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## Gender and Political Institutions in Australia and Canada

Feminist activists cannot avoid the state. Whether feminists are pursuing equal pay, anti-domestic violence laws, or refuge or childcare centres, they must engage with state institutions at some level. The nature of this engagement can range from accepting minimal financial assistance to being employed in a state institution. What determines the extent and nature of this engagement? Why are some feminists willing to engage with some institutions but not others?

Feminist engagement with the state has become a key area of research for feminist scholars. Conventional debates have tended to cast the relationship between gender interests and the state in either/or terms; that is, between those who see the state as either inherently patriarchal and oppressive of women or as gender-neutral and beneficial to women's emancipation. This book provides a new dimension to our understanding of this relationship, suggesting a mid-position that sees the interaction between gender interests and the state as dynamic and co-constitutive. This approach to feminist engagement bypasses the usual normative debate about whether or not feminists *should* engage with the state and, instead, considers what effect political institutions have on shaping feminist claims (and, in turn, what effect these claims have on the nature of these institutions). It raises a number of new questions about the gendered nature of the state, such as: To what extent do gendered political institutions shape feminist strategies? Can feminists challenge established structures and gender patterns within institutions in order to make them more amenable to feminist demands? To what extent are political institutions gendered? And to what extent does this vary across the institutional spectrum?

*Gendering Government* argues that, alongside ideology, political institutions are central to shaping feminists' strategic choices. It does this by comparing the engagement of feminists with political institutions in Australia and Canada during the contemporary period. This comparison is

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illuminating because it shows that, despite some important similarities between Australian and Canadian political institutions, feminists in each country have found that these institutions present them with quite different opportunity and constraint structures. As a result, they have adopted divergent strategies to advance their objectives. Whereas Australian feminists have looked primarily to bureaucratic institutions, Canadian feminists have emphasized lobbying through a peak umbrella organization – the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) – and, in recent years, have focused some of their efforts on using the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to pursue their claims.

It is not only the ‘top-down’ influence of political institutions on feminist activists that is important in this analysis. A second, equally important, point involves demonstrating how, through their strategies, feminist activists have themselves influenced the nature of political institutions. In doing this, *Gendering Government* engages with the structure-versus-agency debate. Rather than coming down on one side of this debate or the other, it demonstrates that the relationship between feminists and political institutions is *co-constitutive*, with agents and structures continuously informing one another. Perhaps the best example of this reciprocal relationship involves the interaction between Canadian feminists and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Although the charter channelled some of the efforts of the Canadian women’s movement towards litigation, it also enabled them to have a direct influence upon how it has come to be understood. Not only did feminist involvement in charter debates ensure that equality clauses were included in the final document, but, since the charter’s entrenchment, it has also ensured that feminist legal experts have directly influenced charter interpretation.

In sum, *Gendering Government* has two central objectives. The first is to explain, from an institutional perspective, the differences between feminist activism in Australia and in Canada. It provides a comprehensive comparative account of the role of institutions in shaping feminist strategies. Its second aim is to add to the knowledge of institutions – to gain a better understanding of the interaction between social actors (in this case feminists), gender norms, and political institutions. It rejects both purely structural and purely agential explanations of the engagement of activists with institutions and suggests, instead, that the relationship between them needs to be seen as a two-way street, with feminists involved in shaping the political opportunity structures (POSSs) open to them.

#### The Role of Ideology and the Importance of Institutions

To the extent that feminist scholars have paid attention to the question of what influences Western feminists’ strategic choices, ideology has often been cited as the key variable. Many analyses have suggested that their

strategies are influenced by a commitment to one or other of two foundational tenets of Western feminist thought. For some scholars, the key to feminist engagement with the state has rested on the extent to which feminists perceive the state to be patriarchal. The more radical or socialist strands of the feminist movement (that emphasize the *inherent* patriarchal character of the state) are more anti-statist and, consequently, less willing to engage directly with the state. This line of argument has been used to explain why feminists in the United Kingdom and the United States have eschewed direct engagement with the state (see Watson 1992; MacKinnon 1989; Brown 1995).

Other commentators have suggested that feminist strategies have been shaped by an ideological opposition to hierarchical forms of organization. For many feminists, such structures represent masculine forms of organizing and are to be eschewed. A resistance to hierarchies has been used to explain why Australian feminists have failed to develop an institutionalized feminist organization (Sawer and Groves 1994) and why Canadian feminists have emphasized external lobbying rather than bureaucratic 'entrism' (Findlay 1987).

Although ideological explanations go some way to illuminating the choices of feminist activists, they are limited. Ideology is better able to explain why feminists have not attempted certain strategies than why, in many instances, they have engaged with the state and created hierarchical organizations. For instance, feminist ideology does not explain why many radical feminists who view the state as patriarchal have chosen to work as bureaucrats, politicians, or legal advocates. Nor does it reveal why certain activists remain hostile to hierarchical structures yet nevertheless create hierarchical organizations. Such a phenomenon has occurred in Canada, where feminists opposed to hierarchical structures have established and maintained the peak organization known as NAC.

Those relying solely upon ideological explanations treat these activities as instances of liberal feminism at work – liberal feminism being the most benign form of feminism, which sees the state as able to operate as a neutral body once women achieve equal representation within its institutions. However, feminists who argue from this position, such as Kaplan (1996) and Burgmann (1993), usually refer to liberal feminism in a pejorative sense; to their minds, liberal feminists are blind to the true nature of the state and will, in time, be co-opted into its patriarchal structures. One limitation of the logic of this argument is that it sees patriarchy as being functional to the operation of the state: one is necessary in order for the other to exist. It also fails to explain the numerous instances in which feminists committed to more radical or socialist perspectives have successfully engaged with state institutions to bring about greater equality for women.

Others looking at feminist strategies from an ideological perspective

have preferred to use the term 'pro-statist' to refer to all feminists who are willing to engage with the state in order to advance gender-equality objectives (see Sawyer 1990; Vickers 1992; Eisenstein 1996). This is a broad and useful term in that it does not infer that those engaging with the state necessarily see it in benign liberal feminist terms. It thereby encompasses feminists from radical and socialist perspectives. Even this term, however, leaves us with the problem of relying solely on ideology to explain feminist action. It does not tell us why, in those instances in which feminists share a pro-statist position (as in Australia and Canada), they choose different strategies.

Although, by itself, feminist ideology is a relatively weak tool with which to understand feminist strategies, it cannot be discounted altogether. However, when discussing the role of ideology, it is important not to isolate it from feminist praxis. As *Gendering Government* demonstrates, the two are interlinked and reinforce each other. Ideology, within the broader political context, also appears to have some explanatory value for political activists (including feminists). Ideological concepts, especially those held by political parties concerning the role and nature of the state, have been a significant factor in shaping the available POS open to feminist activists across the institutional environment. As will be detailed throughout the following chapters, political parties representing different ideological perspectives have operated as an intervening force to shape the openings and obstacles within political institutions.

An additional explanation for feminists' choice of political action has to do with the influence of political institutions. These institutions provide openings and constraints that operate to encourage feminists to pursue particular avenues in order to advance their political agenda. Its particular structural and normative features will influence whether an institution is closed or open to the demands of political actors. For instance, as the following chapters demonstrate, in Australia a tolerance for, and culture of, advocacy in the bureaucracy has encouraged Australian feminists to focus on a 'femocrat' strategy, whereas in Canada a constitutionally enshrined equality guarantee has provided the opportunity for Canadian feminists to focus on litigation. Other opportunities have been influenced by political parties intervening in institutions. More frequently, parties have operated together with other institutions to shape the prevailing POS.

*Gendering Government* adopts an institutional approach to the state and, in doing so, represents an overt attempt to bring a stronger institutional focus to bear on feminist political science. This is not to suggest that the literature has entirely ignored institutions. However, where feminist scholars in the field have taken feminist engagement with the state seriously (rather than seeing it as a form of false consciousness), attempts to incorporate an institutional analysis have been limited in a number

of respects. First, much of the existing research has tended to adopt a micro view, focusing on specific institutions within a given polity. The role of women, the legislature, and political parties has been extensively researched in the United Kingdom (Norris and Lovenduski 1995), Australia (Sawer and Simms 1984), and Canada (Bashevkin 1993; Arscott and Trimble 1997). Women and the bureaucracy has been another favoured topic in Australia (see Sawer 1990, Yeatman 1990; Eisenstein 1996) and, to a lesser extent, in Canada (Findlay 1987; Andrew and Rodgers 1997).

Moreover, while there is some work that addresses the influence of a single institution – such as the legislature or bureaucracy – across polities (see Randall 1987; Lovenduski and Norris 1996; Stetson and Mazur 1995), little work has been done on the influence of a *range* of political institutions across states. Joyce Gelb's *Feminism and Politics* (1989) and Sylvia Bashevkin's *Women on the Defensive* (1998) are seminal comparative studies that include institutional differences in their analyses, but neither study gives a comprehensive account of the institutional structures in the countries under review. In their study of gender and social policy in Australia, Canada, the United States, and Britain, O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver (1999) suggest that the different institutional contexts of each country is a key variable influencing the representation of gender issues. Yet they pay only cursory attention to this context in their account (see O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999, 202-2). Work is only now beginning to emerge on certain institutions, especially federalism, and, in Australia (at least until the recent republican debate), the constitutional and legal system.

This study examines feminists' engagement with institutions at a macro level, outlining how they have engaged with the full range of political institutions in two polities. It not only considers feminists' engagement with the legislature, political parties, and the bureaucracy, but also with the less well-studied constitutional and legal institutions, as well as the institutions of federalism. Using this overarching approach, it is possible to assess the impact of institutions, operating individually and in combination with each other, on feminists' choices. It enables us to identify the arenas where feminists face the most positive POSs and where their efforts have been blocked. Furthermore, when one looks across the spectrum of political institutions, the extent of feminist influence on institutional structures becomes more evident. The analysis avoids the trap that many who focus solely on one institutional arena risk falling into – adopting either an overly optimistic or an overly pessimistic view of feminists' ability to use political institutions to their own ends. Where feminists may be frustrated with their efforts in one institution, they may be able to make advances in another. This broad perspective allows us to examine the wide range of strategies open to these activists and allows us to provide a comprehensive account of feminist successes and failures.

### Neo-Institutionalism

In emphasizing institutions as a major determining variable shaping feminist strategies, my argument falls under the rubric of neo-institutionalism. Using this approach to understand feminist strategies towards the state stems from a broader effort to 'bring the state back in' to political science. The most well-known exponent of this effort, Theda Skocpol (1985, 21), explains that states matter

not simply because of the goal-orientated activities of state officials. They matter because their organizational configurations, along with their overall patterns of activity, affect political culture, encourage some kinds of group formation and collective political actions (but not others), and make possible the raising of certain political issues (but not others).

Neo-institutionalism in its broadest sense is interested in examining the way institutional arrangements shape political behaviour.

There are many 'new institutionalisms' – in economics, organization theory, political science and public choice, international relations, history, and sociology. The variant used in this book is the historical-institutional approach to the state, which suggests that the role of actors within a political system can be understood only by investigating, over time, the nature of the institutions within that system (Keman 1997, 12). The basic argument is that initial choices about policy, or institutional forms, shape subsequent decisions; that policies and political actors are 'path dependent'; and that, once launched, political actors will follow a particular path until 'some sufficiently strong force deflects them from it' (Peters 1999, 19). Historical neo-institutionalism can be seen to have four defining features: it disaggregates the state into separate institutional arenas; it provides a broad definition of political institutions, including the political party system; it stresses the importance of the interaction between institutions within a given polity in influencing the relationship between the state and social actors; and it allows for an embedded and dynamic view of the state.

The point about the relations between various institutions, made forcefully in the work of Thelen and Steinmo (1992), is particularly important in the following argument. The influence of single institutional variables on the behaviour of social actors often does not capture the whole picture. What is required, and what neo-institutionalism offers, is a framework that highlights the independent effect that *the pattern of interaction between various institutions within a given polity* can have on the behaviour of social actors. In interacting with each other, it is possible that one institution can bring about a change within another, thereby prising open, or foreclosing, opportunities for the advancement of the objectives of a particular social group. As will become obvious throughout this book, not only

do individual institutions operate to shape feminist strategies, but the interaction of institutions in a given polity (notably, in this case, the interaction between political parties and other institutions) has an independent influence on feminist activities.

### Political Opportunity Structures

The neo-institutionalist approach to political institutions provides a dynamic and interactive way of understanding the state. However, it does not explain the strategies chosen by the Australian and Canadian women's movements. It has two key problems: (1) it fails to take into account the gendered nature of institutions; and (2) although it provides for a disaggregated and dynamic understanding of the state, its emphasis is more on the policy outcomes of political institutions than on the relationship between institutions and policy practitioners and policy activists. *Gendering Government*, therefore, supplements neo-institutionalism with an additional 'tool' for understanding political behaviour – the concept of political opportunity structure (POS). According to Tarrow (1998, 77), a leading proponent of POS, the concept refers to 'consistent – but not necessarily permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provide incentive for collection action by affecting people's expectations for success or failure.' The POS approach to political behaviour is interested in how political actors can both take advantage of existing opportunities and create new ones. In this sense, it provides a dynamic view of the interaction of social movements and political structures.

At its core, the POS approach suggests that social actors are not just influenced in their choices by endogenous factors, such as the 'resources' at their disposal, but also by external political forces (see McAdam, McCarthy, and Zald 1996, 3; Tarrow 1998, 77). There is, however, some debate about which forces are to be included under the definition. Banaszak (1996, 30-1) provides a useful synthesis of POS factors and suggests that they have three key dimensions: (1) the formal political rules and institutions that provide challengers with points of access; (2) the constellation of political actors involved, including political parties, interest groups, and social movements; and (3) the informal procedures of decision making and the strategies of those in power.

The first two factors are particularly relevant to this study. In both Australia and Canada, formal political institutions have provided a range of openings (as well as constraints) to feminist activists. What the following chapters reveal, and where *Gendering Government* makes a contribution to the POS literature, is that these openings cannot be presumed to exist in similar institutions; rather, they can vary between institutions across polities. For instance, the multiple access points offered by federalism have advantaged the Australian women's movement, allowing it to enjoy a

system of 'dual democracy,' but the same openings have not always been available to Canadian activists. The importance of the interplay between political actors, especially the alliance between feminists and political parties in the Australian case, is also illustrated throughout this study.

In recent times a range of feminist scholars have come to appreciate and to utilize the POS approach to explain feminist political actions (Dobrowolsky 2000; Katzenstein 1998; Banaszak 1996; Staggenborg 1991). The primary attractions of POS for these scholars include its emphasis on the political context in shaping feminists' strategies and its ability to provide a dynamic account of the interaction between the political context and feminist activists. Feminist work has looked particularly at how the POS influences feminists, and at how feminists create opportunities for themselves (see Banaszak 1996, 29). Aware that opportunities are, as Tarrow suggests, 'fickle friends,' these studies have sought to identify those factors that can increase them.<sup>1</sup>

A common feminist critique of the POS approach to political behaviour is that it has failed to take adequate account of the culture and norms that underlie political structures. As Banaszak (1996, 40) argues: 'Political opportunity structures are more than mere "reality" about which political actors must be informed; they also generate a set of values that supports the maintenance of these structures.' Katzenstein (1998, 32), in her impressive study of feminist activism in the military and the Roman Catholic Church, emphasizes the importance of norms as a variable influencing the POS. In her analysis, she shows how the law provides (and withholds) opportunities for 'claims making' as well as how it shapes the way activists define themselves and prioritize their agenda (165).

Katzenstein presents an additional challenge to the POS literature by offering a normative approach to the nature of protest itself. She argues that protest can occur inside as well as outside formal institutions. The key to protest is not the form (such as a sit-in or street march) but the content, which must be 'disturbance making.' Included in her definition of protest actors are feminists who enter traditional institutions in order to challenge and disturb 'long-settled assumptions, rules and practices' (7). The subjects of *Gendering Government* – feminists who have chosen to bring about change through institutions, including the bureaucracy, political party structures, Parliament, and legal structures – fit neatly within Katzenstein's definition of protest activists.

### **Gender Norms, Institutions, and Opportunities**

*Gendering Government* shares much with the work of Katzenstein and other feminist adaptations of the POS concept in that it suggests that institutions, and the POS available to feminists, can only be understood by taking into account the normative context within which they operate. It is



unique in that it accounts for how gender norms operate within institutions and the influence they have had on the opportunities open to feminist activists in Australia and Canada. It takes up the point of key institutionalists March and Olsen (1989); that is, that there is a 'logic of appropriateness' within institutions that guides the behaviour of those operating within them. At the same time it demonstrates that, underlying this 'logic of appropriateness,' there are well-defined guidelines about how men and women should act and the value that is ascribed to masculine and feminine behaviour. It is one of my key objectives to 'undo the taken-for-grantedness' of institutions (Stivers 1993, 5), to show how much of what is presented as 'neutral' is in fact gendered. Each chapter examines how gender norms influence the political opportunity and constraint structures faced by feminists, and each illustrates when and how feminists can unsettle the entrenched norms in order to use institutions for their own ends.

An emphasis on a gendered view of institutions does not imply that one should conceive of the state as being inherently patriarchal. This book rejects the proposition put forward in some feminist theories – notably radical and socialist feminist analyses – that the state is a monolith that always operates to oppress women (for examples of these approaches see MacKinnon 1989; Ferguson 1987; Eisenstein 1993; Brown 1995). One problem with the view that the state represents only male interests is that, as Franzway, Court, and Connell (1989, 29) warn, 'this approaches a conspiracy theory. One is left searching for Patriarchal Headquarters to explain what goes on.' Another problem is that it reifies the state and elides the differences that exist between the various institutions that form it. As Hester Eisenstein (1996, xvii) notes: 'To speak of "the state" is misleading. "The state" means the entire apparatus of government, from parliaments, cabinets, and bureaucracies administering programs for health, welfare, education, and commerce to the judicial system, the army and the police ... Each has a different relation to women.'

Rather than viewing the state as inherently patriarchal, it is more useful to see the individual institutions that comprise it as 'culturally marked as masculine' and as operating largely as the 'institutionalisation of the power of men' (Franzway, Court, and Connell 1989, 41). Nevertheless, the institutionalization of gender values is not 'fixed'; gender norms can manifest themselves in different ways within different institutions and can fluctuate across time and between states. Furthermore, gender operates within institutions at both a *nominal* and a *substantive* level. This point is well made by Savage and Witz (1992, 37, emphasis added), who argue:

it is not the gender of state actors which renders the state patriarchal, but the ways in which the competing political interests of gender are displaced

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onto or 'distilled' through the state. A *nominally* patriarchal state is not necessarily a *substantively* patriarchal one, although it is clear that, if the legislative, administrative and policy making arenas are in male hands (i.e., nominally patriarchal) then the more likely it is that the state will be substantively patriarchal.

Although the political opportunities open to all activists are shaped by existing gender norms, they are especially important to feminists who seek to challenge and destabilize them in order to create new avenues for reform within institutions.

If it is accepted that institutions are gendered and that this shapes the opportunities open to feminist activists, then the question becomes: what constitutes a positive or negative outcome for feminist activists in their engagement with political institutions? In this book, the mark of feminist success or failure is measured by the extent to which they are able to take advantage of existing political opportunities or to create new opportunities through which to pursue 'women's issues.' But how are these issues to be defined? The feminist literature is alive with debates surrounding whether there are, indeed, specifically women's needs, interests, and issues. Given the challenge presented by women from various identity groups about what constitutes a 'woman,' feminist scholars and practitioners are increasingly reluctant to hold on to universalist concepts, which suggest that there is one identifiable set of women's issues. Women, like men, have widely diverse interests and cannot be treated as a monolithic block. Women's diversity presents a dilemma for those arguing for increasing women's representation, whether in a corporeal sense or in terms of 'interests' in political institutions such as Parliament or the bureaucracy. As Anne Phillips (1991, 26) points out, 'the representation of women *as women* potentially founders on both the difficulties of defining shared values of women and difficulties of establishing mechanisms through which these interests are voiced.'

Through their practice it is possible to identify two levels at which feminist activists have understood and operationalized the concept of women's interests. The first relates to women's unique and common biological characteristics, or what could be defined as sex-based commonalities. The fact that women share a similar reproductive system and potential has provided the basis for feminists, politicians, bureaucrats, lawyers, and lobbyists to argue for specialist reproductive and health services, including access to abortion, assisted reproductive technology, maternity services, and the like. However, even this seemingly straightforward understanding of women's interests is problematic with different categories of women. Certain groups of women, those deemed 'most desirable,' have found the state more willing to encourage and support their

reproductive needs, while others, such as those from Aboriginal backgrounds, have faced direct discrimination in terms of access to services. For example, while White women in Australia were benefiting from particular aspects of the welfare state, such as mothers pensions and child custody rights, Aboriginal women were not only denied these rights but, until the 1970s, many were forced to suffer state-sanctioned removal of their children (see Lake 1999, 83). In Canada, First Nations women suffered similar trauma in relation to the absence of rights over their children as well as, until 1985, being discriminated against under the Indian Act (see Weaver 1993).

The second sense in which the term 'women's interests' has been understood and applied by the feminist community relates to those specific interests that arise from women's particular historical and social position (see Vickers 1997b). In this view, women have a set of common interests because of the historical fact of women's relegation to the private sphere and men's predominance in the public sphere. This historical, patriarchal division between the public and private spheres resulted in women being economically and emotionally dependent upon men as well as being less educated. Moreover, it has meant that women have been underrepresented in all areas of the public realm, including corporate and political life. These historical distinctions, and the ongoing attitudes and norms that stem from them, are not founded in any natural biological difference between men and women but, rather, are gender-based; that is, they are socially constructed and are, therefore, able to be challenged. Feminist activists have attempted to do this through legislation, constitutional and common law, and public policies and practices within all forms of political institutions. The introduction of childcare facilities, girl's and women's education programs, equal pay and affirmative action in employment, and anti-violence against women measures are all examples of these efforts.

Arguments about the existence of common women's interests, especially those related to gender-based distinctions between men and women, have been controversial. Challenges have come from a number of directions. Some feminists, particularly those outside the majoritarian strand of the movement, have argued that the analysis of women's specific needs has failed to incorporate the division between women based on race, class, and sexuality. Efforts to redress these socio-historical imbalances have also presented a broad challenge to the social status quo. Many men and women wanting to uphold traditional roles have, therefore, been highly critical of feminist activists' assessment of 'women's issues,' claiming that feminists do not speak on behalf of all women.

Despite the controversies around the notion of women's interests, the concept has been an important discursive tool for activists. The extent to which feminists have used this concept, in both its sex-based and gender-based

variants, is a focus of this book. I am interested in evaluating the extent to which majoritarian feminist activists have been able to take advantage of, or to create, political opportunities to enter institutions and then to advance what they define as women's interests.

#### A Comparative Perspective

As discussed above, the theoretical basis of *Gendering Government* is grounded in a historical neo-institutionalist approach. A key tenet of this approach is the importance of comparing the influence of institutional forces across both time and place. The temporal element is important in showing how changes in the institutional landscape are reflected in social actors' choices within a given polity. I focus on the influence of institutions on feminist activists' choices in Australia and Canada since the resurgence of feminism in the late 1960s to the late 1990s. This thirty-year time span provides an opportunity to plot the effect of the creation of new institutions (such as the entrenchment of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada) and the reform of existing institutions (such as changes to political party pre-selection processes) on feminist strategies in each polity.

The comparative method also has a spatial dimension. It examines differences and similarities in the institutional settings of Australia and Canada in order to make some generalizations about the influence of institutions on feminist activists across place. To what extent do differences in the operation of similar institutions in Australia and Canada – including the legislature and political party system, the bureaucracy, federalism, and the legal and constitutional system – explain the variations in the choice of strategies pursued by feminists in the two polities? What is the effect on feminists of differences between individual institutions (and of the interaction between them)?

I have selected Australia and Canada as the sites of comparison because these two countries are extremely similar to one another. By holding many variables more or less constant, it is possible to identify unexpected and interesting differences between these countries in order to develop 'a more refined account of national attributes and peculiarities' (Alexander and Galligan 1992, 1). Both Australia and Canada have a large landmass with relatively small multicultural and multiracial populations. Both are settler societies with Aboriginal populations. The two countries share a British colonial heritage as well as strong ties to the United States, the influences of which are reflected in similar economic, cultural, and political structures. Both are capitalist countries with residual welfare states. And each has blended a Westminster parliamentary and common law tradition with federal structures to create a hybrid political system.

Despite these similarities, interesting differences between Australia and

Canada are evident at a number of levels. In Canada, cultural, linguistic, and regional cleavages are more pronounced than they are in Australia. To a large extent this can be explained by the existence of Quebec, a province that differs from the rest of the country in terms of its heritage, culture, and language. The pressure stemming from Quebec separatism, or, at the very least, the demand by the province that the rest of Canada acknowledge its 'distinct society status,' has long had a major impact on the Canadian political scene. With the resurgence of Quebec nationalism in the 1960s, the province has been a particularly potent political force throughout the contemporary period.

The cleavages dividing Australia have taken quite a different form from those dividing Canada. Although regionalism has occasionally been a factor, cultural and linguistic divisions have been much less obvious. Historically, religious sectarianism and class have set the parameters around which social and political battles have been fought. The latter has declined in significance during the past three decades only to be replaced by the increased significance of the urban/rural divide. Nevertheless, class has remained an enduring organizing force in Australian political life. In terms of political culture, it appears that Canadians have seen the state as an instrument for accommodating and recognizing minority rights, whereas Australians have traditionally perceived the state in utilitarian terms.

The differences between the two countries do not stop here. It is also possible to identify significant variations between what are outwardly similar political institutional structures in Australia and Canada. For instance, both countries have a system of responsible government in place, yet there are key differences in how parliamentarians are elected to office, the level of partisanship within Parliament, and the composition and operation of the Senate. Important differences are also apparent within the two bureaucracies, especially in their levels of internal politicization and their interaction with the political executive. The federal structures of both countries also diverge from each other in terms of the level of political and fiscal autonomy of the constituent units, crucial aspects of any federal state. Finally, in relation to the Constitution and legal system, Canada has an entrenched bill of rights, whereas Australia has no express rights protections. These institutional differences are not superficial, especially when we consider them from the point of view of social actors. In the following chapters I argue that these differences have influenced the opportunity structures open to political activists in the two countries and, as a result, have shaped their choices in relation to strategies and structures.

*Gendering Government* also contributes to existing comparative feminist literature. Other comparative feminist works, such as that by Joyce Gelb (1989) and Sylvia Bashevkin (1998), have developed arguments about the importance of institutions by analyzing political systems that differ from

each other in important respects. Gelb considers the corporatist Swedish system, the federal congressional regime in the United States, and the unitary parliamentary system in the United Kingdom. Bashevkin compares the American, British, and Canadian federal parliamentary systems. These studies are interesting in that, for feminists, they advance contrasting conclusions about the advantages and disadvantages of these divergent institutional settings. For Gelb, the American-style congressional system most benefits feminists because it enables them to operate as independent, autonomous activists. Bashevkin's (1998, 10) study produces somewhat different conclusions, arguing that the parliamentary systems found in Canada and Britain are not as constraining as Gelb has assumed. While these studies provide valuable comparisons of the influence of different political systems on feminists, they cannot explain why feminists within similar institutional settings – in this case, parliamentary and federal – vary in their strategic approaches to the state. *Gendering Government* is the first book to undertake such a comparison. In providing such an account, it argues, alongside Gelb and Bashevkin, that institutions matter; however, it refines the argument to illustrate how differences within similar institutions influence feminist activism.

I limit myself to providing an account of the strategies of majoritarian feminists in Australia and Canada; that is, the predominantly White, middle-class movement in Australia and the Anglophone strand of the movement in Canada. In doing so, I omit other important feminist actors, including those from minority groups (e.g., Aboriginal activists and those from non-English speaking backgrounds and, in the case of Canada, a second majoritarian movement made up of Francophone feminists in Quebec). The various elements of feminist activism in both countries have not been completely isolated from each other. At various times they have cooperated on a range of issues. Nevertheless, the variations between these activists in terms of strategies and structure make it necessary to differentiate between them.

The same political opportunity and constraint structures cannot be assumed for all women in any single state; rather, we need to acknowledge that the racial aspects of the state have meant that women from different backgrounds have faced different opportunities and constraints. The Anglo-majoritarian feminist movements that are the focus of this book have been in a relatively privileged position compared to their Aboriginal and non-Anglo contemporaries vis-à-vis political institutions. The focus on Anglo-majoritarian elements of the movements in Australia and Canada prohibits broad generalizations about the experiences of all feminists in these two countries. Activists from Aboriginal communities, non-English speaking groups, and Francophone backgrounds all have different stories to tell about the nature of the political and constraint structures

that are open to them and the strategies they have developed in response. It is not my purpose to tell these stories, nor is it my intention to make generalizations about all feminist engagement with the state.

The data for *Gendering Government* are derived from three main sources. They draw upon a significant body of secondary literature related to political institutions, gender politics, and feminist intervention in the state in Australia and Canada. They are also based, to a significant degree, on primary research undertaken in Australia and Canada during the period between 1995 and 2000. I consulted government documents, feminist activist archives, and newspaper reports in each country. I also conducted a number of open-ended interviews with key feminist activists and politicians in Australia and Canada. In Australia these included former heads of the key Commonwealth 'femocrat' agency, the Office of the Status of Women (and the equivalent state agencies in New South Wales and South Australia), feminist activists from the Women's Liberation and the Women's Electoral Lobby strands of the women's movement, and a former minister assisting the prime minister for women's affairs. In Canada, I conducted interviews with former and current bureaucrats in women's agencies, feminist activists from NAC, and feminist academics. To enable interviewees to be as frank as possible, it was agreed that their identities would be protected in any published work arising from this research. Although not referred to by name in the text, these interviewees provided invaluable information that enabled me both to cross-check and clarify information I had gathered from other sources. They also enabled me to open new lines of inquiry. Where direct quotes from interviews are used in the text, the position of the person is noted so long as her anonymity is protected. A list of when and where interviews took place is included with other references.

The following discussion takes up the issues outlined here and extends the current debate about gender interests and the state on three levels. First, it broadens existing feminist analyses by highlighting the importance of institutions, and the opportunities they afford, for shaping the strategic choices of feminist activists. It does this through examining Anglo-feminist engagement with the electoral, bureaucratic, legal, and federal institutions in Australia and Canada. Second, it bridges the structure/agency debate to show how feminists are both shaped by and shape the POSs open to them. Third, it expands the current neo-institutionalist and POS literature by examining how gender norms operate within institutions.