

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.

Karen Myers
University of Toronto

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