

Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

WENDY MCKEEN, *Money in Their Own Name: The Feminist Voice in Poverty Debate in Canada, 1970-1995*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004, viii + 168p.

Wendy McKeen has written a stunning short book on the history of feminist involvement in social policy-making in the critical period of welfare state restructuring from the 1970s to mid-1990s. Opening the book, I expected to read how feminist influence was gradually curtailed, feminist demands over-thrown, and their organizations depleted and marginalized by ascendent neoliberal factions with their pro-family, anti-woman programs. But the story is much more interesting in McKeen's subtle, detailed rendering. She tells of the varying degree of effectiveness of feminist voices and the narrowing of strategic avenues available to their organizations as they attempted to influence social policy debates on behalf of women. Moreover, she presents the struggles and failures of the second wave women's movement without assigning victimization or blame. Members of the movement emerge as significant political actors, not as sell-outs to, or casualties of, neoliberal restructuring.

McKeen's approach to narrating history is bold and effective. She focuses on one key principle—that women should be entitled to social benefits, such as income support, in their own name on a universal basis. The body of her work meticulously documents the career of this proposal, its variations and permutations, over twenty-five years. Providing women “money in their own name” would accomplish several feminist goals. It would, first, recognize that women bear the burden of social reproduction through unwaged labour; second, it would acknowledge that this work is of social value; third, declare that households are sites of redistribution in which women's poverty is hidden; fourth, position women as deserving beneficiaries in their own right, not merely by virtue of their family roles; and finally, provide women with a measure of autonomy so vital to their ability to fulfil modest goals of citizenship. Individualized entitlement was a cornerstone of feminist demands in the 1970s; by the mid-1990s, it had been dropped entirely from social policy debates. Child and family benefits increasingly became targetted by income at the household level in the interest of the child, not in the interest of parents or, crucially, of women.

The strength of McKeen's book lies in its sharp analysis of how feminist policy positions were shaped at key junctures. Because she so adeptly holds the tension between structure and agency, she provides a compelling argument that marginal actors do influence the course of social policy. The feminist voice matters, and because it does McKeen's book throws up surprising intellectual challenges. The first challenge is to imagine how the story could have come out differently, and

what stories will be told later of the present. The fundamental questions, “What should a woman-friendly, egalitarian form of citizenship and social policy look like, and what political demands will help to propel us towards such a vision?” resound through each moment of strategic choice and ideological closure McKean identifies (p. 7).

The second challenge is to consider how the story could be broadened. *Money in Their Own Name* is a national account, featuring members of the “policy community” of English Canada. McKean justifies this focus in light of her decision not to privilege faceless, macro-level forces. Yet I am challenged to reflect on how, methodologically, it would be possible to build on this work by drawing in transnational influences without losing the specificity of documented moments of choice-making by historical actors within concrete institutional and discursive contexts. My impulse to want to broaden the national focus of the analysis is not a criticism of this work but a testament to its success.

The third challenge is to compare the multi-layered concept of “individualization” in McKean’s work with that of contemporary social theorists. I read McKean’s book shortly after reading Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim’s *Individualization* (2002). McKean analyses struggles to advance the social individual as a model of citizenship. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim discuss the emancipatory potentials, as well as the burdens and risks associated with this model. Both works differentiate the social individual from the neo-liberal construct of the free-market individual, yet underscore the tendency for the social model, which promotes “independence within interdependence” (p. 18), to transmute into the neoliberal model, which assigns individual responsibility, and penalizes, yet also reinforces, women’s dependency.

Clear writing, theoretical rigor and solid evidence make *Money in Their Own Name* a model of historical research. I have only one minor regret about the book. It would have benefitted from a glossary of terms specific to social programs and social movement actors, including their acronyms and associated dates. A glossary would facilitate reading by international scholars, who will be interested in this work for comparative purposes. For a younger generation of students of Canadian social policy, the book should be supplemented by reference material that includes a time line. Furnished with appropriate background resources, anyone interested in the history of the welfare state, the history of feminist thought, women’s organizing, and the politics of social policy, will find *Money in their Own Name* a vital and rewarding book.

Mary-Beth Raddon Brock University