

# **The future of the welfare state: paths of social policy innovation between constraints and opportunities**

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## **Families, Markets and Welfare States The Southern European Model**

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"Let us Help Them to Raise Their Children into Good Citizens:" The Mono-Parental Families Act and the Wages of Care-Giving in Israel.

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Most research on sole mother families focuses on how they make ends meet (Edin and Lein 1997), or inquires into the development of social policies toward lone mothers as well as shifts in academic, political and public discourses regarding such families (Duncan and Edwards 1997; Lewis 1997; Millar and Rowlingson 2001). However, this tends to overlook the question of how the gendered cultural schemas within the discourses that inform social policy are deployed by and negotiated among different actors in the policy-making process. Researchers have tended to infer gendered cultural schemas either from existing social programs or from the outcomes of social policy, thereby at least partially ignoring the question of how meaning is produced in the process of policy-making, and underestimating how the prioritization of certain schemas shapes entitlements and constrains the reception of alternative visions of gender roles and relations.

In this article, I examine the Israeli Mono-Parental Families Act, which was passed into law in 1992. The research centers on the parliamentary debates that preceded and accompanied the legislative process. It focuses on the enunciation of gender roles and relations in the discourse that informed and legitimated the Mono-Parental Families Act, and examines how this discourse and the gender schemas it contained established the recognition of mono-parental families in law. I ask what systems of meaning were mobilized to legitimate mono-parental families and which model of motherhood was embedded in the policy paradigm underlying the Act. I emphasize how, in the process of policy-making, institutional legacies and gendered discourses combined to privilege and eventually settle on a model of motherhood that subordinated paid work to care-giving. This privileged articulation of signs limited the

reception of alternative visions of gender roles and relations. The constitution of women (and a minority of men) heading households and their entitlement as care-givers took place just as the Israeli gender policy regime was consolidating its transition from recognizing women as mothers and unpaid care-givers to the growing acceptance of the role of women as earners in the context of dual earner households (Ajzenstadt and Gal 2001). Moreover, the recognition of women (and a minority of men) heading households and their entitlement as care-givers, took place at a time when lone parent families were gaining increased visibility in Western Europe and the United States, where governments sought to reduce benefits for such families and to transfer the responsibility for social provision to the voluntary sector, the family and the market instead (Lewis and Hobson 1997, p. 1).

The paper begins with a description of the Israeli social policy regime, including programs focused on the needs of mono-parental families prior to the legislation of the 1992 Act. In this section, I also present the fundamentals of the program included in the 1992 legislation. The second section offers an interpretative analysis of the debates in the Israeli parliamentary plenum. This analysis reveals the underlying discourses and gendered scripts that were mobilized and deployed to legitimize and normalize mono-parental families in Israel. Special emphasis is placed on how the models of motherhood, fatherhood and the family that were deployed during the parliamentary debates were articulated with ideas of independence, difference and equality. The last section of the article centers on two interpretations of what Orloff (1993) calls "the capacity to form and maintain autonomous households" that emerged during the deliberations in the Knesset Labor and Social Affairs Committee. These two interpretations struggled over the definition of the needs, identities and capacities for action of mono-parental families. It shows how a specific

vision of the capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households – *that of care-givers who happen to be workers* – was privileged by the policy paradigm underlying the Act. The alternative vision – *that of workers with care-giving responsibilities* – was marginalized and eventually disregarded in the final wording and implementation of the Act. The article concludes by analyzing the gender and class implications of the two different visions of the capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households. The privileged vision and the policy paradigm underlying it enabled women heading households to opt out of oppressive relationships and avoid market dependence in the short run, but made them vulnerable to poverty and enhanced gender inequality.

### **Mono-Parental Families in the Israeli Social Policy Regime**

The Israeli social policy regime has been shaped within the context of a settler colonial society involved in a protracted conflict with the native Palestinian population. The aims of social policy and welfare institutions were directed at two main goals of the Zionist colonial project: state building and managing the conflict with the Palestinian population. State building and conflict management depended on attracting Jewish settler-immigrants to Palestine, which in turn was contingent upon the creation of an economic Jewish sector that excluded the native Palestinian population from its labor market, while providing labor, housing and health care to Jewish immigrants. Political parties associated with the Zionist labor movement, as well as other parties, were central providers of social services within the context of the British Mandatory state. Thus, the delivery of social services was also an instrument of political mobilization and enhanced clientalistic practices (Rosenhek 1998, 2003).

With the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, this policy paradigm – using social policy as an instrument to advance Zionist goals in a protracted state of conflict – continued to play an important role in determining the objectives of social policy and the means deployed to implement it. Despite electoral competition and strife, a wide inter-partisan consensus crystallized during the four decades following the establishment of the State of Israel over the goals of the welfare state (Shalev 1999). Four principles were constitutive of this consensus: 1) the deployment of social policy to attract Jewish immigration (Rosenhek 1998); 2) the state's responsibility for the economic well-being and the reduction of socio-economic inequality among Jewish Israelis (Rosenhek 1999; Shalev 1999); 3) the intervention of the state in the economy (Maman 1999); and 4) the commitment of the state to women as mothers and care-givers (Ajzenstadt and Gal 2001; Berkovitch 1997).

Underlying these four fairly consensual principles is a social policy regime that has been characterized as conservative and dualistic and as similar to South European social policy regimes in a number of ways (Lewin and Stier 2002; Lewin-Epstein, Stier, and Braun 2006; Rosenhek 1999).

The conservative features of the social policy regime reside mainly in social benefits attached to labor market participation that are insurance-based, and in the system of old age occupational pensions which is composed of two tiers, the first one state-based with low and flat rate benefits, and the second, dominant tier comprised of occupational pensions. Less than forty percent of retirees in Israel receive an income from occupational pensions. Those lacking occupational pensions are disproportionately drawn from social groups working in the secondary labor market, such as the Palestinian citizens of Israel and first generation Jewish immigrants from

Muslim countries, or from groups with relatively new and weak links to the labor market, such as new immigrants and women (Gal and Bargal 2002).

Dualistic practices that stratify Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel and strengthen the national ethnic divide between them are characteristic of universal programs such as child allowances, social assistance, and housing and labor market programs. In addition, the social policy regime in Israel resembles South European social policy regimes due to the allocation and delivery of social services as a means of clientalistic political mobilization during the country's formative years, mainly among Jewish immigrants and the Palestinian citizens of Israel (Lewin and Stier 2002; Rosenhek 1999, 2003). In light of its conservative and clientalistic features, then, the Israeli social policy regime has been compared to Germany, as well as to Italy and other Southern European countries (Lewin-Epstein, Stier, and Braun 2006). In addition, in light of the role played by the state in economic development, scholars have compared Israel to other developmental states such as South Korea (Maman 2002). Conservative, Southern European and Southeast Asian social policy regimes such as these have been classified as "strong male breadwinners social policy regimes" (Bussemaker and Kersbergen 1999; Gottfried and O'Reilly 2002; Peng 2002; Peng and Wong 2004; Sung 2003).

Despite the above resemblances, however, the gender logics of the social policy regime in Israel display some important differences from the ways in which paid and care work have been coded in corporatist, South European and Southeast Asian social policy regimes. The Israeli social policy regime encourages and supports high birth rates as well as women's employment. The simultaneous encouragement of both high birth rates and women's participation in the labor market has been achieved through a series of institutional mechanisms that ease the transition from paid to care

work and vice versa, such as maternity benefits and insurance, sick leave, tax breaks for each child in the family, as well as a network of subsidized child care centers (Lewin-Epstein et al. 2000). This is in sharp contrast with Germany and Japan, where women tend to withdraw from the labor market after child birth, or where fertility rates have dropped due to the scarcity of mechanisms supporting paid work among mothers of young children (Gottfried and O'Reilly 2002; Peng 2002).

During the 1970s, the social policy regime evolved into what may be termed, following Lewis (2001, p. 157), a dual breadwinner model #2, whereby males are full time earners and females are long-term part time earners. Care is mainly supplied by the state, the market and the female earner (Lewin-Epstein, Stier, and Braun 2006). Thus, labor force participation by Israeli-Jewish women is subordinated to their primary role as mothers and care-givers. According to Ajzenstadt and Gal (2001), social policy has been a major factor in perpetuating the gender division of labor in the family and in shaping the pattern of women's participation in the labor market.

It is within this social policy context that the emergence of mono-parental families or one parent families as a category of social policy should be understood. Until 1992, the term mono-parental family or one parent family (*mishpacha chad horit*) was not recognized as a legal or entitlement category in Israel. Nonetheless, social policy programs recognized different categories of mono-parental families and granted them allowances and services (Pozner 1991). For instance, in 1991 (a year prior to the passage of the Mono-Parental families Act), 53 percent of such families received Survivors' Pensions, child support payments or social assistance allowances from the National Insurance Institute. At this time, the only group of mono-parental families entitled to insurance-based pensions and rehabilitation due to family status were widows and widowers (they were entitled to what is called Survivors' Pensions).

Other mono-parental families (divorced and never-married mothers) were entitled to social assistance and child support payments according to their economic circumstances.

The divergent benefits granted to different types of mono-parental families prior to the legislation of the Act gave rise to a "hierarchy of deservingness" that shared a number of characteristics with similar hierarchies in other countries (Conroy 1997). However, disparities in benefits reflect specifically Israeli features as well. War widows were located higher up in this hierarchy, while divorced and never-married mothers were relegated to its lower rungs. A hierarchy also existed, and still exists, among widows, reflecting the civic value and labor market status of the deceased partner. This hierarchy reflects the institutional legacies and policy paradigm underlying the Israeli social policy regime, the centrality of the Israeli-Arab conflict in shaping the meaning of civic value, and the corporatist leanings of the social policy regime, which in this case, enhances status differentials among different types of women headed families according to the deceased partner's occupational status and civic value.

War widows' higher benefits are reflective of the militaristic character of Israeli society, which highly values sacrifice and loss in the service of the Jewish state in a hostile geo-political environment (Gal and Bar 2000). Next in the hierarchy of benefits are organized workers' widows. Their pension benefits are reflective of the power of the Labor movement and are regulated by work-related pension funds. At the bottom of the widows' hierarchy reside widows receiving only a Survivors' Pension. Their benefits are insurance based, but flat rate and low reflecting the peripheral or weak attachment of their deceased spouses to the labor market (Gal and Bargal 2002). Divorced and never-married mothers fared poorest in the Israeli social

policy regime because their situation was understood to stem from personal choice or whim. In such cases, the view was that society had only to cover their needs at a subsistence level through social assistance and child support payments (Katz and Bendor 1986).

The population of mono-parental families in Israel rose from 4 percent of families with children under 18 in 1970 to 9.9 percent in 2001, before decreasing to 8 percent in 2003 (Central Bureau of Statistics 2005; Gordon and Eliav 1992; Swirski et al. 2002). Women head over 90 percent of the mono-parental families in Israel. The increased proportion of mono-parental families in Israel is the result of changing gender relations, such as women's growing participation in the labor market, increased rates of women in higher education, and rising divorce rates. However, the steep increase in the rate of mono-parental families in Israel between 1970 and the 1990s is primarily the product of waves of mass immigration from the former Soviet Union (FSU) and Ethiopia. Between the years 1989-1992, 13 percent of the families that immigrated to Israel from the FSU were mono-parental (compared to 8 percent among the Israeli born population) (Naveh 1994). In 2003, 33.5 percent of mono-parental families were immigrants from the FSU (the rate of immigrant families in the general population being 15.8 percent).

The composition of mono-parental families in Israel has changed over the years. Whereas in the 1970s widows made up the bulk of mono-parental families (58.5 percent), from the 1990s divorced and separated women began to constitute the majority (Gordon and Eliav 1992). Similar trends were registered in Europe, where divorce and separation have become the main route to lone motherhood in place of widowhood (Duncan and Edwards 1997). Immigrants have been a major factor in changing the composition of the population of mono-parental families in Israel,

shifting the balance from widows to divorcees and separated mothers. Indeed, among immigrants, 77 percent of the mono-parental families were headed by divorced and separated mothers (compared to 68 percent among native-born Israelis) (Gordon and Eliav 1992). The composition of the population of mono-parental families in Israel remained stable in 2007: out of 99,600 mono-parental families, over 75 percent were headed by divorced and separated women, while 25 percent were comprised of widows and never-married women and their children.

Prior to the legislation of the Mono-Parental Families Act, data on the income profile of mono-parental families receiving benefits from the Social Security system in Israel characterized them as a population at risk of poverty. In 1991, 46 percent of Israel's 50,000 mono-parental families were 'working families'. However, 78 percent of them earned less than the average salary, and 45 percent earned less than half the average salary. Moreover, 60 percent of the families headed by women were under the poverty line and 60 percent of those receiving child support allowances from the National Insurance Institute did not participate in the labor market. Those participating did so in low income and part-time jobs (National Insurance Institute 1991).

Prior to the legislation of the Mono-Parental Families Act and the massive influx of immigration from the FSU, most recipients of social assistance, child support and survivors' allowances amongst the mono-parental families population belonged to the lower rungs of the class ladder in Israel (in terms of class and educational background). It was this group of Israeli born citizens, as well as the immigrants from the FSU and Ethiopia, that was targeted as the main beneficiaries of the Act.

Most of the different benefits assembled under the Act were targeted at the most needy sectors of the mono-parental families population, and not as universal, categorical benefits (for a comparison see Skevik 2005). The Mono-Parental Families Act defines a one parent family as composed of a person who is not married (either single, divorced, widowed, separated, or an *aguna* ( Hebrew for a woman chained in marriage by a husband who is missing and not proved dead), who does not have a current common law spouse, and who has children under 18 years old. A mono-parental family is entitled to special mortgage benefits and an increased Income Support allowance (social assistance allowance) under the Income Support Act, three years of assistance with rent payments from the Ministry of Housing, and, in certain local councils, a 20 percent discount in municipal taxes. A mono-parental family receives priority in obtaining professional training and in registering children in day care centers, as well as an income-based discount in tuition fees. Mono-parental families are also entitled to a "study or school grant" at the beginning of each school year for each child between the ages of 6-14.

### **The New Heroines: Normalizing and Legitimizing Mono-Parental Families in Israel**

Parliamentary deliberations over the Mono-Parental Families Act began in 1989, and in December 1991 the first draft of the Act was presented to the Israeli Knesset plenum. The legislative initiative was launched prior to the arrival of the mass wave of immigrants from the FSU, but it seems that the high proportion of mono-parental families among the immigrant population contributed to, and even accelerated the favorable reception of the Act. In this sense, the Mono-Parental Families Act embodied institutional legacies in Israel, that is, the design and

deployment of social programs as instruments of state and nation building, including the absorption of immigrants (Rosenhek 1998).

The discourses and rules incorporating women into citizenship provided the template for the interpretation and production of the mono-parental families' capacities for action, identities and social relations in the Knesset plenum. These discourses were mobilized by policy makers to legitimate the allocation of public resources to such families.

Three dominant lines of discourse recurred throughout the parliamentary debates. The model of motherhood that emerged from the discourses framing the parliamentary debate subordinated paid work to domestic and maternal roles. Fatherhood was coded in terms of primary breadwinning and the family was characterized in terms of a strict gender division of labor. These lines of discourse served as templates for the normalization of a type of family that challenged traditional gender scripts.

The bill's sponsor, MK Ora Namir (Labor) - Chair of the Labor and Social Affairs Committee - summarized the long history of failed efforts to bring about the recognition of the needs of mono-parental or one parent families. These efforts were presented as part of a wider endeavor to redress gender inequalities in Israel. Nevertheless the Act was framed in gender neutral terms, although constant reference was made to the economic distress of women headed families and their children. In presenting the Act, MK Namir framed the needs of mono-parental families within a "social problem discourse" (Duncan and Edwards 1997) and cited three sources of distress: 1. Societal attitudes towards mono-parental families; 2. Emotional problems and; 3. Economic or financial hardship. Namir singled out the financial hardship of

such families as the most important problem requiring public attention, demanding the extension of social provision.

*[...] Surveys conducted by the National Insurance Institute show that mono-parental families are poorer than two parent families. The rate of children dropping out of school is higher in mono-parental than in two parent families. The concern and support for mono-parental families depends on the societal attitudes towards them. A negative attitude would deny them support and worsen their poverty and distress. I am aware that there are groups in Israel [...] that adhere to the institution of marriage at any price, and conceive of the strengthening of mono-parental families as violating their values. But besides the sanctity of marriage there are other important values, such as freedom of choice and the opportunity society grants its members to raise and educate children to be good, happy and healthy citizens (Knesset Minutes, vol. 10, p. 1204, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1991).*

Namir's plea for the recognition of mono-parental families was framed both in terms of a basic responsibility of any society towards its destitute and poor, as well as in terms of modern values such as freedom of choice – a principle linked to the recognition of women's entitlement to form a family and raise children, independent of marriage. Namir hinted at the possible contradiction between freedom of choice (or the subversive potential of lone motherhood) and the sanctity of marriage. However, in contrast to other national contexts, lone motherhood was not directly addressed by legislators as a threat to the social order and/or as embodying a subversive mode of femininity (see e.g., Duncan and Edwards 1997; Hancock 2004).

Most lawmakers conceived of the economic vulnerability of lone mother families as stemming from the loss (by desertion) of the male breadwinner. Being deserted by the family's breadwinner, women headed families were placed in an unequal position

vis-à-vis mothers in dual parent families. In essence, the support for the Act was framed in terms of the equality between women as mothers and one and two parent families. MK Goldman (Labor) underscored this position:

*The proposed act is an act of justice toward mono-parental families. I am familiar with cases in which women with two or three children have to cope with financial hardship and support their children with a meager income when left behind in the household [...] This Act will protect and defend mono-parental families and will establish parity between mono-parental families and other couples (Knesset Minutes, Vol. 10, p. 1206, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1991).*

Other members of the Knesset sought to normalize mono-parental families – mainly women headed families – by championing gender equality. Thus MK Ra'anan Cohen (Labor) framed the problem of women headed families in terms of gender discrimination:

*[...] In our modern society, divorce is widespread, unfortunately, and many parents, both men and women, evade their responsibilities [...] Moreover, women are discriminated against in Israel, but women heading families are among the most discriminated groups. These women fare worse than women in two parent families. Lacking a partner who can help them in the administration of the household and with the upbringing of their children, they are unable to find a job with an income to support their children, and they are also the sole breadwinners in the family [...] Mono-parental families suffer silently and do not complain. It is our obligation as a society to help and assist those mono-parental families in raising a new young generation in Israeli society (Knesset Minutes, Vol. 10, p. 1206, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 1991).*

Note that the above excerpt begins with a gender neutral representation of mono-parental families, establishing parity between men and women in terms of the evasion of familial responsibilities. However, very soon gender neutrality is abandoned and the 'problem' of mono-parental families becomes one of discrimination against women. Mono-parental families fare worse in Israel because of gender inequality and discrimination. However, the conception of gender equality that emerges from the text is one of parity between two parent and one parent families and between women as care-givers. In other words, gender discrimination in this context is represented as stemming from the fact that, lacking a breadwinner to assist them in running the household, women heading families are discriminated against vis-à-vis women in two parent families. It should be noted that a plea for equality between families and care-givers is characteristic of destabilized "strong male breadwinner regimes" (Lewis 2001). Women heading families - as secondary breadwinners and primary care-givers - should be compensated for the loss of the family's primary breadwinner. This interpretation of gender inequality and discrimination, and the proposed solution, reinforce assumptions regarding the dependence of married women on their spouses as well as their primary role as care-givers.

This conception of gender equality/inequality is related to a broader view of the family and the division of labor within it. Despite the increased participation of Israeli-Jewish women in the labor market, the cultural model of the family lags behind changes in the gender order. Moreover, the social policy regime supports women's work but has taken few steps to extend responsibility for care-giving to men. The family in Israel is identified with heterosexual marriage (Lavee and Katz 2003). Women's roles are conceived of primarily in terms of their domestic responsibilities, such as child bearing and rearing, household administration and secondary

breadwinning. Fatherhood, in contrast, is culturally coded in terms of primary breadwinning. Therefore, care-giving and participation in the daily administration of household activities are not integrated into the cultural coding of fatherhood. Care-giving and primary breadwinning are constructed as roles that cannot be easily reconciled, since care-giving, seen as women's natural role, is viewed as interfering with paid work. This cultural coding of gender relations underlies the interpretation of capacities for action, needs and social identities of women heading families and lies beneath the conception of gender equality. Consequently, policy makers legitimized the allocation of entitlements to mono-parental families in terms of society's obligation to assist those mothers in their roles as homemakers, child bearers and care-givers, and only secondarily as breadwinners. Ultimately, mono-parental families were normalized in terms of their differential contribution to the nation. Their mute endurance in fulfilling their expected role as "biological reproducers of the nation" (Yuval-Davis 1996) is what entitled them to claim public resources and the recognition of their needs.

As the composition of the population of mono-parental families shifted from widows to divorced and separated mothers, this new composition implied blurring prior distinctions between "deserving" and "non-deserving" mono-parental families. Therefore, Nava Arad (Labor) (amongst others) made a plea to grant recognition to women who had exercised their freedom of choice, although it must be noted that this freedom of choice was patently associated with the new wave of immigration, which, as stated above, comprised significant numbers of women headed families. Freedom of choice and nation and state building were thus mobilized to legitimize the extension of entitlements to divorced and separated mothers, most of whom were seen as part of the new wave of immigration.

*The state of Israel has recognized war widows, women made widows by terrorist attacks, and other groups, and compensated them for the loss of the breadwinner [...] but times have changed [...] Today, there are women, who, exercising their free will, decide to divorce or to bear children without marrying. We know that in the past this group was condemned by society. Today societal norms have changed. Today assistance is provided to all groups. We are in the wake of an immigration wave from the FSU and Ethiopia. In both groups, there is a problem of mono-parental families. The moment they turn into Israeli citizens they will be entitled to the benefits included in the Act, and this would significantly improve their situation (Knesset Minutes, Vol. 10, p. 1212, 1991).*

Divorced and separated mothers were not normalized and incorporated into the category of "deserving" mono-parental families as mothers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the service of the nation (such as women made widows by war or terrorist attacks). Nonetheless, an appeal was made to include them in the category of those "deserving" state and societal support as full Israeli citizens in the future. The recognition of never-married and divorced immigrant mothers as "mono-parental families" would blur the divide between "legitimate" lone mothers (mainly widows) and those embodying a subversive femininity (associated in this case with the new immigrants from the FSU).

A small minority of law makers interpreted the identities of women heading families in terms of a vision that combined their roles as both mothers and paid workers, urging the Knesset to create the conditions that would allow unpaid caregiving work and wage labor to be combined. Thus, the path to gender equality was interpreted in terms of the conditions that would empower lone mothers as paid workers, but within a discourse that articulated equality with difference and

independence. Independence and equality were linked in terms of access to paid work, or the right to work, coupled with services and benefits that would de-familialize care or re-distribute its burdens between the family and the state (Hobson 1994; Orloff 1993). Still the right of access to paid work or the right to work was not presented by MK Tzaban of the United Workers Party as a prerogative of all women, but rather as a prerogative of lone mothers or women heading families, most of them new immigrants from the FSU:

*Today is "Human Rights Day". The litmus test of human rights is the treatment of minorities and of "Others". It is right and proper for the Parliament to legislate this Act today since mono-parental families are still treated as "others." The treatment of mono-parental families is a litmus test for the implementation of human rights. I would like to say a few words regarding housing problems: without a solution to housing problem there would be no solution to employment. The key question is employment. 17% of unemployed women are prime breadwinners. Two years ago, 8000 women heading mono-parental families were unemployed, and could not find employment or a job. I think that today the figure is double. I think that today 15,000 women heading families are out of work. And work and employment are the most important issue. So it is a positive thing that the Act has taken into account the issue of child-care, income tax credits, and has also granted priority in access to professional training to those women (Knesset Minutes, vol. 10, p. 1207, 1991).*

The emphasis on housing and employment as preconditions for the independence and equality of women headed families was reinforced by yet another lawmaker who emphasized the priority in access to employment for mothers of young children. Eli Ben-Menachem (Labor) specifically highlighted the discrimination of mothers of young children at the workplace:

*[...] what is missing in the Act is priority in employment, especially now that unemployment is rampant. We can upgrade the skills of one parent mothers (imahot chad horiot) but the moment they arrive at the Labor Exchange office they have less rights than other people. Because there they take into account that a woman might not be on time for work or she may miss work because she has children. Moreover, she is automatically discriminated against. We should add to the Act priority in access to employment at the Labor Exchange office (Knesset Minutes, Vol. 10, p. 1211, 1991).*

The discourse that produced the identities and capacities for action of women heading families as workers with care-giving responsibilities constructed their needs in terms of mechanisms that would enable access to paid work. However, this discourse was marginal during the deliberations in the plenum. The dominant gender discourse, which was mobilized and deployed to legitimize the allocation of public resources to mono-parental families, drew on the discourses and rules incorporating Israeli-Jewish women into citizenship. These discourses and rules constituted the identities of women heading families primarily as mothers (care-givers) who should be entitled to benefits for their contribution to the nation. The vision of gender equality that emerged from the debates in the plenum in 1991 was one of equality between mothers as care-givers and between one and two parent families. Thus, while changes in the gender order were acknowledged, such as the increased participation of Israeli-Jewish women in the labor market, as well as the obstacles to equality faced by women in the labor market, equality was constructed in terms of equality between secondary earners who are dependent on a primary breadwinner. In other words, neither the economic dependence of married women as embodied in their role as secondary earners nor the vision of women as primary care-givers were challenged. While legislators acknowledged the role of women heading families as primary

breadwinners, this role was constructed and represented as secondary to their primary role as care-givers. Therefore, the independence of women heading families or lone mothers was to be enhanced through transfer payments in lieu of the missing breadwinner and by supporting women's care-giving activities.

These two alternative discourses of gender roles and relations and the ways they produced and represented the capacities for action, identities and needs of women heading families, promoted different visions of independence, autonomy and equality: one was premised on access to paid work, while the other was premised on state support for care-giving activities without de-familializing care work, at least for the first few years of children's lives. These two alternative visions were sharpened during the debates and deliberations over the details of the Act.

### **Social Programs and the Politics of Need Interpretation: Two Alternative Visions of the Capacity to Form and Maintain Autonomous Households**

The deliberations in the Labor and Social Affairs Committee over the details of the program and the goals to be promoted by it sharpened and intensified the differences between the two interpretations of the capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households that emerged in the plenum. One conception – that of *care-givers that happen to be workers* – was expressed through the social programs assembled under the Act and de-commodified lone mothers of young children through the social security system. This vision was actively supported by the legislators in the Labor and Social Affairs committee. The other conception of the capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households – *that of workers with care-giving responsibilities* – adhered to notions of autonomy and independence through wage labor, combined with social transfers and services that would ensure the social rights attached to women's participation in paid work. This vision was advanced in the

committee by women's organizations. These competing visions reveal two phenomena: first, how changing discourses on gender relations shape the interpretations of needs; and second, how existing social programs constrain the recognition of alternative visions of gender roles and relations (Orloff 1999). The Mono-Parental Families Act did not create special benefits for these families. Nor was it conceived as a universal and categorical benefit as in 'needs based welfare states' (Skevik 2005). Rather, the Israeli Mono-Parental Families Act extended and enlarged existing social programs and their benefits to cover such families. Most programs were designed to cater for families and individuals in need, while others responded to the needs of mothers as workers.

From the outset, the main objective of the new policy was to bring about the upward equalization of mono-parental families *in need*, that is, those families who were receiving benefits and allowances from the social security system. This would include widows receiving Survivors' Pensions, and divorced, separated and never-married mothers who were only receiving Income Support Allowance or Child Support Payments. According to the Chair of the Labor and Social Affairs committee – MK Ora Namir, who initiated and sponsored the Act and shepherded it through parliament – its main goal was "*to close the economic gap between widows, divorced and never-married mothers and entitle them to the same level of benefits. The major beneficiaries of the Act would be mono-parental families (mishpachot chad horiot) receiving Income Support Allowances*" (Mono-Parental Families Act 1992, pp.8-9).

Prior to the passage of the Mono-Parental Families Act, most mono-parental families (with the exception of widows) were entitled to a short term low level Income Support Allowance that amounted to 30 percent of the average salary in

Israel. Under the Act, divorced and never-married mothers were entitled to a special Income Support Allowance. Mono-parental families with one child were entitled to an allowance equivalent to 42.5 percent of the average salary, and families with two children were entitled to an allowance that amounted to 52.5 percent of the average salary.

Upon its legislation in 1982, the Income Support Act recognized mothers as care-givers (both lone and married mothers) if they had a child younger than 5 years of age, or a number of children of whom the youngest was no more than 10 years old. Care-givers were exempted from work tests. After the passage of the Act, however, the criteria for exempting mothers of young children from work tests changed, and mothers of children younger than seven years old were given exemptions. The Act not only awarded the different types of mono-parental families the same cash benefits, but also established parity between lone and married mothers receiving long-term Income Support Allowances. The Income Support Allowance for mono-parental families included also a wage-stop (ineligibility threshold) that was higher than for other recipients. According to Gal and Doron (2000), this enabled lone mothers to combine income from paid work and social benefits without trapping them into poverty.

Lawmakers, and especially MK Namir, advanced an interpretation of the capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households that was premised on care (Orloff 1993, p. 321). The enlarged allowance made it possible for women mothering young children to establish and support autonomous households while granting them the "the right to time to care" (Knijn and Kremer 1997). In spite of the higher wage-stop that allowed for the combination of care-giving and paid work, the balance shifted to full time care-giving, at least until children entered primary school (Flug, Kasir, and Meidan 2005). In this sense, and despite different benefit levels and work

test exemptions, the program resembled social policy toward mono-parental families in countries such as Ireland, the Netherlands (until 1996), and the United Kingdom that supported full time care giving in the context of the household (Conroy 1997; Lewis 1997; Knijn 1994).

Women's organizations promoted an alternative interpretation of the needs of women heading families which included a different vision of the capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households. Without altogether dismissing the right to time to care implied in the subsidy for full time care-giving within the context of the household, women's organizations conceived of autonomy and independence in terms of the conditions that would enhance lone mothers' economic self-sufficiency. Therefore, women's organizations emphasized the establishment of conditions and mechanisms that would enhance the earning capacity of women heading families.

*Na'amat* (a Hebrew acronym for Working and Volunteer Women's Organization) - the women's branch of the *Histadrut* (Israeli Federation of Labor) - viewed the professional training of lone mothers as a pre-requisite for economic independence. *Na'amat*'s representative argued that post-secondary and college level training would upgrade the skills and earning capacities of lone mothers, thus minimizing their dependence on social provision in the long run. Therefore, they demanded amendments in the Income Support Act so as to allow lone mothers to engage in post-secondary and college training in addition to short-term professional training (*Mono-Parental Families Act* 1991, p.24). Under the Income Support Act, only short term professional training under the authorization and supervision of the Labor and Social Affairs Ministry is permitted. Any other form of professional training - even post-secondary education – could serve as grounds for disqualification.

Another women's organization, the Israel Women's Network, put forward an even sharper vision of women's autonomy and independence. The organization viewed access to and participation in paid work as the most fundamental right that the Act ought to be promoting. Professional and academic training and childcare subsidies were deemed necessary in a social policy program that would motivate lone mothers to participate in paid work, and would, they believed, pave their way out of poverty (*Mono-Parental Families Act* 1991, pp.30-31).

Full time care-giving and housewifery were constructed by both women's organizations as perpetuating poverty and dependence among lone mothers. If the Act was to create conditions supportive of lone mothers' participation in paid work, then gender difference and independence, or consideration of women's roles as mothers *and* workers, could be reconciled.

A social policy supporting full-time care giving (albeit in conditions of poverty) was also conceived as problematic by the National Insurance Institute. The Head of the Planning and Research Authority at the NII suggested including sections of the population of lone mothers in a program of professional "rehabilitation" so as to enhance their earning capacities, but mostly to instill in them a work ethic that would replace norms of welfare dependence and would provide their children (who lack a working father) with a positive example. The project would be in line with the Income Support Ordinances, i.e., short-term professional training (Tamir 1992).

Professional training as a prerequisite to enhancing the position of poor lone mothers in the labor market and as a path to self-sufficiency was ultimately rendered ineffective in the final wording of the Act. The limited scope of professional training courses offered by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, as well as the gendered character of courses channeling women into "traditional" feminine occupations and

low earning jobs, suggests that lawmakers did not see the empowerment of lone mothers by upgrading their labor market skills as a high priority goal to be attained by the Act. Indeed, professional training was not and is not a policy pursued by the Israeli government to empower unskilled workers in general and women in particular, but only to endow non-skilled workers with the minimal skills required to enter the secondary labor market, if at all (Adva Center 2006).

At the same time, another clause of the Mono-Parental Families Act granted them priority in registering their children in daycare centers, as well as an income-based discount in tuition. This entitlement, however, was valid only for childcare centers under the supervision of the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and did not apply to private care arrangements.

Only once in the course of the deliberations did the representative of yet another women's organization, WIZO – Women's International Zionist Organization, considered a non-feminist and even bourgeois organization – refer to the ways that the structure and mode of operation of child-care centers weaken the already vulnerable position of lone mothers in the labor market: "*One of the central problems of lone mothers is that they are vulnerable to lay-offs, they cannot work evenings and nights because they are limited by the child care working hours. Yet another problem is that low income mothers are laid off during the year. Their children are not accepted to the child-care centers if they don't work, but there is yet another problem: they are laid off during the (school) year because they miss work due to the children's health*" (Irit Roseblum, WIZO representative *Mono-Parental Families Act 1991*, p. 18-19).

Childcare services in Israel heighten the vulnerability of working mothers in the labor market since they are built on a vision of families composed of primary and secondary earners. The opening hours of child-care centers (7am-4pm), do not allow

for mothers in general to work non-conventional hours and to hold full-time jobs. Moreover, if women want to participate in the labor market, they must subsidize this participation by allocating a significant part of their salary to childcare (Sheffer 1998). State policies concerning childcare are passive, and this policy has transferred the inequality of women from the household to the labor market and strengthened the relegation of women to traditional female occupations that have perpetuated a gender segregated labor market (Ajzenstadt and Gal 2001).

Mono-parental families are also entitled to tax credit points. However, since most mono-parental families targeted by the Act were low wage earners, the actual benefit from this entitlement was minimal. Discussion of the clause dealing with tax credit points brought the issue of women's low wages to the fore, but Israeli women's low wages and vulnerability in the labor market were not seen as lying within the Act's remit.

Institutional legacies and macro-economic policies ultimately combined to shape the policy paradigm underlying the act, and brought about the neglect of women's wages as a path to equality and autonomy in dual and single earner families and as a factor championing the relative self-sufficiency of lone mothers. Women's organizations have traditionally viewed their mission as assisting working mothers through child-care services, but not as encouraging their participation in the labor market as equals or reforming the labor movement's attitude to women's work (Bersntein 1992). Macro-economic policies pressed for greater flexibility in the labor market and drove down salaries in non-skilled and semi-skilled occupations precisely at the time in which the Act was legislated. At the same time, involuntary part-time employment and unemployment rates among women grew (Cohen and Stier 2006). These processes fueled the endeavors to address the needs of mono-parental families

through the auspices of the social security system. In the process, the issue of unequal wages for women has been pushed aside.

### **Conclusions: The Contradictory Wages of Care-Giving**

Feminist scholars usually infer the cultural schemas embedded in the different policy means deployed to enable women (and men) to establish and maintain autonomous households from existing social programs or from the outcomes of social policy and tend to ignore how meaning is produced in the process of policy-making. Moreover, by inferring cultural schemas from existing social programs and their outcomes, they have partially overlooked how certain cultural schemas come to be privileged while others are marginalized during the policy-making process.

In this article, I have analyzed the deployment and negotiation of meaning between different actors so as to ascertain how gender schemas and scripts contained in the discourses that framed and legitimized the Mono-Parental Families Act, as well as in the programs assembled under its aegis, constructed the capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households. One discourse – which became dominant and was later incorporated in the policy paradigm underlying the Act – was underpinned by a model of motherhood that subordinated paid work to care-giving. This gave rise to an interpretation of the policy means by which independence was to be achieved: lone mothers of young children could be exclusive care-givers or combine between care-giving and paid work. However, the particular combination of free choice and the meanings attributed to equality and difference in the dominant discourse that legitimized the Act and that finally took shape in the program elucidates the genuine meaning of the "capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households" and the gender outcomes this entitlement really entails in Israel.

The model of motherhood that was consolidated in the policy paradigm underlying the Act and that emerged from the analysis of the discourses deployed to legitimize mono-parental families' entitlements promoted a version of gender equality that is worthy of note: namely, equality was interpreted in terms of "equality between care-givers and between one and two parent families." This version of gender equality does not create parity between families irrespective of their income; it does not redistribute resources between low income and high income families; and nor does it pretend to give men and women equal access to valuable resources. Leveling up is implemented in relation to different types families in need, i.e., families receiving allowances from the social security system. From a broader gender equality perspective, this concept of equality between care-givers in need enhances gender and class inequality, and emphasizes women's dependence on their partners (irrespective of social class). This particular interpretation of the capacity to establish and maintain autonomous households de-commodified lone mothers by means of transfer payments and cash benefits. By subordinating paid work to care-giving, this vision of independence and the policy means by which it was implemented contradicted another vision of independence that emerged during the parliamentary debates. This vision hinged on the empowerment of lone mothers by upgrading their professional skills and earning capacities, and the de-familialization of care work. This vision of independence is premised on the commodification of women – as paid work can enhance their bargaining capacity within households as well as giving them the possibility to opt out oppressive relationships (Hobson 1990; Orloff 1993). This vision of independence was underpinned by a model of motherhood that interpreted the identities of lone mothers as workers with care-giving responsibilities and sought to de-familialize care so that paid work and care-giving could be better integrated.

Post-secondary and academic training as a pre-condition to access to paid work, as well as to the social rights attached to paid work (such as subsidized child care services), such that the burden of care between the family and the state would be reconfigured, was seen as crucial to lone parents' independence. When articulated with ideas of equality, this vision offers the potential of gender and class equality in that by upgrading the labor market skills of lone mothers (and women in general) it may also upgrade their earning capacity. When coupled with difference, this vision bears the potential for integrating gender difference with gender equality because by de-familializing care it takes women's responsibilities as care-givers into account. This vision of independence does not mean complete reliance on the market, but rather implies an income package in which market income is balanced by transfer payments and services from the welfare state. This vision of independence was marginalized during the debates and, more importantly, in the final wording of the Act. Its implementation would have required that special attention be paid to the expansion and restructuration of child care services as well as to issues of the gender pay gap.

Given that the discourses legitimating the Mono-Parental Families Act and the policy paradigm underlying it were premised on assistance to some of the poorest members of Israeli society, the Act itself proved to have paradoxical outcomes: while it undoubtedly allowed women a measure of autonomy, it simultaneously enhanced gender inequality, poverty and the actual and potential dependence of married women on their partners.

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