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"Women Leaders and Executive Politics: En*gender*ing Change in Anglo-American Nations"
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For several years, pundits have been speculating about Senator Hillary Clinton's prospects of becoming the first woman President of the United States. Preoccupied with the question, "Can she win?", few commentators have stopped to consider whether a woman president would make a difference. Senator Clinton recently declared that her presidency would signal a sea change in public policy and send a stirring message to millions that any girl in America can grow up to become president. If she wins the nomination and the election, she will quickly discover that our institutions, ideology, and evolution make it very difficult for women executives to engender change by promoting policies that advance the interests or enhance the status of women.

In this respect, the US is not alone or exceptional. Only two Anglo systems have elected women chief executives – the United Kingdom and New Zealand, and New Zealand's only elected prime minister, Helen Clark, has succeeded in a recently reformed system that differs dramatically from its Anglo counterparts. Canada allowed its first and only woman prime minister, Kim Campbell, to lead for a few months before she faced and failed to win a general election. The Republic of Ireland has elected two women presidents, but the Irish presidency remains a largely ceremonial post, even though President Mary Robinson substantially stretched the scope of its influence. While the US and Australia remain the only two Anglo countries without any women national executives, the other nations have little to boast about.

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Ironically, Anglo-American systems often serve as models of democracy for the rest of the world, but the experience of women leaders as executives calls into question the democratic character of these regimes. With the exception of NZ, Anglo-American systems rank low on the list of modern, liberal democracies in terms of the representation and leadership of women. Once women do make it to the top, few of them manage to achieve their central policy goals. Anglo-American institutions, ideology, and political development are highly "masculinist" – they privilege traditional masculine traits in leaders. And masculinism presents significant challenges for women executives, especial those who attempt to engender change.

To facilitate programmatic change, adversarial systems concentrate power in the executive, and to ensure accountability, they rely on combat between two major parties. In general, the more adversarial the system, the more masculinist its norms and expectations of executive leadership prove to be. Of course, the role of Commander-in-Chief and superpower status magnify the masculinism of the US presidency. Nevertheless, some measure of masculinism characterizes executive leadership in all Anglo adversarial systems. Women leaders in such systems usually need to develop styles and strategies that show they are capable of being strong, determined, and decisive.

Margaret Thatcher – the best known and arguably the most successful woman leader in the Anglo world – adopted exactly that approach. Thatcher insisted that she alone had a remedy for the problems that plagued the UK, and she described her public philosophy in highly masculinist terms by extolling the virtues of rugged individualism and fierce anti-communism. Moreover, she developed a distinctly masculinist style, which she described during the 1979 campaign when she declared, "I am a conviction

politician. The Old Testament prophets did not merely say, 'Brothers, I want a consensus.' They said, 'This is my faith and my vision. This is what I passionately believe. If you believe it too, then come with me'." It was that style as much as the substance of her leadership that conjured up the image of Boadicea – the ancient warrior Queen – and earned her the appellation Iron Lady.

In the combative environment of the British adversarial system, the practice of "conviction politics" enables women to come closer to meeting the gender-specific expectations of executive leadership. Compared with politicians who equivocate and backpedal, conviction politicians promise to provide strong, decisive leadership. Thatcher shows how women who practice conviction-style leadership can manage to convey the requisite masculine attributes by appearing tough, firm, and determined. For most of her premiership, an overwhelming majority of the public admired Thatcher for precisely these leadership qualities, even when they opposed some of her specific policies.

Throughout the Anglo-American world by the early 1990s, Thatcher and her counterparts overseas had become personally unpopular, although a new consensus had emerged based on the neo-liberal changes they enacted in the 1980s. Their immediate successors faced a substantial challenge: They needed to distance themselves from their radical predecessors without denouncing their parties and by maintaining the new neo-liberal consensus. In Canada when Kim Campbell replaced Brian Mulroney as prime minister, she inherited an environment similar to the situation faced by Thatcher's successor John Major and Reagan's successor George Herbert Walker Bush. These "kinder, gentler" times (to borrow the phrase coined by Bush) might be considered more "feminalist" – favoring traditional feminine attributes and thereby enhancing the

prospects for a woman leader. Yet even in an environment that calls for conciliation, moderation, and maintaining consensus – essentially a softer style – Anglo adversarial arrangements generate highly masculinist expectations of executive leadership.

To a great extent, Campbell confronted the dilemma by pursuing the same strategy Major and Bush adopted. All of them avoided taking precise policy positions and issued mainly ambiguous, equivocal statements. Admittedly, their critics alleged that both Bush and Major lacked vision, and Campbell might have created the same impression during her 1993 campaign. Instead, as a woman, Campbell's evasions conveyed incompetence and ignorance. No one ever questioned the intelligence of Major or Bush (I), but Campbell's vague statements raised doubts about her abilities. Never mind that she had been a university lecturer in political science (whom critics had once condemned for her intellectual elitism), when Campbell adopted the strategy of her male counterparts, her public image went from egghead to airhead – and the media magnified the metamorphosis.

Campbell also attracted criticism when she chose to articulate specific positions. She continued to advocate many neo-liberal policies, but she was a feminist who believed the state should play a positive role in setting social policy. In fact, it was the substance and style of her feminism that frequently foiled her efforts. The government rejected her proposals to reform the judicial system, for example, because they would constitute "special treatment" for women. When she practiced what she called the "politics of inclusion" by holding more cabinet meetings and consulting provincial premiers, she appeared weak and unable to make a decision on her own. Even her refusal to be stage managed during the campaign made her seem naïve. As a feminist, Campbell wanted to

defy stereotypes, not reinforce them, but she repeatedly ran up against the highly masculinist norms embedded in the position of a Canadian prime minister and in the prevailing ideology.

In the 1993 election, Campbell's Progressive Conservative Party retained only two seats (with seventeen percent of the vote), and Campbell failed to carry her own riding. Several factors account for their loss, and the party won roughly the same percentage of the vote that it had secured in the polls when Mulroney resigned and Campbell became leader. Nevertheless, after handing her the poison chalice, the Conservatives blamed her for their devastating loss, and then forced her to resign shortly after the election.

Among Anglo-American women leaders, the only one who has managed to succeed by following a conciliatory, consensus-building approach is New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark. Like other Anglo nations, New Zealand experienced the neo-liberal revolution of the1980s, but by the 1990s the public desired maintenance, not change; cooperation and conciliation, not combat. The 1999 general election that put Clark in the premiership indicates how a less masculinist, more feminalist environment made a difference. With two women leading the two largest parties, an editorial writer for the *New Zealand Herald* observed, "Women will not be alone in looking forward to a *more feminine style of debate*." The media found few differences between Clark and her major opponent Jenny Shipley, but neither candidate suffered as a result. As one journalist put it, "[T]his election is about caring, not daring. It will not be a case of who dares wins, because none of the parties likely to win seats has any daring policies at all that they've announced to date." Throughout the campaign, both Shipley and Clark

delivered vague, equivocal statements about their parties' policies, and yet they escaped the harsh treatment Campbell received in Canada.

As Australians know, New Zealand's neo-liberal revolution had been much more radical than change in other Anglo countries: The nation went from having one of the most controlled economies to adopting an open, unregulated market. In contrast to other countries, in New Zealand the Labour party initiated the neo-liberal policies, and Labour Prime Minister Clark only wanted to halt the change, not reverse it. Strategically situating her party in the middle of the ideological spectrum, she quickly endorsed the centrist approach of President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Tony Blair known as "the third way."

Yet Clark differs from these men in the value she places on social and economic policies that affect women. She is a self-described feminist who first became involved in politics as a student activist in the women's movement. In my interview with her, she reflected on her government's major policies concerning health, education, and welfare by highlighting their positive impact on women. Clark has engendered some change – incrementally and while exercising fiscal restraint.

Several factors explain Clark's success. She has had an advantage as the second woman prime minister (though the first elected) in a country with the highest representation of women in the Anglo-American world (and the only Anglo country to make it into the top ten worldwide). The incremental changes that Clark is able to achieve suit her strategic environment in terms of public opinion, but that was also true of Campbell. Even when the electorate is concentrated in the center with a high degree of consensus, the institutions must generate norms and expectations that women can more

easily meet. Perhaps Clark's greatest advantage was the introduction of mixed member proportional representation (MMP): She has been prime minister in a recently reformed system that greatly reduces the masculinist norms and expectations of executive leadership that prevail in other Anglo systems.

When New Zealanders adopted MMP, they wanted a system more representative than first-past-the-post (FPP), but even more important, they wanted to check against the excessive executive power that had produced dramatic, radical change. In the post-MMP regime, New Zealanders expect their leaders to be conciliatory, willing to compromise, and able to maintain consensus, attributes traditionally nurtured in and exhibited by women. As a woman in this system, Clark could more easily satisfy the expectations of executive leadership than her counterparts in adversarial systems. Public opinion polls attest to Clark's success in satisfying post-MMP public expectations. For example, several polls indicate she is admired for her "flexibility." In that case, a vice in an adversarial system – what Americans disparage as "flip-flopping" – has become a virtue in a system with MMP.

By contrast, in adversarial systems, the institutions continue to generate distinctly masculinist norms, even when the electorate demands a softer style of leadership in kinder, gentler, more feminalist times. As a result, women leaders frequently get caught in a double bind. Consider the dilemma that Senator Hillary Clinton has encountered in the 2008 primaries. Clinton has generally followed Thatcher's example and presents herself as the strong, experienced candidate capable of tackling tough decisions on war as well as law and order. Her campaign commercials emphasize her "can do" spirit and commanding capabilities. But initially the public responded by perceiving her as cold

and hard hearted. Throughout the nominating process, polls have repeatedly shown the public searching for a conciliator, not a combatant, in the Washington partisan battlefield. In the New Hampshire primary campaign, Clinton tried to soften her image by showing a bit of emotion when she expressed her concern for and commitment to her country. "The tracks of her tears" – as Sky television tagged the story – might have won the hearts of some voters, but it immediately sparked her opponents to question her qualifications for Commander-in-Chief. In this primary season, public expectations of leadership and the institutional norms of the presidency call for conflicting gender-specific qualities, and the only woman candidate in the contest is caught in the conflict.

Anglo nations have produced one serious woman prospective president and a few prime ministers, but cabinet ministers provide more examples of women struggling to meet gender-specific norms of executive leadership in Anglo countries. Just as significant, their experience also illustrates how masculinism pervades recent ideological and institutional developments.

In the case of Anglo countries, liberalism constitutes the dominant ideology, and it is a distinctly masculinist ideology in both its classical form and its neo reincarnation. In classical theory, liberalism embraces the concept of a disembodied, genderless individual, making it more difficult for women to seek redress under the law for the concrete ways that their experiences differ from those of men. In Anglo nations, women leaders are likely to be liberal (or neo-liberal) feminists, if they are feminists at all, and so the liberal ideological framework limits the degree of change they seek even in the best of times.

Neoliberalism makes matters worse for women because its market-oriented ideology shifts public policy away from the goal of equality to equity (fairness and impartiality), reinforcing the bias of classical liberal theory that fails to recognize differences between men and women. Just as important, in a neo-liberal period of fiscal conservatism, budgetary constraints have made it difficult for women leaders to promote new social and economic programs or protect existing ones from cuts. As a result, neo-liberal times impose new limits on the ambition and creativity of women as increasing numbers of them move into cabinet posts.

Most of the women ministers in Anglo systems have occupied posts that deal with domestic policies and programs. Traditionally, women have dealt with the "domestic" in the home, so it is not surprising to find them in charge of similar duties in government. In particular, politicians, the press, and the public often consider subjects such as education, health, and welfare "women's issues," and polling data consistently show that women do care about these issues more than men do. In cabinet, many of these positions threaten to become regendered as the "women's posts." As Mary Hanafin, Minister for Education in Ireland, declared, "I can go to a European Council meeting now, and all the education ministers are women. *It's kind of a branding almost*." In the case of women cabinet ministers in the last twenty-five years or so, they have also been the areas that endured the most severe budget cuts or diminished rates of funding. As a consequence, the political costs of implementing the neo-liberal agenda have outweighed many benefits women might have derived from fitting into feminalist slots.

In the UK, budget cuts in education started in the 1970s and continued until the 21st century. Ironically, Thatcher was the first woman Secretary of State for Education

who was forced to endure the unpopularity of budget cuts. When the Conservative government decided that older elementary school children should no longer receive free milk, the popular press vilified "Thatcher the Milk Snatcher," and asked, "How could a woman deprive children of milk?" Several subsequent women ministers in charge of feminalist domestic policies such as education, health, and welfare would suffer similar fates.

Thatcherism lingered long after her premiership, and when Labour returned to government after eighteen years in opposition, its women ministers continued to endure the political costs of budget cuts. Dubbed "Blair's Babes" by the *Times* (of London), one hundred one women Labour MPs won seats in the 1997 election. The Labour party had taken several affirmative steps to increase the representation of women, adopting women-only short lists for parliamentary candidates and reserving at least three spots in the shadow cabinet. The party required Prime Minister Blair to bring members of the shadow cabinet into government, and predictably he placed all but one of the women in domestic posts. The first time a British government included many women ministers, the prime minister put them in positions where they would encounter stringent fiscal constraints and substantial political controversy – as the case of the current Deputy Leader of the Labour Party Harriet Harman illustrates.

As Secretary of State for Social Security (1997-98), Harman was responsible for cutting benefits for "lone parents" (single-parent households), a policy New Labour called the New Deal for Lone Parents, essentially a neo-liberal program that substituted workfare for welfare. Gender clearly colored much of the criticism directed at Harman. As she described the "flack" she got, she conveyed the tone of the attack:

> "You're forcing mothers to work. You don't value motherhood." … It was a woman cutting women's benefits. I mean if I had been a gray anonymous man, then I could have got away with it. But I was incredibly high profile.

Blair might have thought that a woman could more easily institute these cuts and soften their impact, but instead the media magnified the maternal role and Harman's failure to fulfill it.

Admittedly, as part of the New Labour movement, Harman had supported the party's commitment to maintain fiscal restraint. In its manifesto, Labour promised to adhere to the Conservative spending limits at least for the first two years in government. That electoral pledge helped to modernize party policy and proved successful at the polls, but it also placed the Minister for Social Security in a politically untenable position, conceivably the worst spot in the New Labour government. Harman continued to explain:

> I inherited a budget that was going down. So I had to stand in the dispatch box, newly elected as the new government and say, "Hello. We're Labour. We're here to cut all your benefits." Well you can imagine that was not very popular... [I]t caused absolute turmoil and uproar.

Harman believes the policy ultimately proved successful once she had "been sacked and [the government] started putting benefits up," but to achieve that success, she served as the sacrificial lamb on the altar of electoral expediency and in the name of economic efficiency.

In Ireland during the period of economic reform in the 1980s, one woman minister Gemma Hussey successively occupied all three of the highly sensitive, feminalist posts: Minister of Education (1982-86), Minister for Social Welfare (1986-87), and Minister for Health (1987). As Hussey described her experience, she recalled:

> Because of the fiscal constraints, from day one I was thrown into the deep end. Any attempt to introduce any cutback was opposed bitterly in parliament. You go into the Dail everyday and you're faced with the

> howling mobs – and the teachers unions, the parents associations. I was the villain, the number one villain for most of the time.

When Hussey needed to cut one of the teachers training colleges, she recalled, "You'd think that I had declared WW III. The reaction was so (pause), I was never off the front page, it seemed to me." Inevitably (and to her dismay), the mass media compared Hussey with her nemesis Thatcher.

In Australia, one of the first women cabinet ministers, Margaret Guilfoyle served successively as Minister of Education (1975), Minister of Social Security (1975-80), and Minister of Finance (1980-83) in Liberal governments – and she expressed some of the same sentiments as Harman and Hussey. According to Guilfoyle, at "the Social Security Department, you'd wake up every morning thinking, 'Who hates us today?'" In her two feminalist posts, Guilfoyle was subject to the same scrutiny and harsh criticism as her Anglo counterparts.

In Anglo-American countries, only a few women have occupied the highly masculinist cabinet posts pertaining to finance, justice, and foreign affairs. Masculinist norms and expectations have always pervaded these positions, but neoliberalism seemed to intensify and exaggerate the need for masculine virtues of strength, toughness, and hard-heartedness. Finance Ministers in the neo-liberal era needed to make cold, calculating cuts, and they left no room for "bleeding hearts." Justice Ministers had to convey their ability to maintain "law and order" more than ever before, and even when a woman managed to meet masculinist standards, the media might well mock her for her masculinity. (Americans will remember Janet Reno's character on Saturday Night Live.) In foreign affairs, the global status of the nation affects the degree of masculinity demanded of a minister, but neoliberalism in international politics has generally required

a leader willing to fight fearlessly for freedom. The two women Secretaries of State in the US – Madeleine Albright and Condoleezza Rice – have had to walk a fine line between maintaining their femininity and meeting masculinist expectations. Predictably, presidents placed both of them at the Department of State, not Defense. While State is not yet regendered, the US view of diplomacy makes it somewhat feminalist in the field of international affairs.

Regardless of their position, most women describe the atmosphere within the cabinet room as distinctly masculinist. Women ministers use words such as "boysey" and "blokey" to characterize cabinet conversations. While admitting they must scramble to stay in the "scrum," women ministers also tend to dismiss or joke about the implications. Many believe that discussions in cabinet meetings matter very little – when compared to the significance of decision making between presidents or prime ministers and their personal staffs.

Whether the system is parliamentary or presidential, there has been an increasing tendency for chief executives to go their own way by relying on their personal staff and circumventing the institutions of the legislature, parties, and cabinet. Furthermore, within this dramatic development the individual prime minister or president has moved to center stage, adding an element of personalization. In general presidentialization has coincided with the increasing representation of women in cabinet. As a consequence, by the time women arrived in cabinet, this phenomenon had eroded the authority of the institution and diminished the influence of individual ministers.

Like many women ministers in the UK, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1997-99) the late Mo Mowlam reflected on the success she achieved outside cabinet

while expressing the frustration she felt within it. By contrast to the feminalist atmosphere she nurtured in the negotiations, cabinet provided a distinctly different environment in which a single man dominated. While Mowlam joined the other women who believed "the cabinet was not functioning as cabinet government should," she also expressed her regret that the prime minister's presidential style prevented women from making their unique contribution. She explained:

> I mean I can give you the line that Tony is sympathetic to women. You know what the line is, but he doesn't listen to anybody [in cabinet] but Gordon Brown. And Gordon Brown is even worse. I don't think any of them actually fundamentally thinks they need women there. And they do. I think women are better conciliators. So I think there are a lot of advantages women bring to politics, but [the men] don't necessarily benefit from them…My views are quite jaundiced because I think they use us for window dressing, and they haven't actually accepted us as bone fide women MPs.

Mowlam's experience led her to acquire that jaundiced view. After she successfully concluded the agreement that produced the Good Friday Peace Accord in 1998, Blair sacked her and put his personal friend Peter Mandelson in the post.

Among the women in Blair's governments, Secretary of State for International Development (1997-2003) Clare Short proved to be the staunchest, most outspoken critic of his leadership. As she described it, "Tony doesn't run a cabinet of equals… [He's] a very, very great centralizer and dominator." Moreover, Short extended her critique beyond the prime minister's personal style. She understood fully the implications of presidentialization for women in cabinet when she recalled:

> It wasn't just the women who were being excluded, but as women took their place in parliament, took their place in cabinet, power moved. I don't think it's cause and effect, but it does have consequences for women.

And Short added, “It is notable that [Blair’s] inner groups have no women in them.” By the time women arrived at the cabinet room, power had moved to 10 Downing Street, a club that remained reserved for men.

The shift in power has had wider, more profound consequences for the constitution, according to Short. When Blair decided to go to war in Iraq, she resigned and in her resignation speech, she warned parliament that the UK had achieved the worst of two worlds: presidential leadership with large parliamentary majorities, producing an excessive concentration of power in the hands of the prime minister.

Among the negative consequences of presidentialization, Short also emphasized that the prime minister’s ability to go his own way leads him to overlook the expertise and advice of departments as well as cabinet ministers. While acknowledging that this development had started before 1997, Short observed:

> But it’s leapt under Blair… We have this prestigious committee for big foreign policy questions, chaired by the prime minister, and all the big ministers plus heads of the intelligence agencies plus the chief of the defense staff, and it never met. I mean it’s shocking. And everything was so informal. It leads to bad decisions.

According to Short’s assessment, a combination of factors has produced a perilous period in politics, and the British prime minister’s decision to go to war in Iraq provides “the most spectacular example” of the dangers.

On the other side of the Atlantic, critics of the US president’s decision to attack Iraq have rendered a similar critique, although in this case they call the culprit politicization rather than presidentialization. In the politicized presidency, chief executives trust their own staff in the White House more than the professional, permanent bureaucracy. Several accounts document how President Bush and a few close associates

(including only one cabinet member, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld) planned the war while circumventing conventional channels, bypassing bureaucratic expertise, and excluding a cabinet member as significant as Secretary of State Colin Powell. As National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice should have played a central role; yet she increasingly moved to the margins of the inner circle – from 9/11 attacks to the decision to invade Iraq.

As the only woman among the foreign policy players inside the White House, Rice also seems to have been the only one who expressed doubts about the decision to go to war. By most accounts, her voice as an honest broker gradually weakened until she fell silent. While anyone in that lonely position might have done the same, it must have been especially challenging for the only woman to take a softer stance and still struggle to be heard by the president's men. After the decision to go to war, the president moved her out of the White House and over to the State Department. The mass media celebrated the symbolic significance of her appointment as the first black woman to become Secretary of State, but Rice's step outside the White House and into cabinet constitutes a step down from her previous proximity to the president.

The chief executive has become increasingly dominant and personalized in Canada and Australia as well as in the UK and the US. Australians recently witnessed a general election that focused almost entirely on Prime Minister John Howard. Some distinctive features of each system affect the degree of presidentialization, but even Prime Minister Clark has observed the phenomenon in New Zealand. Although her cabinet continues to meet weekly, she believes a degree of presidentialization has occurred – despite reformers' efforts to constrain the executive with MMP. As Clark explained,

"What's happened I think is that the parliamentary systems are transforming themselves almost into presidential systems." Then she added, "Well, we're the head of government as prime minister just as the American president is the head of government. So there are certain functions that go with being the head of government – and sitting around parliament for hours isn't one of them." The adoption of MMP might have stalled presidentialization, but it has not prevented it.

Finally, presidentialization not only diminishes the role of women in cabinet; it also intensifies the masculinist nature of the top job. To the extent that Thatcher presidentialized the position of prime minister, she actually fueled changes that could make it more difficult for women prime ministers in the future, at least as long as stereotypes about women continue to raise doubts about their ability to lead. No longer "first among equals," the prime minister personally bears responsibility for the fate of the nation. As the only case of a woman prime minister in the UK, Thatcher's extraordinary experience might prove insufficient to indicate that women are capable of carrying out such a commanding role. The more parliamentary systems come to resemble presidential ones, the more daunting the challenge for women as national executives. Just ask Senator Clinton.

In conclusion, executive leadership in Anglo adversarial systems is distinctly gendered. To assess the nature and consequences of women presidents, prime ministers, and members of cabinet, we need to consider the masculinist character of our institutions, ideology, and development. Otherwise, we will continue to puzzle over the paradox of

Anglo nations as models of democracy, while women remain limited in their opportunities to provide executive leadership and engender change.