The Politics of

STATE FEMINISM

Innovation in Comparative Research

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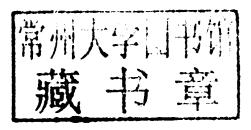# State Feminism

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To our mothers

Preface

T his volume, *The Politics of State Feminism*, is the culmination of fifteen years of work by more than forty researchers in thirteen countries. The collective odyssey began when a critical mass of researchers working on gender politics and the state became interested in doing a systematic study of government agencies established to address women's status and gender equality. This first scholarly collaboration produced *Comparative State Feminism* in 1995 and then led to the establishment of the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) that same year (http://libarts.wsu.edu/polisci/rngs/). Since then, the network has produced five issue books, a follow-up book to *Comparative State Feminism*, and a comprehensive dataset. *The Politics of State Feminism* uses the RNGS study as a launching pad to show to what extent and why women's policy agencies bring about positive state responses to movement claims that expand women's representation.

This work is the capstone of the RNGS study; however, its focus and approach are broader than RNGS and should be seen as part of a larger scholarly project on state feminism. The central focus of RNGS was the interface between movements and agencies. The network researchers developed a complex analytical approach and model to analyze agencies' influences on women's movement access and policy. Developing a theory of state feminism was not their major goal. Indeed, the RNGS documents and books use the notion of state feminism in a variety of ways: as a term to describe women's policy agencies and as a label to identify the agencies most friendly to the women's movement. It was not until the end of the RNGS

study, ironically, that it became clear that state feminism was explicitly about the movement-agency nexus. Thus, this book builds from RNGS work, taking it a step further into systematic empirical theory building across all of the issue areas covered in the project.

The data used in this book come from the qualitative studies of policy debates across thirteen countries published in the five issue books. These cases describe the activities of women's movement actors and women's policy agencies and the results they achieved. The RNGS dataset, available on the RNGS Web site, is also based on those original process-tracing studies. The dataset comprises information on 120 variables for 130 policy debates. In this book, authors have repackaged these original measures into several new datasets appropriate to the specific research questions, propositions, and methods selected for study. In addition, the qualitative studies are the basis for several detailed case studies presented throughout the book.

The Politics of State Feminism uses RNGS's innovative approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative components in its design: in-depth, primary research on cases according to a uniform causal model. Going beyond RNGS, this book sets forth an explicit theoretical framework about state feminism and uses an integrated mixed-methods approach to explore and test the propositions from that framework. These methods are statistical inference, crisp-set Qualitative Comparative Analysis, and causal-mechanism case studies. The goal is to develop an empirically based theory of state feminism.

The idea of bridging the quantitative/qualitative methodological divide, so central to RNGS, has carried over into this capstone study through the rigorous conceptualization of major ideas that compose the theoretical framework. We take a qualitative approach to concept construction, considering the cultural meaning and detailed dimensions before operationalizing core concepts with valid and reliable measures. These concepts, first presented in Chapter 2, derive from in-depth discussions among members in the RNGS project. Throughout the theory-building process, in RNGS and in this capstone endeavor, we have sought to have a dialogue with feminist and non-feminist scholars, taking into consideration the degree to which "mainstream" political science has ignored insights from gender scholarship. Thus, this project is innovative for taking an integrated mixed-methods approach while operationalizing feminist theory and using gender as a significant component of the analysis.

Another innovation of RNGS and of this book is the way countries are considered. From the beginning, a question of research was whether movement and agency relations would follow patterns across specific policy sectors: The universe of policy debates pertained to five different issues—abortion, prostitution, political representation, job training, and priority topics of the 1990s, called "hot issues." By making policy debates rather than countries the units of analysis, the design of the study also provided a way to assess country, versus region, versus sectoral patterns. Readers who are looking for neat country-based analyses of state feminism will therefore be disappointed. In both our treatment of

state feminism theory and unpacking state feminism, we compare the policy debates in terms of countries, but also decades, sectors, and regions.

Despite the absence of a country-specific logic to the overall analysis, readers can find information and analysis on all thirteen countries in the study, both systematically and as illustrative examples. The list of 130 debates covered in the book is presented in Table 1.2. Thirty debates are covered in descriptive and theory-building case studies, and eleven women's policy agencies receive detailed treatment as well. For those who want to go directly to the specifics of these cases, consult the index under the name of the country. There are case studies of ten abortion debates, nine prostitution debates, five political representation debates, four job training debates, and two hot-issue debates. These case studies cover policy debates in each of the thirteen countries: France (three), the Netherlands (three), Ireland (one), Germany (four), Finland (one), Canada (two), United States (two), Italy (three), Sweden (three), Austria (four), Great Britain (one), Belgium (two), and Spain (one). Chapter 3 provides an overview of all of the women's policy agencies covered in the debate analyses, again in this same cross-national, cross-temporal, and cross-sectoral logic, with detailed information presented on eleven agencies at the national or sub-national level in Austria, Canada, Finland, Sweden, and the United States. In Chapter 4, we provide an analysis of the record of democratization in each country in the study through an examination of women's movement success and the role of agencies in that success, and in Chapters 7, 9, and 10 analyses of trends within the countries.

The Politics of State Feminism is not about gender, politics, and the state outside of the postindustrial West. Early in the project, RNGS decided to take a mid-range approach, given that the levels of high economic and political development found in the West have produced similar settings for women's movements, feminism, and the policy agencies. Seeking a shared cultural foundation for the research also necessitated excluding countries that had reached similar levels of development with significantly different cultural dynamics. The final theoretical conclusions we make, therefore, apply only to state feminism in the Western World. We leave it to experts of gender politics outside of the West to examine the theory and methods, to put these conclusions to the test, and to determine whether state feminism even makes sense in other cultural, economic, and political settings.

Given the genesis of the state feminism project and this book's close ties to the RNGS project, we must recognize that without the work of each of the forty-three members of the network, none of this would have been possible. They actively participated at numerous research meetings, where the realities of fieldwork met the exigencies of the design of the project and tough discussions about conceptualization took place. Their names and affiliations can be found on the RNGS Web site, and many of their published chapters are cited throughout the book. These researchers undertook the labor-intensive collection of data in their countries to conduct the process-tracing case studies published in

the issue books and used in our presentation of the thirty theory-building case studies in the book. RNGS members also provided additional detailed data to supplement their qualitative case analyses when we turned to converting RNGS findings into a numerical dataset, in some cases five years after the original research had been conducted.

Joni Lovenduski, Joyce Outshoorn, Birgit Sauer, and Marila Guadagnini all played key leadership roles in RNGS and carried their devotion to a new level in planning and executing this book. While Dorothy McBride and Amy Mazur are the co-authors of the book as a whole and also co-conveners of RNGS, the collaborating authors made substantial independent contributions through their chapters. Along the way, they also helped to develop the design of the capstone analysis and the structure of the book at numerous meetings held in Italy, the United States, and France. Their continued engagement in what at times appeared to be an overwhelming and never-ending project was important from the time we began work on the book in 2004 to its final completion in 2009. We want to thank especially Marila Guadagnini at the University of Torino for hosting two planning meetings. Diane Sainsbury contributed to the plan for the book in the early days. Funding for the work done for this book, outside of the grants and institutional support provided for the RNGS project, also helped our team complete the project. The following organizations provided this crucial support: University of Turino, the Regional Council of Piedmont, Sciences Po Paris/CEVIPOF, Birkbeck College, Washington State University, Florida Atlantic University, University of Leiden, and University of Vienna.

We also thank individuals who gave us important help along the way. Benoit Rihoux and Charles Ragin took time to read the whole manuscript to give us feedback on the QCA, and Rosie Campbell was our expert consultant on all things statistical. The three anonymous reviewers at Temple University Press gave us priceless advice to turn a highly technical and methodological book into one that appealed to a broader audience. Season Hoard provided valuable assistance in producing the final manuscript and helped out in the last preparation phase. We greatly appreciate the support of Alex Holzman at Temple University Press, who from the beginning saw this as an important book in social sciences. Emily Taber, Joan Vidal, Clay Cansler, and copy editor Judy Jamison were helpful in the final production stages. Special thanks go to our partners, Curt Lewin and Gene Rosa, who provided us with essential support, home-cooked meals, and jokes—perhaps the most important—throughout the five years we have worked on this project.

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Methods Appendices

The mixed-methods approach used in this book has produced an array of data analyses, including descriptive statistics, correlations and ordinal regression, QCA truth tables and solutions, and detailed measures of concepts and variables. Although the volume of these materials precluded their inclusion in the published book, they are readily available at http://libarts.wsu.edu/polisci/rngs/ appendices.html under the title *The Politics of State Feminism Methods Appendices*. The materials are organized by chapter. Throughout the book, they are referred to as Web Appendices.

I

Framework and Foundations

This book is divided into four parts. The "Framework and Foundations" section that opens the book is followed by the research results in Part II, "Exploring State Feminism," which assesses theoretical propositions about state feminism, and Part III, "Unpacking State Feminism," where authors consider the implications of state feminism for foundational theories of social movements, political representation, framing, and institutionalism. Part IV, "Conclusion," consists of one chapter that integrates the findings and sets forth a new theory of state feminism.

Part I consists of three chapters that describe the fundamental ideas that have inspired these research endeavors and the methods that researchers used to obtain their results. In addition, it includes a full presentation of the range and variation of women's policy agencies—structures central to the theory of state feminism—over time and across the thirteen countries in the study.

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The State Feminism Project

The politics of state feminism is at the heart of political processes in postindustrial democracies. Of all of the various social movements of the contemporary era, women's movements have arguably been the most widespread and have endured the longest. One of the responses of political leaders to challenges from women's movement activism over four decades has been to establish institutions specifically designed to deal with demands from women's groups: women's policy agencies, machineries, or offices. The motivation for this project is to learn about the activities of these relatively new agencies and whether they have been allies for women's movements in the state, marginal to power, or merely ineffective symbols. The core question of the work, therefore, turns around the question of *state feminism*—that is, whether, how, and why women's policy agencies have been effective partners for women's movements and their actors in gaining access to state policy-making arenas and influencing policy outcomes. Bringing women's movements into the state is necessarily about representation; therefore, this study of state feminism is ultimately about the process of making democracies more democratic.

This book is the capstone—culminating achievement—of work begun by a small group of scholars that formed the Research Network on Gender Politics and the State (RNGS) in 1995. At that time many were calling for more attention to comparative, especially cross-national, research to assess a wide range of theories. In the discipline of political science broadly speaking, there were debates about methodology, especially how to bring a growing body of case studies to bear on "valid inferences about social and political life" (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994: 1). In this context, RNGS was founded to design and carry out a large-scale study of the effects of the women's movement–women's policy machinery interface in Western postindustrial democracies across five policy sectors from the 1970s to the 2000s. The completion of the study is due to the diligence and commitment of dozens of colleagues who joined RNGS as the project developed. We call this capstone investigation the *state feminism project*, and all of the cases analyzed in this book are *RNGS data*, that is, information collected by network members. Thus, this chapter and those that follow describe the processes and results of in-depth, mixed-methods investigations of the

politics of state feminism through the cross-national, cross-sectoral, and longitudinal data collected by RNGS.

We now turn to a presentation of the state feminism framework, its four strands of foundational theory, and the propositions to be explored and unpacked in the rest of the book. After this we discuss the relationship of the state feminism project to RNGS and then provide an overview of the 130 policy debates that are the basis for development of theory. The chapter ends with a detailed presentation of the plan of the book, including summaries of each chapter.[1]

The State Feminism Framework

Research Context

The ideas of state feminism presented here provide an explanatory framework to understand how state-based institutions established to promote women's rights and gender equality—women's policy agencies—can bring about the success of women's movements that originate outside the state in penetrating policy arenas and changing processes of policy formation and representation, substantive policies, culture, and ultimately democracy itself. In order to follow principles of good concept construction, it is important to situate all concepts according to their scholarly use (e.g., Collier and Mahon 1993; Goertz 2006). Conceptualization and operationalization of the components of the state feminist framework should be read and understood in the context of politics of democratic governments in postindustrial societies. Postindustrial democracies are the approximately twenty-three countries that have relatively similar levels of high national wealth, similarly large service, or "post-Fordist" economies, stable nation-states, and well-established traditions of representative democratic institutions and/or the emergence of stable democratic institutions since World War II.[2]

The overarching concept of state feminism as defined in this study must be understood in relation to its use by other scholars. When Helga Hernes coined the term in her 1987 book, she put a name to the idea that governments could pursue feminist aims through policy and also that individuals and actors within the state could promote a "women-friendly" approach to policy and state action.[3] Then, researchers interested in unpacking the state and its actions with regard to women's rights and gender equality identified actors and structures participating in the full range of gender-specific state actions. They used a variety of labels for these structures, such as women's policy machineries, gender equality offices, and women's rights agencies.[4] Australian and Dutch researchers called the actors *femocrats*.[5] With the takeoff in the study of femocrats and women's policy agencies in the 1990s, the notion of state feminism became increasingly associated with these specific structures and actors and less with whether states and government action were generally positively ori-

ented toward feminists and women—although some continued to use the term in that more general sense. For those who take the more specific approach, state feminism has come to have two meanings—to describe the phenomena of women's policy agencies in general and to analyze whether the structures are actually effective in making the state more inclusive of women and their interests.

In this book we use the concept in its more complex analytical sense: State feminism is the degree to which women's policy agencies forge alliances with women's movements and help them gain access to policy arenas and achieve their policy goals. At the outset, it is important to recognize that there are two types of state feminism in this complex sense: *Movement State Feminism* and *Transformative State Feminism.*[6] In Movement State Feminism, the agencies and the state respond to movement activism by promoting ideas, actors, and demands based on gender consciousness, women's solidarity, and the cause of women. Transformative State Feminism occurs when these ideas, actions, and demands are explicitly feminist—that is, recognize patriarchy and gender-based hierarchy and seek to promote gender equality—thus having the potential to transform gender relations.[7]

Overview of the State Feminism Framework

The state feminism theoretical framework proposes that women's movements are more likely to be successful in achieving favorable state responses when they ally with women's policy agencies. Such alliances occur through agreement on the motivational or strategic frames (i.e., issue definitions and policy goals used by both the agencies and movements) and help women's movement actors achieve procedural access and policies that respond to their goals. The agencies facilitate movement success by gendering issue definitions used by policy actors in ways that coincide with movement frames in policy debates, leading to both access and policy change.[8] Thus, a core assumption of the framework is that if policy actors use a definition of the issue gendered in ways that coincide with movement goals, it will facilitate the entry of women's movement actors into the policy arena and their ideas into policy outcomes.

The patterns of successful agency-movement alliances are the patterns of state feminism. Alliances that achieve specifically feminist goals are cases of Transformative State Feminism; those that achieve movement goals more broadly speaking are Movement State Feminism. Agencies also may form partial alliances or fail completely while women's movements are still successful in achieving their goals. The result is women's movement success but not state feminism. With the accumulation of successful alliances over time, democratic governments become more democratic through increased substantive and descriptive representation of advocates for women, a previously excluded constituency. Explanations for patterns of state feminism are found in combinations of (1) agency resources and structural characteristics, (2) women's movement

resources, (3) policy environment characteristics, and (4) elements of left-wing support.

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations

This state feminism framework integrates several strands of scholarly theory and empirical research: institutionalism, social movements, democratization and representation, and policy conflict and framing. A great expansion of interest in these important areas of social science knowledge in the early 1990s coincided with the development of the RNGS project and inspired members of the network during the crucial early phases. It is impossible here to review all the research in these areas; the discussion is instead an overview, focusing on seminal works that influenced the elaboration of the theoretical framework and the conceptualization of its components. More detailed and current discussions of relevant literature are included in subsequent chapters.

Institutionalism and the State

The 1980s witnessed a "return to the state" in comparative social science (although work such as Nettl 1968 had long been pushing the point).[9] Political scientists produced many essays and case studies trying to sort out the pertinent concepts and variables.[10] The 1985 work that started the debate over the study of the state in comparative politics was *Bringing the State Back In*. In her introduction to the edited volume, Theda Skocpol offered three aspects of state theory that have proved useful in developing comparative state feminist analyses. The first involves how scholars have understood the concept—in other words, their definition of the state. Then as now there is no agreed definition of the concept, and the particular definition used in a study may depend on the cultural orientation of the authors. The second topic—capacity of the state to have an impact through policy on society—allows researchers to question how states fashion distinctive policies, their ability to implement such policies, and the consequences, both intended and unintended. The third topic for organizing state studies suggested by Skocpol is the impact of states on political relationships. This involves the interaction between interest groups and public entities. Even more important, however, is the effect of states on patterns of politics: "the ways in which structures and activities of states unintentionally influence the formation of groups and the political capacities, ideas, and demands of various sectors of society" (Skocpol 1985: 21). Thus, this new way of thinking about the state, in its complex and interactive form, underpins our thinking about how the state-based women's policy agencies interface with the society-based women's movements.

Feminist scholars weighed in as well. Critiques of the welfare state arose from Europe and expanded to both sides of the Atlantic (see, for example, Wilson 1977; Hernes 1987; Sassoon 1987; Gordon 1990). In the 1990s the critiques deepened and widened through the 1994 appearance of *Social Politics*, a journal devoted to international studies of gender, state, and society. Although