Title of proposed workshop
Feminism and State Architectures: Devolution, Federalism, Regionalism and (Gender) Equality

Subject area
Gender studies in the field of federal and regional studies

Abstract
What influence does (con) federal, devolved, unitary and other forms of state architectures have on feminist mobilizing and gender equality policy outcomes? Do federal systems, with their multiple jurisdictions offer greater benefits for advancing feminist claims through the state? Or does multi-level governance frustrate the development of gender equality policies and exacerbate inequalities between men and women and amongst women living in different areas of the same country? This workshop builds on innovative research in the area of feminism and state architectures to ask new questions and advance further comparative approaches to the impact and influence of different state structures on women and on gender equality. The workshop will engage in dialogue new and leading scholars in the field of gender and the state as well as those working outside the feminist paradigm to critically evaluate key questions about the nature and influence of state levels and scale in relation to gender and governance questions.

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Outline of topic and relation to existing research

How do state architectures affect women’s lives and gender equality? This workshop considers new ways of analysing the impact of different state architectures on various aspects of women’s lives and gender relations. By bringing together scholars who consider and compare different types of state architectures – confederal, federal, unitary, and devolving as well as the effects of multi-level governance systems on these state structures – the workshop seeks to address how different scales and layers of governance can influence the gender effects of public policies, gender equality policies and women’s political organising.

Feminist political scientists often fail to account for the multiple layers of governance that operate within states and thus conceptualize power as concentrated in a single government that wields undivided sovereign power (an obvious exception being the EU as a political system, see for instance Kantola 2010; van der Vleuten 2007). The unitary model does not fit (con)federations; nor does it accurately portray those unitary states with powerful local governments or multiple governance institutions on a single level, such as the UK. As state power is devolved informally and formally to other governance sites (and off-loaded to non-state partners), the unitary model applies to fewer countries, and cannot continue to form the basis for feminist scholarship. As many modern states are characterized by processes of decentralization, devolution or federalization, also the effects of federalism and regionalism for men and women as citizens and political activist has to be analyzed.

The influence of state architectures on feminist organising and policy making is an exciting emerging area of research. To date, studies in this area point out divergent outcomes. One set of literature identifies the ways in which federalism can generate different types of inequality. Inequality can be seen to emerge from the fact that competencies can get downloaded to regions with different financial capacities and that poorer ones might not invest in gender equality policies or the services of central importance to women such as childcare and violence against women programs (Celis and Meier forthcoming; Teghtsoonian and Chappell 2008; Riedle, 2002). Other inequalities arise due to the fact that through processes of devolution different subject positions are being ascribed to women in different regional development policies (Hudson and Rönblom 2006). A third form of inequality can be found in that federal systems can create distinct and inferior forms of citizenship for women as compared to men, by making them fall under the remit of different political levels (Mettler
1998). For instance, Irving (1994, 2008) argues that in Australia the stronger central government level is subsumed by masculine interests and policies (defence, finance etc) while the weaker state level addresses more feminine concerns (in the form of social services). In sum, women’s interests might not be addressed through public policies in certain regions, they might be approached differently in different regions and they might be approached differently from other social groups falling under the remit of another political level within the (con)federation.

A more optimistic reading of the influence of state architectures on outcomes for feminist strategies has focussed on the extent to which federalism forms a political opportunity structure for women political activists and how and whether they make use of the ‘federalism advantage’ (Chappell 2000; Vickers 2008) by playing one level of the state off against the other(s). Most of this research focuses on comparisons of Australia and Canada, and analyzes what women activists can achieve through federal structures. This research has focussed on the fact that Australian feminists have, contrary to their Canadian colleagues (with the exception of Québec Canadians), shown a more favourable attitude towards the federated state structure and managed to take advantage of the political leverage this multi-level setting offered by shifting their attention between policy levels in order to avoid deadlocks (Chappell 2002a, 2002b; see also Gray 1998). More pessimistic accounts have identified how a multi-level system can complicate strategies of political activists or even exclude these actors from the system (Vickers 1994; Sawyer and Vickers 2001; also see Haussman, Sawyer and Vickers forthcoming). This research builds on and makes an important contribution to the wider literature on state feminism (Stetson and Mazur 1995; Mazur 2001; Stetson 2001; Outshoorn 2004; Lovenduski, et al. 2005; Haussman and Sauer 2007; Outshoorn and Kantola 2007), which aims to identify all the variables at play – including the importance of scale and level of jurisdiction – in advancing gender equality claims through political institutions.

The workshop will broaden the scope of (European) research on the influence of state architecture on gender equality through close consideration and debate of the hypothesis that, although gender/power relations are shaped by large-scale, socio-economic and ideological forces, the different architectures within states affect the gender effects of public policies, the shape and content of gender equality policies, and the success of feminist policy claims in areas including violence against women, childcare, and equal employment opportunity. It will identify whether public policies
might have different gendered effects in different regions; whether gender equality policies might take a different form and content with different jurisdictions and consider whether/how multilevel state forms offer opportunities or present barriers for women's activism absent in unitary states. The key to expanding the literature, and the normative aim of the workshop, is to identify appropriate strategies for feminists working to advance gender equality policies with specific state architectural contexts.

The contributors to this workshop will explore some of the core questions in this emerging area of study. What difference does state architecture make to women’s movements’ organising? What ‘advantage’ does multi-level governance structures provide for gender equality seekers? What thresholds might it create? How does governance scale and level influence gender relations or gender power dynamics? How do (con)federal or devolving states guarantee and provide for gender equality? How do different state architectures affect public policies in their gender effects? To what extent do they make up for diverging forms of citizenship and what are the effects of these on women and on equality? How do gender equality policies and women’s policy agencies evolve in federalising and devolving state structures?

The workshop will bring together a range of perspectives on these questions through a selection of papers on (con)federal, devolved and multi-level governance structures. The papers will point to new and exciting perspectives on theories of the state, (con)federalism, regionalism, devolution and women’s political engagement and gender policy development. As a final product, the workshop aims at bringing together a selection of papers in a special issue of a key journal such as Publius or Politics & Gender or in an edited volume.

**Type of paper**
Papers should contain a comparative perspective in that they compare geographic areas, countries, (con)federal and non-(con)federal systems, devolved and states, policy areas, policy actors (state actors, social movements), and/or their (mobilisation) strategies. The focus may also be on the EU and other regional structures as well as on the role of international governance structures (UN, ICC, OECD, etc) which influence the operation of domestic-level governance practices and processes.

**Possible participants**
Participants will include junior and senior scholars working in the areas of devolution, comparative federalism and multi-level governance. Our aim is to involve feminist scholars as well as those working outside a feminist framework who will operate as ‘constructive critics’ of this work. Identified possible participants include: Gabi Ahrens; Thanh-Huyen Ballmer-Cao; Lee Ann Banaszak; Keith Banting; Douglas Brown; Maria Bustelo; Karen Celis; Jennifer Curtin; Isabelle Engeli; Jan Erk; Allan Fenna; Susan Franceschet; Joan Grace; Helen Irving; Meryl Kenny; Sabine Lang; Fiona Mackay; Anita Manatschal; Michael Mintrom; Elisabeth Prügl; Yvan Rielle; Malin Rönnblom; Kim Rubinstein; Birgit Sauer; Miriam Smith; Carol Spary; Kathy Teghthsoonian; Tania Verge; Jill Vickers; Laurel Weldon.

**Funding**

Funding will be sought from the Swiss Institute of Federalism, the Forum of Federations; the Flemish Fund for Scientific Research (FWO) and the Australian Research Council. Participants will be expected to cover their own expenses.

**Biographical note**

Petra Meier, Assistant Professor of Politics at the University of Antwerp, does research on issues of representation, feminist approaches to public policies, gender equality policies, policy making in multi-level settings and Belgian politics. She recently co-edited *Au-delà et en-deçà de l’Etat: le genre entre dynamiques transnationales et multi-niveaux* (with Bérengère Marques Pereira and David Paternotte, Academia Bruglant 2010), as well as *The Discursive Politics of Gender Equality. Stretching, Bending and Policymaking* (with Emanuela Lombardo and Mieke Verloo, Routledge 2010).

Louise Chappell is a Professor at the University of Sydney, Australia researching comparative gender and political institutions. Her current research projects include an assessment of the influence of international law on domestic policy as well as international collaborative research on gender and neo-institutionalism. Louise has published widely in international journals and her book *Gendering Government* (UBC Press 2002) won the APSA Prize for the best book in the field of women and politics. In 2009 she co-authored *The politics of human rights in Australia* published by Cambridge University Press.
Bibliography

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