



**Childcare and Parental
Leave Policies in
COVID-19 Canada:
Towards New Social
Imaginarities**



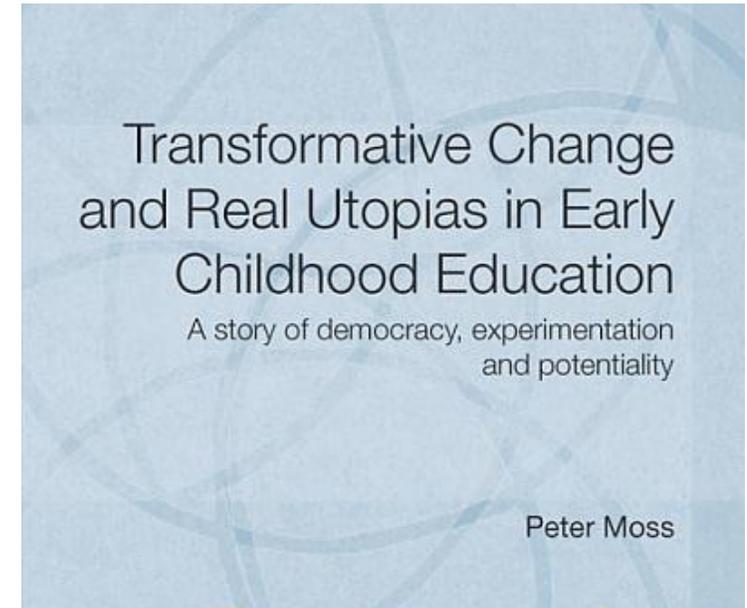
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Queens Institute for Social Policy
Building Back Better
Session 5: Rethinking social protection and the
care economy

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Unprecedented
Times →

Unprecedented
Responses

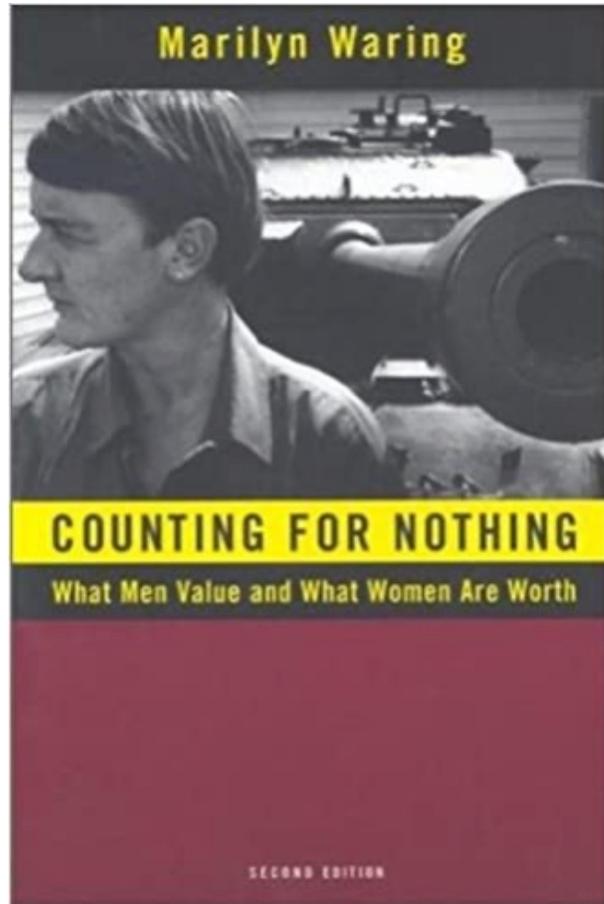


... We need transformative stories and new social imaginaries

Outline (and where I am speaking from)

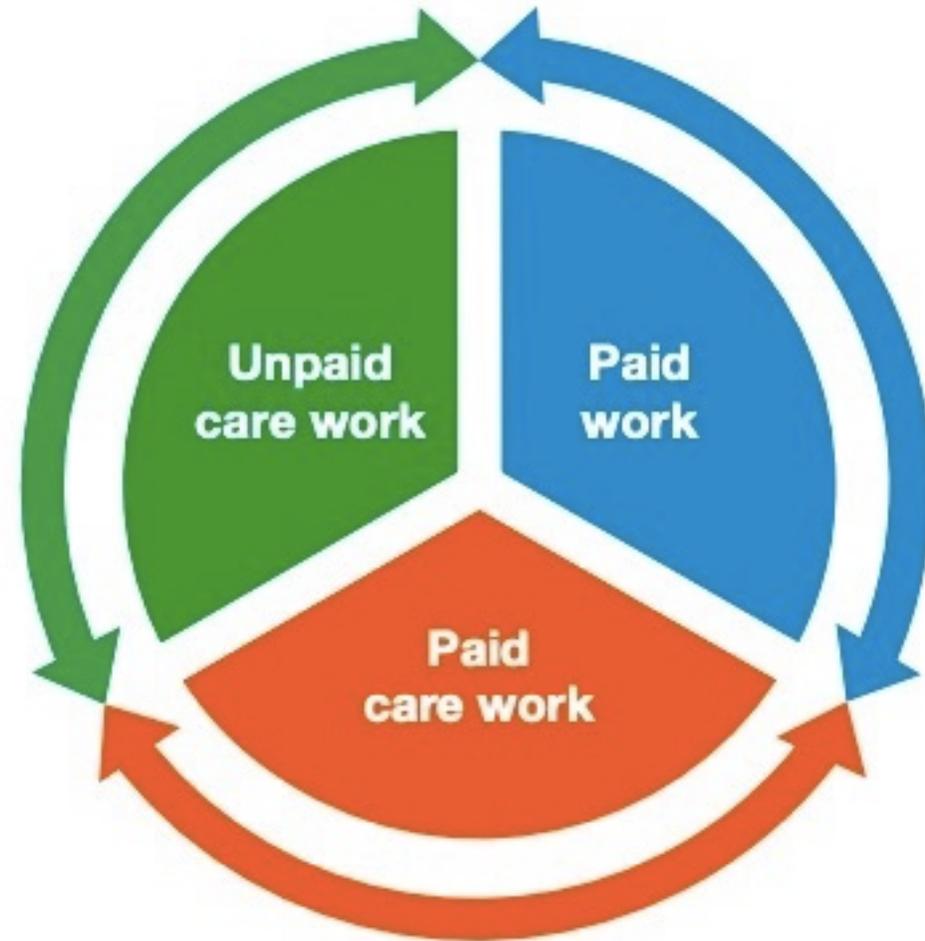
- New social imaginaries of intra-connections between paid work/unpaid care work/paid care work
- Childcare policies
- Parental leave policies

1. A dominant social imaginary of paid work and unpaid care work



- “It still makes me gasp for breath”
- A “production boundary,” as “the dividing line between those productive activities that would be included in the national income and those that would not”.
- “Unpaid work of all kinds was left out of these accounts.. Across the world ... women did the majority of this work”.
- “.. women’s work is of little or no importance.”

The Pandemic and New Social Imaginaries



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), 2018

(i) People are carers **and** workers, caregivers **and** care-receivers in varied and multiple ways across time – with inevitable periods of dependency, interdependency, and vulnerability across the life course.

(ii) **Unpaid care work** is mainly done by women ... **Paid care work** is mainly done by women, especially racialized and low-income women.

(ii) It is not only that the care economy *underpins* the so-called real or essential economy. They are **entangled, knotted, intra-connected...** and the (production) economy actually takes a 'free ride' on the care economy (Folbre, 1994).



2. Canadian Childcare: Deserts and Patchwork

- “44% of all non-school-aged children in Canada live in childcare **deserts**, communities that are parched for available childcare” (MacDonald, CCPA, 2018).
- “The fact that childcare in Canada is mostly a **patchwork** — privately funded, market-driven, and piecemeal — yet must meet an essential societal need is at the root of the childcare chaos brought on by the pandemic” (Friendly and Ballantyne, 2020).



Childcare: New Social Imaginaries

“Accessible, affordable, high quality childcare must be treated as an essential service, during good times and bad, and must be seen as an essential part of Canadian **social infrastructure**” (Friendly & Ballantyne, 2020).

“Building out a childcare system will create jobs in the stimulus period, draw more women into the labour market (with attendant increases in tax revenues), address significant socio-economic inequalities and outcomes for Canadian children, and build a generational fix for deeply entrenched inequalities and social vulnerabilities revealed by the current crisis” (Bezanson, Bevan & Lysack, 2020).

Childcare: Recommendations

- **Phase 1:** (2020-2021) 2.5 billion for Early Learning and Childcare (ELCC) in new federal transfers to provinces/territories and Indigenous communities to support the safe and full recovery of regulated child care as part of the reopening of the economy.
- **Phase 2:** ELCC spending of \$2 billion in 2021-22, **to be increased each year** after by \$2 billion to move Canada towards a **fully publicly funded system**, in partnership with the provinces/territories and Indigenous governments.
 - Provinces and territories required to use federal funds to achieve **measurable** improvements in **accessibility, affordability, quality and inclusiveness**.
 - Establish and fund a federal **ELCC Secretariat** to lead and co-ordinate ELCC.
 - Legislation to enshrine Canada's commitment to **give all children *the right to high quality ELCC*** (Child Care Now, 2020).

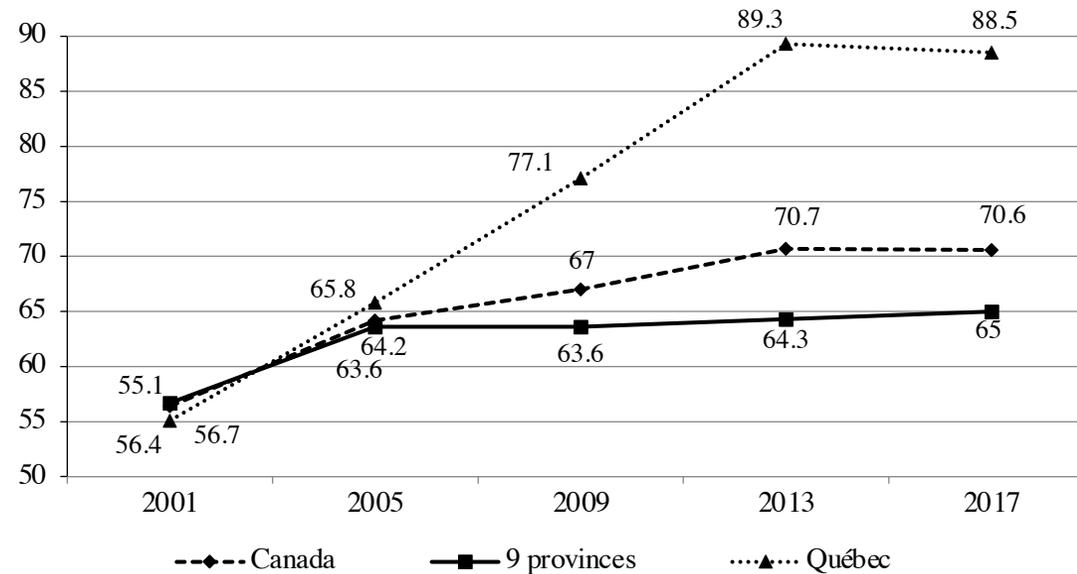
Child Care Now's Affordable Child Care for ALL plan; see also Bezanson, Bevan and Lysack (2020), Friendly and Ballantyne (2020); Yalnizyan (2020); CPPA Alternative Budget (2020), Kaplan and Roy (2020).

Parental Leave
Benefits:
Before
the Pandemic



Parental Leave Benefits: Before the Pandemic

Proportion of mothers receiving maternity and/or parental benefits in Canada, Québec, & 9 other provinces, 2001–2017



Mathieu, McKay, Doucet (2020) *Canadian Journal of Sociology*; Doucet, Mathieu, McKay (2020) *Canadian Public Policy*; McKay, Mathieu and Doucet (2016) *International Journal of Industrial Relations*

Parental Leave Recommendations

(i) Enhance Eligibility: Look to QPIP. Look to European models with “mixed benefits” systems

(ii) Increase flexibility in leaves

(iii) Close gaps between parental leave benefits and employment standards legislation (entitlements to job-protected leaves)

(iv) Collect robust intersectional data on *who* is receiving parental benefits in Canada





Parental Leave Recommendations

(v) Fathers' leaves and gender equality

- Look to QPIP as a model.
- Increase wage replacement rates (70%+)
- Make Parental Sharing Benefit into non-transferable **individual** entitlement; lengthen leave for **single parents**
- Work towards Nordic models of **equal gendered entitlements** to parental leave
- Set clear gender equality aims with **measurable targets**

Parental Leave Recommendations

(vi) Link childcare and parental leave policies

- Look to Nordic models where there is **no gap** between the end of parental leave and childcare/ELCC.
- Parental leave as a “universal right of citizenship, including a right to care but also to be cared for”



Care and social protection: To 'build back better', we need...

- A feminist and intersectional (GBA+) approach
- Transformative stories and new social imaginaries to guide policy
- An approach to childcare *as* social infrastructure where investments lead to multiple socio-economic *benefits*
- To recognize: no recovery without a she-covery/no she-covery without childcare
- An approach that conceptualizes parental leave as *more than* employment policy; it is a care and social protection policy, and a critical lever for **redistributing** gendered unpaid care work.
- A centering of care – *and* of paid work/unpaid care work/paid care work *intra-actions* – in social policy

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