

Book/video reviews

Gendered States: Women, Unemployment Insurance, and the Political Economy of the Welfare State in Canada, 1945-1997. Ann Porter. Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2003; 337 pages; ISBN 0-8020-8408-7; \$30.95 (paper).

Ann Porter's historical analysis of Canada's unemployment/employment insurance (UI/EI) program is a finely detailed case study of gender politics situated in the broader context of the shift from a post-war Keynesian welfare state to a neo-liberal welfare state. Situating her analysis in what she identifies as a "feminist political economy" framework, Porter asks three questions: first, how does gender interact with other political economic forces in the formation and restructuring of the welfare state?; second, how have changes in the UI/EI program affected women's economic circumstances?; and third, how and under what conditions do changes to welfare state policy come about?

Porter is most successful in answering the first of these questions. Indeed, the major contribution of her work is that she firmly establishes the centrality of gender to both welfare state policy and politics. In this sense, Porter's work can be seen as responding to the research agenda laid out by O'Conner, Orloff, and Shaver (1999) in their groundbreaking work *States, Markets, Families*. Porter advances this literature in two ways. First, she provides an empirical test of the hypothesis that welfare restructuring is not just about reconfiguring the relationship between markets and states, but also about the relationships among families, markets, and states. Second, she extends the theoretical framework, positing a model in which a complex ensemble of variables - including gender ideology, juridical norms, political struggles, production and consumption patterns, family structures, and race and ethnicity - are seen as shaping welfare state regimes.

Using archival data such as tribunal transcripts, Porter also presents a superb analysis of how the UI/EI program affects women's lives (her second question). In terms of her third question, her key finding is that while women's advocates had considerable success in eliminating overtly discriminatory practices that were increasingly out of

step with an economy that was more and more dependent on women's labour force participation, they were less successful in challenging policies that were in step with the direction of economic change (such as meagre benefits for part-time workers). Here it seems that Porter is suggesting that fiscal pressures were the primary determinant of change. Unfortunately, however, Porter does not address the implications of this claim. The possibility that women's groups are unlikely to effect change when their demands are "against" the market is both disheartening and counter to much gender scholarship which downplays the "economy" in political economy (McCall and Orloff 2005). A more thoughtful discussion of this issue would have been welcome.

In addition, a more explicit discussion of her methodology would have been useful for new scholars and would have strengthened her analytical contribution towards the development of "feminist political economy approach." These are minor quibbles, however, in an otherwise first rate analysis. This book will be of value among academics and practitioners interested in gender, welfare states, and income security policy.

References

McCall, Leslie, and Ann Orloff. "Introduction to Special Issue of Social Politics: Gender, Class, and Capitalism," *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State and Society* 12.2 (2005): 159-69.

O'Connor, Julia, Ann Orloff, and Sheila Shaver. *States, Markets, Families: Gender, Liberalism and Social Policy in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

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Writing the Everyday: Women's Textual Communities in Atlantic Canada. Danielle Fuller. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004; xi + 298 pages; ISBN 0-7735-2806-7; \$75.00 (cloth).

This is a significant contribution to Atlantic

literature studies. Using "feminist response theory," Fuller confronts the problem of the marginalization of Atlantic women writers within the wider Canadian dominant culture. She emphasizes the importance of "textual community," which includes writers' groups and provincial associations (such as the Writers' Alliance of Newfoundland and Labrador) as well as local publishers and granting agencies. The writers who formed the Newfoundland Writers' Guild in 1968 started out of a rebellion against the remote Canadian Authors' Association, of whom they were a "branch" but found they got nothing for their membership fees (91-92). The Guild was "a turning point for all of us - it was crucial in our development," poet Geraldine Rubia states (95). No longer marginalized by a distant organization in mainland Canada, Guild members found "the support and encouragement" they needed from each other, in the monthly workshops they organized (Fuller 95). Helen Porter, as well as Bernice Morgan and Rubia, continue to be staunch supporters of the Guild, and to mentor emerging local writers.

Fuller focuses on three fiction writers (Joan Clark, Bernice Morgan and Helen Porter) and three poets (Rita Joe, Maxine Tynes and Sheree Fitch). She does not examine the full range of the fiction writers' work, but narrows her discussion to one book each and in the case of Helen Porter, to only one short story. Still, what she has to say is fresh and interesting.

She chooses three performance poets who are largely ignored and disdained by academic critics. All come from disempowered groups within the dominant culture: aboriginal, the Miqmaq poet Rita Joe; black or "Afrocadian" Maxine Tynes; and working class Sheree Fitch. Tynes is disabled as well as black. Fuller makes an interesting distinction between the "formal" poetry reading and "outloud" poetry. The latter depends on a vital dynamic between poet and audience, which may well contain members of the oppressed group. The language is "demotic," simple and direct, confronting painful experiences such as racism, the difficulties of the disabled, or spousal and sexual abuse; and it appeals to the heart and emotions rather than the intellect. The listeners must empathize with those who are suffering; the poet must bear witness to their plight and become an agent of raising consciousness and thus bringing about social change. The audience can no longer plead ignorance of the terrible effects of racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination.

Despite the fact that the books of these three women poets are bestsellers, they are either ignored by academic critics or criticized for their use of clichéd and simplistic diction. (For example, Afrocadian George Elliott Clarke condemns Maxine Tynes for using clichés in her poem "Racism...to Raise the Heart Against.") Fuller defends her poets' use of the "demotic." Their poems must connect, and they must connect with the disadvantaged and poor and, by naming their oppression, empower them. Their political poetics are inimical to the intellectual, cerebral "poetic discourse" of elite High Culture.

The book suffers from some repetitiveness: Fuller summarizes what she is going to do at the beginning of each chapter, and what she has done at the end. Her pompous tone is irritating: "I have situated...I turn once again to...". These passages could well be deleted, and more space given to a wider discussion of the work of her fiction writers. For example, she should have included Helen Porter's path-breaking novel of St John's working-class life, *January, February, June or July*, rather than merely discussing just one short story by her.

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Changing Tides: Gender, Fisheries and Globalization. Barbara Neis, Marian Binkley, Siri Gerrard and Maria Cristina Maneschey. Halifax: Fernwood, 2005; map; xii+307pages; ISBN 1-55266-159-8; \$34.95 (paper). *What Do They Call a Fisherman? Men, Gender, and Restructuring in the Newfoundland Fishery.* Nicole Gerarda Power. St. John's: ISER Books, 2005; photographs, tables; viii+220pages; ISBN 1-894725-02-6; \$24.95 (paper).

The two books under review, although rooted in case studies of fisheries, are important contributions to the wider study of gender and globalization and will be of interest to an interdisciplinary audience of scholars, students and activists. *Changing Tides* brings together work of the Gender, Globalization and the Fisheries Network, founded in 2000 by an international group of feminist researchers, community workers and fish workers. It is a collection of articles based on scholarly research, poetry, personal reflections and community reports on the impacts of economic