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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER AND POLITICS

Gender, Politics, and State Architecture

Introduction

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Feminist scholarship often considers horizontal architectures, such as the separation of powers to characterize congressional systems and the fusion of powers to characterize parliamentary systems. But the new field of feminist scholarship on gender and state architecture introduced in these essays also focuses on vertical architectures, which range from unicameral, unitary systems with all power concentrated on one level; to federations with powers divided between two (sometimes three) levels of government; to multilevel governance systems with as many as five levels of government (from local to inter- or transnational). Moreover, this new field explores how dynamic processes initiated by changes in state architectures, such as devolution in Scotland and Spain, affect women's politics. While the two dimensions often are separated for analytic purposes, the field's emerging research shows how, in reality, they are interrelated.

Most previous feminist theorizing assumes that unitary governments are the norm, but a few early efforts explored the effects of particular combinations of vertical and horizontal architectures, as in parliamentary or congressional systems (Banaszak 1996; Chappell 2002; Haussman 2005). Even early feminist literature about federal states, however, concentrated on federal-level politics and paid little attention to other government levels. Further, except regarding the European Union, gender and the state literature mostly ignores the impact of multilevel governance structures that, in a globalized world, are increasingly important. Hence, current theorizing about gender and politics lacks an adequate account of how local, meso-, and international governance levels affect the federal government institutions and policy outputs.

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Recognizing the impact of multilevel forms of governance opens up a new set of questions for feminists to ask about how women's movements and state structures interact: What difference does having access to multiple levels of governance make to women's organizing and equality seeking? Does multilevel governance provide any "advantage" for those who seek gender equality, or does it just create barriers and cause frustrations? How does the scale of governance affect gender/power dynamics? Exploring such questions also helps us identify the most effective feminist strategies in specific contexts and helps feminist scholars develop a more sophisticated understanding of interactions between different state forms and gender outcomes.

The essays in this Critical Perspectives section identify new and exciting perspectives on theories of gender and state architecture, including federalism, multilevel governance, and devolution. In the first essay, Jill Vickers outlines a research agenda framework that can help bridge traditional, comparative federalist, and feminist approaches. The framework links gender/power relations to four aspects of mainstream federalism scholarship: institutional design and development, democracy and democratization, managing conflict resulting from ethnic diversity, and policymaking and implementation.

The contributors to the section then engage with one or more of these aspects, and provide original insights into the advantages of including a vertical perspective on state architectures for understanding gender and politics. Lee Ann Banaszak and Laurel Weldon consider institutional design and development in a groundbreaking argument about the need to take seriously vertical divisions of power by considering how informal, as well as formal, institutions affect gender politics and feminist strategies. Susan Franceschet's essay focuses on state architecture's impact on politics and policymaking in Latin America through the aspect of democracy and democratization. Franceschet convincingly argues that when federalism is combined with weak state capacity, it produces outcomes that are not more democratic for women. Fiona Mackay and Meryl Kenny also focus on institutional design as they compare the impact of devolution in Scotland and Spain. They demonstrate the need to distinguish between different forms of multilevel governance and to include the broader institutional context in identifying opportunities and constraints that activists experience under new institutional configurations. Deborah Brennan and Rianne Mahon compare relations between vertical divisions of power in political institutions and policy in very different

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approaches to child-care policy in Australia and Canada. Like Mackay and Kenny, they stress the importance of parties and the particular characteristics of state architectures to policy outcomes. And like Banazsak and Weldon, they argue that gender policy outcomes are not just the result of formal state structures.

A central point that emerges from these essays involves the contingent effects of federalism and other forms of multilevel governance on gender policy outcomes and on the shape that feminist activism takes. To identify which contingencies matter — and the conditions on which any effects depend — feminists must confront two issues.

First, they must understand and address the cultural biases we all bring to our research. For instance, scholars whose experience is with asymmetrical or multinational federations, such as Canada and Belgium (which focus primarily on managing diversity and nation building), have different expectations and depend on different discourses (see Simeon and Radin 2010, 360) than those whose experience is with symmetrical or mononational federations (such as the United States, where mainstream federalism scholars see the division of power as a way of limiting central government). A common language is needed within which feminist scholars can theorize the effects of different types of multilevel governance as manifested in different types of states; hence, a priori assumptions about whether any particular type is "good" or "bad" for women must be left behind.

The second challenge is designing different kinds of research projects: one to provide the deep contextual analysis needed to situate each case of vertical state architecture in its broader institutional environment, and another involving large-n studies to build hypotheses. Only such a two-pronged research strategy will permit development of modest generalizations about how vertical versus horizontal state architectures affect gender equality politics and outcomes, while breaking free of the limiting federal/unitary dichotomy, in order to generate new thinking about gender and state architecture. While such a research strategy will be time and resource intensive, the rewards will be significant. For feminist scholars, it promises new ways of understanding of gender, feminist activism, and the state. Moreover, the strategy offers non-gender scholars an entirely new perspective on political opportunities and outcomes across the four aspects of current research on federalism and multilevel governance.

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Gender and State Architectures: The Impact of Governance Structures on Women's Politics

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This essay explores gender scholarship about how state architectures affect women's politics. A rapidly growing literature addresses the effects of vertical and horizontal power divisions in federations. While just one in five states is a federation, federations govern 40% of the world's population (Watts 2008). Globalization and neoliberal ideology foster regionalization, devolution, and increased influence by international agencies, and so more people experience multilevel governance (MLG) in unitary states, too. Hence, feminist scholars now increasingly consider the impact of state architectures. The field's core idea is that while socioeconomic and ideological forces shape gender/power relations, governments and movements respond from within specific state architectures. Related debates involve how institutional designs shape opportunity structures, and how feminists respond to federal diversity.

In *federations*, political authority is divided vertically between two (rarely three) hierarchically organized governments with constitutionally specified powers. A key debate is whether federations' common characteristic — multiple sites and points of access to government — obstructs or enhances women's political opportunities. *Multilevel governance* designates polities such as the European Union with three to five

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