‘From the Substantive Representation of Women to the Constitutive Representation of Gender: The Representative Process in WPA and GM’

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Abstract
This paper suggests that our analyses and understanding of the substantive representation of women (SRW) would be facilitated and refined by supplementing the widespread interrogation of the SRW with an interrogation of the constitutive representation of gender (CRG). The suggestion is that while the SRW captures one representative process, whereby representatives (usually assumed to be elected parliamentarians) aim to speak on behalf of female constituents by articulating (describing) their pre-existing preferences and consciously held interests, the CRG captures another significant representative process, whereby representatives (including unelected femocrats and gender experts) aim to pursue gender equality by articulating (constituting) particular conceptions of gender. The notion of CRG draws both on developments in gender theory, which focus of gendered relations rather than sexed bodies, and developments in theories of representation, which focus on the process of ‘claims-making’ as constitutive. The incorporation of CRG into the gender and politics lexicon might create conceptual space for the claim that female politicians and femocrats each engage in representative claims-making (Saward, 2007), constructing both the group that they claim to represent, and their interests. It is explored here in relation to the ‘post-parliamentary’ representative practices of women’s policy agencies.
Introduction

Theories of representation have been subject to intense scrutiny within the ‘women and politics’ literature and generated extensive research into the substantive representation of women by female parliamentarians. This paper proposes, by contrast, to focus on the constitutive representation of gender by femocrats in the post-parliamentary arenas of women’s policy agencies and government bureaucracies. The substantive representation of women is variously conceived as entailing the introduction of women’s interests, feminist ideas or gender equality into policy-making processes and outcomes. Yet, the multiplicity of understandings as to what gender equality entails, the frequent disjuncture between feminist ideals and female ideas, the diversity amongst women and the corresponding differences amongst their interests, all serve to complicate any evaluate of the representative claims made by those pursuing women’s substantive representation. I want to focus on women’s policy agencies and gender mainstreaming as possible forms of post-parliamentary representation, which have emerged to ‘complement’ gender quotas more generally understood as a paradigmatic way of pursuing SRW.

This paper suggests that our analyses and understanding of the substantive representation of women (SRW) would be facilitated and refined by supplementing the widespread interrogation of the SRW with an interrogation of the constitutive representation of gender (CRG). The suggestion is that while the SRW captures one representative process, whereby representatives (usually assumed to be elected parliamentarians) aim to speak on behalf of female constituents by articulating (describing) their pre-existing preferences and consciously held interests, the CRG captures another significant representative process, whereby representatives (including unelected femocrats and gender experts) aim to pursue gender equality by articulating (constituting) particular conceptions of gender. The notion of CRG draws both on developments in gender theory, which focus of gendered relations rather than sexed bodies and developments in theories of representation, which focus on the process of ‘claims-making’ as constitutive. The incorporation of CRG into the gender and politics lexicon might create conceptual space for the claim that female politicians and femocrats each engage in representative claims-making (Saward, 2007), constructing both the group that they claim to represent, and their interests.
Table 1

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<tr>
<th>Substantive Representation of Women</th>
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<td>Women’s interests</td>
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The paper also draws a distinction between parliamentary and post-parliamentary representation, and argues that explorations of representative processes, whether SRW or CRG should attend to both arenas. Here I draw on developments in theories of governance that have focused attention on post-parliamentary representative practices including policy networks, deliberative policy-making and epistemic communities.

The interest in post-parliamentary representation coincides with the emergence of complex forms of ‘governance’ that appear to challenge the model of representative government with its ‘simple, serial flows of power between the represented and their representatives’ (Judge 1999). Gender scholars clearly draw our attention to the growing complexity of representative practices in the context of multi-level governance: Galligan and Clavero note that: ‘National representation institutions have ceased to be the exclusive sites where the interests of women are being represented.’ (Galligan and Clavero, 2007: 3) Mackay notes that: ‘state reconfiguration has rendered the policymaking process more complex with the involvement of many different actors at different levels of governance.’ (Mackay, 2007:6) She argues that a broadened version of representation is needed which takes into account government performance, the institutionalised voice of women, and the challenges of accountability (2007, 8). Similarly Celis et al suggest that ‘the focus on policy change formulated and approved by members of parliament limits substantive representation to one set of actors and a single site of political representation.’ (Celis et al, 2007:1).

The need to address non-parliamentary forms of representation has focused attention on women’s policy agencies (WPAs) and processes of gender mainstreaming (GM), generating explorations of the impact of women’s civil society organisations and femocrats on the policy agenda (Stetson and Mazur, 1995; Ousthoorn and Kantola, 2007). Nonetheless, among gender and politics scholars the interest in the notion a ‘group’ representation has tended to focus on the relationship between ‘descriptive’ and ‘substantive’ representation, exploring whether and in what ways women might represent
women (Childs 2004; Mateo Diaz 2005). The debates are often located in relation to the widespread introduction of gender quotas in countries across the globe (Dahlerup 2006; Krook 2006).

Where the quotas literature focuses on the link between presence and policy-change, the WPA literature focuses on the link between process and policy-change. Quota advocates usually frame their arguments in terms of the correspondence between the increased presence of female parliamentarians and the improved representation of women. Gender mainstreaming advocates, by contrast, usually frame their argument in terms of the correspondence between the improved processes of gender impact assessments and gender auditing and increased gender equality. Mainstreaming, if it is to be thought to be a representative process at all, is generally cast (in its expert-bureaucratic form at least) as a trustee model of representation, where gender experts and femocrats represent women by virtue of their expertise, manifest in their evidence-based analysis of the factors causing and perpetuating gender inequality and their ability to recommend objective solutions to the problem of gender inequality (see Celis et al, 2007:4). Where quotas aim to secure the greater presence of women able to embody shared subjective understandings of policy concerns, mainstreaming aims to implement more effective processes of policy formation that encompass objective evaluations of likely policy outcomes. Advocates of increased numbers of female parliamentarians often argue that their shared understanding with the female electorate is authorised by electoral moments; mainstreaming, by contrast, claims evidence-based authority affirmed by policy networks.

Table 2

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<th>Parliamentary</th>
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<td>Female parliamentarians</td>
<td>Femocrats</td>
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<td>Presence/ideas</td>
<td>Process/evidence</td>
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<td>Quotas</td>
<td>Gender Mainstreaming</td>
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<td>Policy preferences (voice)</td>
<td>Evidence-based policy-making (data)</td>
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<td>Authorization via election</td>
<td>Authorization via policy networks</td>
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Though the SRW clearly occurs in the post-parliamentary arena, and the CRG occurs within the parliamentary sphere, I want to focus here on the post-parliamentary CRG manifest within WPAs and GM processes.
Table 3

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<th>Process Location</th>
<th>Substantive Representation of Women</th>
<th>Constitutive Representation of Gender</th>
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<td>Parliamentary</td>
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<td>Post-parliamentary</td>
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The suggestion is that, though the emergence of gender machinery is not generally cast as a representative development, it can usefully be viewed in this light. However, the claim that the gender machinery pursues the CRG as well as the SRW focuses our attention on the need to ensure that the CRG is framed by democratic mechanisms of accountability. The concern is that, shorn of mechanisms of accountability and authorisation generated by electoral systems, claims-making using elite conceptions of gender equality may marginalise certain interests from the political agenda and privilege those forms of gender relations that are most consonant with dominant modes of governance.

One might ask whether it matters whether the post-parliamentary CRG can be viewed as democratic processes, if it can be shown to promote greater gender equality, but I want to argue that it does matter, precisely because conceptions of gender equality are deeply contested: advocating certain conceptions of gender equality serve to ‘represent’ some women more effectively and more positively than others. There is something rather troubling about using technocratic articulations of gender equality to re-present women, shorn of deliberative mechanisms of authorization and accountability. For this reason I argue for the need to strengthen the participatory-democratic features of WPAs and GM, emphasising their status as post-parliamentary deliberative mechanisms of representation rather than as technocratic sites of governance.

SRW and CRG are archetypal categories, which are inevitably inter-twinned in practice, but it is nonetheless useful to distinguish between the two representative processes analytically. One particular reason for being interested in isolating and interrogating the CRG as opposed to the SRW is that it focuses attention on the potential disjunction between representative and democratic deliberative processes, and highlights the need to articulate an account of the mechanisms of authorization and accountability that might operate within the CRG. In order to ensure that both SRW and CRG are inclusive democratic representative process, mechanisms of authorization and accountability need to be in place. These mechanisms have conventionally taken the
form of electoral moments, but have increasingly been conceived – by democratic theorists at least – as deliberative processes. As representative politics are increasingly viewed as alienating the electorate many theorists have either returned to emphasise the importance of participation to strengthen democracy, exploring the deliberative as opposed to aggregative possibilities of democracy. Political theorists have focused their attention on articulating more deliberative models of representation, attempting to revive representative theories from the critics of deliberative and direct democrats by giving it a more communicative edge (Young, 2000; Mansbridge, 2002). The interest in deliberative representation reflects a growing disenchantment with aggregative politics and focuses attention on anticipation and education, exploring ways in which communicative practices might render representatives more accountable. These theorists have generally framed their discussion in relation to parliamentary representation, but the idea of deliberative authorization and accountability could usefully, the paper suggests, be extended to post-parliamentary forms of representation, where the CRG is increasingly located.

In order to sketch out this argument, I first outline recent theoretical considerations of the concept of representation; second, I outline what I understand by the ‘constitutive representation of gender’; thirdly, I survey the growing concern with post-parliamentary governance and establish the importance of WPAs and Gender Mainstreaming as representative practices. I then go on to evaluate the extent and ways in which WPAs might be argued to be engaged in SRW and/or CRG. I point out that CRG is a process that, in this post-parliamentary arena, has few mechanisms of authorization and accountability, and has becomes increasingly technocratic rather than bureaucratic. Finally I argue for the need to consider a role for more deliberative mechanisms of authorization and accountability in order to ensure that the conceptions of gender equality being advocated are a product of inclusive dialogue.

The Concept of Representation
When Hanna Pitkin published *The Concept of Representation* in 1967 she raised a series of questions about the concept of representation that have preoccupied theorists ever since, namely: Does truly representative government exist? What is the proper relationship between representative and constituent? Should a representative do what s/he thinks is best or accurately reflect the wishes of those s/he represents? When should people feel they are represented? What would count as evidence that they are represented? These
questions continue to haunt debates on representation, though the answers to these
questions have changed over time.

Pitkin’s celebrated text *The Concept of Representation* used linguistic analysis to
explore the concept itself as manifest in ordinary language, and so produce a concise
compendium of a great array of theories of representation. This analytic approach to
representation has tended to reinforce the view of many scholars that empirical and
normative explorations of representation have remained ‘largely distinct’ (Achen 1978,
475; Fain 1980, 109), with empirical studies documenting representative processes and
normative studies offering ‘persuasive definitions’ of the meaning of representation
against rival contenders. Yet the relationship between representative practices and
theories is more complex than this suggests; theories of political representation have
clearly changed over the years, both reflecting and influencing the political practice of
representation at any given time (Judge 1999). Moreover, political practices of
representation have generally been cumulative, with successive deposits stacked-up one
on top of the other - sedimenting rather than eroding previous practices - so theories of
representation become ever more complex, such that most political theorists now accept
that ‘representation is a muddle.’(Phillips 1995: 41) Debates about the substantive
representation of women take place within this muddle, with emerging theoretical
preoccupations reflecting recent practical developments

Much of the muddle surrounding the nature of representation can be traced back
to the historical tension between various distinct forms of representation which have
developed alongside, but not replaced, pre-existing representative mechanisms. Medieval
roots within our representative systems can be witnessed in the notion that parliaments
function as a geographic forum where representatives speak for territorial units, such as
counties and boroughs (see Judge, 1999, chapter 3). For theorists of representation such
as Edmund Burke, constituency interests are objective and specific, with each locality
assumed to have a single pervasive interest (Pitkin 1967: 174). Then again immediately
prior to the late 18th century it was commonly assumed that government represented not
districts but property owners, introducing the notion of the functional representation of
particular interests in addition to territorial representation. The mass suffrage
movements, demanding working-class and then women’s suffrage, challenged this notion
of representation ushering in the idea of the ‘general will’ – though this again augmented
rather than replaced the prior practices of territorial and interest representation. The
adoption of the party system in which representatives represent their constituents,
ideological perspectives and class interests is a complex negotiation of these historically sedimented layers of representative practices. Onto this representative system, which intertwines the representation of constituencies, interests and beliefs, new demands are then placed: demands that socially marginalised groups (increasingly understood to be women and ethnic minorities rather than members of the working class) should be represented by those who share their identities. From this perspective composition becomes central, focusing attention on how the legislature is composed, making claims for the more proportionate representation of specific groups.

There has then been no clear unchanging conception of what it is that we require our ‘representatives’ to represent. For as long as representation has been a key feature in our model of liberal democracy, the issue of what it is that is to count as being politically worthy of representation and who deemed able to represent others has itself been the object of political battle. There are competing conceptions of representation in relation to three key features of the concept: What is one representing? How does one represent it? Where does one represent it? Much of the theoretical literature has focused on the first two of these questions, but third is of growing significance.

In answer to the first question - what is one representing - there would seem to be four distinct sorts of answer: constituencies, interests, beliefs and identities. According to which of these one chooses to prioritise one will advocate geographic, functional, ideological, or social representation respectively (Marsh and Norris 1997). In answer to the second question - how does one represent it - there are generally thought to be three means: symbolic, microcosmic and principal/agent (Pitkin 1967). In answer to the third question - where does representation take place - the traditional answer has generally been local and national arenas, though the emergence of new, more fragmented, forms of governance have supplemented these sites, allowing for more diverse array of representative sites in future.

We can therefore distinguish between distinct conceptions of representation according to what is being represented, how and where. Each of these factors will have a significant impact on the form of representative mechanisms. Take for instance, the geographic, functional, ideological and social distinction. The territorial approach to representation involves district-based delegates. Here representatives are to act in ways consistent with the opinions of citizens from areas which elect them. This is ‘representation from below’ (Marsh and Norris 1997: 155), with low levels of party discipline and minimal ideological manifestos. The ideological approach to
representation involves collective representation via parties. It is the ‘responsible party government’ model which requires disciplined parties with alternative programmes on major issues facing the country, voter choice on the basis of evaluations of government record or policy platforms and free and fair elections. This is ‘representation from above’ (Marsh and Norris 1997: 154), in that there is a highly centralised, party led decision-making structure. Collective responsibility and party discipline work to ensure that representatives do not represent differences other than those of belief - be they geographic, interest group or identity based. The functional approach to representation involves representatives acting as spokespeople for interest groups and new social movements. On this model representatives respond not primarily to party or constituents but to pressure from organised interests (such as farmers or the gun lobby). Such functional representation is often viewed as compensating for weak parties, operating to the extent that ideological representation does not. Finally, the identity-based approach to representation involves representatives reflecting the social composition of the electorate in terms of presence as secured by quotas policies or reserved places. On this model representation occurs when the legislature include the same proportion of each relevant subgroup as the population from which it is drawn. Rather than looking to the decisions of the legislature to determine its representativeness one looks to its composition.

Turning to ‘how’ representation occurs, the literature has distinguished between three forms of representative practices: microcosmic, symbolic and principal-agent (Pitkin 1967; Judge 1999). The first definition of representation given by Hanna Pitkin is representation in the sense of the descriptive representation of identities, where ‘representativeness’ is used to indicate that a persons share some of the characteristics of a class of persons. Thus we might talk of ‘a representative sample’, and demand that the legislature, if it is to be representative, is to be a ‘mirror’ of the nation (Pitkin 1967:60-91). The second conception of representation Pitkin discusses is symbolic representation: indicating that a person symbolises the identity or qualities of a class of persons. Thus we might say that ‘a queen represents her people’ or a ‘sculpture represents courage’ (Pitkin 1967:112-143). The third significant conception, in terms of our discussion is that of representation as ‘acting for’: the representation of interests where a representative denotes an agent who acts on behalf of his or her principal. Thus we often speak of ‘a lawyer representing her client’ (Pitkin 1967:143). Principal-agent representation occurs when one person acts on behalf of one other, or when the agent
acts in the principal’s interests. Microcosm representation occurs when, in John Adams’
words the legislature is ‘an exact portrait, in miniature, of the people at large, as it should
think, feel, reason and act like them.’ (quoted in Pitkin 1967: 60) In other word, a group
is representative if the sample includes the same proportion of each relevant subgroup as
the population from which it is drawn.

While ideological is clearly distinct to functional representation they both appeal
to a principal-agent mechanism of representation. Social representation on the other
hand requires microcosm or ‘mirror’ mechanisms to ensure representativeness. Both can
be applied to representatives though they may conflict - representatives could
conceivably be a microcosm of society in every relevant respect and still fail to do what
the voters want. Conversely, they could do what the voters want without being
statistically representative of them. The key difference here is whether one looks at the
composition of parliament to determine its representativeness, or whether one looks at
its decisions. The distinction between a ‘politics of presence’ and a ‘politics of ideas’
drawn by Phillips (Phillips, 1995) focussed attention on the significance of this
distinction, generating a significant literature on the nature of the correlation between
descriptive and substantive representation.

The notion of the ‘substantive representation of women’ draws on the categories
of both social and functional representation, with the former suggesting that
representation should entail microcosmic representation and the latter implying
principal-agent representation. It is the relation and tension between these two that
cause much of the analytical and empirical difficulties within the gender and politics
literature that aims to establish whether women make a difference.

More recently theories of representation have begun to focus on other
representative practices, emphasising the ways in which representation is a creative
process, constituting rather than simply depicting what is seen. Representative claims-
making (Saward, 2007) is argued to be a process in which representatives construct the
group that they claim to represent and their interests. As Linda Alcoff notes: ‘In both the
practice of speaking for as well as the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in
the act of representing the other’s needs, goals, situation, and in fact, who they are. I am
representing them as such and such… I am participating in the construction of their
subject-positions. This act of representation cannot be understood as founded on an act
of discovery wherein I discover their true selves and then simply relate my discovery.’
(Alcoff 1991:9) This constitutive theory of representation alters the nature of the
relation between representative and represented, focusing on the power relations that mutually constitute both.

The preoccupation with the composition of parliament and the SRW can all too easily generate a theoretical frame in which posits a static relation of substitution between the bodies and mind of the representatives and their constituents. By contrast, the constitutive theory of representation depicts representation as mediation, entailing participation in activities of authorization and accountability (Young 2000:125). In characterising representation in this way Young, for example, rejects a more prevalent understanding of representation within a ‘logic of identity’ whereby representatives are assumed to be present for their constituents and act as they would act, arguing that ‘rather than a relation of identity or substitution, political representation should be thought of as a process involving a mediated relation of constituents to one another and to a representative.’ (Young 2000:127)

Normative theorists have suggested that the relation between the represented and representative should be deliberative. Here, representation should be evaluated according to the character of the relationship between the representative and the constituents. This approach depicts the ‘represented’ in a more active light, authorizing, communicating, evaluating. Representation becomes a form of participation. We need not, as Plotke argues, ‘assume an opposition between acting and being represented’ (Plotke 1997:30). Representation here becomes a cycle of anticipation and recollection between constituents and representative, and its analysis entails ‘taking temporality seriously.’ (Young 2000:129) The moment of authorization (via election) needs to be supplemented by a moment of accountability that entails more than simply re-authorising via re-election. ‘All existing representative democracies could be improved by additional procedures and fora through which citizens discuss with one another and with representatives their evaluation of policies representatives have supported.’ (Young 2000:132) From this perspective greater ‘listening and connectedness’ is required, for representation is cast as a deliberative systemic process.

Similarly, Mansbridge suggests that the traditional model of ‘representation as promising’ needs to be supplemented by a further model of representation as ‘anticipatory’ (Mansbridge 2002:1, 2003:515). She argues that the appropriate normative criteria for judging this form of representation are systemic, in contrast to the dyadic criteria appropriate for representation by promising, and deliberative rather than aggregative (Mansbridge 2002:1).
Representation by promising assumes a power relation between voter and representative that runs forward in linear fashion - the voter, ‘statically conceived’ tries to exercise power over the representatives as agent’ (Mansbridge 2002:2). In anticipatory representation, by contrast, the power relation works not forward, but backward, through anticipated reactions: the voter looks back to the past behaviour of a representative in deciding how to vote in the next election. This model is more deliberative because it requires communication between the represented and representative and depicts the represented as ‘educable’ by representatives, the media, opposition candidates and others who all seeks to offer ‘explanations’ of the representatives votes (Mansbridge 2002:3). Legislators are here given a role as ‘initiators and educators’ (2002: 4). This model of representation requires that we ‘shift our normative focus from the individual to the system, from the quality of promise-keeping to the quality of communication between legislator and constituents, and from an aggregative focus on the way the legislator votes to a deliberative focus on the way the legislator communicates.’ (Mansbridge 2002:5) This turns our attention to communication – the pursuit of knowledge about the representative’s decisions, their rationale and implications.

So here representation comes to be viewed as communication and deliberation, but it is still located within the parliamentary sphere, with authority and accountability being granted by electoral processes. While these recent theoretical developments provide important tools in terms of interrogating the way in which representation unfolds – which the continued sway of ‘critical mass’ has done much to hinder (Childs and Krook, 2007), they still remain fairly unreflective in terms of location, assuming a parliamentary focus. This paper suggests that this constitutive approach to representation could be used as a basis for a more nuanced exploration of the various communicative processes by which the female electorate, women’s organisations and feminist groups each engage with the representative system.

**Representing Women/Re-presenting Gender**

Explorations of the SRW have tended to work with a largely unproblematised conception of the category of ‘women’, notwithstanding a wealth of literature that has critically interrogated the concept, some of which casts gender difference as sexist cultural stereotype to be transcended (Fraser 1997:100), while others view gender differences - which may be a biological given or a result of social conditioning, as worthy
of due public acknowledgement, which may entail not an identical set of rights for all, but specific group rights for women. Critics have been quick to suggest that these latter arguments swiftly fall into an essentialist logic that entrench rather than unsettle cultural stereotypes (Scott 1997:765), and are too unitary to be sensitive to the contradictions and antagonisms within as well as between groups (Bacchi, 1990).

This debate, which focused on whether the feminine was to be repudiated or celebrated, was complicated by an emerging concern with the diversity within the category ‘woman’ (Mohanty, 1991, Spelman, 1988), and with men and masculinity (Connell, 1987; Hearn, 1992). This led to a heated – and continuing – debate about the tendency within some forms of ‘difference feminism’ to essentialise the category of woman, such that differences between women are obscured and a dominant (white, heterosexual, Western, able-bodied…) construction of femininity privileged. A critique of this tendency generates a concern with multiple femininities and a commitment to exploring the ways in which the construction of gender intersected with other identities (Crenshaw, 2001). The first development has led to a large and growing literature on ‘intersectionality’, which explores the effect of in-group essentialism whereby a sub-set of a group seeks to fix the characteristics of a specific identity, marginalizing those group members who differ in other aspects of their identity (Hancock, 2005: 8). Scholars of intersectionality suggest that those who share multiple marginalized identities face challenges that are qualitatively different from those who do not (see Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). Meanwhile, the second development focused on the differences amongst men and led to a notion of multiple masculinities, in which hegemonic masculinity is constructed in opposition to a range of subordinate masculinities (Connell, 1987: 183-88; 1995).

Together, these developments generated a focus on the multiplicity of gendered identities, whilst leaving the concept of sex largely un-interrogated. However, this tendency is dramatically challenged by Butler’s argument that many of these deployments of gender served to essentialise sex, which is itself socially constructed through routine gendered performances (Butler, 1990). Here sex becomes an effect of gender and the distinction between sex and gender collapses. While advocates of pluralised accounts of constructionism have moved from talking about ‘woman’ to ‘women’ and ‘masculinities’, discursive accounts of gender reject the idea that even ‘women’ exist in any stable form: “women” is a volatile collectivity in which female persons can be very differently positioned, so that the apparent continuity of the subject of “women” isn’t to be relied
on (Riley 1988:1-2). Feminist debates - which created the category of gender in order to answer the question ‘what is a woman?’ in a non-deterministic manner, now finds itself unable to speak of ‘woman’, or even ‘women’, without major discomfort. The project then, is not to discover some essential ontological nature for women, but to proclaim that, ‘women is indeed an unstable category, that this instability has a historical foundation, and that feminism is the site of the systematic fighting-out of that instability - which need not worry us.’ (Riley 1997:244) This means that the sexed body can no longer be conceived as ‘the unproblematic biological and factual base upon which gender is inscribed’, but must itself be recognised as constructed ‘by discourses and practices that take the body both as their target and as their vehicle of expression.’ (Gatens 1992:132) Yet, if ‘women’ is an unstable category the whole process of representing women politically becomes problematic.

The gender and politics literature has nonetheless tended to retain a concern with the representation (descriptive and substantive) of women as a group with prescribed preferences that ought, if gender equality is to be secured, to be included in the democratic institutions of decision-making. Of course there are feminist political theorists who recognise the tensions of this continued commitment to retaining a notion of women as a group. Eveline and Bacchi, for instance, argue that Young’s account of the objective ‘structures’ of inequality is too static and fails to capture the ways in which gender differentiation is ‘done’ via institutional procedures (Eveline and Bacchi, 2005:501). On this account gender is a process rather than a structure, a verb rather than a noun. Gender is not a fixed entity attached to people: it is an ‘effortful social and political process’ (Eveline and Bacchi, 2005:501). This turns attention away from gender as fixed categories, to the ongoing gendering of policy and institutions (Eveline and Bacchi, 2005:502). However, this theoretical insight has, as yet, played a very minor role in shaping the political strategies adopted by feminist in pursuit of the substantive representation of women. For, if we are to move beyond this common-sense groupism we need to conceptualise ethnicity, gender, and so on, not as substances or things or entities or organisms or collective individuals, but rather ‘in relational, processual, dynamic, eventful, and disaggregated terms’ (Brubaker, 2004: 53). This means thinking of gender, and ethnicity, race, and nation, as political, social, cultural, and psychological processes. We can study the politics of categories, focussing on the ways in which categories are ‘proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalized, discursively articulated, organizationally entrenched, and generally embedded in multifarious forms of
“governmentality”.’ (Brubaker 2004: 56) However, if the aim is to explain the processes by which gendered identities are constituted via various representational practices, rather than to use these identities as the basis for representation, then the CRG will be a more conceptual frame than is the SRW.

**Post-parliamentary Representation**

The location in which these representative practices take place also needs to be reconsidered. Political representation is usually discussed within mainstream political science in terms of how accurately elected representatives reflect the interests of voters. However, there is a growing recognition that we need to focus attention on alternative sites of political representation, recognizing that ‘constituents’ and ‘representatives’ need not be members of electoral districts and elected parliamentarians respectively, and so looking ‘more closely at the democratic status of non-electoral representation’ (Saward, 2006:415).

If we understand representation as ‘a process in which the relationship between citizens and representatives continues over time’ (Thompson, 1988: 136), and which entails the practice of making claims to be representative, then representatives might well be found outside of the parliamentary arena. As Saward suggests, the representative claim is constitutive in that it constructs a constituency in whose interests the representative claims to speak: ‘representatives construct portrayals or depictions of the represented, in order to be able to represent them’ (Saward, 2006: 414). So, when women’s policy agencies claim to help the actors ‘that speak for women and gender equality’ to enter government policy-making arenas, and bring ‘women’s interests and gender equality issues into public policy discussion, formulation and implementation’ (Mazur, 2005:3), they are making just such a representative claim. So it is noteworthy that although feminist political scientists have concentrated much of their attention on the representation of women in national legislatures, they have also explored alternative forms of representation, recognizing that the use of gender machinery to increase the profile of women’s issues and interests might be viewed as a group representation strategy along with gender quotas.

Arguing that the creation of gender machinery has facilitated women’s representation, Weldon suggests that women’s policy agencies are best placed to represent marginalized groups, without assuming a false homogeneity of interest or identity, in a manner that reflects group diversity (Weldon, 2002:1155). Reflecting on the
relative merits of the two models of representation offered by gender quotas and women’s policy agencies, Weldon claims that women’s policy agencies and women’s movements in combination ‘provide more effective avenues of expression for women’ than do women in the legislature (Weldon, 2002: 1153). She reads the case for gender quotas as invoking a form of group representation in which individual legislators stand for their group, having opinions or behaviour that is favourable to women because of their shared experiences: it is their personal experiences that are argued to be the basis of their claim to be representative (Weldon: 2002, 1154-5), and argues that this model of representation is limited because of the weakness of the presumed link between the personal experience of the individual representatives and their knowledge of the group perspective (Weldon, 2002:1155).

The descriptive representation that is privileged in gender quota strategies is generally argued to lead to substantive representation because of the presumed links between identity (being a woman), experiences (gaining first hand knowledge of the way in which gendered practices impact on women) and perspectives (developing a set of preferences and policy priorities on the basis of these experiences) (Mansbridge, 1999). But if different women have different experiences (because of their differential positioning in relation to practices of ethnicity, sexuality and so on) they will no doubt have different perspectives. Weldon therefore suggests that individual women in the legislature are not particularly well placed to reflect the diversity within women as a group given that they cannot share a set of experiences that are similar to those of all marginalized group members, and can only draw on their own personal experiences.

The logic of this argument suggests that an individual can only represent a group if their experiences map onto those of the group, which can only occur if there is no within-group diversity: ‘if she is a white, straight, middle class mother, she cannot speak for African American women, or poor women, or lesbian women on the basis of her own experience. Any more than men can speak for women merely on the basis of theirs.’ (Weldon: 2002:1156) Weldon suggests that this attempt to read group perspectives off individual identities is problematic: group perspectives can only really be grasped via group interaction, which will frequently involve conflict and contestation (Weldon, 2002:1157). The interactive nature of a group perspective is, she argues, more readily represented by women’s policy agencies in consultation with women’s movement organisations than by female legislators reflecting on their own personal experiences: notwithstanding their diversity ‘women’s movements are likely to come closer to
articulating women’s perspective than a disparate, unorganized group of women in the legislature’ (Weldon, 2002:1161). The general upshot of her analysis is that women’s policy agencies and women’s movements together are more effective than large numbers of women in the legislature at securing policy action. Policy agencies, in other words, are argued to be important sites for the SRW.

The Substantive Representation of Women?
The weakness in this argument lies in precisely in the need for WPAs to constitute women as a group on which behalf they speak, notwithstanding the diversity amongst women that Weldon is keen to have recognised, and the lack of mechanisms that might ensure accountability to all women. Given that the femocrats found in women’s policy agencies have become the privileged speakers for women’s interests (Hobson, 2003), and assuming that not all women share the same interests, it is important to ask which interests in particular they privilege. Many accounts of women’s policy agencies suggest that they aim to represent the substantive interests, not of women, but of the women’s movement (Stetson and Mazur, 1995). However, the women’s movement has declined in visibility and influence in recent years (Bagguley, 2002; Ryan, 1992; Threlfall, 1996), moving away from the early 1970s radicalism to a more moderate, state-involved, and accommodationalist stance by the 1990s’ (Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht, 2003:2) and a trans-national rather than local form of organising. These changes have combined to make the ‘movement’ more like a policy network (Rhodes, 1994, 1996) – more able to influence the policy agenda but less

It is certainly clear that numerous case studies of women’s policy agencies express concern that the agencies benefit only a small female elite (Franseschet, 2002), or focus on only those issues that are compatible with the dominant state religions (Matear, 1997; Waylen, 2000), with scholars noting, for instance, that the Turkish women’s policy agency ‘kept the Islamist women’s movement at a distance’ (Gunes-Ataya, 2001:164). In Latin American scholars note that female relatives of human rights violations or women campaigning to improve living conditions gained less access to women’s policy agencies than those that were self-proclaimed feminist groups (Friedman, 2000). On the other hand, Franceschet and Macdonald suggest that in Chile women in state agencies have been much less willing to advocate social welfare policies than have women’s autonomous organisations – who argued for these on the basis of women’s difference - given that the government is committed to market and private sector solutions.
SERNAM, the Chilean women’s policy agency, has focused on women’s civil and political rights rather than their socio-economic rights, given that the government is committed to market and private sector solutions and so fails to reflect the social demands of the autonomous women’s organizations, which advocate social welfare policies. As a result many of the autonomous women’s organizations feel that the more institutionalised policy community is marginalizing rather than representing their demands.

While the manner in which gender equality is conceived in particular national discourses will vary, the tendency to privilege state feminists who most clearly articulate a conception of gender equality that resonates with dominant policy frames appears to be standard. Hobson notes that in Sweden the feminists to be given policymaking roles were those who did not decouple class equality from gender equality (Hobson 2003), given that women’s emancipation was cast as part of the labour movements’ struggle for a just society (Palme 1972: 235-243). As a result, gender equality policies are nearly always presented as gender-neutral, rather than as a means of recognizing gender distinctive claims (Hobson 2003). Significantly, immigrant women’s groups were rendered invisible by this Swedish institutionalized feminism, which ‘produced hegemonic representations of women’s political identities’ (Hobson et al, 2007), obscuring the experiences of immigrant and minority women (Mulanari, 2001 cited in Hobson et al forthcoming). The Swedish equality discourse that has been celebrated around the world as a model for empowering women politically and economically is, it appears, implicated in creating another inequality by entrenching a hierarchy between ‘Swedes’ and ‘immigrants’ (Towns, 2002).

This tendency may be common amongst the Nordic countries, which have been regarded as model states in relation to gender equality, but which actually privilege a form of gender equality that is not well placed to deal with the challenge of multiculturalism. As Siim argues, the Nordic ‘discourse of gender equality has increasingly become a means to legitimise discrimination and stigmatisation of ethnic minorities’ (Siim, 2007). The Danish gender discourse, and the state feminists who articulate it, have depicted young Muslim men as violent and young Muslim women as oppressed and victims of their ‘culture’, ‘representing’ Muslim women in ways that frequently compete with their own self-understanding of the conflicting demands of their religious and national cultures. Given that these Muslim women are under-represented in political parties, women’s policy agencies and voluntary organisations, neither the Danish women’s
movement nor the Danish women’s policy agencies give these particular women a voice. Whether women’s policy agencies will facilitate or hinder this process is open to question, for the process of representing women entails not only the reflection of pre-existing identities and interests, but also the constitution of a ‘group’ on behalf of which the agencies speaks, portraying the represented in order to be able to represent them (Saward, 2006: 414). Perhaps inevitably, the particular portrayal of women offered by many women’s policy agencies privileges a particular form of gender identity, which silences rather than gives voice to various ‘minority’ women.

Moreover, where the women’s movement of the 1970s was characterised by local organisational structures, the 1990s were characterised by the growing influence of ‘transnational feminism’ (Mendoza, 2002:306-7). This signalled a shift away from ‘building an alternative public sphere along with community-based women’s groups’ towards lobbying practices of globetrotting feminists ‘now acting primarily in international conferences and coalescing within international feminist movements’ (Mendoza, 2002: 307). The notion of ‘transnational feminism’ replaces the earlier idea of ‘global sisterhood’ (Morgan, 1984), which was abandoned in the face of challenges that it universalised the perspectives of First World, white, middle-class feminists (Mohanty, 1992). However it is not altogether clear that the idea of transnational feminism is any better placed to confront the challenges of diversity than was the earlier notion of the women’s movement. While the term ‘transnational’ is sometimes used to refer to concrete experiences of transnational organising of women across the globe, it also tends to imply a potential solidarity of women in the North and South (Bunch, 1995), or even – critics suggest - western feminist dominance in worldwide feminist movements that are entangled in global networks (Narayan, 1997; Mendoza, 2002:296-7). In this context many scholars have argued that the creation of WPAs simply empowers a privileged and professionalized group of ‘transnational feminists’ who dis-empower local activists: the professional feminist – the gender expert – has ‘arrogated the global terrain to themselves without a clear basis of legitimation from local constituencies’ (Mendoza, 2002: 309). Claims that WPAs are more inclusive sites of SRW therefore look vulnerable.

**The Constitutive Representation of Gender?**

The examples of the representation of women’s interests by WPAs above suggest that they tend to re-present women in ways consonant with hegemonic state conceptions of
gender equality and transnational feminist agendas, with little authorization from or accountability to local women’s organisations: that they are involved in CRG rather than SRW. For instance, Mohammad suggests that the Instituto de la Mujer, the state department for women establish in Spain in 1982, used its location within the state to disseminate (and universalise) its vision of what counts as women’s equality and how this might be achieved (Mohammad, 2005:248). She argues that Spanish state feminism offers a conceptualisation of gender equality that aims to make women equal to men by developing their opportunities and creating a ‘model of Spanish womanhood capable of taking up these opportunities.’ (Mohammad, 2005:249) Those capable of the necessary transformation are brought to the fore, whilst those not are relegated to the periphery. In this way the ideal of gender equality prescribes a particular model of womanhood and valorizes it over others.

Concerns about the role played by policy agencies in the constitutive representation of gender might be lessened by clear indications that they were also effective mechanisms for SRW, which might suggest that the particular representative claims made were at least grounded in the voiced preferences of women. Yet, paradoxically, women’s policy agencies emerge to represent the voice of the women’s movement within the state just as the women’s movement was fragmenting into a series of diverse groups and loosely aligned networks, with no ideological core, and the state appeared to be being ‘hollowed out’, with its traditional responsibilities being dispersed vertically (to local and supranational institutions) and horizontally (to courts, executive agencies and civil society organisations). Where the movement is fragmented and its demands are contested, the function of these agencies may well entail the active portrayal of ‘women as a group’ rather than the simple reflection of them, such that they serve as a surrogate for women’s civil society voice, producing particular representations of women’s political identities that may not capture the diversity amongst women, and privileging particular conceptions of gender equality that may structurally disadvantage some gendered identities while privileging others.

Interestingly, while Weldon suggested that women’s policy agencies and women’s movements together are more effective than large numbers of women in the legislature at securing policy action, Anne-Marie Goetz argues that ‘it is muddled thinking’ to expect women’s policy agencies to be accountable to women’s movements, for they are directly accountable, like all other bureaucratic units, to the elected government (Goetz, 2005:6). She suggests that to hold policy agencies directly accountable to the women’s movement
is to expect women’s policy agencies to perform a ‘representative function even though the staff and leadership of these agencies are not directly elected’ (Goetz, 2005:6).

Saward does suggest that non-electoral representation may be democratically acceptable because ‘the claimant’s activities are locked in to networks of informal accountability’ such that alternative forms of accountability become exercised (Saward, 2006). Yet, this returns our attention to the central issue of mechanisms of accountability. Clearly these mechanisms are more extensive than the single electoral moment so frequently appealed to in representative claims, but how are we to determine what is to count as a democratically acceptable mechanisms of authorization and accountability once we step beyond the parliamentary process?

The fragmentation of the women’s movement and restructuring of the state both have profound implications for the ability of women’s policy agencies to represent women and women’s issues within state bureaucracies. The representative function of women’s policy agencies is challenged given that both the constituency which they aim to represent and the institution that they hope to influence have been rendered more complex than early models of state feminism anticipated (Outshoorn and Kantola, 2007).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s the state has ‘reshaped, relocated and rearticulated its formal powers and policy responsibilities’ (Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht, 2003:4). Though the process of state reconfiguration has been highly differentiated, Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht outline four key features, which they label, uploading, downloading, lateral loading and off-loading. Uploading describes the process of state authority shifting up to supranational organisations such as the EU, whereby individual member states have transferred formal decision-making competences in specific policy areas to the regional body. Downloading, by contrast, describes the process of state authority shifting down to sub-state bodies such as the newly established Scottish Parliament. These two processes represent a ‘vertical reconfiguration’ of the state (Banaszak, Beckwith and Rucht, 2003:4). Horizontal reconfiguration of the state also occurs in the form of lateral loading, whereby power shifts across states spheres, from elected bodies to the courts or executive agencies of government. Off-loading describes the process by which traditional state responsibilities shift to civil society organisations, including the market, family and community. Traditional neo-corporatist arrangements, which gave privileged state access to some industries and trade unions, have been replaced by ‘partnerships’ that provide new political opportunities to a diverse range of groups.
These reconfiguration processes are crucial for women’s movements insofar as they provide both negative and positive opportunities that differ fundamentally from the state context that women’s movements faced in the 1960s and early 1970s. Firstly, downloading state powers in the form of devolution has given some feminists opportunities for engaging in constitutional design, helping to shape new state structures in the making (Mackay, Myers and Brown, 2003; Mackay, 2007), and augmenting the recent focus on the representative and administrative branches of the state with an increased interest in the constitutional (Waylen, 2006). Secondly, uploading state powers to regional and international bodies has increased women’s opportunities to use supra-state institutions to put pressure on the state to increase women’s representation, encouraging the development of transnational NGO activism (Outshoorn, 1999:3). Thirdly, off-loading state powers to civil society organisations, which leads to the use of ‘partnerships’ in policymaking and implementation, gives feminist NGOs new responsibilities and powers (Larner, 2005; Newman, 2001).

Various forms of state off-loading have empowered certain feminist NGOs, further fragmenting the women’s movement by creating a growing disjunction between those groups that work with the state and those that do not. But, perhaps more significantly still, some forms of off-loading threaten to replace the problematic – but democratic – process of group representation with a more bureaucratic process in which the technical pursuit of ‘gender equality’ becomes disentangled from the political process of defining its nature. For example, states seeking gender advice and knowledge increasingly contract NGOs to provide research on indicators of gender inequality, or evaluate the effectiveness of policy outcomes. With the growth in new public management (introducing private sector techniques of governance into the public sector) there has been a notable tendency to devalue in-house policy expertise in favour of contracting out (Sawer, 2005:7). Feminist NGOs are therefore increasingly involved in gender policy assessments, project execution, and social services delivery (Alvarez, 1999:182): ‘the perfect sites to channel international funds now seeking alternatives to the state’, feminist organisations become ‘entangled with the development apparatus and neoliberal policies, and even financially dependent on them for this subsistence.’ (Mendoza, 2002: 308). In this way NGOs have become professionalised technical experts, in a contractual relationship to the state, rather than autonomous organisations advocating political change.
Although much of the financial support for NGOs in the developing countries comes from private donors and bilateral and multilateral agencies keen to promote a thriving civil society, the criteria for determining which NGOs will be consulted rarely entails considerations relating to their ability to mediate with civil society constituencies, usually focusing on more technical criteria, and privileging those NGOs deemed politically trustworthy (Alvarez, 1999:193, 198). These processes have given the NGOs better access to state policymaking, but also increased their distance from more movement-oriented activities. Given that their role as gender experts frequently entails advising on or carrying out government women’s programmes, the boundary between the policy community and appointed officials is blurred and the space for contestatory politics is lost to more technical endeavours. Whilst many of the actors in these NGOs initially negotiated both technical expertise and critical advocacy roles, their involvement in the former has increasingly been bought at the expense of the latter.

**Technocratic and deliberative communication**

The difficulty of representing the diversity of women’s civil society voices appears increasingly to be negotiated via an appeal to professionalized feminist NGOs which adopt an increasingly technocratic mode of operation. This mode of communication encourages a rationalised communication premised on evidence-based indicators of an accepted conception of gender equality, rather than a more a deliberative communication premised on subjective expressions of politically contested gender equality. For instance, Mohammad suggests that the Spanish women’s policy agencies produce extensive materials informing and guiding women, which serve to ‘produce a collective memory of women’s history which acts as a basis for the formulation of gender equality programmes and provides legitimation for equality feminism’ (Mohammad, 2005:251). In this way the Spanish agencies teach women the techniques by which they might become better workers, representing women’s interests in a way that is simultaneously constitutive of new gendered identities. This implies that the sharp fall in Spain’s birth rate, now the lowest in Europe, is a reflection of the increased availability of contraception and information, but ‘also the lower social value placed on motherhood and mothering’ (Mohammad, 2005:256).

In these circumstances, the task of women’s policy agencies is to depict gender inequality in a way that ‘both grasps its truths’ and ‘re-presents it in a form in which it can enter the sphere of conscious political calculation’ (Rose and Miller, 1992: 183).
Femocrats therefore enter into a double alliance: on the one hand allying themselves with political authorities, focusing on their problems and offering expertise about this new policy concern; and on the other hand, forming alliances with women’s organisations, translating their concerns into the rationalities of government, and offering to teaching them the techniques by which they might become more modern citizens.

Notions of good governance have always stressed the importance of basing policy-making on factual evidence rather than on mere opinion (Rose, 1991), but evidence-based policy-making has become particularly important over the last decade and is now the dominant model for evaluating claims in the policy process (Marston and Watts, 2003). Research and expertise are required to ensure that policy outcomes align with policy intentions. Evidence-based policy-making is argued to facilitate greater transparency than was afforded by older models of incrementalism (Laforest and Orsini, 2005). Such evidence-based policy-making privileges specific social science methodologies, frequently relying on quantitative studies that generate ‘objective’ truth claims. The processes of representation pursued by gender machineries look increasingly complicit in this new style of governance (Bacchi and Eveline, 2004:103-4).

Indeed, there is an emerging rhetorical claim that neoliberal forms of governance have given way to a new form of governance based on trust and collaboration (Newman, 2001, 2006; Rhodes, 1994, 1996). Whereas earlier forms of governance required managers with bureaucratic skills, this newer form of partnership governance requires ‘strategic brokers’, who have the ability to network with community activists and promote change, creating a newly professionalized cohort of ‘social entrepreneurs’ (Larner and Craig, 2005: 405). Interestingly, women are disproportionately represented in these brokering roles (Larner and Craig, 2005: 420), suggesting that this new mode of governance has both facilitated, and been facilitated by, feminist demands for greater political inclusion and critiques of hierarchical modes of government. State feminists have acted as key strategic brokers, working with feminist activists and women’s organisations to create partnerships with a professionalized network of ‘gender experts’. Together, the strategic brokers within women’s policy agencies and social entrepreneurs within women’s NGOs have created powerful new forms of governance designed to improve the social integration of women. This has clearly empowered many women politically, but it has also ‘governmentalised’ their professional functions and political ambitions.
For instance, given the dominance of evidence-based policy making, NGOs are called upon to produce knowledge that will further the goals of their organisations and sway policy-makers. This results in activist organisations abandoning contentious modes of advocacy in favour of more ‘legitimate’ evidence-based claims of expertise (Laforest and Orsini, 2005). In order to produce such expert knowledge and develop their research capacity, feminist organisations inevitably require increasing levels of organisational stability and funding. Some scholars have interpreted this turn to knowledge production within advocacy organisations as symptomatic of the depoliticizing and managerialist dynamics of neo-liberal governance, focusing on the growth of consultancy services, and the demand for new expertise in fundraising and organisational management (Chasin, 2000), which makes activists increasing accountable to funding bodies rather than political constituencies (Richardson, 2005:528). As Laforest and Orsini argue, ‘while this shift creates opportunities for organizations which engage in research activities, it also constrains their options by closing off political spaces to forms of representation that may be unconventional or deemed too politicised.’ (Laforest and Orsini, 2005:483-4) NGOs increasingly adopt professional forms of organisation, adhere to social scientific standards of knowledge production and speak the language of rational empiricism. The negative reading of this is that in order to participate in governance processes, activists become ‘responsible’ in form and voice and lose their political edge: the processes involved in securing consultancies and generating ‘objective’ social scientific knowledge thereby bring groups into alignment with state objectives.

Nonetheless, feminist organisations have readily become responsible ‘evidence producing’ organisations peopled by ‘gender experts’. The more positive reading of the feminist turn to ‘expertise’ is that the emergence of evidence-based policy-making offers social activists in NGOs new opportunities for making new knowledge claims and for having these claims accepted given that evidence-based policy-making unsettles the monopoly on policy knowledge previously claimed by the traditional public servant (Laforest and Orsini, 2005). Feminist NGOs have been given new opportunities to filter their knowledge claims into the policy-making processes, but – no doubt anticipating problems of credibility conferral if they were to speak from subjective marginalised locations - have usually drawn on traditional social science methods and knowledge structures to do so.
This is particularly interesting given that feminist critiques of objectivity have long been influential (Lloyd, 1984; Harding, 1991; Code, 1995; Prokhovnik, 1999), with feminist theorists routinely arguing that empiricist epistemologies marginalize those whose knowledge is not readily amenable to objectification, driving a wedge between those perceived to be making special interest claims and those capable of transcending their own narrow concerns to make objective judgements. For this reason many feminists (and others) rejected claims to impartiality, arguing that the apparently just liberal presumption of impartiality actually worked to privilege dominant interests (Young, 1990; Tully, 1995). Indeed, many theorists have suggested that one product of historical oppression and marginalisation is the tendency to work with concrete and particular modes of reasoning (Collins, 2000; Tronto, 1993), given that a ‘sense of vulnerability’ impedes people’s ability to take the abstract stance required of objective judgement: a lack of power and consequent inability to do something in the world renders people uncertain about their right to make such statements. This focuses attention on the psychological limitations placed upon marginalised people’s construction of knowledge claims by their experiences of marginalisation. Similarly, Miranda Fricker suggests that the conferral of credibility upon knowledge claimants is a process that favours those groups who are already privileged, for the norms of credibility will reflect the structures of social power (Fricker, 1998). In this way Fricker complements the claims of earlier standpoint theorists (Harding, 1991; Hartsock, 1983), analysing the processes that prevent the knowledge claims of marginalised groups being accepted as true. In particular, the sorts of knowledge claims made by marginalised groups that are closely bound to the social location or identity of that group are likely to unsettle the dominant norms of society and therefore be harder to integrate into existing bodies of knowledge (McConkey, 2004:203). Social movement activists therefore not only need to make new knowledge claims, but also need to ensure that these claims are deemed to be credible.

Feminists are generally sensitive to the fact that those deemed to be pursuing ‘special interests’ have frequently been depicted as subjective and partial, operating with value-laden knowledge only (Code, 1995:17). It appears that many feminist NGOs are now drawing on this perception, motivating their own assertions of objectivity. The affirmation of gender mainstreaming by international organisations and its formal endorsement by national governments now allows feminist activists to articulate historically excluded knowledge in their capacity as ‘gender experts’ and to have these
claims listened to. It also privileges a certain form of knowledge, produced by social scientific enquiry, which does not simply describe the world, but also enacts it (Law and Urry, 2004:391). This suggests that gender experts contribute to the enactment of certain sorts of gendered worlds. The emergence of evidence-based policy-making and of gender mainstreaming has created new opportunities for feminist activists to make gendered knowledge claims and to make new gendered realities, with the production of sex-disaggregated statistics proving to be a central tool in this process. The demand for such knowledge has led to a professionalisation of feminist NGOs and to the increased use of empirical research to ground the knowledge claims of gender experts.

In this way the pursuit of ‘gender equality’ has become a more powerful feminist strategy than is the claim to represent women’s substantive interests, because the knowledge claims involved a more easily professionalized. This tendency to marginalise those who do not articulate their demands in the appropriate form has not been lost on many women within civil society. A pamphlet of The Revolutionary Women of the Philippines, for example, argues that mainstreaming is ‘an imperialist scheme for co-opting the world’s women, buying off once committed activists’ (Baden and Goetz, 1997:6), while panellists in a Forum organised by the Applied Socio-economic Research organization of Pakistan argued that gender analysis had become overly technocratic due to the professionalization of the women’s movement. Meanwhile, Baden and Goetz argue that gender analysis, including the use of gender disaggregated statistics which are frequently undertaken to generate a more robust analysis of the likely impact of policies and so prevent policy failure, has the function of reducing ‘gender’ to a product: ‘the gender-disaggregation approach… tends to a static and reductionist definition of gender (as women/man)… Bureaucratic requirements for information tend to strip away the political content of information on women’s interests and reduce it to a set of needs or gaps, amenable to administrative decisions about the allocation of resources.’ (Baden and Goetz, 1997:7)

So while empowering, in that this technocratic and depoliticised process of policy-making offers feminist NGOs and gender experts new sources of authority and avenues of influence, it should not be forgotten that the nature of the knowledge claims made by ‘gender experts’ remains contested, and the world these claims enact is still ‘provisional’ and open to democratic challenge. For instance, the emphasis of quantitative measurements and empirical indicators has encouraged ‘gender experts’ to produce sex-disaggregated data, which focuses attention on sex differences rather than
gendered processes. The large body of data on the number of women in national
parliaments is one clear example of the emphasis on empirical indicators. The number
of women in parliaments is measurable in a way that the effect of gendered practices on
policy outcomes is not: descriptive representation fits the logic of this new mode of
governance in a ways that the substantive representation of women simply does not. As
social–scientific knowledge production becomes a political strategy, those feminist
NGOs that have the resources to conduct and present empirical research will find it
easier to impact on the policy-making process than those without these capacities. While
the empowerment this confers on some feminist organisations is to be welcomed, the
processes of marginalisation it inscribes on others should not be overlooked.

**Bringing Authorization and Accountability Back In**

The extent to which the representative claims of femocrats are subject to inclusive
processes of deliberation matters because, ‘theorizing gender relations and gender
inequality is more complicated than the construction of a simply scale of inequalities..
there are different possible standards and goals.’ (Walby 2004:4) The pursuit of gender
equality is a contested as well as a complex business. Some of the indicators of inequality
that are frequently invoked include life expectancy and physical health, bodily integrity
and safety, educational access and attainment, access to paid work, rates of pay, political
empowerment, and being treated with dignity  (Robeyns, 2003: 76-86). Deciding what
and how we measure is a political process with political consequences, such that access
to the process by which the relative importance of these indicators is determined will
correlate with the adoption of remedies that most directly reflect one’s own particular
egalitarian concerns. In this way, conceptions of equality can be seen to be constitutive,
generating equality policy frames that privilege certain concerns whilst obscuring others
(Bacchi, 1999).

Given the fact of human diversity, egalitarianism cannot be reduced to the
distribution of one thing, and the process of determining what the criteria of equality are
to be is an ineluctably political one for, given existing inequalities, different people are
likely to privilege different egalitarian concerns. So, for example, Sen criticises Dworkin’s
account of the initial equality of resources, and Rawls’ account of primary goods, as
neglecting the importance of diversity in that different people will need different
amounts and kinds of goods to reach the same levels of well-being. Social diversity
means that the conversion of resources into opportunities will vary from person to

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person: some people will need more than others to achieve the same capabilities. Differences in age, gender, disability and so on can mean that two people with the same ‘commodity bundle’ will have divergent opportunities regarding quality of life. He suggests therefore that human diversity ‘is no secondary complication (to be ignored, or to be introduced ‘later on’); it is a fundamental aspect of our interest in equality.’ (Sen 1992:xi) In this way Sen introduces the notion of multiplicity to the distribution process, broadening the focus on equality debates beyond resources to whatever people need to develop their capabilities.

Whilst recognising the value of pluralizing the measure of inequality, some scholars have found the capabilities approach to be limited by it ‘under-specified character’ (Robeyns, 2003: 67) and have attempted to make it more concrete by specifying a list of human capabilities that might be measured when trying to establish degrees of gender inequality. Most influentially, Nussbaum offers a cross-national basis for claims to social justice and equality by providing a philosophical justification for a universal account of human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2003). Nussbaum’s commitment to a universal list is aimed to guarantee a ‘minimal conception of social justice’ (Nussbaum, 2003:40) that can challenge paternalism. Yet, while she insists that human capabilities be specified in an abstract manner, to ‘leave room for the activities of specifying and deliberating by citizens and their legislatures and courts’ (Nussbaum, 2003:42), the derivation of this list marginalizes the political struggles that are involved in their formulation and institutionalisation. As Okin notes, Nussbaum’s ‘highly intellectualised conception of a fully human life and some of the capacities central to living it seem to derive far more from an Aristotelian ideal than from any deep or broad familiarity with the lives of women in the less-development world.’ (Okin 2003:296)

Meanwhile, Robeyns takes issue, not with the content of the list, but with the process by which it is derived, emphasising the importance of the procedural aspects of democratic practice (Robeyns, 2003:69). Sen supports this approach, suggesting that critical public discussion, or democratic deliberation, is vital to the realisation of capabilities: ‘The exercise of basic political rights makes it more likely not only that there would be a policy response to economic needs, but also that the conceptualisation – including comprehension – of ‘economic needs’ itself may require the exercise of such rights… Open discussion, debate, criticism, and dissent, are central to the processes of generating informed and reflected choices. These processes are crucial to the formation of values and priorities, and we cannot, in general, take preferences as given
independently of public discussion.’ (Sen 1999: 153) For this reason Sen argues that ‘participation in political decisions and social choices… have to be understood as constitutive parts of the ends of development in themselves.’ (Sen, 1999:291) This participation should not be viewed in ‘an unduly narrow and restricted way’ in terms of public balloting only (Sen, 2003:7), but should embrace the messy processes of participatory democracy.

This suggests that the capabilities that concern us in relation to equality are themselves a product of political deliberation: the list of capabilities is culturally and historically specific rather than universal, a product of dialogue and contestation rather than abstract reflection. Moreover, perceptions as to whether these capabilities might reasonably be expected to be evenly realised by all social groups is also an issue of political contestation. In other words, in considerations of equality what comes to count as a norm of evaluation is a product of social deliberation. If this deliberation is delimited to certain groups of participants only, the current (socially constructed) priorities and preferences of these groups are likely to prevail in the devising of the list of capabilities of concern and determining the relative importance assigned to each.

Because the meaning of equality is contested it is vital that marginalized groups are able to take part in the formulation of equality norms, rather than simply being the objects of policies thought by privileged minorities to be equitable. As a result, there is a strong normative presumption within much of the recent theoretical writing on marginalized groups that these groups need to be present in deliberative bodies in order that their perspectives can be voiced and taken into account when formulating public policies (Young, 2000; Phillips, 1995; Williams, 1998). This insight politicises the formation of equality policies, and links the process to the question of political inclusion rather than abstract reasoning.

The question is whether post-parliamentary representation, which I am suggesting is constitutive as well as reflective, can also be deliberative, generating a mechanism of authorisation that ensures that this form of representation might reasonably be viewed as democratic. The brief survey of gender machinery outlined above suggests that advocates hope that women’s policy agencies might act as mediators, while critics fear that they all too easily become un-elected legislators. Whether it is possible to guard against this slippage in post-parliamentary representation is unclear. Yet, if WPAs are involved, as I have suggested, in not only the SRW but also the CRG, then it is worth scrutinising the democratic nature of these representative claims and
considering ways of strengthening the mechanisms of authorization and accountability via deliberative processes.

If the representative potential of women’s policy agencies and gender mainstreaming is to entail moments of authorization and accountability the participative-democratic processes of deliberation and consultation will need to be strengthened in order to counter the current tendency to rely on expert-bureaucratic processes shorn on democratic mechanisms of accountability. There are moments when this is recognised. For instance, the Council of Europe detailed three types of mainstreaming tools: analytic (including statistics, research, checklists and gender impact assessments), educational (training, awareness-raising, manuals or experts), and consultation and participation (think tanks, hearings, expert meetings, databases, and the participation of both sexes in decision making) (Verloo, 2005:351). This last set of tools suggests that democratic debate about gender equality might reasonably be viewed as part of the mainstreaming process. However, this insight has generally been lost in the repeated appeal to the definition of mainstreaming provided by the report of the Group of Specialists to the Council: ‘the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking’ (Council of Europe, 1998:15). This definition fails, as Verloo rightly points out, to make ‘reference to the need to give voice to the feminist movement or to those suffering from gender inequality’ (Verloo, 2005:351). Indeed there is no discussion as to how a gender perspective’ might be derived. There is no reference to the possibility of opposing political ideas on gender equality, and the expertise mentioned seems unrelated to normative beliefs, which suggests that mainstreaming is ‘beyond politics’ (Verloo, 2005:321). So, while the goal of gender equality has been embraced and pursued in numerous mainstreaming practices, debate as to what gender equality comprises, and how it is to be understood, has been rather marginal. The emphasis on consultation and participation tools has been sidelined and the notion of gender equality as a product of political struggle is lost, while other commitments, such as increasing organisational effectiveness and economic productivity, have emerged as central to mainstreaming practices, and gender relations have increasingly been ‘represented’ in ways that facilitate greater economic competitiveness above all else. This approach may, of course, result in increased gender equality; but the particular conception of gender equality embraced will not necessarily have been a product of democratic debate.
Conclusion
It is possible to depict women’s policy agencies and gender mainstreaming processes as post-parliamentary manifestations of the SRW, reflecting the interests of women. Yet these agencies are generally accountable to the elected government rather than to the women’s movement, or particular organisations within it, while mainstreaming practices rely on technocratic data collection and impact assessments carried out by professionalized gender experts. These are mechanisms of governance as well as of democratic voice, engaged in the CRG as well as the SRW. If the SRW is to inform the CRG then mechanisms of authorization and accountability need to be built into their work, for without inclusive deliberation as to what gender equality entails - and therefore what form gender equality policies should take – the pursuit of gender equality can itself become an exclusionary process, undertaken for considerations of utility rather than justice. To mainstream a gender equality perspective is not necessarily to democratis the state (Rai, 2003). Future feminist political practices need to be attentive not only to fostering modes of governance that take the pursuit of gender equality as a policy goal, but also to ways of facilitating a more inclusive democratic debate as to what gender equality comprises.

The democratic challenge of realising group representation that is sensitive to the diversity amongst women has increasingly been circumvented as states have turned to feminist NGOs as gender experts ‘rather than as citizens’ groups advocating on behalf of women’s rights’ (Alvarez, 1999:183). This process occurs in place of a ‘wider political debates with the civil society constituencies with the highest stakes in gender-focused programmes.’ (Alvarez, 1999:192, emphasis in original) NGOs therefore become surrogates for civil society rather than an intermediary to it, circumventing the pressure on governments to establish other democratic mechanisms through which women might express their voices. In this way the growth of women’s policy agencies and professional feminist NGOs might be viewed as an anti-political rather than a democratic tendency. Indeed, in the absence of political debate women’s policy agencies may actively construct women’s interests with little input from women themselves (Bacchi, 1999) doing more to facilitate a governance agenda than a democratic one.

As a result women’s policy agencies increasingly appear to represent women’s interests in ways that actively constitute those gendered identities that are compatible with government rationalities, offering technical expertise on a new policy concern rather
than providing a representative mechanism for women’s civil society voices. It is in this – less than reassuring - way that women’s policy agencies can be understood to perform a representative function notwithstanding their lack of accountability, not least because they generally make a representative claim.

The danger with the form of constitutive representation offered by women’s policy agencies resides in the possibility that they may represent ‘women’ and their interests in ways that fail to do justice to the diversity amongst women, and yet offer no deliberative mechanisms by which they might be held to account for their ‘unrepresentativeness’. This raises the issue of the relation between democracy and representation. Those working with the gender machinery claim to represent women, yet do so without the conventional mechanisms of authorization and accountability being in place that we might expect of a representative relation. As Pitkin recently pointed out representation ‘may have nothing at all to do with democracy’ (Pitkin 2004: 337).
References
Celis, K. et al (2007), ‘Rethinking Women’s Substantive Representation’ paper prepared for ECPR, Helsinki May 7-12


