

Women's Movements Facing the Reconfigured State

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When Power Relocates: Interactive Changes in Women's Movements and States

Lee Ann Banaszak, Karen Beckwith,
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INTRODUCTION: WHERE IS THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT?

Feminist activity for childcare in the United States took two forms during the 1970s. First, local feminist groups were active in building community day-care centers. Groups like the Women's Action Alliance (1974) and Resources for Community Change (1974) encouraged women to form cooperative day-care centers, allowing parents and local community members to direct child-care implementation and institute a curriculum that minimized sex role differences and encouraged social change. Second, the National Organization for Women and feminist legislators fought hard to pass the Comprehensive Child Development Act of 1971, which would have provided federally regulated and funded child-care centers open to parents of all incomes on a sliding fee basis. Although the bill passed Congress with bipartisan support, Nixon vetoed the bill in December 1971.¹ Both local community organizers and those who pushed for federally funded day care protested nascent corporate interest in profit-making, privatized day-care centers ("Kentucky Fried Children," as Featherstone [1970] called them). Radical and diverse, both autonomous and state-involved, the U.S. women's movement argued for a national child-care policy that was woman centered, independent of financial circumstances of parents, state funded, and community controlled.

By the 1990s, the U.S. feminist movement's concern with childcare had diminished,² and the site for discussion had shifted location. Childcare, even among feminists, was discussed primarily in the context of women's employment, and as child centered and concerned with child safety and development, rather than as an issue essential to the full human actualization of women with children. Moreover, child-care policy had acquired a two-class resolution: no child-care provision by the state for poor mothers, private child-care provision arranged by individuals for middle- and upper-class mothers. Female, and even many feminist, members of Congress, by voting for the Personal Responsibility

¹ Attempts at similar legislation in 1974 and 1975 were unsuccessful.

² See, however, the efforts of the National Organization for Women, in Mink 1998: 7, 162–163n85.

and Work Opportunity Act (PRA) of 1996, disempowered poor single mothers and advanced a welfare child-care policy considerably less feminist than its precursor (the Child Development Act of 1971) twenty-five years earlier. The PRA ended child-care entitlements for welfare recipients, eliminated “welfare-related child-care programs” and did not provide enough funding to supply affordable childcare to poor mothers compelled by the PRA to work (Mink 1998: 114). Thus, by the late 1990s, feminists had abandoned their previous concern about poor women’s access to childcare as well as the larger concerns about the ideological content and locus of control of child-care solutions.

These changes in the policy concerns of women’s movements in the United States are not unique. They neither occurred only in the United States nor were they restricted to the particular issue of daycare. As with the United States, women’s movements³ in West Europe and Canada with radical and even revolutionary antecedents transformed their feminist policy concerns and their relationship with the state. They have moved from an early radicalism, autonomy, and challenge to the state in the 1970s, to a more moderate, state-involved, and accommodationist stance by the 1990s. Some parts of the movement even employ a neoliberal rhetoric that would have been unthinkable within the movement’s ranks in the 1970s. This pattern of change, although not perfectly replicated in every West European and North American women’s movement, is nonetheless evidenced in each of them.

Can our claim about the dramatic change of the women’s movements in North America and Western Europe be substantiated? And if so, why have these movements, situated in widely differing contexts, followed a similar trajectory? These are the two key questions that this volume seeks to answer. In doing so, we maintain that a crucial factor in explaining this trajectory is that women’s movements today no longer confront the state they faced in the 1970s. We argue instead that the state has reshaped, relocated, and rearticulated its formal powers and policy responsibilities throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Women’s movements in North America and West Europe have been interactively engaged with this “reconfiguring” state, and this relational interaction has transformed feminist movements. As a result, changes

³ We conceive of *women’s movements* as those movements whose definition, content, leadership, development, or issues are specific to women and their gender identity (Beckwith 2000). Such a definition includes feminist movements, liberal women’s groups, and [even] some conservative women’s organizations, and provides us with the analytical flexibility to compare women’s movements within and across West European and North American nations. From the European perspective, the term *women’s movement* is often equated with feminism, particularly those aspects that are associated with the radical branch of the movement. This branch is distinctive in its critique of state institutions and society as patriarchal, compared to, for example, a liberal strand of the women’s movement, which accepts institutional arrangements and struggles for women’s equal access to them. Our definition of women’s movements permits us to incorporate a wider array of groups than a more restrictive definition would allow.

in feminist movements cannot be seen simply as interior to the movement; for example, as the result of the movement's natural lifecycle (Tarrow 1998), of personnel changes (see della Porta, this volume for refutation of this position), or the natural waning of activists' enthusiasm and energy (Hirschman 1982). Rather, women's movements face a reconfigured state that offers them opportunities for advancing feminist agendas and that also threatens feminist successes.

Moreover, by interacting with governments that are reconfiguring state power, women's movements have also contributed to state reconfiguration and facilitated and resisted the changes that accompany it. In this regard, we do not see women as "the objects of state policy" or the state as "something 'out there' and external to women's lives . . . over which they have little control" (Waylen 1998: 4). Rather, we see both states and feminist movements as "sites of struggle" (Waylen 1998: 15) in dynamic interaction. Neither is homogeneous or monolithic; instead they are engaged in complex, flexible, nonteleological interaction with each other. This book, then, investigates the pattern of change in women's movements in West Europe and North America as they interact with states that are reconfiguring state powers. Given this central theme, our task in the rest of this introductory chapter is twofold. First, we clarify the concept of state reconfiguration and outline its extent and evidence in three exemplary nations. Second, we demonstrate how state reconfiguration influences concrete interactions between states and women's movements and discuss the effects of these interactions on both states and women's movements.

THE RECONFIGURATION OF STATES IN WEST EUROPE AND NORTH AMERICA

The fundamental character of the nation-state is undergoing change. Underlying this claim is the assumption that the postwar period represents a stage of state development which, in spite of national variances, was structurally similar across most Western nations insofar as they were all modeled according to the capitalist welfare state. In the European context, this state was often characterized as "Keynesian" or "Fordist." Economic and social changes have contributed to the gradual abandonment of this state model. At the same time, fundamental changes in the nature of the state have emerged, reconfiguring formal and informal state powers, potentially shaping a new state model, and thereby changing the relationship between states and civil societies. Several authors have attributed state changes to more global economic transformations by labeling a new state model as neo-Fordist or post-Fordist⁴ (Hirsch 1985; Hirsch and Roth 1986; Jessop 1990; Nielsen 1991).

⁴ The term post-Fordist or neo-Fordist describes a state that has moved beyond relying on economic mass production and industry, Keynesian economics, and extensive welfare provisions to a state encouraging flexible production and globalization of the economy.

We prefer a more neutral term – *the reconfiguration of the state* – which reflects both the developing, incomplete, and flexible nature of changes in West European and North American states and which is less emphatic in stressing the economic aspects of this transformation. As was the case with the formation of nation states (Anderson 1974a, 1974b; Bright and Harding 1984) and the creation and development of welfare states (Castles and Mitchell 1993; Esping-Andersen 1990; Rieger and Leibfried 1995), the process of reconfiguration is highly differentiated, starting at different time points, taking different guises, and evoking different levels of support and resistance depending on the specific context in which it takes place. Nevertheless, for the sake of analytical clarity, we describe reconfiguration as an *ideal-type* process, and illustrate the various dimensions and aspects of the process with empirical references to particular states and policies.

Reconfiguration is evidenced, first, by structural changes within the state and, second, by the changing relationship between the state and civil society. These changes are accompanied, and partly reflected, by a changing discourse about the role of the state – an aspect that we will discuss further below.

Structural Changes within the State

These structural changes imply a relocation of formal state authority and/or a transfer of state policy responsibilities from one governmental level or branch to another. This relocation can first occur in a vertical direction by shifting power, which was mainly concentrated at the level of the nation-state, upward or downward. Much state authority has been *uploaded* to supranational organizations such as the European Union (EU), various UN bodies, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Member nations of the EU, for example, having relinquished independent formal state powers to the EU, are subject to “supreme legal powers residing in the European Court of Justice, . . . and the autonomous capacity for action of the European Commission. . . . [T]he Treaties and Directives of the EU have a direct effect on every citizen of the EU” (Walby 1999: 120). Whereas Walby argues that the EU is best understood as a new federal suprastate, we conceive the transfer of formal decision-making competencies by individual nations to the EU as a vertical reconfiguration of power. Other examples of uploading include the transfer of economic decision-making powers by the United States and Canada to the North American Free Trade Agreements and to the WTO. In these arrangements, nations have relinquished autonomy of decision making in policy-specific areas, and hence, have ceded some state authority to supranational organizations.

Vertical reconfiguration of formal state decision-making powers is also evidenced by *downloading*, that is, by the relocation of national state authority or responsibility for specific tasks to substate, provincial, or regional governments. For example, the devolution of formal decision making from

the British Parliament to the new Scottish Parliament constitutes a transfer of state power and authority and the formal empowerment of a national region. Two Scottish referenda and elections to a new Scottish Parliament in May 1999 indicate that formal state powers, formerly the purview of the House of Commons, have been relinquished to Scotland and would be difficult to recover (Bogdanor 1999, 1997). The content and implementation of policy decisions by the new Scottish Parliament will likewise be irrefutable by the House of Commons. In addition to downloading formal authority, national governments have been reducing their responsibility for tasks by downloading these to subnational territorial units, without transferring the authority over policy arenas. For example, the Personal Responsibility Act mentioned previously increases the discretion of individual states, but “also imposed additional procedural, administrative, and financial burdens on states” (Mink 1998: 61–62; see also Schram and Weissert 1997).

Parallel to these vertical changes in state authority and responsibility, shifts of power occurred across the traditional representative spheres of the state, particularly the legislative and executive arenas. As a rule, there has been a weakening of the power of elected state spheres and a growing reliance on other and partly nonelected state bodies to make policy. We refer to these changes in state responsibility as *lateral loading*.⁵ The national state maintains its decision-making powers, yet policy decisions increasingly occur in the courts, quasi-nongovernmental organizations (quangos), and executive agencies of government. Jessop (1991b: 150) notes that there has been a “decentralization of new supply-side powers... through the creation of single-function non-elected government agencies.”⁶ For example, in Great Britain, the Housing Act of 1988 led to the replacement of elected officials from the local authority housing departments by appointed officials on housing trusts (Lewis 1991).

The movement of policy decisions to nonelected state bodies is important because each policy venue influences the specific characteristics of policy decisions (Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Kirp 1982). In particular, as Baumgartner and Jones note (1993: 32–33), electoral politics allow activists greater influence over the framing of issues. When issues move from the Parliament to the administration, they tend to become more invisible and depoliticized. Similarly, issues may become depoliticized when they move to the judiciary. For example, the German Constitutional Court’s decision on the 1992 abortion law changed the character of the German abortion

⁵ We thank Michael Lewis-Beck for suggesting this term.

⁶ Baumgartner and Jones (1993: 38–39) argue that as individual groups and issues gain recognition within the system, they may effect long-term structural changes in how policies are decided. This may be one cause of the increased power in nonelected state bodies. For example, as gender issues have gained more recognition, new and more independent bureaucracies concerned with gender were created.

debate. It effectively removed the issue from the arena of public debate, and constrained Parliament in their ability to determine abortion policy.⁷ As governments have increasingly engaged in lateral loading, women's movements have been presented with an increasingly depoliticized and remote set of state policy-making agencies at the national level. Thus, the relocation of responsibility to nonelected state bodies eventually reduces social movement influence.

Structural Changes in the Relationship between State and Civil Society

States have not only shifted their power within their own realm but also have reduced their own power and authority vis-à-vis civil society. Perhaps the most visible part of such a shift in power and authority involves states' decisions to offload their traditional responsibilities onto nonstate venues such as the community, the family, the market, or intermediary organizations. In the United States, Germany, and Great Britain, for example, the state has shifted away from being the sole provider of welfare and the primary authority for equalizing economic inequalities. Instead, some of these responsibilities are now part of the economic market or, in the case of alleviating poverty, have become the charge of the community or of civil society (Birkinshaw, Harden, and Lewis 1990). In policy areas such as education, health, and housing, there has been a move toward "private interest government" (Jessop 1991a; Streeck 1995; Streeck and Schmitter 1983). In this case, individual social groups may become regulating agencies of the state. This differs from existing corporatist institutions in that the emphasis lies not in "interorganizational concertation" but in creating institutions and parameters for groups to act independently or at best in "informal cooperation" (Jessop 1990: 140). One result of offloading has been that families (particularly women) increasingly bear the burdens of caring for the aged and disabled (Bashevkin 1998).

Related to the rise in power of nonelected state bodies has been the proliferation of civil society representation within the state itself. Quangos, regulatory agencies, and corporatist institutions usually include representatives of civil groups. For example, beginning in the 1980s, educational policy in the United States was increasingly decided by quasi-governmental organizations (Fuhrman 1994). Members of these organizations are appointed by national or state political leaders, who usually seek representatives of business, teachers, and policymakers. Thus, as the number of such bodies has increased in the last ten years, so has the presence of certain parts of civil society within official state organizations (Levine and Trachtman 1988).

⁷ Some social movement scholars have argued that access to the judiciary is a powerful political opportunity for social movements, by providing access to policy change (Kitschelt 1986; Kriesi 1995). We do not disagree. Rather here we are arguing that when the locus of policy making is removed from elected systems, social movements lose.

TABLE 1.1. *Reconfiguration Processes*

	Changes within the State	Changes in State/Society Relations
Vertical shifts	Downloading of power and responsibility to lower state levels Uploading of power and responsibility to higher state levels	Offloading of state power to nonstate actors
Horizontal shifts	Lateral loading by the delegation of competencies to nonelected state bodies	

These changes in the institutions of the state reflect a new power relationship between the state and other actors. On the one hand, there is a decline of the traditional neocorporatist arrangements of the past (Schmitter 1989). To the extent that states have lost macroeconomic control and businesses have moved toward more flexible forms of production, neocorporatist institutions, which engage in price and wage controls, have become less useful and less powerful (Jessop 1991A). Two groups appear to have lost more as a result of this shift. First, some industries, previously key to corporatist institutions (such as steel, coal, and large industrial manufacturing firms), are less relevant to the new economy and therefore no longer have the same power vis-à-vis the state that they once did (Jessop 1991A). Second, the new power constellations have also excluded traditional trade unions or only included more privileged groups of workers (Hirsch 1991, 1985; Jessop 1991A). For example, Jessop (1991B: 148) notes that under Thatcher the British system of tripartite corporatism was altered, often by eliminating or downgrading those institutions where trade unions were strong. On the other hand, the structural changes described previously, particularly the offloading of state responsibilities, mean that an increase in public-private partnerships provides new power to particular private interests. Certain policy areas are increasingly seen as specifically geared to serving business interests (for example, education, health, security, prisons) and, as a result, private corporations have increased power over certain types of state policy.

To summarize, reconfiguration is a multifaceted process that can be conceptualized as a syndrome of four specific transformations: Within the state we witness processes of horizontal and vertical shifts of power and policy responsibility, namely *uploading*, *downloading*, and *lateral loading*. At the same time, the relationship between the state and civil society has undergone fundamental changes insofar as states have *offloaded* responsibilities by simply withdrawing from particular functions and/or by delegating tasks to actors in civil society. These four processes are located in Table 1.1.

As the overall political and social power structure, including the organization and competencies of the state, is reconfigured, it affects a broad range of

policy domains and social actors. To the extent that state reconfiguration is the result of large scale transformations in the global economic structure and international world order, states will experience widespread and long-lasting structural alterations, to which nonstate actors such as women's movements will have to adapt and of which they can take advantage. We argue that these reconfiguration processes are crucial for women's movements insofar as they provide negative as well as positive opportunities that differ fundamentally from the state context that women's movements faced in the 1960s and early 1970s.

Structural changes in the state are accompanied by a rhetoric and discourse of the state that has provided the rationale for state reconfiguration. That West European and North American states have developed, especially throughout the 1980s, a neoliberal discourse is not surprising, given the right-wing governments of Thatcher in Britain, Mulroney in Canada, Kohl in Germany, and Reagan in the United States. This discourse helped to shift and justify citizens' perceptions from a vision of states as activist centers of policy initiatives to one of states as limited, morally and economically, in their responsibilities and to an image of citizens as customers. Relying on frames developed in multinational industry and banking (Hirsch 1991, 1985; Jessop 1991b; Nielsen 1991), states articulated a neoliberal politics of individualism, meritocracy, self-reliance, and minimalist state responsibility. For example, Elman (this volume) argues that in the United States during the 1990s both the women's movement and the government emphasized the economic benefits to corporations of policies attacking violence against women. In addition, states altered their discourse about citizen participation from a vision of individuals as citizens with basic rights and of political participation, particularly voting, as the basis for citizen equality in the 1970s to a neoliberal discourse in the 1980s where citizens are seen as clients or consumers whose primary legitimate demand upon the state is for the satisfaction of specific needs (Brown 1995: 194).⁸ For example, the Citizens' Charter in Great Britain, despite its name, lists rights that clients of the National Health Service or riders of British Rail have as consumers of these services.

Examples of Reconfiguration in Three Nations

Although we argue that all nations in West Europe and North America have experienced state reconfiguration, we also recognize that not all nations have reconfigured in the same ways, at the same pace, and to the same extent. We discuss the cases of Britain, France and Germany, which serve as examples of different experiences with state reconfiguration from the 1970s to the 1990s, as follows.

⁸ Indeed, a vision akin to the "civic man" of Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee (1954).

Britain

Britain's major reconfiguration of state powers is evidenced in its 1) program of radical privatization of state-owned enterprises, 2) shift of many former social welfare commitments and responsibilities away from the national state, by defunding and abolishing some programs, and by transferring implementation responsibilities to local venues, 3) transfer of responsibilities to nonelected venues within the state, and 4) devolution of some powers to Scotland.

Although British nationalization policy in the mid-1970s involved "a bipartisan element in the approach to public enterprise (i.e., the Conservatives had tolerated it and Labour had been enthusiastically in favour of it)" (Swann 1988: 7), by the mid-1990s, formerly nationalized industries and utilities had been sold to private owners.⁹ The extensive privatization program, initiated under the Thatcher government and pursued by the Major government, included privatization of the coal industry (1992–3) and the gradual sell off of the railway system (1987 through the mid-1990s). The Blair government has not reversed these policies, in contrast to the French experience (see the following).

During this same period, state responsibility for traditional social welfare policies was reconfigured through a combination of defunding, reorganizing, and relocating policy implementation to local or nonstate venues. For example, under the Thatcher governments of the 1980s, state responsibility for public housing was partially relinquished by offloading public housing stock to the private sector (Studlar 1996: 172). As the British state downloaded and offloaded policy responsibilities, however, it not only maintained its authority over local councils and agencies, but also increased its formal authority in the 1980s by abolishing several local councils, such as the Greater London Council (see Birch 1998: 193–195).

The establishment of quasi-nongovernmental organizations (quangos), which removed various social policy decision making from democratic accountability, also dispersed policy responsibilities without relinquishing ultimate formal authority (Wolfe 2001). By 1990–1, British "quangos were spending three times as much as they had in 1978–79" (Krieger 1996: 69), despite a reorganization by Margaret Thatcher; by 1994, quangos were "responsible for one-fifth of all public spending and more than three-quarters of local government spending" (Krieger 1996: 69). Hutton claims that by 1996, the Conservative government had established 7,700 new quangos (Hutton 1995: 4–5).

Recently, state powers have also been devolved to Scotland and, to a lesser extent, Wales. In Scotland, two referenda (approving a Scottish Parliament and additional powers of taxation) and parliamentary elections in May 1999 formalized the devolution of state powers over such areas as school policy

⁹ For a list of privatized industries in Britain, see Table 2 in the Appendix of Swann (1988).

and some environmental policies, previously the purview of the Scottish minister. Although devolution involves less transfer of power than would a federal reconfiguration of British powers (Bogdanor 1997), state authority recently ceded to Scotland will be exceedingly difficult for Britain to recover (Bogdanor 1999).

On the other hand, Britain has not been as active as France and Germany in uploading formal state powers to supranational organizations, specifically the European Union. Britain's membership in the EU has been marked by a series of fits and starts; since joining the EU, Britain has conditioned its membership by reserving for itself specific policy exceptions. For example, Britain signed the Maastricht Treaty but negotiated a series of "opt-outs" from workers' rights provisions in the Social Charter of the Treaty,¹⁰ and from its unitary monetary and currency provisions. Britain's resistance to ceding these sovereign powers to the EU is shared by both the Conservative and Labour Parties (see, for example, Butler and Westlake 1995).

France

The French state varies considerably in all reconfiguration dimensions from Great Britain. France's state reconfiguration has been limited; the French state has continued central state authority within national boundaries, and maintained its commitment to state social welfare provisions. Nonetheless, France has moved toward reconfiguration, decentralizing policy implementation to local governments and relinquishing some authority to the European Union.

On its face, a major reconfiguration of state power would appear to be the decentralization policy of the Mitterrand government. In the 1980s, the Socialists introduced the *loi Defferre*, restructuring and increasing municipal, *département*, and regional powers and responsibilities. For example, *départements* assumed authority over "general medical facilities, maternity care, family welfare and special forms of social assistance for the elderly and physically disabled" (Mazey 1994: 160). Formal regional authorities were established and charged with economic development responsibilities, including vocational training and employment responsibilities. Despite the Socialists' initiatives at the local level, France has not ceded state authority by transferring formal authority (such as the power to tax) to local or regional authorities.¹¹ As Mazey claims, "the decentralised structures remain, for the time being at least, dominated by traditional political and administrative elites who have once again demonstrated their capacity to adapt to changing circumstances" (1994: 167, see also Mény 1998).

¹⁰ The Social Charter, as it is referred to by other EU member states, is formally the "Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers."

¹¹ Transfer of implementation responsibilities was strongly resisted by the various Ministries (see Ashford 1990: 52). Ashford also argues that "most local spending is more or less obligatory and provides little room for discretion" (59).

The French experience with privatization in the late 1980s similarly involves modest state changes rather than radical ones. The French engaged in a series of nationalizations and privatizations throughout the 1970s and 1980s as governments changed. However, nationalization, privatization, and renationalization have not evinced fundamental changes in state authority; “parties of [both] the Right and the Left have for the most part nurtured and expanded the size and scope of the French public sector” (Zahariadis 1995: 118). In marked contrast to Britain’s program of privatization, the first Mitterrand government (1981–2) introduced a program of bank nationalizations. In response, in 1986 the Chirac government privatized “65 industries – 9 industrial groups, 38 banks, 13 insurance companies, 4 finance companies” (Zahariadas 1995: 117) and communications groups (but not rail or coal), involving 900,000 jobs.¹² It did not, however, attack the principle of state ownership of economic enterprises; nor was it antistatist in its intentions or rhetoric; indeed most privatizations are more rightly characterized as reprivatizations, since most of these industries had only recently been nationalized by Mitterrand. French privatizations also lacked the ideological underpinnings of free market neoliberalism typical of Britain during the same period (Maclean 1995; Zahariadas 1995: 122–123). These privatizations continued (albeit at a much slower pace) when the Socialist Party resumed power in 1991 and increased again with the return of the center right in 1993 (Maclean 1995: 273).

Similarly, in France there has been little evidence of the types of horizontal shifts in policy responsibility we have labeled lateral loading. No specific policy agencies representing women have developed a lasting place within the French state. Rather, the French state has shifted policy responsibility for women’s rights back and forth often depending on the party in power (see Mazur 1995: 78). For example, in 1974 President Giscard D’Estaing created a deputy ministry office for women (the *Secrétariat d’Etat à la Condition Féminine*) that disappeared in a governmental reorganization two years later. Moreover, France has evidenced little transfer of responsibilities to nonelected state bodies, in part because the executive branch in the Fifth Republic already controls more state authority and responsibility than its counterpart in the United Kingdom.

France’s greatest step toward reconfiguration is its membership in the European Union, with commitments to monetary union and to the social and economic components of the Maastricht Treaty. As a founding member of the Common Market (1957), France has had longstanding political commitments to Europe as a unified entity as evidenced in its transfer of state power through the Single European Act (1987) and the Treaty of Maastricht (1993). In contrast to Britain, France has not reserved specific state powers

¹² For a list of French privatizations, see Table 5.1 in Zahariadas (1995: 118).