

Journal of Political Science

(A Peer-Reviewed, Open Access Journal; JPPS Star Ranked and Indexed in NepJOL)

ISSN 2362-1273 (Print); ISSN 2773-8132 (Online)

Volume 22, February 2022

<http://ejournals.pncampus.edu.np/ejournals/jps/>

Published by

Department of Political Science, Prithvi Narayan Campus, TU, Pokhara, Nepal

Email: polsc@pncampus.edu.np; URL: www.pncampus.edu.np

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

Mahendra Sapkota, PhD¹

Kabita Dahal²

¹Central Department of Rural Development, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur

²Central Department of Gender Studies, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur

Corresponding Author: Mahendra Sapkota, Email: sapkota.mahendra27@gmail.com

Copyright 2022© The Author(s). With permission of the concerned author(s), the publisher shall publish the articles for first edition. The journal is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/).



DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3126/jps.v22i1.43041>

Submitted 1 Nov. 2021; Reviewed 4 Nov. 2021; Accepted 20 Nov. 2021; Published 15 Feb. 2022

Abstract

The relation between politics and gender is contentious, which is further implied in the feminist critique of the state. This paper assumes that the nature of the state is gendered. With this ontological position of critical worldview, it aims to synthesize the gendered nature of politics. Methodologically, it is based on the secondary literature and thus the authors did not offer their empirical data to synthesize the major arguments so far. It has first discussed the feminist theoretical debates about the worldview of the state and then offered the empirical issues of power and citizenship. It argues that the state is constructed with contradictions in terms of uneven allocation of resources, gendered institutions, androcentric leadership, and male-biased policies. In this context, the paper analyzes the state as an androcentric construction that is political, coupled with uneven gender relations. The authors also agree that politics eventually makes up the state - the supreme of power and hegemony against the women. The paper finally observes a need for further research works to critique the regimes, hegemony, and institutions of the state at the macro-level and identity, self-dignity, and citizenship of women in the state at the micro-level.

Keywords: Citizenship, feminism, gender politics, state, power

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

Introduction

The nature of political science is a contested issue, both as a discourse and in empirical studies. Celis et al. (2013) have therefore made a solid conclusion that politics is a real-world phenomenon and political science has become an academic discipline. A commonality in both is that their nature is gendered. This connotation does not take gender just about biological determinism of sex, which now goes beyond the dichotomous categories of male or female, masculine or feminine, heterosexual or homosexual, and transgendered or non-gendered. Rather, gender in the modern world is a complex whole involving multiple identities of social structure, including culture (race, aesthetics, caste/ethnicity, and religion), politics (nation, states and representation), economy (production, technology, market and class) and the ideological too. Indeed, there is a rare denial that gender seems to be cosmopolitan. Both, gender and politics are interwoven, which calls either gender in politics or politics in gender (Krook & Childs, 2010). But, there are constant debates among scholars about how gender matters in political science and vice versa. It is thus a question of how existing political science would contribute to gender analysis and the feminist perspective of its conventional concepts, theories, subject, and its method.

Though gender and politics have been increasingly institutionalizing as an academic discipline (Celis et al., 2013), it is an interdisciplinary field, drawing core ideas and practices from both the disciplines of political science and gender studies. The contemporary contestations in gender and politics include a variety of scientific issues including feminist political thought, public policy, women leadership and citizenship, nature of the state and political institutions, intersectionality, queer movements and identity politics. In this context, feminism as further scoped as a specific field of study in political science and gender studies which aims to understand the relationship between politics and sexuality and between politics and gender relations (Teelen & Thelen, 2017). In political science, the feminist study engages how political participation and people's experiences interact with their identity of sex and gender, and how ideas of gender shape political institutions and decision-making (Naples, 2016). Women's political participation in the context of patriarchal political systems is a particular focus of study including its specific manifestations of race, caste/ ethnicity, class and gender (Dolan, et al., 2021). Following this, various scholars have argued that the nature of the state, its institutions or apparatuses and the power structure within them is gendered (Lovenduski, 2005; Waylen, 2012). In consequence, the state for women is constructed with a full of contradictions in terms of uneven allocation of resources, androcentric leadership and male-biased policies. In this context, the paper analyzes the state as an androcentric construction that is politically coupled with uneven gender relations.

Methodology

In general, the study of the state in political science is macro-perspective though it is a micro-perspective in gender studies. Moreover, the feminist political theoretical position is itself critical and transformative. Some recent readings engaging this dilemma include Ackerly and True (2019); Nielsen (2019); and Lowndes et al. (2017). However, this study does not engage with such methodological debates regarding the feminist method of state studies. Methodologically, this paper is rooted in a critical ontological position that critically observes the nature of the state in different feminist approaches, including theories, power and citizenship. Thus, the main purpose of the paper is to synthesize the arguments and

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

counter-arguments about the state through the eye lens of feminism. Therefore, the authors didn't engage with their primary data anticipated from the empirical field; rather, they took secondary literature and scientific publications to advance the argumentation and synthesis.

Feminism: A Theoretical Dialogue

By the 1970s, feminist discourses got popular with distinct movements and policy approaches. Scholars have categorized these movements into liberal, radical, and socialist/Marxist (Nicholson, 2013). However, there are other variants within these three approaches and new categories have been also emerging, including post-feminist and postmodernist perspectives (Ferguson, 2017).

Liberalism is, historically, associated with the individual freedom of the citizens vis-à-vis the hegemony of the state. It advocates for protecting the individual's freedom, rights and choices from powerful state dominance. Liberal feminism focuses on the entitlement and equality of women; it is not opposed to the legitimate existence and functioning of the state. Though the state was established with a patriarchal society because of historical reasons, it would eventually function to attain gender equality and secure rights and freedom for women. The characteristic features of liberal feminism include right-based claims for women's equality, political and legal reforms, and policy changes. Ideologically, it analyzes the state from the capitalistic school of thought, which is dominated as a mainstream discourse (Zhang & Rios, 2021). As characteristic, liberal feminism is also called 'mainstream feminism,' 'reformist feminism,' 'equity feminism' and 'egalitarian feminism'- though there is not a specific theorization of these concepts. Critically, it is referred to as "bourgeois feminism" (or bourgeois-liberal feminism) because of its elite-centric advocacy. Critics against liberal feminism maintain that it is too much individualistic, which eventually ignores the social and cultural basis of differences and inequalities (Hooks, 2000) or multiple sources of oppression in a postcolonial context (Mills, 1998).

Radical feminism, known as the 'women-centred approach, aims to abolish the patriarchal structure of society by eliminating male supremacy over the socio-economic and political contexts. Its focus is on unequal power positions in gender relations and the sexual objectification of women in society. Radical feminists assert that global society functions as patriarchy in which the class of men is the oppressors of the class of women (Echols, 1989, p. 139) to maintain the fundamental form of oppression of women since history (Atkinson, 2000, p. 86). The foundation of male power is in the patriarchal system, where differences are celebrated, thus it becomes political. It is the argument how 'the personal is political' was emerged and got popularized (Hanisch, 1969). This eventually became a characteristic feature of the feminist movement during its second wave in the 1970s.

Radicalism maintains that the ethnicity, race, class, culture, marital status, sexuality and (dis)ability and personal experiences of the female are not biological or social; they are political (Geoghegan & Wilford, 2014; Millet, 1970). They view women as the "other" to the male norm and have been systematically oppressed and marginalized (de Beauvoir, 2011). However, the essentialist approach to the oppression of women in radical feminism has been contested. Indeed, "the liberation of women and ending of the patriarchy does not guarantee the liberation of all and the women in particular. Interesting is that, as argued by Ellen Willis (1984), radical feminists were accused of being "bourgeois", "anti-left," or even "apolitical" within the New Left movement, whereas they saw themselves as "radicalizing the left by expanding the definition of radical."

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

Socialist/ Marxist feminism emerged as a blending approach of progressivism and revolutionism in the dialectical historical context (Armstrong, 2020). It laid an anti-colonial, anti-imperial and anti-capitalist worldview in the global context while the class structure of society in a particular context (Luxton, 2014). Class dichotomies precede oppression of women, which results in all kinds of inequalities, including the inequality between males and females. The inequality is perpetuated in terms of the sexual division of labour. The contradictory interrelationship between patriarchy and capitalism is much important for the socialist feminists, while the Marxists further argue that patriarchy and class structure are fundamentally exploitative to disempower and marginalize women. As argued by Skoble and Tibor (1999), the goal of socialist feminism is to abolish the social relations that constitute humans not only as workers and capitalists but also as women and men.

The Socialist and Marxist approach of feminism views the state as it would be androcentric and oppressive. However, it is equally important to note that after the 1980s socialist and Marxist feminism were not taken as synonymous as was earlier. Socialist feminism emerged as a type of New Left movement that focuses upon the interconnectivity of patriarchy and capitalism (Kennedy, 2008). It argues that the emancipation of women can only be achieved by the elimination of sources of oppression against women, including social, cultural, political and economic. Though socialist feminism draws its main tenets from Marxism and materialistic interpretation of history, it is less concerned with the class struggle where women could act as a revolutionary force.

On the other hand, Marxist feminists advance the idea of socialist feminism and materialist feminism by incorporating and extending the Marxist idea of history, class struggle, ideology, emancipation. Marxist feminism analyzes how women are exploited in the capitalistic mode of production and along with the instrumentation of private property (Desai, 2014, p. 119) and the commodification of women (Engels, 1884). Thus, the dismantling of the capitalist systems in which much of women's labour is uncompensated is a precondition for the liberation of women (Ferguson et al., 2010). Despite this, both socialist feminism and Marxist feminism are less theorized in the changing context of base-superstructure relations, global division of labour and the changing nature of class and production relations.

Since the 1980s, postmodern and post-structural impacts on feminism surfaced to feminism. It eventually formalized the notions of post-modernist feminism, ecofeminism, anti-racist feminism, power feminism, victim feminism, cultural feminism, black feminism, etc. This variation has injected plurality into the discipline of feminism. However, there are contestations in their theorization. Some feminists then cautioned against this kind of categorization, as it creates borders and limits the pursuit of knowledge (Young, 1984). Therefore, today feminists are speaking in terms of 'mapping feminism' which challenges any kinds of typologies. Nevertheless, all the feminist movements (and their perspectives) are placing the debates, contradictions and arguments on their own. Following this, the concept of differences becomes the most important concept in contemporary feminist political theory (Brah & Phoenix, 2004). It would allow the emergence of new contexts, implications and critiques of feminism. It means there is a plurality in the feminist perspectives of political science in recent years. Nash (2003) seems to be very logical that in the feminist political theory, the emphasis has shifted from difference to differences with the rise of the twenty-first century. This is taking momentum in recent decades as well.

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

Feminist Critique on the Mainstream Political Theory

The feminist thinkers have a varied conceptualization of politics and political concepts which seems to be woman-centric. Despite this, a gender perspective is comparatively flexible as compared to the feminist critiques of politics. The invisibility and passive presence of women in political theory caught their eye and it became their main thesis. Feminism looks at the traditional concepts and theories of political philosophy with doubt and distrust. It is claimed that the political theories are fundamentally male-biased, normative, and androcentric. The concept (and practice) of the state, nation, democracy, king, citizens, leadership, power, legitimacy, authority, governance, policy, judiciary and legislature are constructed by the hegemony of males to suppress the women in an institutionalized and structured way. Thus, there is an unanswered question about how to construct an unconventional theoretical base towards understanding women's issues in politics. The feminist political theory incorporates a broad scope of approaches in a multidisciplinary. The feminist contentions in political theory include the following, but are not confined to them (Vinod & Deshpande, 2013, p. 394):

- a) Feminist critique of rationality
- b) Public/ private dichotomy
- c) Feminist understanding of the state
- d) Feminism and the concept of power
- e) The feminist notion of citizenship

The blending of feminism into political science and vice versa is a daunting task. The field is comparatively new, inherently innovative, and still expanding, such as it is including the new dimensions, such as the feminist critique of governance and feminist critique of the market.

Understanding of the State: Feminist Worldviews

The state has been a central idea of political science, which is explained in different characteristics, theories of origin and operational modalities. Its authoritative nature, ruling apparatuses, hegemonic structure and power contradictions are largely contested in political theories. Perceptions of the state in the feminist discourse have undergone increasing attention since the 1970s along with different waves of feminist movements. The ideological critiques (as a discourse) and changing gender relations and feminist issues have also exerted a greater influence on it. Thus, the universal theorization of the state from a feminist perspective is not yet offered that would analyze the global milieu of politics and feminism. As MacKinnon (1983) beautifully narrates it:

Feminism has no theory of the state. It has a theory of power: sexuality is gendered as gender is sexualized.... feminism distinctively as such comprehends that what counts as truth is produced in the interest of those with power to shape reality and that this process is as pervasive as it is necessary as it is changeable. (pp. 635-658)

The fundamental critique of the state adhered by the feminist is that the philosophy of state is power-centric, and the power is often defined, used and operationalized by the male or his representative structures. Accordingly, norms, structures, values, knowledge and realities, etc. are the construction of power. There is a manipulation of male-dominated leadership to hold on to power and take advantage of them. Feminism is critical and resistant to this form of power that legitimizes the hegemony against women. Hence, feminist political theory is

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

constructed around the existing power relations as represented by and constructed with the state. Taking a reference of Vinod & Deshpande (2013), feminist perceptions of the state can be illustrated theoretically with the following four dimensions.

Critique of Social Contract Theory of the State

The social contract theory of state proposed by Rousseau, Hobbes and Locke has been severely criticized by feminists. According to them, individuals have not consented to be ruled by the state authorities in exchange for protection of their remaining rights (Richardson, 2007). Social order, harmony and consensus in political systems and state functions are often created by men and thus they work for them only, not to the women. Pateman (1988) in her innovative work *The Sexual Contract* has brought out the gendered nature of the contract, which she calls 'sexual contract.' She rejects the basic assumption of the contractualism that the individual's social contract to create the state by consenting is not gender-neutral. Rather, it has reinforced the idea of a 'masculine' citizen to keep out and exclude women from the public sphere or mainstream of state apparatuses. The irony is that in the beginning, women's consent was not taken and, hence, as per the rules of the contract, they remain free, but they are subjected to the authority that was created as a result of the contract. Tracking this gap, she critically argues that the freedom of women in the social contract is ridiculous and androcentric.

Ontologically, social contract theory is deeply rooted in the basis of liberal theory. Pateman (1988) seems to be very critical to various issues of this notion like marriage, sexuality, motherhood, domestic labour and sexual violence remained outside, reaffirmed through actual contracts in everyday life (p. 114). For her, social contract and patriarchy go together, though women are nowhere in this journey. She seems to be very argumentative that "The original (social-sexual) contract creates the modern social whole of patriarchal society. Men pass back and forth between the public and the private spheres and the writ of the law of male sex-right runs in both realms" (p. 12). However, the critics have pointed out that the power relations, as projected by Pateman, ignore the polycentric nature of power and plurality of power centres in society. It is the multiple crises in contract theory (Biesecker & von Winterfeld, 2018). The power relations in state and society are not based on a single factor of male sex rights, but a variety of factors make up it. Postmodern feminists have explored this critique of power, though are not as much as critical towards the social contract as the Marxist and socialist feminists are (Boucher & Kelly, 2003; Walsh, 2015).

Critiques of the Gendered Role and Power of the State

The patriarchal nature of the state is the central theme of feminist critique. It was epochal largely in the second wave feminism, i.e. during the 1970s and continues to come. The radical feminists maintained that the state's role is to form patriarchy and to ensure its continuity. But, subsequently, liberal feminists and the postmodernists were ready to accept the intervention of the state in the key areas of concern, like abortion, anti-rape legislation, pornography and such other issues against which there were popular movements. The construction of state power through an engagement of women is an evident artefact in history (Randal, 2012). There has been a gradual realization that the state has a role in curbing such practices, which could not be solved by the social and market forces. In sum, feminists of all levels often criticize the unitary role of the state, which seems to be male-biased, objectivist and instrumental. Summarizing this realization, Geeta and Nair (2013)

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

further maintain that gender, including class and race, are three components to shape the contemporary debates of power, post-colonialism and international relations.

The radical feminists and the socialist feminists are critical of the liberal state, including its democracy and welfare politics. The liberal policies, freedom apparatuses and soft structures of the state are inevitably male-dominated. It is through the mechanism of the state, the patriarchal system is strengthened and the domination of men over women established and legitimized in the name of development, well-being, human rights, and elections. Even the participation of women in the state organs is elite-centric. Mackinnon (1989) in *Toward a Feminist Theory of State* critically maintains that liberal legalism is a medium for making male dominance. The dominance is invisible and legitimate, as clear by the male point of view in law as is enforced that view on society (p. 237). In this context, Allen (2018) critically urges that state power from a feminist perspective should be analyzed in terms of resistance, domination, and solidarity.

Regressive Role of the State

There is a debate among the feminists whether to choose the idea of a welfare state or not. In the capitalistic mode of production, some feminists accept the notion of the welfare state, but with some reservations as the dimensions of welfare to be defined and gender-responsive. They argue that the welfare schemes of the state are beneficial to women as they got benefitted from domestic gendered power relations, including cares, incentives and allowances. Hernes (1987, p. 15) holds that a welfare state promotes a woman-friendly society where there is no unjust treatment for women on the grounds of sex. Rather, it has exposed the women in the public sphere, which eventually changed dependency. As the women are employed by the state, the dependence on a male member of the family gets replaced by a dependency on the state for the job and wages. However, Dahlerup (1987) argues that the change is not solely because of the welfare state, but due to the rapid industrialization and socio-economic changes (p. 15). In this context, Borchorst and Siim (2008) warn that only the nature of dependency has changed, but the state which is the biggest patriarchal structure itself continued and institutionalized it. The suppression of women may continue with different schemes of welfare adhered to by the state.

Some feminists are critical of universalizing all the states in the world. This is a theoretically impossible and empirically contested idea to define the state in a singular term- as what is it for the women and how it works for them. Therefore, there is a disagreement as to extending the experience of women in one state to the other in a generalized, absolute, and deterministic way. It then made possible adoption, reconceptualization and remodeling of the welfare state about which the feminists were previously very critical. It is witnessed particularly with the fall of socialism in Russia and the emergence of a unipolar world dominated by neoliberal democracy. One such classic critique is the *Gendering Welfare States* published which has offered a thorough analysis of the then existing welfare models in the UK, Germany and Eastern Europe, with a feminist perspective (Sainsbury, 1994). In contemporary literature, the other works include Orloff (2009, 2014); and Laperrière and Orloff (2018). In this context, feminists gradually realized that the extreme worldview of either looking at the state as an enemy or as a friend is empirically untenable. As Mottier (2004) has rightly put it as a crucial need for feminist analysis going beyond the sophisticated models. It would then consider the complex, multidimensional and differentiated relations between the state and gender.

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

Critique of State Power

Power is a contested term. In the Foucauldian perspective, power creates discourse, the discourse then creates hegemony and domination (McHoul & Grace, 2015). The subsequent review reflects that there are three broad theoretical categories of power: pluralist approach (liberal democratic society), elite theory (minority-led group-based society) and the Marxist perspective (class society—instrumental approach and structuralist approach) (Connolly, 2017; Stor, 2017). Many studies in feminism have focused on the power of women in the private and public spheres, which are interlinked. However, the feminist studies on the power of non-state actors are less scholarly attempted (Olive, 2017). A critical review on it reflects that power was understood by the feminists in the initial phases in terms of control over resources, later they focused on the institutions and structures.

The feminist scholars are critical to the hegemonic nature of power that disempowers and subjugates women in the state, society, culture and politics. In particular, the power centres on the patriarchal system are institutionally gendered. As a result, they lead to perpetuate gender inequality and powerlessness of women. Feminists often reject the state power that gives privileges to the male at the cost of the female. Feminists disagree with the use of military power and other repressive organs by the state as history is clear where women become the victims of war and violence most of the time, and they had lost their lives in the name of revolution, emancipation and nationalism.

The political system cannot remain in isolation where it requires power to survive and transform. Feminism is critical of power in a democracy if it exists with gender inequality. The autonomy and sovereignty of power are ever contested from where and to whom is it constructed. Indeed, there is a gender construction of power that is politically legitimized through the state. It is thus the decision-making power is granted with and exercised by the male member in society. The power in the private sphere gets transferred to the public sphere due to the process of democracy and its norms, including election, leadership, representation and governance. Thus, democratic power is exercised for the domination and suppression of women, rather than making a just and gender-responsive society. However, it is not a generalized notion in feminism that all feminists necessarily negate the role of power in democracy and other political systems (Paxton et al., 2020).

Another perspective of power is worthwhile to note in this regard. Most feminist scholars conceptualized power as the tool of liberation, though it is contested (Hinojosa & Kittilson, 2020). From this perspective, women often want power so that they could be equal to men and enjoy freedom like them. This is a soft version of critique of state power. The harder one perceives power as to mean ‘power for self-definition, ‘power over one’s body and the ‘power of self-determination’. In this line, Segal (1987) defined power in terms of determining the order: ‘we wanted power to participate in making of a new world which would be free from all forms of domination (p. 2).

Feminist Critique of Citizenship

Citizenship has been a fundamental issue in political science at which feminist thinkers have observed gender bias and an androcentric worldview. They reject the universalized notion of liberal citizenship. The political theory of liberal democracy is dominant and mainstream in the present world order. It assumes that there is equal access and rights of citizenship in a democracy. However, the history of feminist movements critically warned a common

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

feature of modern states, i.e. exclusion of women from public politics, elite-centric male domination and denial of citizenship rights to women. Eventually, the participatory rights of the woman had not been empirically valid. Pateman, Walby, Richardson, and Arno are critical of the mainstream citizenship theory as it is theoretically incomplete and empirically patriarchal.

In this context, Okin, Elshtain, Pateman and others have dealt with the issue of how and why women as a group remained less prioritized in political theory. Even in T.H. Marshall's conceptualization of citizenship ("*Citizenship and the Social Class*" in 1949) which narrates the evolution of civil rights, political rights and social rights, there is no issue of women is presented. Sylvia (1994) has raised objections against Marshall's theory for not considering gender relations. Following this, Siim (2000) has further criticized the model as it was based on the development of rights of men which eventually could not notice the women's rights and other subordinated groups though they have had their history and logic. In recent years, however, women's citizenship has been knotted with the multiple issues of society and state, including migration and women (Dobrowolsky, 2016); women, marriage and the law of citizenship (Bredbenner, 2018); sexual politics and citizenship (Franzway, 2016); and gender, class and citizenship (O'connor, 2018).

Multiculturalism and diversity among women have been another debated issue in feminism (Martin, 2020), which is further questioned whether it is good or bad for women (Okin, 2016). It would add a new dimension of re-gendering citizenship. Lister (1997) has proposed a comparative approach rather than universalizing 'all the women' in the world and their issue of citizenship. The needs and rights of specific groups of women and the needs and rights of women in general might of empirically different. She identifies feminist approaches to citizenship into three categories: Gender-neutral model (women are equal with men); Gender-differentiation model (women are different from men); and Gender-pluralism model (men and women are members of multiple groups and holders of multiple identities). Lister in her later works as well firmly concludes that the best way is to construct 'women-friendly citizenship' by synthesizing all the three models, and urges it to be the responsibility of modern states (Lister, 2008).

As argued by Fierro (2016), it is an urgent need to go beyond the existing heterogeneity among different positions in the feminist political theory. It is thus desirable to identify some common aspects that provide a basis for the critique of the liberal conception of citizenship. This contradicts with the theory of multiracialism and the practice of multiculturalism denying the mainstreaming of feminist agendas of citizenship and political rights. It is the responsibility of the state to offer a women-friendly citizenship policy by reconciling the needs and rights of all kinds of women in their specifications, whether they be—the refugee women, the migrant women or the women of the host country. Along with this, a notion of differential universalism in citizenship is getting importance in feminist political critique. On the other hand, feminists are also divided at the scope of citizenship: whether it is granted by the state or from the culture and society. Most of the postmodernists and few neo-Marxists tend to involve the idea of citizenship both as to membership of a state and the membership of a community. Patriarchal social structure, androcentric worldview and gender-biased production relations are strongly functional not only in the state's affairs but also in the day-to-day operations of non-state actors, civil societies and cultural practices. Moreover, feminists severely attack the assumption of a self-interested self, i.e. individuals to cultivate a virtuous self (Connolly, 2002). Unfortunate is that a good

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

citizen is recognized with (and expected to) cultivate typically manly virtues such as self-control, impartiality, and civic courage.

State Feminism vs Market Feminism

The state vs market contradiction is one of the most contested ideas in political science and economics and development studies. Gender and politics consider it as an engaging topic of scholarship where state feminism and market feminism are contrasted and compared critically. State feminism is the state-centric notion of feminism that is facilitated, created, or approved by the government of a state or nation. Helga Hernes coined the term in 1987 with particular reference to the situation in Norway (Hernes, 1987), which then extended to the Nordic countries and Scandinavian countries (McBride, & Mazur, 2010, p. 4). Feminist theorists in the 1980s revisited their assumption about the role of the state (as oppressive) and realized that governments could have positive outcomes for women in terms of quality of lives/ livelihoods, and the mainstreaming in socio-economic sectors. The emergence of this notion was based on government-supported gender equality policies. Franceschet (2003) argues that state feminism is a policy approach when the government or the state adopts policies that are beneficial to women's rights and the improvement of women's lives (p. 17).

The state feminists often look at the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of various government programs, as if these interventions improve women's rights and their status. Kobayashi (2004) defines the state as a system that could support the interests of different classes, genders and racial hierarchies (p. 17) along with a diverse number of programs that have different levels of support within government or society (p. 19). Thus, state feminism believes that a state program or a policy reform particularly contributes to gender equality, which then opens a possibility of transforming gender relationships. State feminism favours participatory government to enhance democratic governance and gender-egalitarian policies in favour of women. However, it has been criticized that attachment of state feminism with the state is itself a wonder, ontologically, to adapt the patriarchy- the major source of power. Moreover, women's movements and targeted programs may be prohibited by the government as its hegemonic construction. The state could grant the rights of expression, civic freedom and participation in the political sphere for women to a small scale, though these reforms are often defined and operationalized through the androcentric worldview of politics at large. On the other hand, as noted by Allsopp (2012), state feminism does not talk about why and how the government takes over the role of speaking for and on behalf of women, rather than letting women themselves speak and make demands.

Contrary to state feminism, market feminism adheres to the market and private sector as the reformer, executive, and guarantor of women's rights. Women are less political and more economic in this worldview. McCloskey (2000) proposes to women why they could not be economic agents and as economists, while there is a dominance of males as economists and economic agents. Scholars increasingly realize that the state could not offer emancipatory measures and interventions in favour of women. Rather, it is the market that dominates the state and society and thus has sufficient room for mainstreaming women's agendas and improving their lives. Market feminists often believe that free-market economics can improve the position, status and well-being of women. There is a classic work *Market, state and feminism: the economics of feminist policy* which questions the philosophical basis of free-market feminism, challenging its masculine assumptions about rationality and individualism (Hatt & Watson-Brown, 2000). It is a critical remark on the theoretical

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

validity of the debate, i.e. market versus the state. The authors analyze the nature of the state as being restrictive and intrusive, though it could enhance the individual's ability to make cost-effective choices. Rather than focusing on dichotomous positions, they thus draw attention to the interdependence between markets and state institutions.

Some feminists have warned of the inadequacy and incapability of the state to promote women's well-being. Kantola and Squires (2012) argue that the concept of 'state feminism' no longer adequately captures the complexity of emerging feminist engagements with novel forms of governance. 'Market feminism' could serve as a new strategy for women's empowerment. It would ease a new conceptual framework to analyze and evaluate the feminist approach (of both private and public sphere) in terms of changed policies, practices and the new form of governance. However, this is less theorized how the market would serve the feminist emancipation instead of the state. Is the market such a powerful and all-embracing institution? In this context, Eichner (2016) seems to be critical of contemporary US feminism. She realized that it has not adequately been theorized the problems with the relatively unregulated market system. In this context, it is worthwhile to mention the argument of Yeatman (2017) who maintains that progressive politics is centred on the state, which is also implied in the feminist discourse. The notion of distributive justice is essentially privileged to the state, which would also affect the feminist claims of reform, well-being and political participation.

Conclusion

The scholarly debate and engagement of feminism reflect that the idea of the state is gendered. This paper synthesizes that, in terms of feminist criticism, they construct the state with contradictions in terms of uneven allocation of resources, gendered institutions, androcentric leadership, and male-biased policies. However, it lacks a uniformity to analyze the pattern, trend and structure of gender in the state. While the liberal feminist seems at looking state as a right-based approach, socialists and Marxists view this from the power-based approaches. It is theoretically rational to know feminism with theoretical accounts of politics and its construction, i.e. the state. The state is itself a repressive agent for women, though feminists are divided to view this as they need to abolish it or continue it with some improvements and gender-friendly adaptations. All types of feminists would then link their critiques of state with its structure and function along with power relations and provision of citizenship. Unfortunately, former works were overly focused on the actors of the state that repressed the voices of women. The structural approach was lacking in visualizing the gendered state.

The sociological debate of actor vs agency was less entertained in political science and they also reflected it in the feminist movements. There was an "institutional turn" in gender and politics in the 1980s. Feminist institutionalists are less attractive towards the analysis of the state. It is important to theorize that if there is a wider understanding of institutions in the society as gendered structures, the institutions of the state (i.e. actors, apparatuses, and structures) are also gendered in nature. Equally important is the theorization of how the classical perspectives of feminism (liberal, socialist, Marxist, and radicals in particular) over the state have got severe criticism in recent years. In this context, the paper argues that the rise and imminent scope of new feminist movements, including post-modernism, neo-Marxism, post-feminism and post-structuralism, cannot be avoided in contemporary discourse.

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

Thus, this paper concludes that the state is not a homogenous and women-friendly construction. Rather, it is ever debated and contested in terms of its structure, power and the actors and agencies within it. There is a need for more research on the ideological dimension (philosophy and discourses of state) as well as in the empirical dimensions (including actors and structures of the state, role of gender and sexuality in constituting those actors and structures, violence and gender equality policies). Feminist critiques of the state have looked not only at how and why gender inequality occurs or persists in the state, but also how and why gender difference is constructed and gender inequality reproduced through institutions and policies to continue the hegemony of the state. It is also critical not that modern nation-states are adopting particular kinds of reforms in favour of women, but they are gendered and thus reproduce continues hegemony in the name of liberalism, freedom and democracy. The market actors and their forces are too androcentric. In this context, further research works are needed to critique the regimes and institutions of state at the macro-level and identity, self-dignity and citizenship of women of state at the micro-level.

As a final remark, though the states have often criticized in androcentric which avoids the feminist goals, we cannot negate the fact that the modern states are rapidly changing. They have also become the locus of many of the problems and issues of feminism viz. mainstreaming, identity, wage labor, unpaid works, stereotyping, history and contemporary art and aesthetics. Both empirically and theoretically, addressing all these issues from a feminist perspective is still a critical question. Following this, this paper necessitates exploring how the variations in national location and disciplinary compulsions lead to innovative forms of feminist state theory concerning a range of states—agents of neoliberalism, welfare states, developmental states, authoritarian states, aspiring nascent states, and rapidly industrialized states.

References

Ackerly, B. A., & True, J. (2019). *Doing feminist research in political and social science*. Red Globe Press.

Allen, A. (2018). *The power of feminist theory: Domination, resistance, solidarity*. Routledge.

Allsopp, J. (2012). *State Feminism: Co-opting Women's Voices*. Open Democracy. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/state-feminism-co-opting-womens-voices/>

Atkinson, T. G. (2000). Radical feminism. *Radical feminism: A documentary reader* (pp. 82-89). <https://cache.kzoo.edu/bitstream/handle/10920/28101/RadicalFeminism.pdf?sequence=1>

Borchorst, A., & Siim, B. (2008). Woman-friendly policies and state feminism: Theorizing Scandinavian gender equality. *Feminist theory*, 9(2), 207-224. <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.999.6297&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Armstrong, E. (2020). Marxist and Socialist Feminisms. *Companion to Feminist Studies* (pp. 35-52). https://scholarworks.smith.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1014&context=swg_facpubs

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

- Biesecker, A., & von Winterfeld, U. (2018). Notion of multiple crises and feminist perspectives on social contract. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 25(3), 279-293.
https://epub.wupperinst.org/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/6883/file/6883_Biesecker.pdf.
- Boucher, D., & Kelly, P. (2003). The social contract and its critics: An Overview. In D. Boucher & P. Kelly (Ed.), *The social contract from Hobbes to Rawls* (pp. 11-44). Routledge.
- Brah, A. & Phoenix, A. (2004). Ain't I a woman? Revisiting intersectionality. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3), 75-86.
<http://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1543&context=jjws>
- Bredbenner, C. L. (2018). *A nationality of her own: Women, marriage, and the law of citizenship*. University of California Press.
- Celis, K., Kantola, J., Waylen, G., & Weldon, S. L. (2013). Introduction: Gender and politics: A gendered world, a gendered discipline. In G. Waylen, K. Celis, J. Kantola, and S. L. Weldon (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of gender and politics*. Oxford University Press.
- Connolly, W. E. (2002). *Identity, difference: democratic negotiations of political paradox*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Connolly, W. E. (2017). *Political science & ideology*. Routledge.
- Dahlerup, D. (1987). Confusing concepts- confusing reality: A theoretical discussion of a patriarchal state. In A. S. Sassoon (Ed.), *Women and state* (pp. 93-127). Routledge.
- De Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex*. Vintage Books.
- Desai, M. (2014). Feminism and policy approaches for gender-aware development. In M. Desai (Ed.), *The paradigm of international social development: ideologies, development systems and policy approaches* (pp. 113-136). Routledge.
- Dobrowolsky, A. (2016). *Women, migration and citizenship: making local, national and transnational connections*. Routledge.
- Dolan, J., Deckman, M. M., & Swers, M. L. (Eds.). (2021). *Women and politics: Paths to power and political influence*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Echols, A. (1989). *Daring to be bad: Radical feminism in America (1967-1975, 1st ed.)*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Eichner, M. (2016). Market-cautious feminism. In *Special issue: Feminist legal theory*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1059-433720160000069011>.
- Engels, F. (1884). 'The origin of the family, private property and the State.' Verso Books (republished in 2021).
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf
- Ferguson, A., Hennessy, R., & Nagel, M. (2004). Feminist perspectives on class and work. In Stanford University (Ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.
<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-class/>

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

- Ferguson, K. E. (2017). Feminist theory today. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20, 269-286. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/full/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052715-111648>
- Fierro, J. (2016). A Feminist critique of the liberal conception of citizenship. *Estudios Políticos*, 48, 13-31. http://www.scielo.org.co/scielo.php?pid=S0121-51672016000100002&script=sci_arttext&tlng=pt
- Franceschet, S. (2003). State feminism' and women's movements: The impact of Chile's *servicionacional de la mujer* on women's activism. *Latin American Research Review*, 38(1), 9–40. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2003.0006>
- Franzway, S. (2016, September). The sexual politics of citizenship and violence. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 58, 18-24. Pergamon.
- Geoghegan, V., & Wilford, R. (2014). *Political ideologies: An introduction* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Geeta, C., & Nair, S. (2013). *Power, postcolonialism and international relations: Reading race, gender and class*. Routledge.
- Hanisch, C. (1969). The personal is political. <http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html>
- Hatt, S., & Watson-Brown, L. (2000). *Market, state and feminism: the economics of feminist policy*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Hernes, H. (1987). *Welfare state and women power: Essays in state feminism*. Norwegian University Press.
- Hinojosa, M., & Kittilson, M. C. (2020). *Seeing women, strengthening democracy: How women in politics foster connected citizens*. Oxford University Press.
- Hooks, B. (2000). *Feminist theory: From margin to centre*. Pluto Press.
- Kantola, J., & Squires, J. (2012). From state feminism to market feminism? *International Political Science Review*, 33(4), 382-400. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0192512111432513>
- Kennedy, E. L. (2008). Socialist feminism: What difference did it make to the history of women's studies? *Feminist Studies*, 34(3), 497-525. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20459218>
- Kobayashi, Y. (2004). *A path toward gender equality: State feminism in Japan*. Routledge.
- Krook, M. L., & Childs, S. (Eds.) (2010). Women, gender and politics: An introduction. *Women, gender, and politics: A reader*. Oxford University Press.
- Laperrière, M., & Orloff, A. S. (2018). Gender and welfare states. In B. J. Risman, C. M. Froyum, W. J. Scarborough (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of gender* (pp. 227-244). Springer.
- Lister, R. (1997). Citizenship: Towards a feminist synthesis. *Feminist Review*, 57(1), 28-48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/014177897339641>

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

- Lister, R. (2008). Citizenship and gender. In K. Nash and A. Scott (Eds.), *The Blackwell companion to political sociology* (pp. 323-332). John Wiley & Sons.
- Lovenduski, J. (2005). *Feminizing politics*. Polity Press.
[https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=V-yAOBNjEcsC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Lovenduski,+J.+\(2005\).+Feminizing+politics.+Polity.&ots=RgyrMU3vIj&sig=e8j9inY3hl1dJfdQ_Mhk1QG3pYM](https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=V-yAOBNjEcsC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=Lovenduski,+J.+(2005).+Feminizing+politics.+Polity.&ots=RgyrMU3vIj&sig=e8j9inY3hl1dJfdQ_Mhk1QG3pYM)
- Lowndes, V., Marsh, D., & Stoker, G. (Eds.). (2017). *Theory and methods in political science*. Macmillan International Higher Education.
- Luxton, M. (2014). Marxist feminism and anticapitalism: Reclaiming our history, reanimating our politics. *Studies in Political Economy*, 94(1), 137-160.
<https://scholar.archive.org/work/ewf4f5vqzh5tntmo3ckd2iofa/access/wayback/http://spe.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/spe/article/download/22289/18099>
- MacKinnon, C. A. (1983). Feminism, Marxism, method, and the state: Toward feminist jurisprudence. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 8(4), 635-658.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/3173687>
- MacKinnon, C. A. (1989). *Toward a feminist theory of the state*. Harvard University Press.
- Martin, J. (2020). Multiculturalism and feminism. In G. Bottomley, M. de Lepervanche, & J. Martin (Eds.), *Intersexions* (pp. 110-131). Routledge.
- McBride, D. E., & Mazur, A. G. (2010). *The politics of state feminism: Innovation in comparative research*. Temple University Press.
- McCloskey, D. N. (2000). Free-market feminism 101. *Eastern Economic Journal*, 26(3), 363-365. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40326003>
- McHoul, A., & Grace, W. (2015). *A Foucault primer: Discourse, power and the subject*. Routledge.
- Millet, K. (1970). *Sexual Politics*. Virago Press.
- Mills, S. (1998). Postcolonial feminist theory. In S. Jackson & J. Jones (Eds.), *Contemporary feminist theories* (pp. 98-112). Edinburgh University Press.
- Mottier, V. (2004). Feminism and gender theory. In G. F. Gaus & C. Kukathas (Eds.), *Handbook of political theory* (pp. 277-288). Sage.
- Naples, N. A. (Ed.). (2016). Special issue: Women, gender and politics: An international overview. *Social Sciences*, (5), 2.
- Nash, K. (2003). Feminism. In A. Finlayson (Ed.), *Contemporary political thought: A reader and guide*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Nielsen, J. M. (Ed.). (2019). *Feminist research methods: Exemplary readings in the social sciences*. Routledge.
- Nicholson, L. (Ed.). (2013). *Feminism/postmodernism*. Routledge.

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

O'Connor, J. S. (2018). Gender, class, and citizenship in the comparative analysis of welfare state regimes: Theoretical and methodological issues. In J. S. O'Connor, G. M. Olsen, & W. Korpi (Eds.), *Power resource theory and the welfare state: A critical approach* (pp. 209-228). University of Toronto Press.

Okin, S. M. (2016). Is multiculturalism bad for women? In F. Silvio, & C. Rinaldo (Eds.), *Current issues in law and religion* (Vol 4, 1st ed., pp. 331-348). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315095165>

Olive, R. (2017). The political imperative of feminism. In M. L. Silk, D. L. Andrews, & H. Thorpe (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of physical cultural studies* (pp. 50-59). Routledge.

Orloff, A. S. (2009). Gendering the comparative analysis of welfare states: An unfinished agenda. *Sociological Theory*, 27(3), 317-343. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40376139>

Orloff, A. S. (2014). Gendering the analysis of welfare states (with examples from Australia and the United States). In C. L. McNeely (Ed.), *Public Rights, Public Rules: Constituting Citizens in the World Polity and National Policy* (pp. 239-264). Taylor and Francis.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315050232-18>

Pateman, C. (1988). *The sexual contract*. Polity Press.

Paxton, P. M., Hughes, M. M., & Barnes, T. (2020). *Women, politics, and power: A global perspective*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

Randall, V. (2012). Gender and power: women engage the state. In V. Randall & G. Waylen (Eds.), *Gender, politics and the state* (pp. 185-206). Routledge.

Richardson, J. (2007). Contemporary feminist perspectives on social contract theory. *Ratio Juris*, 20(3), 402-423. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9337.2007.00367.x>.

Sainsbury, D. (Ed.). (1994). *Gendering welfare states*. Sage Publication.

Segal, L. (1987). *Is the future female? Troubled thoughts on contemporary feminism*. Virgo Publication.

Siim, B. (2001). Gender equality, citizenship and globalisation. Keynote Speech *How to achieve gender equality, conference social policy, marginalisation and citizenship.2-4. November, 2001*, Aalborg University, Denmark.
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.523.3242&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Skoble, A. J. & Tibor R. M. (Eds.). (1999). *Political philosophy: Essential selections*. Pearson.

Stör, L. (2017). Theories of power. In C. L. Spash (Ed.), *Routledge handbook of ecological economics* (pp. 141-151). Routledge.

Sylvia, W. (1994). Is citizenship is gendered? *Sociology*, 28(2), 379-395.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/42857698>

Teele, D. L., & Thelen, K. (2017). Gender in the journals: Publication patterns in political science. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 50(2), 433-447.

Gender and Politics: A Feminist Critique of the State

- Vinod, M.J. & Deshpande, M. (2013). *Contemporary Political Theory*. PHI Learning. <https://books.google.com.np/books?id=>
- Walsh, M. B. (2015). Feminism, adaptive preferences, and social contract theory. *Hypatia*, 30(4), 829-845. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12175>.
- Waylen, G. (2012). Gender, feminism and the state: an overview. *Gender, politics and the state*, 11-27. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9780203004890-6/gender-feminism-state-overview-georgina-waylen>
- Willis, E. (1984). Radical feminism and feminist radicalism. *Social text*, (9/10), 91-118. <https://doi.org/10.2307/466537.%20JSTOR%20466537>
- Yeatman, A. (2017). Contemporary issues for feminism: The politics of the state. In J. Blackmore & J. Kenway (Eds.), *Gender matters in educational administration and policy* (pp. 137-145). Routledge.
- Young, I. M. (1984). Pregnant embodiment: Subjectivity and alienation. *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 9(1), 45-62.
- Zhang, Y., & Rios, K. (2021). Understanding perceptions of radical and liberal feminists: The nuanced roles of warmth and competence. *Sex Roles*, 1-16. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11199-021-01257-y>