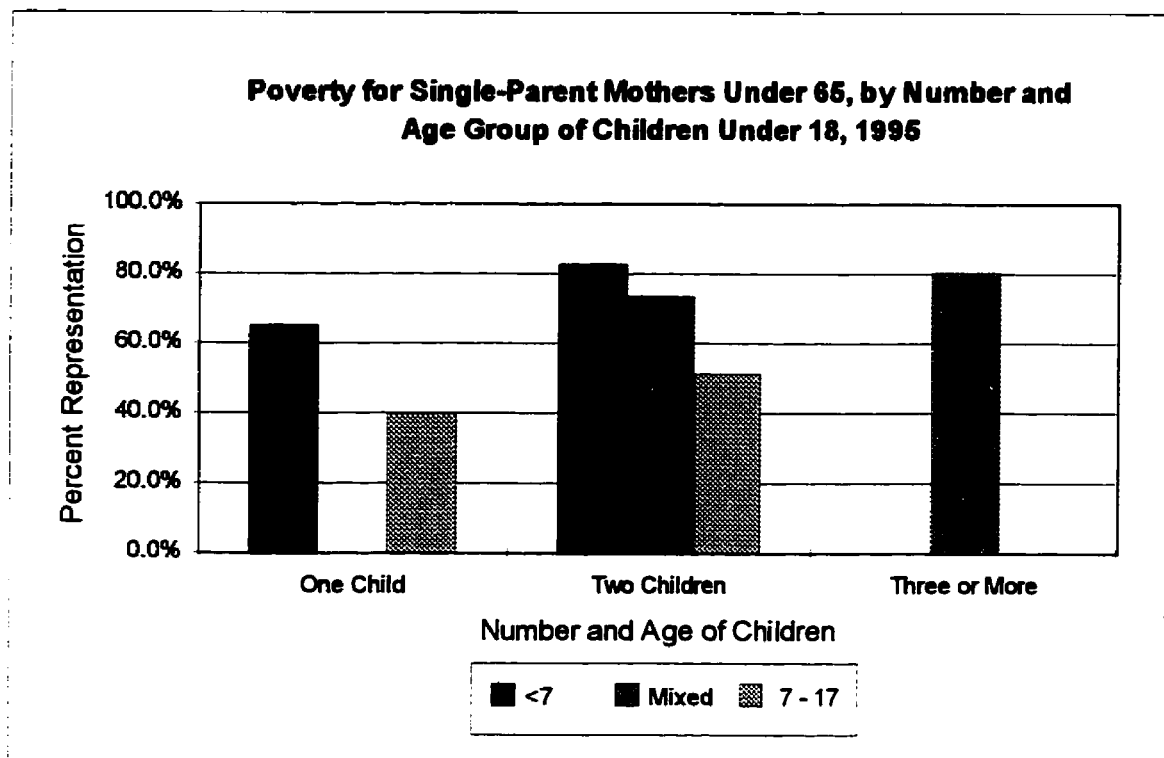
Figure 2: Poverty rates for single-parent mothers under 65
Source: Poverty Profile 1995, National Council on Welfare, 1997

The average income for poor single mothers under the age of 65 with children under the age of 18 was $14,696 in 1995 and approximately 70% of their total income was provided by government programs. In comparison, transfer payments provided 46% of the total income of poor men under the age of 65. Evidently then single mothers rely very heavily on government's assistance to meet the basic needs of their family. In 1995, poor single mothers lost $318 in their yearly transfer payments, a loss that "may seem small in absolute terms", but "is relatively large when compared to the low incomes of poor Canadians" (National Council of Welfare: 1997)

Governments continually promise to attack child poverty, however as the National Council of Welfare reports, the overall poverty rate for children rose from 19.1% in 1994

to 20.5% in 1995, and the proportion of poor children living with single mothers has substantially grown from 1980 to 1995. The National Council of Welfare stated in its report that it was concerned about the emerging decline in the transfer payments provided by governments, and that if these trends continued it would be impossible "to mount any effective campaign against poverty" (National Council of Welfare: 1997). They had hoped that their report would serve as a wake-up call to governments to be more concerned about the impacts of further cuts in welfare programs on poor Canadians.

In Ontario 19.3% of all families have single-parent mothers, according to Statistics Canada of 1991, and the National Council of Welfare reported that the majority of sole-support mothers receive social assistance benefits, under the Ontario Mothers Allowance or OMA (National Council of Welfare: 1997). Today, the OMA is narrowing the definition of entitlement and reducing the transfer payments to single mother because of pressures to reduce the deficit. As a result then, single mothers are relying more upon private welfare agencies and are "under increasing pressure to prove their financial and moral worthiness in order to receive public and private welfare" (Little: 1995: 103).

The federal government elimination of the Canada Assistance Plan and the introduction, in its place, of the Canada Health and Social Transfer have ended a universal family allowance plan for single mothers (Little: 1995: 103). This move has increased the vulnerability of single mothers who can no longer depend on the federal government to ensure that provinces support them and view their allowances as a right, not as a privilege (Little: 1995: 102).

In October of 1995, the Ontario Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris realized its electoral promise to attack welfare recipients by cutting their benefits by 21.6%. Single mothers were not spared this alarming blow to their income. In Ontario, under the new Conservative rules, a single mother with two children now receives a maximum of $1,239 a month or $14,868 a year, which is below the poverty line of $22,000 for a family of three, as defined by Campaign 2000 (Kitchen: 1997).

The Conservative government also targeted single mothers by reintroducing the "spouse-in-the-house" rule, a sexist regulation which implies that a woman who lives with a man is dependent on him. This legislation shows the sexist nature of neo-conservatism, because it denies assistance to women for the sole reason that they are living with a man, regardless of the fact that he may not contribute financially. This legislation also has a negative impact on the children because it jeopardizes their entitlement to benefits, especially if the welfare worker presumes that the mother is living with a man. Ultimately then, this discriminatory legislation will increase the risk of poverty of both single mothers and their children.

The right wing ideological shift of our present system is increasingly denying the dignity of single mothers in Ontario by:

- classifying them as the undeserving poor;
- not longer guaranteeing their right to welfare on sole economic need;
- attaching some retraining conditions (in Ontario it is not clear if workfare projects will be forced upon single mothers and may include single mothers with children over the age of three);
- reducing their benefits;
- increasing policing and moral regulation of welfare recipients
  (Little: 1997).

Although neo-conservative policies may appear to be gender neutral, they do have a disproportionately negative impact on women, and especially on single mothers, since these women rely on government assistance more than men. These women have been particularly targeted and punished for their poor conditions in the recent neo-conservative era. Neo-conservatism has not tried to realistically understand the root of the inability of single mothers to improve their economic and social situation: unavailable affordable day-care, housing and scarce number of flexible and permanent employment opportunities. Instead, neo-conservatives have found it more convenient to blame the victims for their situation and made them the scapegoat of the rest of the population.

Feeling as though they were the scapegoat was, in fact, a familiar and important experience shared by most of the women in my sample. One of them, Stacey, commented to me that:

> "I've been on welfare for a few years now and I've seen the changes. For example, I noticed it's common to hear politicians saying that because too many are on welfare and because some abuse it, the country is in this big debt. I don't understand too much about politics, but I think there are other reasons. But they only talk about welfare, like it's only our fault".

Stacey's view was shared by Rose, who reported to me that she often hears comments which imply that most of the nation's economic problems are caused by an overgenerous welfare system. As she said to me, "it's not only the government. I can't even count how many times I hear even my friends say, 'getting welfare is easy', or 'that is good money'. I don't know where they get this idea it's good money, because it is not!".

Ultimately, scapegoating and blaming the victims for their conditions affect people's self-esteem. Wendy, another woman I interviewed, told me that:

"after hearing people saying that it's the welfare people's fault that the cuts had to be done, or saying that I shouldn't have had kids if I couldn't have afforded it, well, how do you think it makes me feel? I almost start to believe that I must be stupid or irresponsible. That is not right. It sure doesn't help me to go out and look for a job. If I am stupid, lazy or irresponsible, like they say, who is going to want me?"

Like Wendy, Pat told me that "one of the things I hate the worst about being on assistance is that many people look down at us and it almost makes me feel ashamed that I can't be working right now."

Monica, an eighteen years old woman, also feels "like dirt, that's exactly how I feel sometimes. I can almost understand when it's rich people looking down at me, but when it's even politicians who are supposed to care for all people, it really makes me feel angry, but also ashamed. I don't like feeling this way, but I do."

Chapter V: A History of Aboriginal Policies

The previous chapters have emphasized the structural barriers which limit Canadian women from obtaining the same degree of economic and social achievement that men enjoy in this country. Chapter two of this thesis argued that not all women share the same type of oppression and inequality. For poor women of colour the interplay of race, gender and class makes their experiences particularly complex in a patriarchal and white-dominated society.

Aboriginal women of Canada occupy a distinct position in society; they are women, members of a visible minority and have a special legal status as "Indians". Linda Gerber analyzed the situation of Aboriginal women using the Canadian Census data of 1986, and found that this group is the most disadvantaged in Canada (1990). She concluded, using an exchange theory perspective, that "native females suffer multiple jeopardy on the basis of a number of objective indicators of social and economic well-being" (Gerber: 1990). This reality is in contradiction with the publicized view of Canada as a nation of fairness and equality (Royal Commission Report: 1996). Why is it that Aboriginal people, and especially Aboriginal women, face such high incidences of poverty, illness, violence, poor housing conditions, unemployment and incarceration?

A Political Economy Perspective of Aboriginal Peoples

This chapter will argue that "grinding poverty, alcoholism and social conflict were not always part of Indian life. Prior to European discovery, the peoples of the Americas were proud and self-reliant" (Purich: 1986: 13).

Following a political economy perspective, this chapter rejects the cultural-deterministic explanation of the Chicago School, which views the problem of Aboriginal peoples mostly related to their lack of assimilation with a white culture (Park: 1950; Nagler: 1975). A political economy perspective of Aboriginal peoples emphasizes, instead, the "changing material circumstances which shape and are shaped by aboriginal life experiences" (Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 12).

This approach is concerned with class relations which shape people's opportunities. It also recognizes that people are active subjects who "make choices that are both unique to their particular circumstances and indicative of their positions as boys and girls, men and women, and members of particular racial and ethnic formations" (Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 13).

A political economy perspective, then, views the unique situation of Aboriginal peoples as one of both domination over and resistance by this group. Unlike other explanations, a political economy perspective on Aboriginal peoples emphasizes the transformation of native life, and integrates race, class and gender issues in its analysis (Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 14).

This chapter will study the root of the "Indian problem" by looking at the past, so that we can gain an understanding of the present relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. In order to obtain a clear picture of the current situation of Aboriginal women, each transformation will be tied to its impact on the women of the First Peoples of Canada.

First, the chapter will briefly describe the lives of Aboriginal peoples before the arrival of Europeans. It will dispel the stereotype of the "uncivilized savages", and look at the nature of traditional Aboriginal gender relations. Second, the chapter will analyze the period of early contact between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans. This period was based on cooperation and partnership between the two distinct cultures. Third, the chapter will focus on the period from mid 1800s to 1970, which was mostly characterized by domination over Aboriginal peoples. Finally, the chapter will move to the period from 1970 to the present: a time for renewal and uncertainties. This last period is characterized by an increased political struggle by Aboriginal people. However, within a neo-conservative context, Aboriginals face regressive policies and a resurgence of racist attitudes.

Aboriginal Life prior to Colonization

Before colonization, Canada was inhabited by a distinct people, who were divided into separate nations and constituted approximately fifty different tribes. They each had their own language, customs, religion and governmental organizations (Purich: 1986: 21-22). The Iroquois tribe, for example, had a well developed formalized constitution, contrary to the belief that Aboriginal peoples lacked political skills and organization. The Iroquois's political structure was based on consensus and democracy among all members of the tribe (Purich: 1986: 22).

Many Western feminists assume that women's oppression is universal and separated from class and race relations. According to feminist anthropologists, women in pre-capitalist societies were not subjected to the same form of oppression that Western

women were. In fact, it has been argued that Aboriginal women had more relative autonomy prior to colonization (Leacock: 1980).

Aboriginal gender relations, based on the kinship system, were mutual and reciprocal and "based upon the common ownership of the means of production" (Bourgeault: 1991). Patricia Monture-Angus points out that women had important responsibilities in First Nations societies (1995:241). Particularly in Iroquois tribes, women held the right to select and dispose of chiefs, they supervised field labour, had the care of the treasury and helped in settling disputes (Monture-Angus: 1995: 241).

Patriarchy, as a specific form of male domination, was not present in most Aboriginal societies. Any relation of domination that did exist was restricted to the collective appropriation of labour around certain tasks, and not transferred into other spheres of tribal societies (Bourgeault: 1991: 90). Therefore, some Western feminists claim that patriarchy is a form of oppression shared by all women in any given society is not valid with respect to traditional Aboriginal life. Any differences in the division of labour that existed were qualitative and not quantitative and did not translate into relations of power and exploitation (Bourgeault: 1991: 93).

The relations of cooperation between the sexes in Aboriginal societies changed after the arrival of Europeans. This transformation did not occur immediately, instead it went through different phases, reflecting the kind of relationship which came to exist between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals.

The Period of Early Contact

The early period of colonization of Canada covers approximately three hundred years, from the 1500s to the mid 1800s. This period "emphasized the securing of resources, primarily furs, and the strategic occupation of land for trade routes" (Dickinson & Wotherspoon: 1992: 408) by Europeans. During this phase, Europeans viewed Aboriginals as allies for both military and trade purposes. These two distinct groups exchanged goods, bartered and created bonds between each other. "Indians' labour power was valued for providing knowledge and skills related to land and its resources" (Dickinson & Wotherspoon: 1992: 408). Cooperation, not conflict, was the theme of this period, and cooperation was formalized in treaties and in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 (Royal Commission Report: 1996).

The treaties constituted a recognition of Aboriginals as sovereign peoples and as nations. However, it is now recognized by Aboriginals that Europeans did not totally view the treaties as full recognition of Aboriginal sovereignty. The treaties were designed by Europeans "to facilitate the use and transfer of land as required for colonial purposes" (Dickinson & Wotherspoon: 1992: 409).

For Aboriginals the treaties and the Royal Proclamation of 1763 meant a commitment by both parties to treat each other with respect and cooperation and share the land that is now Canada (Royal Commission Report: 1996). It was with a sense of betrayal that in later years Aboriginal peoples realized that Europeans did not value the signed documents in the same fashion.

For Aboriginal women, the early period of colonization marked the beginning of a change in gender relations within their societies and with non-Aboriginal men (Bourgeault: 1991: 94). In order for Europeans to successfully obtain the Aboriginal labour power in the fur trade, they had to transform the kinship system which was based on cooperation and communal ownership. As Bourgeault argues: "Relations of exploitation had to take precedence over relations of cooperation"(Bourgeault: 1991: 94).

Aboriginal men were gradually assigned leadership and authority in all aspects of their communities. Treaties were signed between European men and Aboriginal men "thereby undermining traditional relationships of accountability"(Bourgeault: 1991: 95).

However, European traders soon recognized that Aboriginal women could be used for physical survival and to develop ties with Aboriginal communities. Eventually, European fur-traders established unions with Aboriginal women. These "tender ties" were not merely private relationships, but also public. They enabled Europeans to establish important ties with Aboriginal communities (Van Kirk: 1980).

The unions between Aboriginal women and European men were not based on an equal basis. Aboriginal women had to become accustomed to the patriarchal system that European women were already subjected to (Van Kirk: 1980). Moreover, the children born out of these unions provided a cheap labour force for European traders (Bourgeault: 1991: 106). Ultimately the relationship between Aboriginal women and European men led to the beginning of a class stratification among Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal men acquired leadership and control within their communities, and "half-breed" women eventually acquired more status over pure Indian women. As Bourgeault says, "Thus

class and race divisions were imposed on Indian women through dependency relationships with European men and under the influence of colonial relations of domination"(Bourgeault: 1991: 109-110).

The period between 1500s and mid 1800s was, then, characterized by a peculiar form of cooperation between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. For Aboriginal women, however, this period already meant a radical transformation in their relations with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal men. Gender relations were no longer based on equality, but rather on exploitation, and this escalated after the mid 1800s.

1850s to 1970: A Period of Domination

In the 19th century the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Europeans shifted from semi-equal to one mainly founded on domination over the original inhabitants of Canada.

Wotherspoon and Satzewich argue that the shift from mercantilism to an industrial capitalism profoundly altered the nature of the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals (1993:21). The fur trade economy declined and the emergence of industrial capitalism required large acquisition and use of lands. Consequently, the policy established during the early period of colonization, which recognized aboriginal title to land "came to constitute a political-legal obstacle to the development of an industrial mode of production"(Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 21). Europeans not longer needed the cooperation and skills of Aboriginal peoples, and the latter began to be seen as impediments to progress (Royal Commission Report: 1996).

Overpowering policies of assimilation became predominant by the mid 1800s and continued until the late part of the 20th century. These policies were based on an ideology which proclaimed European superiority and maintained racist assumptions of Aboriginal culture. The era of domination was "marked by a conscious attempt to destroy the Indian identity and replace it with the identity of the "good civilized Canadian"" (Purich: 1986: 32).

Racism became incorporated into the state apparatus through legislation intended to assimilate Aboriginals into the mainstream culture. The language and content used within the 19th and 20th century legislation reflected the racist attitudes that the European state officials and missionaries held towards Aboriginals. The 1857 Act for the Gradual Civilization of the Indian Tribe and the 1859 Civilization and Enfranchisement Act portrayed Aboriginals as uncivilized human beings who needed to be taught by Europeans the civilized culture (Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 16).

Missionaries described Aboriginals as being,

in many ways like children. At any time they will act just so foolishly; thankless beyond measure, strangers to the truth and right, depraved and filthy in the extreme; they typify man having reached the lowest level of the human ladder (Kellough, as cited in Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 16).

After dispossessing the Aboriginals of their land for the development of capitalism, the Canadian State wished to resocialize Aboriginals into the European culture. In 1880, Prime Minister John A. MacDonald clearly announced that the Canadian government's policy and goal was "to do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion" (MacDonald, as quoted in the Royal Commission Report: 1996).

Again, several years later, the Minister of Indian Affairs Walter Harris stated that "the cultural goal of our Indian policy is the integration of the Indians into the general life and economy of the country" (Harris, as quoted in Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 29).

The racist expressions of the state officials in the 19th century "were not formed in isolation from other forces" (Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 29). In fact, they were an integral part of the new capitalist relations of production. This new system demanded that the Aboriginal communal system had to be changed within a capitalist society to a class-based one (Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 29).

The Indian Act, first enacted in 1876, was "a consolidation of various statutes. The essential thrust of the Indian Act was to make Indians ward of the state" (Purich: 1986: 126). This piece of legislation restricted personal liberties of Aboriginals, defined who was legally considered an Indian and outlawed traditional Aboriginal customs and religious practices (Purich: 1986: 126). Moreover, through the opening of the residential schools, Aboriginal children were removed from their families and placed in institutions which prohibited them of their language and customs (Purich: 1986: 132). The results of the mandated residential schools included the end of bonds between many children and their families and nations (Royal Commission Report: 1996).

Aboriginal women were particularly affected by the racist policies of domination and assimilation implemented during this period. In addition to the racism which Aboriginal men experienced, Aboriginal women also faced a sexist form of oppression.

Section 12 (1)(b) of the Indian Act terminated the status of Indian for Aboriginal women who married non-Indian men. This section of the Act prevented Aboriginal

women from remaining in their communities, possessing any land on the reserves, and taking part in the political and social aspects of their communities.

There is some academic debate concerning the motive behind the origin of this section of the Indian Act. Some claim that, while sexist in its implications, the policy was aimed to protect reserve-land from white men (Weaver, as cited in Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 31). Others have argued that this policy was both racist and sexist, because it was based on both the assumption that Aboriginals were not capable of managing their own affairs (racism), and that Aboriginal women should not be allowed to own and transmit property (Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 31).

Regardless of its original intention, section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act ultimately divided and destroyed Aboriginal communities. Monture-Angus argues that this particular section of the Act " is a significant source, if not the primary source, of the opposition that exists between Aboriginal men and women (at least in formal political spheres)"(Monture-Angus: 1995: 182). This discriminatory policy altered the traditional Aboriginal institutions from a cooperative to a non-democratic and hierarchical government institution (Monture-Angus: 1995: 182).

The next section of this chapter will, in fact, deal with current issues and concerns held by both Aboriginal men and Aboriginal women.

Period of Renewal

Beginning in the 1970s, Aboriginal issues came to the centre of Canadian political stage. Resistance to assimilation and domination began with the release of the White

Paper in 1969 by Minister of Indian Affairs Jean Chretien of the federal Liberal government.

The White Paper proposed to do away with special status for Indians, offering instead equality. It also wanted to transfer responsibility for Aboriginal issues from the federal government to the provinces and bands. Moreover, it called for a termination of the recognition of Aboriginal title. Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau himself argued in favour of the White Paper and stated that

> It's inconceivable I think that in a given society, one section of the society have a treaty with the other section of the society... We can't recognize aboriginal rights because no society can be built on historical "might-have-beens" (Trudeau, as quoted in Purich: 1986: 52).

Aboriginals quickly voiced their opposition to the proposals set out by the White Paper. Correctly, they perceived the document as a threat to their collective rights as distinct peoples. They also saw the White Paper as another attempt to assimilate them into the mainstream culture. In response to the challenge, Aboriginals began to mobilize themselves politically and make their concerns and issues known to the rest of the Canadian population (Purich: 1986: 52).

From the opposition toward the Meech Lake accord for its oversight of Aboriginal entitlements to the confrontation at Oka over a contested land-entitlement claim, Aboriginal issues increasingly attracted the attention of non-Aboriginals. The government could no longer remain unaccountable for its lack of responsibility towards Aboriginal peoples.

In the recent past, Aboriginal women have also become more politically active and have voiced their own specific issues as both women and Aboriginals. One of the most

important and controversial issues taken up by Aboriginal women was the amendment to section 12 (1)(b) the Indian Act.

After oppositions from inside and outside of aboriginal organizations, Bill C-31 was enacted, enabling Aboriginal women to recover their Indian Status. The opposition to Bill C-31 came from some Aboriginal men's organizations and also from some Aboriginal women. Both groups portrayed the amendment as another imposition by White society on First Nations (Krosenbrink-Golisen: 1993: 361). The opposition from Aboriginal men, however, has also been argued to be an example of the gender inequality currently present in Aboriginal communities, which resulted from the patriarchy inherited by colonization (Krosenbrink:Golisen: 1993: 361).

Monture-Angus argues that Bill C-31, while allowing Aboriginal women access to band membership, still contains some discrimination by leaving the second generation cut-off intact (Monture-Angus: 1995: 183). Gender discrimination still exists under Bill C-31, because the grandchildren of women who "married-out" cannot be registered as Indians, while grandchildren of men who married non-Aboriginal women can (Monture-Angus: 1995: 183).

In addition to the persistent gender bias, Bill C-31 does not automatically permit Aboriginal women access to the band's resources. The ultimate acceptance of these women lies with band councils. Some bands are still reluctant to give their permission, because of scarce resources in the reserves, and also because of some sexism which exists in some male-oriented aboriginal communities (Wotherspoon & Satzewich: 1993: 31-32). this particular issue affects some of the women whom I interviewed. As I discussed in

chapter two, the majority of the women in my sample gained (or regained) their status since the enactment of Bill C-31. However, some of the women did not have access to land on reserves and/or experienced some reluctance to acceptance from their band's councils or residents.

Jane, Debbie and Anne obtained their Indian status in 1989, after their mothers regained their own status. Jane told me that "it felt kind of weird. I always knew I was an Aboriginal, in my heart I always knew, but when I was actually able to show it with the card they gave me, it's almost as if I was born again." Debbie also felt as "being born again, because some people used to say to me that I was not a real Native, because I had no status. Now they can't say that anymore". As Anne told me: "I remember that when we went to get our status back, some of the people at the band's office were not too pleased. I think maybe they were afraid too many people would try to get their status and there wouldn't be enough resources for everybody."

Clearly, Aboriginal socio-political and economic life has moved from a period of independence, prior to colonization, to one of domination. Most recently it has shifted back to becoming a more integral part of the Canadian society. The Royal Commission report on Aboriginal Peoples of 1996 recommended to the governments of Canada that a new relationship with Aboriginal peoples is necessary. This renewed relationship will have to be built on respect, sharing, recognition and responsibility (Royal Commission Report: 1996). Table 1 illustrates the financial strategy proposed by the Commission:

Table 1: The strategy for breaking the cycle of dependency
Source: The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996

	2001	Additional allocation in the year 2016
Structural Measures		($ millions)
1. Tribunal and treaty commissions	50	50
2. Nation rebuilding	50	0
3. Nation governments	50	425
4. Land claim settlements	0	1,000
Total for structural measures	150	1,475
Social and economic measures		
Healing		
5. Education, youth and culture	300	150
6. Health care	100	(450)
7. Social services	100	(425)
8. Justice	25	(325)
Economic opportunity and living conditions		
9. Economic development	350	225
10. Income transfers	0	(250)
11. Housing and infrastructure	400	350
12. Human resource development	150	425
Total for social and economic measures	1,425	(300)
Government revenue gains	-	(1,550)
Overall total	1,575	(375)

The response from the federal Liberal government however, has not been positive. The Minister of Indian Affairs Ron Irwin quickly rejected the Report's recommendation for more financial investment towards Aboriginal self-determination. He claimed that under the reality of fiscal restraints, it would be unlikely that the finance Minister would approve of more spending on Aboriginal programs (Irwin, as quoted in the Globe and Mail: November 1996).

The reluctance of the federal government to follow the recommendations of the Royal Commission Report has to be looked at within the context of the current neo-conservative ideology. Today Aboriginal peoples, in fact, face new challenges as a result of neo-conservatism. The next section of this chapter will deal with the most recent policies adopted by neo-conservative political leaders that represent Canada's governments method of dealing with Aboriginal issues.

Aboriginal Issues within a Neo-Conservative Era

Murray Angus has argued that aboriginal people will be the most victimized from cuts in government spending because they are already a marginalized group in Canada (1991:23). Furthermore, Angus points out that "given that they were among the last to benefit when the welfare state was expanding it is not unreasonable to expect they will also be among the first to suffer when the welfare state contracts'(Angus: 1991: 23).

The former federal government ruled by the Progressive Conservative Party initiated many attempts to reduce its spending and responsibility over Aboriginal programs. The Nielsen Report was the first example of such attempts and it laid the groundwork for cuts (Angus: 1991: 25). The report documented that cuts were necessary because of demographic changes in the Aboriginal population. If the government proceeded with the same type of expenditures, the report claimed, the government's spending would dramatically rise. Thus, in response to domestic and foreign pressures to reduce the overall government's spending, the Nielsen Report recommended that the federal government restructure Aboriginal policies and programs (Angus: 1991: 27).

The most significant proposal suggested by the Nielsen report was that about 35% of the spending was "discretionary", thus implying that the government was not legally and/or morally obliged to meet many of the needs of Aboriginal peoples. In addition to the discretionary 35% that could be cut, if politically acceptable, the Report also suggested that some of the responsibility towards Aboriginals could be transferred to the provinces (Angus: 1991: 26).

The Nielsen Report also called for the dismantling of the Department of Indian Affairs and a new funding structure that would give resources directly to the bands, rather than to individual Native Organizations (Angus: 1991: 27).

The Progressive Conservative federal government under the leadership of Brian Mulroney, while not directly implementing the proposals of the report, cut some program expenditures in economic development, comprehensive claims and human resources development (Angus: 1991: 29). Moreover, the Progressive Conservative government also did not take into consideration inflation in its expenditures, therefore resulting in less money given to recipients. In 1990, the federal government also reduced core funding to aboriginal organizations, such as the Assembly of First Nations and Native Friendship Centres- the details of the latter will be specifically dealt with in the next chapter.

Angus is skeptical of the readiness of Canadian governments to negotiate self-government with Aboriginals. While self-government could benefit Aboriginals, by allowing them to determine their own future, it might terminate the Canadian state's present obligations towards Aboriginals for past injustices (Angus: 1991: 20).

Ovide Mercredi, the Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, shares the same concern of Angus. Mercredi is skeptical of the Canadian government's own motive to promote self-government (Mercredi: 1993: 107-131). Without a strong financial investment to aid Aboriginals in their road to self-government, it is unlikely that Aboriginal communities would succeed (Mercredi: 1993: 131).

The most recent actions taken by the Minister of Indian Affairs Ron Irwin in reaction to the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples reveals that Mercredi's lack of trust in the government has some validity. Within the persistent neo-conservative discourse, policies that could better benefit Aboriginal peoples are pushed aside in the name of fiscal restraint.

In Ontario, a neo-conservative ideology has negative repercussions for Aboriginal peoples. Jean Trickey correctly points out that the Harris government promotes the resurgence of racism through ideology, structure and process (1997:113). She demonstrates, in fact, that today in Ontario the Progressive Conservative Premier Mike Harris increasingly uses a rhetoric that incites fear and opposition towards Aboriginals and other visible minorities by portraying them as "the others" (Trickey: 1997: 114).

More disturbing is the fact that Premier Mike Harris has even increased structural barriers that perpetuate systemic racism. One of the more obvious acts against fairness in employment was the repeal of the Employment Equity Act which "withdraws support for women, Aboriginal peoples, racial and ethnic minorities and those who are disabled" (Trickey: 1997: 115).

By stating that the repeal of the Employment Equity Act will restore meritocracy, the current Ontario government implies that aboriginal peoples, together with the other groups addressed in the former legislation, were not as qualified as the rest of Canadians. The elimination of Pay Equity is another example of the regressive policies which have a negative impact on Aboriginal women. Any progress these women have made in a sex-segregated labour market is set back. Now the government of Ontario, through the changes in the employment legislation, is reducing its commitment towards the concept of equal pay for work of equal value. The implications of these regressive policies are worse for Aboriginal women who, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, are traditionally the most socially and economic disadvantaged group in Canada (Gerber: 1990).

In September of 1995, the Ipperwash event, which concluded with the death of the aboriginal activist Dudley George, clearly showed that the present conservative government of Ontario prefers confrontation to consultation and cooperation with Aboriginals. As of today, even after the courts convicted sergeant Kenneth Dean in the shooting of Dudley George, Premier Mike Harris refuses to have a full inquiry on the events surrounding the murder. This failure by the Premier leads one to question if his government has something to hide, and if racism is becoming more entrenched in Ontario (Powless, as cited in Trickey: 1997: 119).

The Ontario provincial government of Mike Harris has also eliminated the Ministry of Citizenship and Culture Anti-Racist Secretariat, and the anti-racism branch of the Education Ministry. These are more regressive steps which will weaken the province's ability to deal with racist issues (Trickey: 1997: 119). They also reveal the disinterest of

neo-conservatism towards anti-racist programs that counteract the activities of hate groups. In relation to Aboriginal issues, the provincial government of Ontario has recently cut funding to the Native Community Branch and Aboriginal Economic Development.

> Since the government has withdrawn from anti-racist initiatives, it functions as a racist government. The dismantling of progressive policies and programs is an abdication of the leadership necessary in a complex, multi-cultural society (Trickey: 1997: 119).

Just as Aboriginal peoples, and particularly women, had finally made progressive steps towards a more equal standing in Canadian society, a neo-conservative ideology has presented obstacles to Aboriginal self-determination. The next chapter will reveal how neo-conservative policies are impacting on the daily lives of Aboriginal single mothers. It will show how these women's lives are particularly vulnerable in a neo-conservative discourse which only perpetuates and accentuates sexism, racism and classism.

Chapter VI: The Daily Struggles of Aboriginal Single Mothers

Approximately 45% of the total Aboriginal population lives in the cities. Aboriginal people leave their reserves to go to the cities for many reasons: to seek employment, to escape the poverty and violence in their communities, or to go to school. Women outnumber men in the urban population; some of them may live in the cities to escape family abuse in the reserves, or because they are denied residence as a consequence of the amended Section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act (Royal Commission Report: 1996).

Aboriginal urban women struggle daily in the cities in trying to better their economic and social conditions while maintaining their own culture and identity. For a great number of these women, the Native Friendship Centres are places where they can find support, counsel and help in their efforts to adapt to life in the cities.

Native Friendship Centres

Native Friendship Centres deliver a variety of programs and services to urban Aboriginal people that are culturally relevant. They are mostly funded by the provincial government through the different departments and also by the federal government. In 1995, the provincial government gave a number of grants to the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, totaling to approximately $500,000, and the federal government contributed approximately $150,000 in grants. The provincial government also funds the Federation's core programme and its infrastructure programme (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres Annual General Meeting Manual: 1996). The federal government's position is that urban Aboriginal people should be the responsibility

of individual provinces, "yet some provincial authorities argue that status Indians remain the responsibility of the federal government" (Royal Commission Report: 1996).

Despite the difficulties which arise out of the conflict between the federal and the provincial governments over the responsibility towards urban Aboriginal programs, the Native Friendship Centres are still able to provide the necessary support to their urban population.

They offer programs that meet the needs of the unemployed (Employment and Training Units); they also have programs that deal with health issues (Healing and Wellness Program); Native Friendship Centres also provide services to expecting mothers and newborns (Pre-Natal Program); and they also have programs which are specifically designed for young children and their parents(the Aboriginal Head Start Program funded by Health and Welfare Canada). In conclusion, "a Friendship Centre is a non-political, non-sectarian, autonomous social service agency existing to administer and carry out programs to meet the needs of native people, either migrating to cities or living in them" (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres Annual General Meeting Manual: 1996).

I had the opportunity to take part in some of the functions held by the N'Amerind (London) Friendship Centre and the Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre (Windsor), both as a daughter of a member, and also as a researcher during my fieldwork for this thesis.

On October 18-19, 1996, I attended the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres Annual General Meeting in Windsor, Ontario. One session of the meeting was also attended by some members of the Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat, to answer some concerns the board members had about the recent cutbacks the provincial government had

implemented. The board expressed its frustration over the direct loss of funding to the Centres, which had resulted in the elimination of vital programs and services to urban Aboriginals. The board also told the Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat that government downsizing has increasing negative effects on individuals, on Friendship Centres and the community as a whole. They pointed out that more people need the services provided by the Friendship Centres, because of the effects of cutbacks, and yet the Friendship Centres are faced with fewer resources.

The reply of the Ontario Native Affairs Secretariat was that their role was to provide advice to the Ministry of Social and Community Services, not to deliver programs, and that they would report the issues raised at the meeting to the Ministry.

Federal and Provincial Cutbacks to Friendship Centres Programs

Across the province of Ontario, urban Aboriginals have been affected by the elimination or reduction of some programs and services they have used and came to depend on for their needs. The Aboriginal Education Council ceased to exist as of August 31, 1996; its mandate was to coordinate with the Minister of Education and Training on all matters affecting Aboriginal post-secondary education. The Ontario Native Courtwork Program, which focuses on assisting Aboriginal people who come into conflict with the law, had a 28% cutback. The Ontario Aboriginal Housing Services had been created to deliver 2,000 housing units for urban Aboriginals. In July 1996, the Ontario Progressive Conservative government canceled funds for all new non-profit housing. Currently, the provincial government is delivering the Urban Native Housing Program. However, the intent of the province to get out of the housing business is threatening the existence of

these programs, because at this time there is no assurance the programs will continue (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centre Annual General Meeting Manual: 1996).

On March 31, 1996, the federal Liberal government concluded the "Pathways to Success" Program. In its place, the federal government has decided to form a direct agreement with Aboriginal groups which are recognized in the Canadian Constitution. Since off-reserve peoples have no standing in the Canadian Constitution as distinct socio-political entities, urban Aboriginals were not included in the agreement. The provisions of the services previously provided by the "Pathways to Success"- which included culturally appropriate training and employment services to urban Aboriginals - now rests with the reserve communities (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres Annual General Meeting Manual: 1996).

Consequently, the Friendship Centres' ability to provide adequate and sufficient programs to urban Aboriginals is now diminished. More conflict between urban Aboriginals and on-reserve Aboriginals is also likely to occur over the priority of the allocation of resources.

All Friendship Centres had a reduction in their core funding by the Department of Canadian Heritage. As a result, operating costs and administrative costs of the Centres were affected by this reduction.

The Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre of Windsor has lost all its provincial funding for the L'il Eagles Programs and the After School Tutoring Program. These were two valuable children's programs which both children and parents relied on. However, the Can-Am is still able to provide part of the programs through volunteering and combining

the programs with others. The Can-Am also lost funding to the Native Community Development Programs and the Native Social Counselor. These were programs that connected the urban Aboriginal community with the rest of the city of Windsor, and provided awareness to the larger community of Aboriginal culture and issues. The Native Social Counselor provided counseling, advocacy and assistance to individuals who had legal problems. Women used this program heavily for family-related legal issues, such as Children Aid Society cases, family violence and divorce proceedings.

The Administrator of the Can-Am Indian Friendship Centre said to me that now more people use the services of the Centre for support, to access other services in the community, for training opportunities and for help with the children. However, the staff had to be reduced because of the loss of core funding and other cutbacks. The Can-Am still tries to provide the much needed programs and services, but it is very difficult and the remaining staff is over-worked and performs jobs that are not part of their regular duties (George: 1997).

The N'Amerind (London) Friendship Centre has experienced similar strain and setbacks. Its core funding was reduced, the children program's funding cut, and they also faced the threat of their secondary alternative school's closure. Thanks to great lobbying effort and protest, the school is still open. However, the government has not provided the Centre with a long-term commitment, therefore the members are still concerned about the possibility of a future closure.

In order to grasp the impact of both the provincial and the federal neo-conservative policies on the everyday lives of Aboriginal single mothers, the ethnographic

technique which I employed was very helpful. The interviews reveal both the issues and concerns which Aboriginal single mothers have beyond a neo-conservative context, and the specific impact of neo-conservative policies on their lives. I will now turn to the analysis of my data by first exploring the general issues related to Aboriginal single mothers and then moving to the impact of neo-conservatism on these women.

Aboriginal Women Speak About Being Single Mothers

My sample included twenty Aboriginal single mothers. Each of them had at least one child under the age of five. The youngest mother was 17 years old and the oldest was 35. The following tables show the age demographics of my sample and their children.

Table 2: Age stratification of single-mother respondents

Age (Years)	London Respondents		Windsor Respondents		Totals	
17 - 20	3	30%	4	40%	7	35%
21 - 24	2	20%	1	10%	3	15%
25 - 28	1	10%	1	10%	2	10%
29 - 32	3	30%	2	20%	5	25%
33 +	1	10%	2	20%	3	15%
Totals	10	100%	10	100%	20	100%

Table 3: Age stratification of dependent children

Age (Years)	London Respondents		Windsor Respondents		Totals	
Under 1	2	11%	2	13%	4	12%
1 - 3	7	37%	5	33%	12	35%
4 - 6	6	32%	5	33%	11	32%
7 - 9	3	16%	2	13%	5	15%
10 - 12	1	5%	1	7%	2	6%
Totals	19	100%	15	100%	34	100%

Each of the women indicated that taking care of her children is her top priority, meaning that they stay at home to provide them with love, care and the basic needs. For

these women, having children is not an impediment, although they recognize that they are prevented from finding employment that would better enable them to provide their families of items which they can't afford with their limited resources. These women see their role of mothers as an integral and important one in their communities. They expressed to me that motherhood represents to them a fulfillment of their responsibilities to not only their families, but also to First Nations.

As Anne, a mother of three, expressed to me:

"You see, I, for example, do not get this whole liberation thing that some women think is so important. Some women prefer to make lots of money, not having kids. That's not for me. I think it's like my duty to have children. For us Natives to survive as a Nation, we have to have children. Otherwise, we are finished, you know? People look at me and say sometimes "Why you have children if you can't afford them?" I say " If everyone in our community thought kids were in the way, we'd be finished. I really feel it's very important what I'm doing".

Claire, a mother of three, also felt that being a mother was an important role in her community and, in fact, told me that: "I never regret it. I may be poor, but I know that having children is very important. In this world it seems like people do not value children, but in our traditional ways, children are the most important thing."

The mandate of some radical Western feminists for women to forfeit their expected role of motherhood is not part of some Aboriginal women's own conception of liberation. For the group of people I spoke with, at least, motherhood is tied with their sense of identity and responsibility over the whole community.

Another woman from the Onyota'a:ka nation told me that:

"It's time we rebuild our Nation. The Whites pretty much eliminated us, with the residential schools. I am helping in a way to do that."

As mentioned, the majority of the women I interviewed realize that being single mothers does put additional stress on their lives. They are conscious of the fact that being sole parents and on social assistance reduces their ability to provide for themselves and their children.

Christine, a Mohawk woman with three young children, clearly pointed out to me the daily struggles which she encounters while trying to support her family:

> "It's very hard. I don't believe people realize how bad it is. Try to survive on the little money they give you. After you pay for rent, hydro, gas, buy food for 4 of you...you are left with maybe 5 dollars for the whole month. Try then to tell your little son that you can't buy him a chocolate bar for a month. It breaks my heart to see him cry, but I have nothing left to get it for him".

Some of the women resort to food banks periodically to alleviate the poverty which is a harsh condition of their lives. Although they feel "less of a person" because they access food banks, each of the women who do, pointed out to me that the reason they have to take this coping strategy is so that their children wouldn't starve. As Jane told me:

> "I don't like it at all you know. The first time I had to walk in to the food bank, I turned back a couple of times. But then I saw those beautiful brown eyes of my little one and I had to force myself to go inside. I still don't like when I have to do it, but when you have zero money left and there is no food for your kids, what else can you do?".

Louise said: " I have to go to the food bank. I don't like it, but I do it". I asked her "What is exactly about going to the food bank that you don't like?". She replied: "The workers are nice, I like them, but people outside the place, when they see you coming out with bags, they have this look and I don't like that."

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Another woman said that "every time I go to a food bank, when I come home, I cry, because it feels so desperate."

The majority of the women I spoke with reported that their conditions have deteriorated so much in the past five years, that they were finding it increasingly difficult to cope with being a single mother, and that they have resorted to food banks more frequently. When asked what the source of their worsening conditions were, they replied: cutbacks in social services, losing a job and loss of income.

Aboriginal Single Mothers Speak About The Impacts of Neo-conservatism

Most (80%) of the single mothers I interviewed receive 100% of their total income from Mother's Allowance. Some of the respondents combine some occasional work with social assistance to make ends meet. They either wait on tables or do some craftwork (beading is the most common type) and sell it at Pow-Wows. The following table shows the sources of income of the respondents:

Table 4: Sources of Income for Respondents

Sources	London Respondents		Windsor Respondents		Totals	
Job/Social Assistance Combined	1	10%	2	20%	3	15%
Social Assistance Only (Family Benefits)	9	90%	7	70%	16	80%
Other Government Transfers (Post-Secondary Allowance)	0	0%	1	10%	1	5%
Totals	10	100%	10	100%	20	100%

Evidently the majority of my respondents are very dependent on the provincial government for their survival. The reasons for their single mother status varied. Some of them were previously married and are now on social assistance, as a consequence of the break-up of their marriage. Some had previously worked, but were laid-off from their previous employment. Some of the respondents never worked and were never married; they became pregnant when they were still in high school, dropped out and went on social assistance after the child was born. Their lack of higher education, employment skills, together with their responsibility at home, prevent them from obtaining stable and regular employment.

All of the women reported having been affected by the neo-conservative cutbacks and/or by the downsizing of the workplace They did not use political terms, such as neo-conservatism, neo-liberalism or New Right, nevertheless, they were able to convey to me that either their health or their financial situation had worsened because of "all those cuts by the new government", or because "so many factories are moving to other countries because it is cheaper for them to pay the workers there". Some of the women said that "so many people are blaming us for the debt. So now the government is punishing us".

Loss of Jobs

Teresa is a mother of two who previously worked in the food industry for several years. The job she held there provided her with a reasonable income and good benefits. The company closed down a few years ago and as a result, she is now on social assistance. As she pointed out:

> "I had it all. A good job, I really liked it too. The money was good and
> my family was okay. Then, they closed it down. First, I collected

unemployment. I searched for jobs, but nothing. So now I am here, on welfare. Three years later and we are poor".

Dorothy, a mother of three originally from Walpole Island, came to the city about ten years ago with her husband who had found work in a plant. Four years ago, he lost his job. Following the lay-off, he became depressed because couldn't find another job, and eventually became abusive towards Dorothy and the children. She finally left him about two years ago.

> "It seems that all of sudden my dreams all went up in the air. One day we
> had a great family. Then another, he lost the job and things went downhill
> from there. I didn't ask for this".

Another woman was also a victim of economic restructuring. She was a nurse aid in an hospital for the elderly, but "then one day they laid some of us off. Since I was one of the last to be hired, I lost my job. It's not just the money that I miss, it is also the fact that I was around many people and now I feel isolated at times".

For some of the women, then, neo-liberal practices which emphasize restructuring and downsizing had led to their final dependency on the welfare state for their basic needs. Similar to the rest of the respondents, these women have been affected by a neo-conservative ideology that wants to dismantle the welfare state and discipline recipients. The women I spoke with repeatedly talked to me about some of the devastating impacts of the neo-conservative ideology and policies.

Loss of Income

Almost all of the women in my sample have been further hit by the 21.6% cut to their welfare payments enforced on October 1995 by the Ontario's Progressive Conservative government. The only woman in my sample that was spared the cut was

Pat, a mother of one daughter, who was attending university and received post-secondary allowance from her band, the Delaware First Nation.

The 21.6% cut to welfare payments meant less money available for food, rent, clothes and other expenses. Andrea, a woman from the Stony Point First Nation, is a mother of two young sons who is now forced to get by with a monthly income of $1,200. When asked about the impact of the 21.6% cut to her income, she replied:

> "Well, it was hard enough to live by before, then they took about $250 out my cheque. Now, I am supposed to buy food, pay the rent, the bills with only $1,200. The rent alone is $700. That leaves me with $500 for everything else. You try to feed 2 little ones with that. It's pretty much impossible. How do I do it? I go without eating myself for days sometimes, so they can eat... [There was a long silence and then she started to cry].

At this point, the interview became too emotional for the both of us and had to be interrupted. We were able to complete it later in the afternoon

Mary, an eighteen years woman and a mother of two, also shared with me how she was affected by the provincial government's cut to welfare payments. She told me that:

> "as soon as the cheque arrives, it is gone. Everything goes to pay for my apartment, food, diapers. I had to get rid of my phone, because I don't have enough money by the end of the month. And if I borrow money from my family, I am supposed to tell the welfare department and then they take it off."

Another woman reported to me that the loss of income translated into "no more cable for us or phone. Now, I take my kids to the Centre to watch TV, or they go to the neighbours. My daughter told me that she hates being so poor and it's embarrassing for her, but that's what we have to do to survive."

Stephanie, who has one daughter, said to me: "I now have to live with less than $1,000 a month and I find that extremely hard. Every cent goes to pay for basic stuff, like rent, food, bills, phone, things for the baby. It has become very hard." When asked if she had been affected by the 21.6% cut to her welfare payment, Debbie answered: "You bet. I didn't need that cut to my cheque, when already every penny was going for basic expenses. I had to rearrange my whole budget, and now I am always short."

Kim told me that it's very difficult for her to cope with the reduction in her income and said: "Two hundred less has been very hard for us. I always worry now if I can pay my bills. It's very hard for the children too."

Food

Food was a common area of concern for all the women, who experienced an increased stress in trying to budget their new social assistance payments. Since food was the most flexible item in their list of basic expenditures, it was the first to be reduced. In order to ensure that their children could still eat nutritious meals, these mothers either ate less themselves or resorted to other coping strategies, such as food banks or going to the Friendship Centre's soup kitchen.

Carrie, a mother of three, reported that she had lost thirty pounds in the last year (she now weighs 102 pounds), because she preferred to starve herself than seeing her children go hungry.

> "When you don't have enough money for food for the 4 of you, as a mother, how can I let my kids go hungry? They are growing so fast, you know, have so much energy and need lots of food to grow. So, I don't eat sometimes. I guess you can say I'm on a Mike Harris diet [nervous laugh]."

Andrea, already cited above, also reported to have lost weight in the last two years, because of the reduction in her income.

"You know, I just feel even guilty to eat regularly, because there's very little food available in my house now. I just can't afford it, to buy enough food for all of us. So, I don't eat. And of course, I have less energy for my kids and I also feel guilty about that after."

Kim, when talking about how the reduction in the welfare payment had affected her, told me: "I noticed it the most in my groceries. With about $200 less, I can't buy enough food anymore. By the middle of the month, my fridge is almost empty and I have to be after the kids so that they don't keep going to the fridge for food. I hate doing that to the kids, but once the food is gone, where am I going to get the money for more?"

Anne said to me: "I had to cut on the food. I try to make my meals from scratch and buy food that's very cheap, but sometimes I still run out of food by the end of the month. It's very tough. Food is a big problem now."

Rose also found it difficult to provide enough food for her family. She said: "It has put a lot of stress on me, the cuts, that's for sure. It has been hard to even have enough for food. Yes, I have to say that food is a big problem for me now, and I don't think it should be that way."

In many cases, then, the broad neo-conservative policy to reduce spending on social assistance has meant inadequate nutrition for single mothers. Since poor nutrition is a determinant factor in health problems, poor single mothers' health is deteriorating as a result of the neo-conservative cutbacks. In fact, some of the women I interviewed discussed some of their concerns about their health and the health care reforms.

Health: Physical and Emotional

Twelve of the twenty women interviewed reported that they have been more frequently sick in the last two years, and so have their children. It may be difficult to connect the direct cause of their increase in poor health; some may argue that the women's poor health was caused by other variables (poor weather, presence of some new virus, even carelessness of the individuals). However, when asked about their own perception of the cause of their deteriorating health conditions, some of the women responded:

> "I definitely think it's less money I have now. So I eat less and cheaper food. I can't afford to go to the doctor anymore since now I have to pay this new fee they charge you. Maybe $2 means nothing to someone who has a job, money. For me, it means two loaves of bread." (Stephanie)

Kim, a mother of three, answered my question by replying:

> "The cuts, what do you think? There's always been bad weather, colds go around, I still cover myself when I go out. But when you have to eat less, of course you are weak and get sicker. The government thinks they're saving. I think not. People are getting sicker and that will cost them one day more than what they save".

Jean said: "I get sick more now, and so do my children. I think it has a lot to do with having less money, less food, you get weak and can't fight the cold." Monica also said: "My child has been getting sick and I try to take care of him the best and buy medicines, but then I get sick too and mine stays long and he can't get better. The doctor tells me to take care of myself, to eat properly, but with what money?".

Teresa said: "Yes, I noticed I get sick more, and when it happens it lasts longer. I am too weak to fight it."

The emotional well-being of the single mothers that I interviewed has also been impacted by the neo-conservative cuts implemented. Rose, a mother of two from the Onyota'a:ka Nation, told me that she is finding it extremely hard to cope nowadays, because of the financial stress and the stigma that is attached to her status as a welfare recipient.

> "I never before thought that I would prefer to be dead. But more and more now I do. When every month I have to face being with no money, see my kids not being able to have food and things other kids have. And then to make things worse, people keep saying it's our fault, we should not have kids, we're lazy. I cry myself to sleep so many nights. I wake up and cry. And sometimes I have nearly come this close to end it".

Mary, who is only nineteen, also told me that "I am an emotional mess." She said that even her child has noticed that she is always sad and that she finds it difficult to make her understand that the financial stress is causing her the frequent depression.

Claire's emotional well-being has also suffered. As she said to me: "I get more down, emotionally. But how can I help it? I have to constantly worry about making it and then I see more hostility around me. It eventually causes one to get down."

Louise said: "I try to look at things in a positive way, but when things get very tough, and now they are very tough on single mothers and other poor people, it's very hard not to let it get to you. One person can only take so much.".

A worker in the Friendship Centre has told me that she has noticed that a larger number of single mothers, and also other women and men, have dropped in to talk to someone about their emotional well-being and asked for help to cope with their desperation.

Giving up their children

Aboriginal communities have a long history of broken families and loss of their children, as a result of the policies of domination and assimilation discussed in chapter five. The results of the past policies have been dramatic for Aboriginal peoples: it has practically produced a cultural genocide. In the recent past, Aboriginal peoples have begun to heal from these injustices.

Giving up their children to Children's Aid Society is a step Aboriginal women do not want to take, because of the impact the loss of Aboriginal children has had on the community in the past. However, two women of my sample told me that they are considering this alternative. They have clearly pointed out to me that they do not wish to give up their children, but they think perhaps it would be in the best interest of their children.

Mary, a mother of two, said:

"I'd hate to give them up. I know it's going to break my heart. It's the last thing I'd ever want to do. I know it's terrible. My grandmother told me a bunch of stories of Native families having their children taken away. I don't really want to do it. But the way things are going, sometimes I wonder if maybe they'll have a chance for a better life".

Another woman said that "who knows? If Children's Aid can find them a good home, maybe it's best for everyone", although she then commented that "and if I give up my children I know what people are going to say, that I don't care about them and that it's just typical of us Natives. No matter what I do, it seems that it's never good enough".

The Administrator of the Can-Am Friendship Centre pointed out to me that the community is concerned about the growing cases of poverty among single parents. As a

result of the poverty, the community fears that some families may lose their children, and that the latter will be placed into non-Aboriginal homes. The possibility of Aboriginal children once again losing their ties with the Aboriginal community is a great concern for Aboriginal peoples (George: 1997).

Social Services Cutbacks

Almost all of the women that I interviewed use the services provided by the Friendship Centres of their cities on a regular basis. The beginning part of this chapter outlined the different cutbacks which have impacted on the programs of the Centres. The elimination and/or reduction of the services have been felt by the majority of these women and their children.

Wendy, a mother of two young children, reported to me the frustration and helplessness she felt when the cutbacks took place:

> "I just couldn't believe it! They got rid of the Native Social Counselor program. She had been a great help to me, giving me advice about the different laws. She helped me. The Centre is going to try its best with the little money they have and keep some of the service. But I am scared. What about if there are more cuts?"

Wendy's fears were shared by other women. One mother pointed out that "the Centre is the only Aboriginal place that help us who live in the city. When they cut money for the programs at the Centre, that means less help for us". Anne, another woman, said to me that "sometimes I am afraid that if the cuts keep happening, there won't be a Centre left."

Christine told me that "I find it upsetting that not only they cut our benefits, but services too. So when the services are needed more, they reduce them. How are people supposed to survive?".

Jane said: "When I found out that there was no more legal aid for certain things, less services for poor women, and now less money to survive on, I thought they really want to punish us, but for what?".

The last important effect of neo-conservatism which the majority of the women I talked with have experienced, is crucial to the understanding of the interplay of sex, race and class in the lives of Aboriginal women. When asked as an Aboriginal single-mother, what -if any- changes from the government or the public they have experienced, some of the women shared with me painful memories of racist and sexist behaviour.

1990's Racism and Sexism in Ontario

Jean, a mother of two originally from the Stony Point First Nation, told me:

"It's always been bad for us, no doubt about it. White people have always put us down. But I personally never thought it would come to the death of one. After Dudley George died, a lot of people, white, they would openly say to me "Now that Harris is here, you people can't get away with special privileges"... I am more scared now to live here, I see more racism now against me and my children at school. It is sad and it makes it angry. The government is not doing nothing about it and now we saw with the murder at Ipperwash that they prefer to kill rather than sit and talk with us about our rights to the land".

Kim, a mother of one daughter, told me:

"I think there's always been racism. But at least the government did not approve, or pretend to in paper. Now though, you hear even politicians say that we have to be equal, but they mean not caring about us Natives and our rights that still are not settled. It is like we are going back instead ahead. I had my landlord say to me "No more free ride for you people" It made me feel low and angry. What free ride? They took our land, we are the poorest and they do not care".

Claire, a mother of three, pointed out how she views her specific identity as a woman, an Aboriginal and a single mother:

> "I don't feel like I am, but I know people see me as the lowest and treat me that way. Even social workers, they are harassing now more about if I drink, if I go to Bingos, about my sex life, trying to find out if someone lives with me so they can cut me off. I love being Native, there are alot of things we can teach the others. But they treat us like we are the lowest, and now it is getting worse. I think it has alot to do with the politicians say things like we should not have special status, that makes other people hate us even more".

For the majority of the women in my sample, racism, if not personally experienced before, is becoming more prevalent in today's Ontario. These women were ready to connect the growing instances of racist attitudes to the economic crisis and a neo-conservative ideology that views people of colour as "others". One woman commented that "we are the ones whom they took the land from and they insist we get special privileges. What upsets me is that I can see it's not only rich people who say that the government should stop paying us so much". As another woman pointed out: "It seems to me that because the government or the media is saying that the economy is bad because of people on welfare, or because of too many immigrants, now people who are scared they might loose their jobs are agreeing and blame the poor and people are more racists now". In the words of another interviewee, "when the economy was different, people were more tolerant and respected other cultures. Now that things are tough, I see around me that people blame those who are poorer and especially Natives and others who are not white for this situation."

I hope that the choices of some of the interviews gave the reader an understanding of the struggles and dilemmas these women face in an era of neo-conservatism. For the women in my sample, their physical and emotional well-being is deteriorating, they are experiencing an increase in racist and sexist attitudes against them and they are finding it increasingly difficult to cope.

Chapter VII: Conclusions

In most countries neo-conservative leaders have been successful in promoting their ideology and corporate agenda. A major component of the neo-conservative agenda is the dismantling of the welfare state, as neo-conservative proponents believe governments should intervene less in the economy and transfer their responsibility towards the less fortunate to the private sector and/or the family.

Neo-conservative spokespersons often use a gender-neutral tone in their discourse. This thesis has argued that neo-conservative policies, despite their gender-neutral tone, have had a disproportionately negative impact on women, especially on women who are marginalized and rely on the welfare system to meet their basic needs. Moreover, the neo-conservative discourse is based on the assumption that women will "take the slack" that results from the dismantling of the public services (Bakker: 1996: 35).

On June 1995, the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party, under the leadership of Mike Harris, won the provincial election. Soon after his coming into power, Premier Mike Harris implemented a number of policies which reduced welfare payments (the 21.6% cut) and women's rights (the elimination of the Employment Equity and Pay Equity); privatized non-profit housing; and restructured the health care and education systems.

In light of the increasingly dominance of neo-conservatism in Ontario, I investigated the impacts of neo-conservative policies on a group of our Canadian society: Aboriginal women. This group, as outlined in chapter five, has historically been the most disadvantaged, and any gains they may have recently made have now become vulnerable

within a regressive neo-conservative era. Moreover, as the Ontario government has redefined and limited the rights and benefits of single mothers, my study focused on the experiences of Aboriginal single mothers. Using an ethnographic method, my findings support the claim made by critics of the neo-conservative agenda that neo-conservative policies have a negative impact on the lives of many women.

My interviews revealed, in fact, that the effects are real and devastating. The social services that women rely on are being cut, especially at a time when these services are most needed. The twenty women I spoke to are very sensitive to the cuts administered through neo-conservative policy. They have also been victims of an increase in stigmatization and racist attitudes. As I discussed in chapter four, the success of neo-conservative economic policies depends largely on regulating the morality of society, by means of restructuring the welfare state. The result of increased policing and of reduced welfare aid for single mothers, who are portrayed by neo-conservative policy-makers as the "undeserving poor", has been negative; at least for the twenty women in my sample. These women are finding it increasingly difficult to provide the basic necessities for themselves and their children. Even food has become a commodity which some of these women have had to reduce and, in some cases, eliminate.

As members of a distinct group of the Canadian society, these Aboriginal women are facing negative consequences which are specific to their own identity. They have experienced an increase in racist attitudes against them and some of them are struggling with the possibility of having to give up their children. Aboriginal communities have recently begun to heal from the consequences of past policies of assimilation. Some of

these policies included the removal of Aboriginal children from their communities which, ultimately, meant a threat to the survival of the Aboriginal culture.

The reduction of the social safety net and an increase in stigmatization are narrowing the options for Aboriginal single mothers. Although they recognize that losing their children would be detrimental not only to their own personal lives, but to the Aboriginal community as a whole, some of the women I interviewed are considering giving up their children. Their difficult position has arisen because, "I really don't see that I have any other choices left. I can't make it anymore", as one of the women told me.

Neo-conservatism has achieved its much desired hegemony in Canada, as elsewhere. This is evident by some of the popularity which Mike Harris has gained by targeting welfare recipients and by convincing a segment of the Ontario population that socially and economically restructuring the province is necessary.

Resistance against the neo-conservative hegemony exists as evidenced by the Days of Action and other protests in Ontario. It is not within the scope of this thesis to prescribe future policies which could foster the well-being of most members of our society. I also do not propose an alternative to the current dominant discourse, although I may hold my own personal views on it. For an effective counter-hegemony to take place, first we need to unmask the reality of the impacts of neo-conservative policies. By knowing the negative repercussions which neo-conservative policies are placing on the least fortunate, opposition to the dominant ideology can better mobilize itself and, then, recommend alternative measures.

My study, through the voices of the women who are negatively affected by neo-conservatism, is a contribution to the knowledge needed for a strategic counter-hegemonic movement. This movement would better achieve its goals by mobilizing different groups, from those at the grassroots level to those at the academic. As a social researcher, one can help in advocating progressive changes. Ultimately, it is my wish that the findings of my study can serve the Aboriginal organizations in their efforts to represent and serve their communities.

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Appendix A

Schedule of Interview Questions

1. How old are you?

2. How many children do you have?

3. What are the ages of your children?

4. Are you married, separated, divorced or single?

5. Are you the primary caregiver of your children?

6. Is the father(s) of your child(ren) a part of their upbringing; if so, how?

7. Do you work outside the home?

8. If you are currently working, when you are at work, who takes care of the children?

9. If you do not work outside the home, what is/are the main reason(s) for that decision?

10. What is the major source of your income?

11. Have you suffered any loss of job in the last 5-8 years?

12. Have you ever used services provided by some agencies, centres, government and non-government ones, those provided by Aboriginal organizations and those that are not?

13. If you have, can you tell more about what kind, and how would you describe the experience you have had with it/them?

14. Have any programs, services you have used in the past been eliminated? If so, when? And do you know why? How did you feel about it?

15. Have you ever lived in a reserve? If yes, how would you compare your experience there with the one in a city?

16. How long have you lived in this city?

17. How would you compare your conditions of life today from about 5-8 years ago?

18. Have you noticed any changes in your health, both physical and emotional? If so, could you tell more?

19. As a single mother, can you tell me about some of the issues, concerns, experiences that you are faced with?

20. If you receive social assistance, have you experienced any cut to your payments? If yes, how has it affected you?

21. Excluding money spent on rent, groceries, hydro and gas expenses, how do you spend your income?

22. As an Aboriginal woman, can you tell me about some of the issues, concerns, experiences that you are faced with?

Biographies of Respondents

Andrea is from the Stony Point First Nation and has two young sons. She is waiting for her support payments from her husband, who has paid them directly to the government, but she has not yet received them.

Anne is thirty-three years old and has three children: one daughter is seven years old, another daughter is five years old and the son is two years old. Her husband died two years ago. While her husband was alive she never worked outside the home. He always maintained a secure employment and she was the one primarily responsible for the home. She believes that her main responsibility is to stay at home and take care of her children until they are old enough to attend school. Anne is from the Turtle Clan.

Carrie is from the Wolf Clan and a mother of three. She left her reserve to follow her husband who died two and half years ago in an accident. She has tried to return to her reserve, but has to wait for available housing. In the city, she is finding it difficult to live with a small social assistance transfer payment, especially since the 21.6% cut from the Ontario Conservative government. She has lost thirty pounds in the last year and she is afraid she won't be able to keep her children.

Christine is a Mohawk woman. She has three young children. Her ex-husband left her and the children a couple of years ago and she has not received any support from him. Her family of origin lives in a reserve very far from the city of Windsor, where she lives at. She finds it very difficult to support her family. She has tried to maintain

some employment, but being the sole person responsible for the three children and not having access to affordable day care has prevented her from keeping a stable employment.

Claire is thirty years old and has three sons. She is originally from the Delaware First Nation and of the Turtle Clan. She has been the victim of verbal racist behaviour, even from a social worker.

Debbie is seventeen and has a five months old daughter. The father of her child is still in college and works part-time. Sometimes he helps out with the daughter. Debbie intends to return to school next year.

Dorothy is originally from the Walpole Island and now resides in Windsor with her three children. She was previously married, but left her husband after he became physically abusive. He is currently in counseling, and she hopes that he will deal with his behaviour so that perhaps they can be reunited.

Jane is twenty-five years old and the mother of two young sons. She has been the victim of abuse from both her foster father and her former husband. She left her husband and is trying very hard to make a new life for herself and her children.

Jean is from the Stony Point First Nation and a mother of two. She is thirty-three and was previously married. Her ex-husband is presently unemployed, therefore she receives 100% of her income from social assistance.

Kim is thirty-one years old, originally from the Onyota'a:ka Nation of the Bear Clan. She has three children. She does some beading and baby-sitting to supplement the income she receives from social assistance.

Kimberly is twenty-seven and has one daughter who is four years old. She has finished college and hopes to obtain a full-time job.

Louise is thirty-one and has two children. She was married and during the marriage she worked part-time at a restaurant. After the divorce, she was unable to keep her job, because the owner expected her to work late evenings and she could not find reliable care for her children.

Mary is nineteen years old and a mother of two. She finished high school and would like to continue her education. Presently she is facing a difficult decision: she is wondering if it would be in the best interest of the children if she gave them up.

Monica is eighteen years old and has one year old son. The father wants no contact with the child and does not contribute financially. She plans to obtain her high school diploma as soon as her son is old enough to go to day-care.

Pat is twenty-seven and has one daughter. She is attending university and is receiving tuition and living allowance from her band. Her neighbour watches over the baby while she is at school.

Rose is a mother of two from Onyota'a:ka Nation. She is a survivor of a very abusive marriage. She is, however, considering going back to her husband, because of the great amount of stress she is experiencing.

Stacey is from the Chippewa of the Thames Nation. She is twenty years old and has two children. She has never been married and she works part-time at a restaurant. Her younger sister takes care of the children when is at work. She is also taking some

courses at an adult education program. She hopes to obtain her high school diploma and go to college.
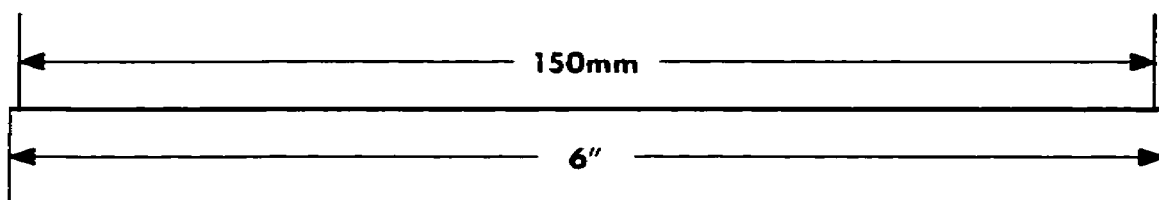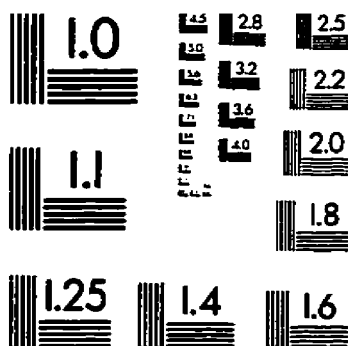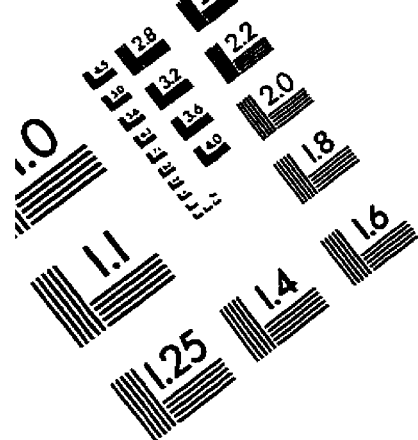
Stephanie is eighteen years old and has one year old daughter. She dropped out of high school after the baby was born. The father of the child has refused to be involved in the upbringing of the child, both financially and emotionally. She has been very fortunate to have her immediate family's support and love during the difficult times.

Teresa is from the Cayuga Nation and a mother of two. She previously worked in a food plant, but lost her job due to the plant's closure. She is divorced and receives some sporadic support payments.

Wendy is eighteen years old and has one daughter and one son. She is attending an employment training program and the father of the children takes care of the children when she is at school.

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