1 Finding the women’s movement

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For more than 30 years obituaries have been appearing for the second-wave women’s movement, in what has been called ‘false feminist death syndrome’. By 1998 *Time* magazine is said to have run 119 death of feminism stories.¹ The grounds for pronouncing death are rarely clear. Some believe that feminism is no longer relevant because equality has already been ‘done’. There is often thinly disguised irritation that feminist claims-making is still happening, at least in Western democracies. Or else there is a lack of knowledge that such claims are still being made, perhaps because of lack of media interest. The women’s movement is no longer ‘new’ and therefore is no longer ‘news’. The women’s movement has outlived the attention span of the media.

Some suggest that generational change has taken place and that the women’s movement is no longer relevant to young women, just as happened in the aftermath of suffrage mobilisation when ‘flappers’ supposedly became more interested in exploring their new social freedoms than in changing the world. Others argue that gender identity is now so unstable and intersects with so many other identities that it can no longer provide a basis for political action. We believe that this potential for political action still exists, even if it is absent from our television screens. This book contests the obituaries, setting out to find the women’s movement in one country and to show how it has sustained itself over time, even when the times have not suited it.

As stated in the Preface and in greater detail in the Appendix, our findings are based on large-scale quantitative data relating to institutions and protest events in Australia as well as focused research on the mapping of discursive and advocacy communities. This is the first time that institutions arising from a women’s movement have been so comprehensively mapped, enabling their trajectories to be examined in relation to protest event activity. We believe the findings are relevant not only to the study of women’s movements in other Western democracies but also to the study of other social movements.

It is true that the Australian women’s movement, like other Western feminist movements, is less visible than when it was receiving headline media treatment in the 1970s. As Sylvia Walby suggests, this is partly because:

New forms of feminism have emerged that no longer take the form of a ‘traditional’ social movement, being institutionalised instead in civil society
and the state. These new institutional forms are less recognisable as feminist by those who are accustomed to thinking of feminism as merely visible protest.7

But beyond the question of social movement form and visibility, we also contend that the way in which social movements themselves have been theorised has proven inadequate for understanding women’s movements. As shown in the Preface, one influential approach developed in the United States made the employment of non-institutionalised action the defining feature of social movements, the thing that distinguished them from other political actors. On this reading, movements lacked institutional resources and hence engaged in a distinctive repertoire of contestation.9 Identifying movements with a particular repertoire based on protest events meant in turn that the activity or life cycle of movements could be measured quantitatively, through protest event databases. While such measurement can tell us interesting things, and indeed is used in this book, it focuses on only one of the multiple ways in which social movements operate and tells us little about the meaning of these events for participants. It also privileges this mode of operating over others that may be more characteristic of women’s movements.4

Another influential approach to theorising social movements came from Europe and is particularly identified with the work of Alberto Melucci.11 It appears more relevant to our own historical purposes than early resource mobilisation or political process theory, having an emphasis on identity-creation and meaning-making and on movements as submerged social networks. However it ties the appearance of new social movements to a particular point in history when there was scope for the appearance of movements based on postmaterialist values.

Yet as Druke Dahlberg argues in the next chapter, the women’s movement has been a continuous movement for more than a century, so cannot be tied to a particular post-industrial moment. Our approach builds on the work of others who have pointed to the lack of fit between propositions derived from male-dominated movements and the nature of the women’s movement.6 We see women’s movements as challenging the existing social order through gendered claims-making and women-centred discourses, without this necessarily involving disruptive collective action. In other words, we argue that institutionalisation is part of how the women’s movement has always operated. This has brought us to define women’s movements in the following terms:

- mobilising collective identity as women;
- sustaining women-centred discourses;
- making claims that challenge the existing gender order.

This combination of characteristics brings us close to the definition offered by Dorothy McBride and Amy Mazur, who understood women’s movements as comprising of ‘collective action by women organized explicitly as women presenting claims in public life based on gendered identities as women’.7 We don’t

bring the word ‘feminist’ into our definition because, as we shall discuss below, there have been times when women’s movements were doing all the things in our definition but distanced themselves from word ‘feminism’ – the early years of Women’s Liberation are but one example of this.

If we no longer rely on disruptive action as a defining element of a social movement, then this has implications for the kind of longevity we can attribute to a movement. Social movement theorist Sidney Tarrow developed a life-cycle model of such movements, arguing that by their nature, as non-institutionalised mass movements, they could not be sustained for long. A movement’s adoption of more institutional forms, incorporation into existing institutions, or collapse altogether, was seen as inevitable. This view of social movement life cycles lends itself to proclamations of the death of a movement when the activities of movement activists are no longer visible. Either the movement’s claims are accommodated and institutionalised or else the movement fails, but either way the movement is ‘over’. In such life cycle theories of social movements, institutionalisation means ‘the substitution of the routines of organised politics for the disorder of life in the streets’.9

There is a general assumption that institutionalisation is something that comes after, replaces or usurps the role of social movements and signals the end of the potentially transformative phase of political action.

As we have seen in the Preface, social movement theorists themselves increasingly acknowledge that the original dichotomy between contentious and conventional politics was too sharply drawn. Nonetheless, there is still a strong tendency to see institutionalisation as a strategy mistakenly adopted by social movements, which leads to co-option and displacement of goals. This negative perception of institutionalisation precludes asking how social movement agendas can be sustained over time, even as the form of engagement changes.

In contrast, a definition such as ours opens the way for greater understanding of the ways in which movement goals can be pursued through creating institutions, and as through non-institutional action. As we shall see from the qualitative data presented in subsequent chapters of this book, institution-building can take place at the same time as non-institutional contentious action, rather than following from a period of contentious action as sometimes suggested by social movement theory. The inclusion in our definition of a discursive element acknowledges the significance of cultural production as well as the role of women’s organisations in sustaining women-centred discourses through difficult times. Thanks to the Internet such organisations now use social networking and blogs to affirm values and maintain feminist rage, often through feminist humour, as do the feminist on-line communities discussed by Frances Shaw in Chapter 8.

This chapter looks at how, in terms of our definition, the women’s movement has had a continuous existence since the nineteenth century, even as it has diversified and as its repertoire and agenda have changed. We find that despite such changes, activities continue to identify with previous struggles. This justifies our argument that this is the same movement manifesting itself in ways that are both the same and different.
Women's movement repertoires

As we argue above, the idea that the women's movement is 'over' is tied both to negative perceptions of institutionalisation and to the definition of social movements in terms of disruptive or contentious repertoires of action. Our own rejection of this approach comes partly from its lack of fit with the history of women's movements in Australia and its close neighbour, New Zealand. If we consistently applied the definition of social movements as based on non-institutionalised protest activity we would have to conclude that successful campaigns for the vote in Australia and New Zealand in the late nineteenth century did not involve women's movements, which is clearly wrong.

Nonetheless the repertoire of direct action used by the militant wings of the women's suffrage movement in the United Kingdom was a source of inspiration to later generations and was appropriated by movements that lacked a similar history of militancy. For example, ' chaining' and making public speeches while chained to the railings of important buildings in London was part of the repertoire of both the Women's Social and Political Union and the Women's Freedom League at a time when women had already won political rights in Australia. In 1908, Australian electioneering lawyer Anna Majer, a WSPU member, became famous as the first woman to make a speech in the British House of Commons - while chained to the grille of the Ladies Gallery. A year later she again received headlines when she sought to drop handbills over Westminster from a Votes for Women airship. Inspired by knowledge of suffragette chaining, in 1965 Australian women received worldwide media coverage for chaining themselves to a public bar in Brisbane - at a time when women were forbidden to drink in such bars in Australia. Four years later Zelda D'Aprano chained herself to the doors of the Commonwealth Building in Melbourne in protest against an equal pay decision that only brought equal pay to the 18 per cent of women workers who did the same work as men.

The use of disruptive repertoire was also the way that much of the world became aware of the arrival of the second wave of the women's movement. The catalyst was a disruptive 1968 protest against the Miss America Contest. A ' freedom trashcan' was planned where bras, girdles, stiletto-heeled shoes, curlers and other instruments of torture were to be dumped. A sympathetic journalist added the flames, thinking the analogy with the burning of draft cards would give the event added gravitas - thus giving rise to the headline that went around the world of 'Bra-burners and Miss America'. The alliteration of 'bra-burning' and the image it conjured up became so pervasive in the media that even many women's movement activists came to believe that some bras must have been burnt somewhere by someone.

One symbolic element of the Miss America protest that was quickly appropriated by Women's Liberation groups around the world was the image of a clenched fist within Venus's handmirror, the latter being the symbol used in biology to denote female. The image provided a visual jolt, together with its reproduction in 'menstrual red', the name used by Robin Morgan to deter appropriation by lipstick manufacturers. The clenched fist symbol was still being used by the Norwegian Women's Front in 2008, the year they finally succeeded in their struggle to criminalise the purchase of sexual services. While confrontational repertoire became identifies with Women's Liberation, it is generally true that women's movements have been less likely to engage in disruptive or violent action than male-led movements. Even in the case of protest events, such as those explored by Catherine Strong and Kirsty McLaren in Chapter 4, women's movements have found non-violent ways to become noteworthy by transgressing gender norms. But much of the work of women's movements has been of an institutional or discursive nature. A study of the UK, France and Germany covering the period 1980-2007 found that only 2 per cent of the overall activities of women's movements were protest-related or disruptive. Women's movements operate in multiple arenas, using a wide variety of repertoires, which may include disruptive action but also less public ways of challenging the gender order. As discussed further in Chapter 3, one of the best known is consciousness-raising - meeting in small groups and discovering the commonality of experiences. As Robin Morgan wrote, 'The Women's Liberation Movement exists where three or four friends or neighbours decide to meet regularly over coffee and talk about their personal lives.' While this technique requires the trust established in small groups, disruptive action may be needed to get the message out via the media to broader groups of women. As shown in Chapter 7, popular culture may help disseminate the message still further, whether through music, television or even sports such as Roller Derby.

Contrary to those who think that the transformative phase is over, we find that the women's movement is still challenging the gender order and working its way through institutions, as well as engaging in cultural production, cyberspace and everyday living. Women-centred discourses and claims-making are sustained through women's advocacy organisations, vocational bodies and women's offices, as well as through social networking campaigns. Women's units established in Australian governments in the 1970s institutionalised the feminist insight that no public policy could be assumed to be gender-neutral in its effects, given the social division of labour. Women's services institutionalised explanations of domestic violence as arising from systemic inequalities between men and women.

While there may be less visible policy engagement and public contention, there are extensive commemorative activities that sustain collective identities. For example, the Sydney-based Colectivo Mujer brings together commemorative objectives with those of challenging the gender order. It seeks to honour the achievements of past and present Latinas and Spanish-speaking women, to highlight the role of women's activism and 'to disrupt, challenge and reimagine current gender realities in our communities'. Elsewhere, annual memorial lectures named in honour of second-wave feminists such as Claire Bunner or Pamela Denoon provide an occasion for reaffirmation of identity and values, as do awards, prizes and scholarships for feminist achievement.
Other forms of feminist cultural production include film, books, music, art, theatre, websites or blogs, as shown by Sarah Maddison, Frances Shaw and Catherine Strong in this book. This form of expressive politics has been crucial to maintaining women-centred discourses and challenging gender norms during hostile or unfavourable political periods. Indeed, a recent survey in the UK and US found that newspapers were much more likely to run articles relating feminism to popular culture and politics than to cover feminist protests such as Take Back the Night/Reclaim the Night marches, reinforcing the perception that these no longer happen. Our own protest event data shows that one of Australia’s major broadsheets stopped covering International Women’s Day marches for a number of years after 1976, despite the turn out for marches being comparable to earlier years (see Chapter 4). Lack of media interest in such protest events may itself contribute to a shift in repertoires.

Understanding movement continuity

Insisting on the use of disruptive or direct action as the marker of a social movement means disregarding much of the activity of women’s organisations and agencies and discounting it as an indication of the presence of a movement that links past to present and future. It means overlooking the demonstrable continuity over time in the ways women have constituted themselves as collective political subjects and sought separations, too, of female solidarity. Most importantly, it means disregarding the ways in which women’s movements have themselves identified with preceding waves. Activists have reinforced collective identity (the sisterhood discussed below) through celebrating the genealogy of the women’s movement. As Dahlerup writes in Chapter 2, when we talk about women’s movement identity, this includes identifying with past as well as present generations of women and drawing on women’s past struggles as inspiration for present action. This point, that women’s collective identity means acknowledging the contribution of past as well as present generations of women activists, is one explicitly made by the Feminist Majority in the United States in their YouTube video on what it means to be a feminist.

We have already noted the referencing of suffragette repertoire by later waves of the women’s movement. Recent women’s movements have often drawn inspiration from such ‘heroic’ moments of women’s political history. For example, Australian second-wave feminists organising events for International Women’s Year, led by the Prime Minister’s Women’s Adviser, adopted the colours of the Pankhurst’s WSPU as a signifier of solidarity with feminist struggles past and present. Since 1975 the WSPU colours have been used everywhere in Australia, from government publications and websites to International Women’s Day banners. One respondent to a survey of women who were the colours said that for her they meant: ‘identifying with first-wave feminists who initially proposed these as signifiers of the women’s movement’. Another said: ‘They give me a strong sense of the history and ongoing struggle of women to achieve equality.’

The purple, green and white of the WSPU and the events associated with these colours may have seemed more heroic than the white ribbons of the ten- perance movement that were so prominent in the suffrage movements of Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Even a conservative federal government in Australia was persuaded to use the WSPU colours for the suffrage fountain commemorating the centenary of women’s political rights. These colours had become the signifier of women’s struggle for the vote, freed from any specific organisational reference.

Women’s movements have been notable for such commemoration of their past history. For example, there were very extensive celebrations of the achievement of women’s suffrage in Australia and New Zealand, a form of identity affirmation missing from the centenaries of male suffrage. This identification with past struggles has helped underlie the historical continuity of the women’s movement, which coexists with connections to the newer social movements. Discounting continuity appears both counter-intuitive and unhelpful in terms of deepening our understanding of social movements.

Examples of continuity can be found around the world. In Canada the case brought by the ‘Famous Five’, that women should be regarded as ‘persons’ under the British North America Act and hence eligible for appointment to the Canadian Senate, was finally successful in 1929. Among the many commemorations of the Famous Five is the striking sculpture on Parliament Hill, Ottawa, of the women receiving news of their victory. In Western Australia, Women’s Electoral Lobby recreated in 1990 the ‘mile-long’ suffrage petition presented by the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union a century before and hundreds of women carried it in an International Women’s Day march.

One of the ways in which activists have mobilised collective identity is through deploying the idea of ‘sisterhood’, whether in the first or second waves. Indeed, imagined sisterhood is the emotional force that has brought together diverse groups of women to work on common projects. After addressing an audience of some 16,000 at the Albert Hall in London in 1911 Australian suffragist Vida Goldstein wrote that the meetings each ‘had for its centre and circumference an exalted sense of sisterhood of women.’

Sisterhood also became a central mobilising device in the second wave of the women’s movement, as in the slogan ‘sisterhood is powerful’. In the first issue of Ms. Magazine, Gloria Steinem wrote that because of lack of self esteem, women had wanted to identify up with men and not down with women. It was only when feminist realisation dawned that the birth of sisterhood took place. One element of sisterhood was refraining from public criticism of other women. Of course this element of sisterhood was not always adhered to (Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer were notorious examples of feminist leaders who did down other women) but it could contribute to an unwillingness to recognise or deal with genuine differences.

One set of differences that soon emerged was the critique of ‘mainstream’ women’s movement organisations as insufficiently attuned to the different realities experienced by Indigenous, lesbian, culturally and linguistically diverse
women or women with disabilities. Such critique, sometimes forthrightly presented at ‘mainstream’ conferences, led to separate organizing to ensure a national policy voice, often supported by funds made available by feminists within government. Today advocacy peaks representing all these groups work together in Australia on projects such as capacity-building for policy work, pre-Budget submissions, raising election policies of political parties or shadow reports on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (Chapter 4).

Continuity and discontinuity over time

As Dahle points out, new waves of feminist protest often begin by distancing themselves from feminist predecessors, or particularly those of their mothers’ generation. The women’s movements of the early 1970s at first were slow to identify with their more polite predecessors. For the young women of what was later called the ‘second wave’ the women’s movement began with them. An article published in 1974 by the newly formed and highly effective Women’s Electoral Lobby (WEL) confidently began: ‘The women’s movement in Australia is now a new two years old.’

When we talk about waves, there is danger that we overlook what comes between the waves, as the young women did in the early 1970s. Looking back, however, there seems to be remarkable continuity between successive waves of the women’s movement and what comes in between. Women have struggled for equal citizenship; for control of their bodies; for recognition of their claims as mothers and workers.

Of course while succeeding waves of the women’s movement were contesting the prevailing gender order, they did not necessarily agree on how to achieve a better one. While first-wave feminists were clearly aware of the issue of domestic violence, feminist and temperance movements were often intertwined in voting for women and control of the liquor trade as being the answer. In contrast, second-wave feminists were anxious to ensure that the underlying cause was seen as gender inequality rather than the availability of alcohol. The ‘taken for granted’ understandings of different generations on matters such as race, eugenics or sexuality were also vastly different. For example, hundreds of women attending a 1975 International Women’s Year conference in Canberra gave a standing ovation to Ruby Rich, a stalwart of the Australian women’s movement since the 1920s. Rich had been a long-time office-bearer of the Australian Federation of Women Voters, a campaigns for Aboriginal rights and a family planning activist. But her contribution to the family planning movement began with her role as a founding president in 1926 of the Racial Hygiene Association. It was not a ‘racist’ organization as such – Rich and other members were Jewish – but like other birth control associations of the time it had eugenic overtones that would be unacceptable in the post-Fascist era, let alone after the International Year of the Disabled in 1981. Yet in the 1920s concern over inheritance of disease or mental deficiency was commonplace among feminist activists and eugenics was more publicly acceptable than family planning. In fact the name Racial Hygiene Association was retained until 1960 when it became the Family Planning Association of Australia.

Similarly, first-wave feminist campaigners such as Vida Goldstein were supporters of White Australia, as part of a progressive concern for social equality. It was assumed that a racially divided society would be an unequal one. Goldstein included White Australia in her 1903 platform when she ran for the Senate, along with support for protection, conciliation and arbitration and women’s suffrage. She did, however, oppose the exclusion of non-white mothers from the maternity allowance when it was introduced in 1912, saying it was the ‘White Australia policy gone mad’.

As concerned sexuality, first-wave women’s movements generally campaigned for a single standard of sexual behaviour – purity for men as well as women (although exceptions are noted in Chapter 10). Goldstein’s campaign committee assured voters in 1903 that, contrary to rumours, she opposed easy divorce as antagonistic to the stability and purity of the home. Heterosexuality was generally taken for granted. The second wave also wanted to do away with double standards, but now in order to liberate women’s sexuality and talk about it openly. A pamphlet on female sexuality produced by Women’s Liberation members caused uproar when it was handed to schoolgirls in Brisbane in 1971. One woman was arrested and postal facilities were withdrawn. In Sydney the principal of the second-wave journal Refractions of a Refractions of 1974 on the grounds it was obscene. When another printer was found a leaflet was included asking ‘Are lesbians obscene?’

In relation to prostitution there were both continuities and discontinuities between the waves in Australia as elsewhere. First-wave feminists generally saw the existence of prostitution as incompatible with improvements in the status of women and many of their continuing organisations, such as the International Abolitionist Federation, effectively argued for the abolition of prostitution. They saw criminalisation of prostitution as encouraging not only the treatment of all women as sexual commodities but also the international trafficking of women. This view has inspired the policy of criminalising the client, but not the prostitute, which has been legislated in Sweden, Norway and Iceland. On the other hand, many second-wave organisations adopted a different approach to prostitution, adopting the discourse of ‘sex work’ and seeking better protection of the rights of sex workers, including protection from discrimination on the basis of occupation. Organisations such as WEL carried placards in International Women’s Day marches in the early 1980s supporting the rights of prostitutes, something that would have been unthinkable in first-wave marches.

Another discontinuity during the early years of the second wave was that of organisational philosophy. As we shall see in Chapter 5, the second wave brought with it ideas concerning the relationship between hierarchy (identified as a masculine principle) and the disempowerment of women. The minimum of structure found in the new women’s movement collectives contrasted with the ranks of office-bearers of earlier women’s NGOs, even those at the more radical
end of the spectrum. Many of these older feminist office-bearers worried about the leaderless style of the new women’s organisations and whether it could be effective. At the same time, the creation of a wide range of women’s policy agencies and government-funded women’s services (see Chapter 6) became a part of the repertoire of the second wave that had little precedent.

Adopting or rejecting the label ‘feminist’

From its introduction in France in the 1880s the label ‘feminist’ has had mixed fortunes. Activists working to improve women’s lives have often eschewed the label, for a variety of reasons: some perceive feminism as inescapably linked to Western hegemony; others object to the bourgeois character of Western feminism; yet others hope to avoid the marginalisation … that accrues to those who identify as feminist.39 For example, the socialist Clara Zetkin, widely regarded as the mother of International Women’s Day, distanced herself from the term, believing that ‘bourgeois feminists’ were seeking to detach working-class women from the class struggle. At the same time young college graduates in the US were embracing the term as a sign of modernism, while in the UK playwright Cicely Hamilton identified herself as a feminist rather than a suffragist because she was rebelling against ideas of marriage and motherhood as a woman’s destiny.39

The antipathy to bourgeois feminism expressed by leading socialist women such as Zetkin and Alexandra Kollontai continued into the interwar period. At the same time long-time feminist activists observed how, for different reasons, the term had fallen out of favour among young women:

Modern young women know amazingly little of what life was like before the war, and show a strong hostility to the word ‘feminism’ and all which they imagine it to connote. They are, nevertheless, themselves the products of the women’s movement and the difficult and confusing conditions in which they live are partly due to the fact that it is in their generation that the change-over from the old to the new conception of the place of women in society is taking place.37

While young women in the interwar period might have seen feminism as old-fashioned, mainstream groups like the UK National Council of Women or the Women’s Institutes avoided the unpopular ‘feminist’ tag in order to maximise their membership.38 For these groups there was a perception that feminism was hostile to the vocation of wife and mother. Vera Brittain, mother of politician Shirley Williams, in an article entitled ‘The Bogy-Feminist’, wrote about how feminists were popularly perceived as ‘spectacled embittered women, disappointed, childless, dowdy, and generally unfeminine’. She herself was denounced as a ‘beauty-obsessed spinster, clearly with “strong feelings against the opposite sex”, after she gave a public lecture suggesting women could now combine home and family with a career.39

In Australia too, ‘feminism’ came to connote something old-fashioned and out of step with the times. An article in 1965 in the leading current-affairs weekly, The Bulletin, claimed that feminism had no footholds, suggesting it was out of date compared with the new social movements. The author described the Feminist Club in King Street in Sydney as a ‘pleasant backwater’, while ‘hard-core feminists’ clustered around the League of Women Voters.39 The Bulletin’s label ‘hard-core feminist’ referred to the separate organising and polite but persistent advocacy of women’s rights maintained by organisations like the League of Women Voters over many decades. Their newsletters served to maintain feminist discourses through hard times, presenting feminist perspectives on public affairs and affirming feminist values. This kind of activity ‘focused on maintaining networks, organisations and ideas’ has been described as typical of a social movement in obscurity.39 Perhaps, however, we can discard the ‘abysmal’ label to say that this kind of activity and the associated friendship networks have been typical of how women’s movements have operated over time.

It was common in the 1960s for public commentators and indeed social scientists to decry separate organising by women as something holding them back. Norman MacKenzie, brought to Australia by the Social Science Research Council to investigate the status of women, was very critical of the attitudes of sex antagonism and sex loyalty he associated with feminism. He was heatmap, however, to find ‘some evidence that the older forms of women’s organisations are losing their appeal and finding it hard to sustain their numbers’.39 His conclusion that younger women with more education and a wider experience of employment would not be interested in ‘women’s questions’ was a fine example of how disastrously wrong social science can be: a great reverence of women’s organisng was just around the corner.

The main image of feminism as quixotic, out-of-date (and basically ineffectual) made it perhaps unsurprising that even when the second wave arrived, young women did not want to be seen as feminists. They saw themselves instead as liberationists, like other radical movements of the time. Their vocabulary was one of the features that distinguished them from their predecessors, along with their scorn for formal meeting procedures and repertoires of ‘polite’ political action. As we have seen, their attitude to sex was also ‘liberated’ and very different from that of earlier generations of feminist activists. Gisela Kaplan notes that the Australian Women’s Liberation groups of the 1970s spurned the word ‘feminist’, seeing it as implying a limited, reformist approach.40 Anne Summers also recalls that in the mid-1970s:

To our consternation the term ‘feminist’ was starting to appear more and more in the American publications. It was not one we could identify with. We were liberationists. Granted, the term was rather clunky, its meaning was far from clear and it was easily lampooned . . . But it at least signified that we were modern, and forward looking. ‘Feminist’ was so old-fashioned to us it conjured up elderly ladies with umbrellas who had fought for the
vote and then campaigned to close the pubs. In our ignorance we believed that they were all whores and puritans, nothing like us.\(^{36}\)

It was a sign of the women’s movement’s constant change and adaption that the more all embracing and less left-identified term ‘feminism’ returned to replace ‘women’s liberation’ in the second half of the 1970s. In the US, Gloria Steinem was winning converts to the women’s movement from both the city and the suburbs with her wit and style. As she often put it: ‘Women have two choices: either she’s a feminist or a housewife.’

In Australia the term ‘feminist’ became important for WEL members as they rediscovered the continuity of the women’s movement. The 1980 WEL Papers began with a period woodcut and a 1915 definition:

Mother, what is a feminist?
A feminist, my daughter,
Is any woman now who cares
To think about her own affairs
As men don’t think she ought.

But by the 1990s the term ‘feminist’ was once again to fall out of favour among young women, a phenomenon explored in Chapter 9. The pressures of combining work and family were now seen as the ambivalent legacies of the new generation, the myth of ‘having it all’. Feminism had supposedly persuaded women they could either be superwomen juggling careers and families or to put their careers ahead of babies.\(^{35}\) In 2012 Princeton academic Anne-Marie Slaughter, who had given up a job in the Obama administration involving 16-hour days, wrote a cover story for the Atlantic entitled ‘Why women still can’t have it all’. In the week after its publication more than one million people read it on-line and 160,000 commented on Facebook. This phenomenon was written up in the Murdoch press under banner headlines such as ‘Death of the Feminist Dream’\(^{37}\) – as though ‘having it all’ was a feminist concept and feminists had dreamed of women having 16-hour days in the paid workforce.

As with the first wave, there were also the media stereotypes of feminists as man-hating and sexually unattractive. Sarah Maddison found when Convener of Younger WEL in NSW that media images of feminists as ‘ugly, hairy legs, separatists, man-hating, fat’, were a barrier to the recruitment of young women.\(^{38}\) While these images were different from the bespectacled and scrawny images of an earlier generation of feminists they carried the same message: challenging the gender order made women unattractive to men. Even at the height of women’s movement influence in Finland in the late 1980s, feminists were perceived as aggressive, fanatical and vilifying men.\(^{39}\) In London, the leading women’s rights advocacy organisation, the Fawcett Society explained in 2005 that it rarely used the term ‘feminism’ because ‘it was perceived negatively in focus groups.’

Eventually women’s organisations in the US, the UK and Australia started to respond to this media denigration. In the US the Feminist Majority Foundation sponsored a Feminist Expo in 2000, became the publisher of Ms Magazine in 2001 and also took to social networking.\(^{40}\) The Foundation organised YouTube celebrity endorsements of feminism and the wearing of ‘This is what a feminist looks like’ T-shirts by a diverse range of men and women. In Australia theYWCA took a lead in a similar promotion, while in the UK the Fawcett Society rebranded itself with a slogan saying ‘Reclaim the F-word with Fawcett’. Some of those reclaiming the word ‘feminism’ used the term ‘third-wave feminism’ to indicate this was feminism for young women, not just ageing second-wavers. While the term can be described as an empty signifier,\(^{41}\) for some it indicates a feminism that differs from its predecessors by including men, by being ‘pro-sex’, and being more sensitive to forms of difference that intersect with gender. Whether these are characteristics that in fact differentiate ‘third-wave’ from ‘second-wave’ feminism is a moot point.\(^{42}\)

In the US a high point in the reclamation of feminism was the January 2009 cover of Ms Magazine, showing President Barack Obama revealing a ‘This is what a feminist looks like’ T-shirt under his suit and tie. In the same year the Dalai Lama also declared himself to be a feminist. In Sydney the F Collective embarked on a blog project in 2012 to showcase on a weekly basis ‘other organisations and people who are part of a movement that is alive and kicking patriarchy in the arse.’\(^{43}\)

Building feminist institutions

As we have seen, one problem with equating social movements with disruptive action is that it renders invisible the historic continuity of women’s movements. Another problem is its effects on how social movement engagement with the state is perceived. For some writers, disappearance off the streets and into public institutions, including government, is a sign that a movement is over because it has ‘quenched its thirst’ and moved forward, bringing new people and new perspectives to the policy process.\(^{44}\) For others it is a sign of co-option, of buying off revolutionary potential. But social movements do not just disappear into existing public institutions. They may be responsible for creating a new constellation of institutions reflecting a movement’s values and perspectives. In Chapter 6 MerrindaH Andrew analyses the nature of this constellation, drawing on a database covering the institutional harvest of the Australian women’s movement over a period of 35 years. Our databases provide a unique opportunity to trace women’s movement legacies, but the findings are of relevance well beyond Australia. As we shall see, some of these institutions proved more durable than others. While women’s budget programmes disappeared in the 1990s, feminist vocational bodies multiplied.

As we have already observed, there is still a strong tendency on the part of social movement theorists to see ‘institutionalisation’ in negative terms: to view it as a strategy mistakenly adopted by social movements, which results in co-option, deradicalisation, routinisation, marginalisation or ‘fading’. Institutionalisation is identified with professionalisation of women’s organisations and, with work inside the system, a choice that drains energy from social movement activism.
Yet it is evident that feminist institutionalisation has proceeded in space in most parts of the world over recent decades. We understand this in the broadest sense to mean the creation of women-centred institutions with a mandate to empower women and promote gender equality, whether through democratic service provision, through providing cultural space, through providing redress for discrimination or through policy advice and policy monitoring. Some of these institution-building takes place within existing institutions, such as within professional or cultural bodies, churches, trade unions, government, parliament or multilateral bodies. Other institution-building takes place outside existing bodies, whether through the creation of women’s centres or advocacy groups, community-based women’s services, or cultural spaces such as feminist blogs and women’s choirs.

The term ‘institutionalisation’ is sometimes used more broadly to refer to the establishment of new norms of behaviour or the adoption of new discursive frameworks — for example, policy documents framing domestic violence in feminist ways. Like Mary Fainsied Katzstein, however, we use it in this book mainly to refer to the creation of space for women’s claims-making.

As we have already noted, in examining discontinuities with first-wave feminism, ‘second-wave’ feminist institution-building was deeply influenced by anti-hierarchical organisational philosophies. Second-wave feminists took these organisational ideas into other campaigns they became involved in, whether over environmental or peace issues, or the treatment of asylum seekers. They even took them into government. In New Zealand the new Ministry of Women’s Affairs practised collectivism and consensus decision-making, processes that were ‘so alien to the conventional, hierarchically public service culture it was like a foreign body, which had to be expelled if it were not to corrupt the entire culture’.

At the international level some of the recent forms taken by feminist institution-building include the adoption of electoral quotas for women in more than 100 countries, the adoption of women’s policy machinery in more than 165 countries, the creation and public funding of feminist services to address gender-based violence and the creation of parliamentary bodies with a mandate to focus on gender issues. Feminist advocacy from both inside and outside has resulted in new normative regimes, entrenched in instruments such as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), Security Council Resolution 1325 or the UN Millennium Development Goals. While all such gains involve compromises, they create space for further feminist claims-making.

One of the distinctive and enduring features of the Australian women’s movement has been its close and even embedded relationship with the state. The generations before and after the arrival of the ‘second wave’ were linked by the belief that equal opportunity for women required action by the state, and that only the collective effort and concerted pressure of women’s organisations would secure the attention of political leaders sufficiently for such action to occur. While hostility towards the state was expressed in the early years of Women’s Liberation, there was not the more sustained commitment to be the ‘sand rather than the oil in the machinery of government’ found in the German movement.

Beginning at the federal level in the 1970s Australia developed a unique model of women’s policy machinery, devised by feminists and promoted by organisations such as WEL. A reforming Labor government (led by Gough Whitlam) had responded to claims presented on behalf of the women’s movement with a commitment to address issues of concern to women as the business of government. The model of women’s policy machinery that resulted, the ‘hub and spokes’ model, was based on the feminist insight that because of the gendered division of labour, no government policy was likely to be gender-neutral in its effects. As mentioned in the Preface, this gave the rest of the word the word ‘feminocrat’, a term applied to feminists when appointed to the new women’s unit positions in the bureaucracy. As it is often forgotten, many of the first femocrats came directly from Women’s Liberation although it was WEL that helped promote the hub/spokes model in all Australian jurisdictions.

The focus on analysing the impact of policy on women across all portfolios was the forerunner of the women’s budget statements introduced at the federal level in 1984 and subsequently in all Australian States and Territories. At the international level such gender disaggregation of budgets became known as ‘gender-responsive budgeting’ and was promoted from the 1990s as a best-practice example of gender mainstreaming. Meanwhile, back in Australia, women’s policy co-ordinating agencies were being moved out of their centralised location in government and women’s budget statements were being dropped. As we shall see, however, this was not really a story of feminist ‘failings’ caused by institutionalisation but owed more to a neoliberal distaste for disaggregating the outcomes of cuts to the public sector. International Women’s Year in 1975 had coincided with a return to popularity of neoclassical economics when Keynesianism no longer seemed to have the answers to the ‘stagflation’ experienced by Western economies.

The consequences for women’s movements of state engagement have been much debated in the West. In Australia, as well, the taking up of opportunities for entry into government in the 1970s has been blamed for depleting the energies of the women’s movement. Some have seen the process of negotiation and compromise required by state-focused strategies as contributing both to the dilution of feminism and its loss of visibility. Already by 1976 one prominent member of Women’s Liberation was complaining that ‘The women’s movement in Canberra seemed to have shrivelled into an informal branch of the federal bureaucracy’. On the other hand, as noted in Chapter 5, the number of national women’s organisations continued to grow in the decades following the arrival of the ‘second wave’ as well as becoming both more diverse and more closely networked at national and international levels. Despite professionalisation, corporatisation and the dominance of neoliberal discourse, particularly in the Howard era, feminist agencies were still being pursued through women’s agencies inside government and linked to women’s organisations and services outside. For example, despite pressure from the Howard government to deregister domestic violence as
'family violence', government-funded women's violence services continued to frame the issue in terms of gender inequality. The harvest of the second wave is all around us, waiting to be identified and understood. Tracing these positive outcomes is one of the key tasks of this book.

So is the women's movement over?

As we have seen, suggestions that women's movements are over may derive from particular theoretical or methodological positions. Some authors share the negative assumptions concerning institutionalisation discussed above. Sabine Lang, in 'The NGOzation of Feminism', saw the institutionalisation of the German feminist movement as having led to the proliferation of women's equality offices inside the state and, outside the state, to more specialisation, professionalisation and focus on funding issues and obtaining state resources. Institutional strategies had been adopted at the expense of broader feminist mobilisation and were ultimately responsible for the lack of identification of young women with feminism. Whether social movements indeed engage in this form of strategic choice between repertoires, and whether institutionalisation bears this kind of explanatory weight, is discussed further in Chapters 5 and 6.

Kate Nash, in another approach to the question, cites Alberto Melucci to the effect that a social movement requires both a common identity and a common adversary: in the absence of these a movement is over and replaced by micropolitics. Nash suggests that in the UK, or at least in the English part of it, the mobilising of collective identity as women has been actively rejected, particularly by young women. Gendered claims-making is viewed as necessarily involving the suppression of multiple identities such as ethnicity, race and class, as well as the construction of men as the enemy - the image of the feminist as a 'male-hater', as discussed above.

The argument that a social movement requires a common adversary is appealing on one level - for instance, the pro-choice and pro-life movements are said to derive strength from each other. However, it is too simple to suggest that the common adversary of women's movements is men. Over time the women's movement has engaged with a range of adversaries, from the institutional conservatism of church and state to the neoliberal push to deregulate the labour market. In Sydney the F Collective simply names the enemy as patriarchy.

The idea that the mobilisation of a collective gender identity required the suppression of competing claims arising from social and racial diversity is again an interesting one. Yet as Margaret Henderson has shown in relation to Australia, this is a retrospective reading of the nature of 1970s feminism. Gendered claims-making then, as now, included demands that government consult with diverse communities of women, for example Indigenous and migrant women, as a routine component of policy development. Once feminists entered government, one of their priorities was strengthening the voice of marginalised women, whether through grants programmes or the bringing of community representatives into bodies such as the Commonwealth-State Council on Non-English Speaking Background Women's Issues.

Nonetheless, it is clear that in Western democracies the attitudes of neoliberalism have weakened the women's movement, offering in their place the chimera of individual choice and consumerism. These discursive shifts are explored further by Sarah Maddison in Chapter 3. The lack of visibility of the women's movement has weakened the political base for women's policy at the national level, even while important international gains are being made. In the following chapters we shall explore further the trajectory of the Australian women's movement and the implications of our large-scale empirical findings both for theorising of women's movements and for social movement theory more generally.

Yet we maintain that the women's movement is not dead. While the movement has changed and evolved, it has hidden in some unexpected places and taken on new forms, making it unrecognisable to some who are only too happy to proclaim its early death. Sometimes we need to turn to other social movements, such as environmental and social justice movements, into which feminists have migrated, taking feminist values and ways of organising with them. But we have also been exploring the forms taken by what we define as the women's movement today, its continuity with past claims-making as well as its new manifestations and practices. Like the Fawcett Society, we see the women's movement as 'closing the gaps since 1856', while also finding new ways to challenge the gendered expectations that limit women's lives.

Notes
1 Erica Jong, quoted in Baaragander and Richards, Manjísta, p. 93.
2 Wally, The future of feminism, p. 2.
3 For example, Tarrew, Power in movement, p. 4.
4 See, for example, Katzensein, 'Feminism within American institutions'; Ruth, 'Interactions between social movements and states in comparative perspective'; Baguley, 'Contemporary British feminism'.
6 Stiggenborg and Taylor, 'Whatever happened to the women's movement?'.
8 Tarrew, Power in movement.
9 Tilly and Tarrow, Contentious politics, p. 101.
10 Today there is a Muriel Matters Society based in its home town of Adelaide and supported by the Australian Governor-General. www.murielmat tersociety.com.au [visited 4 April 2012].
11 This is the account given by the journalist concerned (van Gelder, 'The truth about beer-bunders', p. 81).
12 In the same year the Canberra Rape Crisis Service in Australia ceased using it, believing it to be too confrontational.
13 Fosin-Staudinger and Orth, 'Gendered political opportunities?'
14 Morgan, Sisterhood is powerful, p. xxvi.
18 Marian Sawer

15 Facebook post by Colecito Mujer 23 September 2011. www.facebook.com/coleci-
tivojue (visited 4 April 2012).


17 Mendes, Feminism in the news, p. 139.

18 Sawer, 'Wearing your politics on your sleeve', p. 52.

19 This was interesting as the WSPU colours were only adopted in the UK some six
years after the achievement of women's political rights in Australia.


21 Steinem, 'Sisterhood'.

22 Sawer, Making women count, p. 251.

23 For critique of correspondents that nothing happened between the waves see Lake.
Getting equal.

24 Bamford, That dangerous and persuasive woman, p. 66.


26 Hawksworth, 'Western feminist theories', p. 199.

27 Caine, 'Women's studies, feminist traditions and the problem of history', pp. 6-7.

28 Nonetheless, Hamilton was very active in the suffrage movement, writing a play to
promote the cause as well as the lyrics for 'The March of the Women'.

29 Boxer, 'Rethinking the socialist construction and international career of the concept
bourgeois feminism'.

30 Sturkey, Our freedom and its results, p. 10.


32 Britain, 'The bogey-feminist'.

33 Rolfe, 'Whatever happened to feminism?'


36 Kaplan, The meager harvest, p. 34.

37 Sommers, Ducks on the pond, p. 265.

38 Curthoys, 'Doing it for themselves', p. 441.

39 For criticisms of these ideas see Cox and Simic, The great feminist debate, p. 73.

40Campo, From superwoman to domestic goddess.

41 Kirschen, 'Death of the feminist dream'.

42 Maddison, 'Why feminism is a dirty word'.

43 Hollis, Discourse and politics for gender equality in late twentieth century France, p. 16.

44 Dean, Rethinking contemporary feminist politics, p. 83.

45 Smeal, 'The art of building feminist institutions to last'.

46 Dean, Rethinking contemporary feminist politics, p. 151.

47 Henderson,Marking feminist times, pp. 177-179.

48 http://collective.wordpress.com/about/ [visited 4 April 2012].

49 Moger, On political institutions and social movement dynamics, p. 274.

50 Katsensteins, 'Stepsisters'.

51 Kedgley, 'Heading nowhere in a navy blue suit', p. 282.

52 Sawer, Women and elections, p. 203.


54 See, for example, Walby, The future of feminism, p. 9.

55 Maddison and Jung, 'Autonomy and engagement', p. 33.

56 Reed, 'Now we are six', p. 8.

57 For contrasting views of this harvest see Ferree and Martin. Feminist organizations
and Kaplan, The meager harvest.

58 Lang, 'The NGOization of feminism'.

59 Nish, 'A movement moves... ', p. 320.

60 Henderson, Marking feminist times.