

## Preface

This 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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May 2010

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