Economy and Society Volume 31 Number 4 November 2002: 533–557

Feminism in a global era

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Abstract

Feminism is being re-shaped by its articulation through a global discourse of human rights and an increased focus on state interventions. This is partly a result of the transition in the gender regime changing the economic and political resources and opportunities open to women and partly due to globalization. Globalization has not only created difficulties for democratic governance, but it has also facilitated the development of new spaces, institutions and rhetoric where universal human rights is a powerful justificatory principle.

Keywords: feminism; globalization; gender regime; modernity; social movement; human rights; politics.

Introduction

Feminism is being re-shaped by its increased articulation through a global discourse of human rights and an increased focus on state interventions. There is an increase in the use of rhetoric that women's rights are human rights as a framing and justification of feminist action, simultaneous with a turn of feminist activity away from autonomous separatist groups towards their mainstreaming within civil society and the state. Of course, neither the use of the notion of equal rights nor demands on the state are entirely new within feminism, but both the extent of the use of universalistic conceptions of human rights, which draw down on global and regional practices and institutions, and the extent of the orientation to states constitute new developments. This raises a number of questions as to how this is to be understood and why it is happening. My argument is that there have been two major changes in the context of contemporary Western feminism, which have facilitated the priority given to globally articulated

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ISSN 0308-5147 print/1469-5766 online
DOI: 10.1080/0308514022000020670

rights-based arguments together with an increased orientation to the state: the transition in the gender regime and a complex globalization.

First, the transition in the gender regime has provided political opportunities within the state and formal electoral politics that have facilitated the mainstreaming of feminist demands. This transition is leading to women finally being incorporated into the governance of what might become, but are not yet (contra Miller and Rose 1990), liberal democracies. Significant proportions of women are still in pre-modern forms of social relations, such as housework rather than marketized work (Mies 1986; Walby 1997), only very recently beginning to participate directly in the elective forums of liberal democratic states (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2000; Norris and Lovenduski 1995) and still barely citizens (Orloff 1993). The issue here is: what are the implications of a transition in the nature of the gender regime for the nature of the gender politics that are taken up? What are the implications for the orientation of feminist politics towards the state as the gender regime changes? While it has been argued that feminism is a social movement that has entered abeyance (Bagguley 2002; Sawyers and Meyer 1999; Taylor 1989), is it more appropriate to conclude instead that feminism has simply changed its repertoire and form? Here I draw on social movement theory in order to assess the implications of changes in the gender regime for feminist politics. This investigates the significance of changes in the economic and political resources involved in political mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977), changes in political opportunity structures (Taylor 1989), changes in the availability and use of different types of framing (Diani 1996; Snow *et al*. 1986) and the potential significance of argumentation and epistemic communities (Haas 1992; Risse 1999).

Second, globalization has facilitated new spaces, institutions and rhetoric where the notion of universal human rights is a powerful justificatory principle embedded in specific institutions. Globalization constitutes a new framing for feminist politics that assists the change in discursive presentation and new opportunities for argumentation. Globalization impacts on the nature of feminism especially by creating changes in political opportunities. By globalization I mean a process of increased density and frequency of international or global social interactions relative to local or national ones. This includes economic, political and cultural dimensions. This closely follows the definition of Chase-Dunn *et al*. (2000). I resist a definition in terms of supra-territoriality (Scholte 2000), as this underestimates the extent to which global processes still have a territorial component. The definition is deliberately minimalist to avoid conflating the causation of globalization with its definition and to allow for the possibility of multiple waves with different causes. Much of the analysis of globalization has analysed social processes primarily connected with changes in capitalism and associated class, political, economic and cultural relations (Held *et al*. 1999; Ohmae 1990). However, this is unduly restrictive. When the focus includes differences due to gender, ethnicity and religion a wider set of politics comes into focus. The extent of globalization can be overestimated (Hirst and Thompson 1996) and remains highly uneven, with countries differentially

integrated into global networks (Hirst and Thompson 2000). Of course, globalization has not homogenized the world and many national differences remain (Whitley 1999). Globalization does not simply entail an economic process which diminishes the political capacities of nation-states (Cerny 1996; Ohmae 1995), but rather more complexly is implicated in the restructuring of workers' repertories of political action (Piven and Cloward 2000) and of regional polities (Hettne *et al*. 1999), such as the European Union (Walby 1999a), and the development of forms of global governance (Held 1995) and global civil society (Berkovitch 1999). The changes in time-space relations involved in globalization produce contradictory effects. It has sometimes been thought that globalization is a process hostile to feminism (Peterson 1996), that emerging forms of global economic governance are in opposition to women's interests, as is suggested in the case of the neo-liberal strategies for micro-credit to women (Rankin 2001) and in structural adjustment policies of the IMF (Sparr 1994), and that feminist responses are primarily ones of opposition (Haxton and Olsson 1999; Rowbotham and Linkogle 2000). However, increases in international linkages have also been used for political projects designed around women's perceived interests (Moghadam 2000; Moser, 1993; Ramirez *et al*. 1997). Globalization restructures gendered political opportunities and resources in complex ways.

This re-framing of feminism in terms of universal human rights constitutes a challenge to some forms of feminist treatments of difference. Diversity has rightly been a major form of social analysis in recent years (Calhoun 1995; Taylor *et al*. 1994). One of the major issues for contemporary feminist theory has been how to theorize differences between women while not reifying them (Braidotti 1994; Squires 1999; Young 1990) and simultaneously addressing commonalities. While a considerable amount of Western feminist theory has focused on the 'doxa of difference' (Felski 1997), for example in the debate about the ethics of care (Fraser 1997; Gilligan 1982; Sybylla 2001; Tronto 1993), and ethnic, national, religious and racialized divisions between women (Mohanty 1991), a new wave of international feminist practice has embraced the discourse of human rights (UNIFEM 2000a). This opens fundamental questions as to the nature of the basis on which claims for justice are made and the implications of the use of the concept of the universal (Nussbaum 2000a, 2000b; Menon 2002; Sen 1987, 1999). The notion of human rights has sometimes been thought to be limited by its Eurocentric origin and thus its closeness to Western rather than universal ideals of the autonomous individual. However, the range of human rights legitimated by the UN includes not only the individual civil and political rights of the Western heritage, but also the list of economic and social rights developed in the Soviet Union and Asia, which was integrated into the UN list of human rights in 1966, so that these UN legitimated human rights now take a hybridized rather than purely Western form (Woodiwiss 1998). The reformulation of the list of universal human rights endorsed by the UN is, because of its recent and various additions and re-interpretations, obviously a social construction, even as its invocation of the 'universal' as a source of legitimacy attempts

to stabilize it as an absolute. The conception of feminism in terms of rights is of course, not itself new (Banks 1981; Ramirez *et al.* 1997), but the nature of its current deployment globally, appears to have some new features (Berkovitch 1999). Is, then, the 'traditional' feminist focus on difference being undercut, transformed or restructured in a new global context? Is there, and if so how important, an emergent unifying framework for feminism in which an increasingly global discourse invokes the notion that women's rights are human rights? How important is the practice of complexity and alliances (Jakobsen 1998), coalitions (Ferree and Hess 1995) and networks (Castells 1997) as practical forms of engagement with difference?

The paper will first present an account of the new kinds of politics that are under discussion in this paper. Then, it will argue for a multi-layered explanation of these changes drawing on social movement theory, theories of globalization and theorization of changes in the gender regime. The empirical focus on the paper is on the UK and the US, though where possible it draws on wider data, especially from advanced industrial countries. This is set in the context of developments at a regional level, especially that of the European Union, and the global.

Changes in feminism

This analysis will be empirically supported and illustrated by two examples of feminist politics. The first is that of gender mainstreaming in economics, especially through policies of equal treatment and the legal regulation of employment. The second is the attempt to stop male violence against women. In both cases there have been feminist attempts to develop political interventions in both civil society and the state. They are part of a set of global feminist politics, which, while tailored to local circumstances, draws profoundly upon a common web of politics. In each case these are political issues of long standing, being articulated during first wave feminism at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as today. But their current form is new, drawing upon the political capacities of women that are newly available consequent upon the transformation of the gender regime and the development of the global linkages.

There are four key dimensions to the changes in the forms of these feminist politics. The first is the movement from separatist autonomous groups to engagement with the state. The second is the increased use of equal rights discourse, with a simultaneous fading of oppositional radical feminist and socialist discourse. The third is the increasing significance of the global level, partly in the sense of increased communications among feminist networks, but more importantly in the sense of the utilization of new political spaces developed within and by emergent forms of global and regional institutions (such as, respectively, the UN and the European Union). The fourth is the increasing use of coalitions and alliances and networks as modes of organizing which engage with difference in a more nuanced way than either the earlier tightly knit groups

based on 'identity' or the more traditional democratic and bureaucratic centralist forms.

From radical autonomous groups to engagement with the state

In the 1970s in the UK and the 1960s in the US many feminist strategies involved the setting up of independent feminist bases, separate from mainstream political forums such as the state. Examples of this in the area of violence against women in the UK included the establishment of refuges for battered women and rape crisis centres run by women for women (Dobash and Dobash 1992; Hague and Malos 1993). Indeed, the state was often seen as much a part of the problem as a source of the solution (Hanmer 1978). Funding from the state was small and marginal, more often at a local rather than national level (Pahl 1985), although there were some exceptions to this (Smith 1989).

During the 1990s there were significant changes in UK state policies towards violence against women (Grace 1995), though not ones that the feminist community generally understood to be adequate, since they did not substantially address issues of gendered power in the home and the state (Hester *et al*. 1996). By 2000, a wide range of feminist networks, such as the Women's Aid Federation of England, women legal professionals, feminist academics and senior women police officers, came to be in more systematic dialogue with the state at local and at the national level over improving policy in relation to violence against women (Labour Party 1995). This process was aided by the significant increase, over the last thirty years, in the proportion of women at senior levels in professions relevant to criminal justice policy. This lobbying was not only at the local and national levels but also involved regional and global institutions, including the European Union and the Council of Europe (Kelly 1997). The Home Office began to address violence against women more systematically, and to fund and support a wider range of policy developments, while simultaneously seeking to shape the agenda in its own terms. The allocation of £8 million to run and evaluate experimental projects by NGOs as well as by state agencies, in order to test ideas on how to reduce domestic violence and rape against women in the Crime Reduction Strategy at the end of the 1990s, marked a new departure in Home Office policy (Taylor-Browne 2001). However, there remain ongoing demands, for instance, for more substantial central support for the network of refuges and rape crisis lines, and for improved court procedures to deal with the exceptionally high rate of attrition in rape cases and the consequent low conviction rate for rapists (Kelly 1999; Lees 1996). Nevertheless, the strategy of engagement with the formal political sphere, rather than relying primarily on women's own resources in civil society, has been consolidated. UK feminists have drawn on the resources of a trans-national movement against male violence against women in their engagement with the British state.

Economic issues are also being mainstreamed with increasing emphasis on the state (Walby 2001b). This is in contrast with the 1970s, when feminist strategies

more often involved the building of women's separate committees in trade unions and professions in order to give women an independent voice. By 2002 such basic capacity building for the articulation of women's voices is more developed, even if rarely regarded as sufficient. There has been a considerable increase over the last thirty years in the proportion of women in senior positions in trade unions, in the academy, in management and in government, which has facilitated the articulation of a variety of women's perspectives on economic and redistributive issues (Acker 1989; Gagnon and Ledwith 2000; Ledwith and Colgan 1996; Shaw and Perrons 1995). Feminist strategies in relation to economics build on the already existing institutionalization of women's voices (Hicks 2000), as part of the agenda of gender mainstreaming, that is, the incorporation of a gender perspective on all economic matters (Rees 1998). Examples of this process include the government commitment to gender mainstreaming in 1998, led by the Women's Unit, with an ongoing process of implementation throughout government (Cabinet Office 1998; Department for Education and Employment 1998). This includes the Treasury engaging in dialogue with the Women's Budget Group (an informal think tank of women economists, social policy experts, trade unions and NGO leaders) over the gender implications of the budget (Himmelweit 2000; Women's Budget Group 2000). Of course, the process of gender mainstreaming is not complete (Gregory 1999); nonetheless, the mainstreaming of gender in the economic domain, integrating feminist concerns into state policy and policy machinery, is proceeding.

Globalization of gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming is a development that goes beyond that of equal opportunities. It goes beyond it by requiring that all areas of policy are re-examined using a gender lens, assessing the implications of all policies for women and men, and also by broadening the political strategy from equal opportunities into more varied ways of engaging with gendered inequalities (Pascual and Behning 2001; Rees 1998).

Gender mainstreaming is now a global movement (UNIFEM 2000a). There were, of course, many pre-cursors to this movement. The International Labour Organization has attempted to set standards for employment since its inception in 1919, one of which, Convention 100 adopted in 1951, was for equal pay for equal work by men and women (Valticos 1969). This has been ratified by most of the many states that are members of the ILO. The UN adopted a Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women at the General Assembly in 1979, which has been ratified by most members of the UN (Nelson and Chowdhury 1994). While in itself this convention has little binding force, nonetheless, it was important as a form of legitimation of this demand when made by local activists in particular countries (UNIFEM 2000e). For example, it was important in the campaign by Japanese women who were demanding equal opportunities legislation. They successfully used this convention by threatening

to embarrass their government if it had not passed suitable legislation before an international meeting (Yoko *et al.* 1994).

Gender mainstreaming became a high profile strategy at the UN conference on Women at Beijing in 1995, following on from the UN conference for women in Nairobi ten years earlier. This has involved a strong presence within the processes and politics of development and the South as well as in the North. The spread of the ideas has been through global feminist networks, and their utilization of international development and UN institutions (Moghadam 1998).

The EU has adopted gender mainstreaming and it is now, since the Treaty of Amsterdam, a core policy (European Commission 1999; Rees 1998), even if unevenly implemented (Pollack and Hafner-Burton 2000). It is a process that is under active development by a variety of political actors, including trade unions, and a variety of women's lobby groups including women's committees in trade unions (Pascual and Behning 2001). Gender mainstreaming builds on and goes beyond Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, which required equal pay for men and women in Member States, and which was the foundation of a series of Directives expounding the principle of equal treatment in employment. This EU policy is legally binding on Member States. If a state is not following EU policy then there are two remedies. One is that the European Commission will take the defaulting Member State through legal proceedings in the European Court of Justice. In one example in the early 1980s this process resulted in the revision of UK sex equality laws so that it included work of equal value, not just similar work. The other route is for citizens to take legal cases directly based on European law. In either case, the principle is that EU law is superior to domestic law. Member states are obliged to comply with EU rulings on equal opportunities. Before the Treaty of Amsterdam this remit did not extend beyond employment, but this Treaty has widened the range of issues potentially covered (Hoskyns 1996; Pillinger 1992; Walby 1999a, 1999b), though there are remaining gaps (Randall 2000). The EU is the superior polity in this area of the regulation of gendered employment relations. Women are not mere passive beneficiaries, since women in the UK and elsewhere, such as Ireland, have been very active in pressing the EU to take action to implement its Treaty obligations, over the heads of national governments, both by lobbying and by taking cases through the courts based on EU law (Curtin 1989; Hoskyns 1996; Pillinger 1992).

The EU did not adopt these measures because its Member States requested it; indeed the policy goes far beyond that of most Member States (European Parliament 1994; Fitzpatrick *et al.* 1993). Rather, they were part of the EU strategic response to globalization, which was perceived by key actors to require the building of a regional economy that could compete on a global scale in a way that the individual nation-states could not. They were part of associated social model that was one of social cohesion and of open competitive markets. Equal opportunities in the labour market were a key element of this strategy, that is, part of a strategic engagement with globalization (Walby 1999a, 1999b).

The EU has developed a different model of capitalism from that of the US (Crouch and Streeck 1997; Leibfried and Pierson 1995; Therborn 1995). This difference is a result at least partly of the political efforts of a variety of actors, especially in building a social dimension to sustain social cohesion that is core to the EU model (Bornschier and Ziltener 1999). The long tradition of labour unions (Pascual and Behning 2000), the contingent presence of socialist political entrepreneurs such as Delors (Bornschier and Ziltener 1999), the political coalitions forged in response to the traumas of the Holocaust and nationalist militarism (Therborn 1995) and the development of women's lobbies (Hoskyns 1996) have been key elements in the construction of this EU social model. The European response to globalization was thus forged in a different context from that of other world regions (Hettne *et al.* 1999) and has generated a model of capitalism in which the support of social cohesion is a significant element. In this context women's organizations and their allies have been successful in creating equal opportunities as a key, indeed constitutional (Weiler 1997), principle of the EU.

Stopping violence against women

The attempt to stop violence against women involved the development of political networks at local, national and global levels. There has been a globalization of demands to restrict men's violence against women by the use of legal regulation and to provide resources to women who have suffered such violence. Like economic equality, the demand to reduce and stop men's violence against women has a long history. Campaigns to protect women from domestic violence and sexual assault can be found at the end of the nineteenth century. During the 1960s and 1970s, feminist activists in the US and UK were prominent in the development of national, yet mutually informed, movements around domestic violence and rape (Dobash and Dobash 1992).

The ideas and practices spread rapidly to many countries. This was partly due to feminist networking, travelling, global media, development aid and the global publishing industry. Local campaigns were established in both Western nations (Hanmer *et al.* 1989) and the developing world (Counts *et al.* 1992; Davies 1993), from Canada (Johnson 1996) to Malaysia (Ariffin 1997) and India (Sen 1998).

The European Union facilitated the spread of feminist practice on violence against women by funding a series of networks and projects with the explicit intent of sharing knowledge and stimulating developments in further countries. Support was particularly strong in the European Parliament, which voted three times for Daphne initiatives to fund the development of a large number of innovatory measures, and also networks of non-governmental bodies (NGOs) working in this area. Some members of the European Commission supported this activity: for instance, Gradin, when European Commissioner responsible for justice and home affairs, launched a European campaign for 'zero tolerance of violence against women' on 8 March 1999. The movement into this policy

area goes beyond earlier restrictions of EU interventions to economic matters. This necessitated discussions as to the legal basis of these developments. In April 1999 the European Parliament decided that it had legal authority for these actions under Article 152 of the Treaty of Amsterdam that referred to human health, including respect for physical integrity (*Women of Europe Newsletter* 1999), a broadening of remit from that in earlier treaties.

By the early 1990s this demand to stop men's violence against women was articulated in international forums, including those of the UN (Friedman 1995). This was translated into language and concepts more appropriate for the predominantly male forum of the UN, that is the language of human rights rather than men's oppression of women. The demands were that women's rights were human rights, and that violence against women constituted a violation of women's human rights. This was a call for the transformation of the existing agenda of human rights and for a new interpretation that placed women's issues at the heart of the mainstream (Bunch 1995; Stamatopolou 1995). In 1993 a UN conference in Vienna resolved that

> Violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women . . . there is a need for a . . . clear statement of the rights to be applied to ensure the elimination of violence against women in all its forms, a commitment by States . . . and a commitment by the international community at large to the elimination of violence against women.
>
> (UNIFEM 2000b)

This outcome was the result of actions by a set of alliances, networks and coalitions at both grassroots and international levels (Toro 1995). While this Declaration was not legally binding on Member States, nonetheless it recommended a series of specific legislative, educational and administrative measures to be taken by states and, further, has provided an important source of legitimation to feminist activists in putting pressure on 'their' states. This declaration was used as a resource in arguments by feminist expert networks. These actions were reiterated and developed in the 1995 UN Beijing Platform for Action. In 1996 the UN established a trust fund in support of actions to eliminate violence against women, administered by UNIFEM (2000c). UN agencies have encouraged the sharing of knowledge about both the effects of violence and effective means of combating violence by non-governmental organizations as well as states (UNIFEM 2000d). In 1997 the UN General Assembly adopted the 'Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence Against Women in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice', which further expanded the UN-recommended policy on violence against women (UNIFEM 2000d).

This conceptualization within the discourse of rights has facilitated the spread and legitimation of this campaign against violence against women (Bunch 1995). This feminist practice has transcended the 'doxa of difference' in feminist philosophy (Felski 1997). Rather, feminists here learnt to work with and across difference (Friedman 1995). However, the rhetoric of 'cultural difference' was

used by states which were resistant to this expansion of women's human rights different from those that they had been traditionally granted in particular societies, especially some Islamic countries (Mayer 1995; Rao 1995). Nevertheless, the 1993 UN declaration directed states not to 'invoke any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations' regarding violence against women (UNIFEM 2000d). Important to the feminist success here was the constant engagement with the issue of diversity through the breadth of variety of grassroots organizations together with the use of networks and coalitions rather than monolithic organizational forms. This enabled fluid and flexible political responses that were sensitive to context within the framework of a shared desire to end male violence against women and a willingness to utilize the rhetoric of rights that resonated both with the grassroots and with the administrators of international organizations. The development of communication technologies facilitated the rapid transfers of knowledge and practice between grassroots and international organizations. In this way globalization facilitated the development of feminist campaigns around violence against women.

Explaining changes

The explanation of these developments in feminism, the increasing use of human rights discourse and the increasing engagement with the state, need to be multi-layered. It involves changes in social structure, in political opportunity structures, in economic and political resources, in the framing of the issue and the development of feminist epistemic communities. These are interrelated levels of explanation rather than competing ones.

Social structural changes

There have been important changes in the form of the gender regime affecting many dimensions of women's lives, creating new possibilities for feminist politics (Walby 1990, 1997). During processes of gendered social change, the category 'women' is not a stable one. As gender relations change, so too does the constitution of masculinity and femininity, and the interests and priorities of 'women'. The political priorities of different groups of women may change along with changes in their economic and domestic situations. As certain types of material situation become more prevalent, so too may the political priorities associated with those situations. As social situations change, so too may the economic and organizational resources and political opportunities available to some women. The issues addressed below are debates about the specific changes that might be leading to the developments in feminism noted above, and the linkages between them.

Macro social change associated with industrialization has often been

implicated in the rise of feminist politics, though the way that this takes effect is understood through quite different mechanisms, ranging from modernization (Chafetz and Dworkin 1986) to post-materialist values (Inglehart 1977; Inglehart and Norris 2000) and women's employment (Manza and Brooks, 1998). Chafetz and Dworkin (1986) found that industrialisation, urbanization and the growth of the middle classes (proxied by education) were the most important factors explaining variations in the strength of feminist movements. Inglehart (1977) and Inglehart and Norris (2000) argue that the link between industrialization and new forms of feminist politics in advanced industrialized countries is a result of the development of post-materialist values. Those who have the most post-materialist values are those who are well educated and young. This is a development not only of feminism, and of post-materialism, but one in which women are increasing moving leftwards in their political priorities. Norris (1999b) finds a gender generation gap in voting in the UK since 1992, in which women under 30 are more likely to vote left than men of their own age or older women. Manza and Brooks (1998) attribute the increase in left voting among women in the USA to the increase in the proportion of women who are employed, since the policy priorities of employed women include the provision of public services. Their sophisticated statistical modelling shows that this shift in political priorities relative to the average is not found among all women, but specifically among employed women. The growth in employed women is fuelling the gender gap in voting and increasing women's demands on the state for intervention in institutions perceived as relevant to gender inequalities. Huber and Stephens (2000) find that women's labour-force participation is an important correlate of the expansion of public social welfare services net of other social and political factors across an analysis of sixteen advanced industrial countries, as well as social democratic governance and state structure.

Thus economic development is part of the explanation of increased feminist mobilization of women and their leftwards political movement, which involves increasing demands for state services. The increase in women's employment and education is part of the mechanism by which this shift occurs. These changes are part of the transition in the gender regime from a more domestic to a more public form (Walby 1990, 1997). However, questions remain as to the exact nature of the link between structural change and changes in women's politics. One of the links is the relationship between social change and access to economic and organizational resources.

Economic and organizational resources

Economic and political resources are key components in changes in political mobilization (McCarthy and Zald 1977). Increases in women's employment and education and in their presence in a variety of civil society institutions from trade unions to feminist advocacy networks constitute increases in the resources available to feminism. As women's employment has grown so also has, not only the

economic resources of many women, but also women's presence in organizations, which make demands on employers and government (Ferree 1980; Gagnon and Ledwith 2000). There has been a significant increase in the presence of women in trade unions and their governance structures (Hicks 2000) and the growth of expert feminist advocacy networks both in the UK (Himmelweit 2000) and at the international and transnational levels (Keck and Sikkink 1998; Moghadam 2000).

Political opportunity structures

The form that political action takes depends to some extent on the nature of political opportunities (Eisinger 1973). There has been a very significant change in the political opportunities facing feminism as a consequence of the transition in the gender regime, in which women have come to have considerably greater, though still less than equal, participation in the state. The implications of this partial opening of the state to women for feminism is subject to debate, not least because the conceptualization and location of the state in feminist politics has long been subject to controversy and development. The rejection of the significance of the state in gender politics by some radical feminists (Millett 1977), its dispersal in feminist Foucauldian analysis (Smart 1989) and micro-level conceptualizations of governance (Haney 1996), has recently been subject to critique as a result of analysis of the significance of the welfare state for gender relations (Orloff 1993), new configurations of feminist practice through the discourse of human rights (Peters and Wolper 1995), the increased representation of women in parliaments and cabinets around the world (Githens *et al*. 1995; Walby 2000) and by increased theoretical interest in conceptualizing the complexities of the issue of representation and the state (Squires 1999; Kymlicka 1991, 1995; Phillips 1995; Young 1990, 1997).

There has been a significant change in the political opportunity structures as a result of the slow opening of positions in parliaments to women. The shift in the opportunity structure is implicated in the shift in emphasis of feminist politics from radical separatist autonomous political developments to mainstream more liberal politics focused on amelioration of the position of women through reform of state actions. In the 1980s, the contrast in political opportunity structures between the US, the UK and Sweden led Gelb (1989) to conclude that such structures were a major determinant of whether feminist politics took an autonomous or state-oriented form. At a local level there has been a trajectory of development in the history of several organizations within a rape crisis movement from radical autonomous groups to engagement with the state (Matthews 1994).

There has been an increase in the proportion of women involved in elected national assemblies (Walby 2000). This has occurred in most, though not all, countries around the world, including especially Western Europe (Inter-Parliamentary Union 1995, 2000). This increase in elected women in parliament

represents a shift in the political opportunity structure. This increase in women in parliament is associated with a change of attitude and a change of policies towards those which women prioritize, according to studies on the UK (Norris 1996a), US (Thomas 1991), Sweden (Wängnerud 2000) and Norway (Skjeie 1991). In the case of the UK, female prospective parliamentary candidates for the 1992 election were more likely than male candidates to support women's rights in abortion, action against rape in marriage and domestic violence, and equal opportunities, as well as to adopt positions more typical of women in a range of other matters including nationalization/privatization, nuclear weapons and the death penalty (Norris 1996a). In the US, women in the state legislatures with the highest proportion of women introduced and passed more priority bills dealing with issues of women, children and families than men in their states and more than female representatives where women were low in number (Thomas 1991). Women diffuse policy priorities in two ways: through a high percentage of women in office or through the presence of a formal women's legislative caucus, that is, both numbers and organization made a difference (Thomas 1991).

The reduction in the closure of parliaments against women is a significant change in the political opportunity structure that contributes to the change in form of politics by opening possible new lines of political engagement. When these state institutions were *de facto* closed to women, feminist politics engaged in more radical separatist autonomous forms of politics. As these institutions have slowly admitted more women, there has been a growth in the kinds of politics that are oriented to the state. Liberal democracies are in the making, but are not yet consistently developed.

Framing

While these changes in social structure and institutions and the associated political resources and opportunities which follow from them are important in explaining variations in the extent and nature of feminist politics, they are by themselves insufficient. Symbolic resources and the ability to challenge existing notions of social order are an important part of the repertoire of a social movement (Eyerman and Jamieson 1991). The ideas held by a movement may be very important to participants, and not merely instrumental to more material goal (Melucci 1989). It is useful to ask why certain kinds of framings of politics were used and to find the links between the economic, political and institutional level of analysis and that of the individual actors (della Porta and Diani 1999; Diani 1996; McAdam *et al*. 1996). Frame theory offers such a linkage (Snow *et al*. 1986). 'Frame alignment' occurs when the process through which an individual's interests, values and beliefs become congruent and complementary with those of a social movement organisation. Frames organize experiences and events, making them meaningful. Frame alignment is necessary for movement participation (Snow *et al*. 1986). Diani reinterprets Snow *et al*.'s (1986) concept

of frame alignment to refer to the process of 'the integration of mobilizing messages with dominant representations of the political environment' (1996: 1058), rather than the connection between the movement entrepreneurs' values and goals and those of their potential constituents.

Frame alignment analysis, the process of 'the integration of mobilizing messages with dominant representations of the political environment', is a useful addition to the layers of analysis. The extent to which feminists have sought to radically reshape conceptions of gender justice, or work within a dominant frame, depends on specific sets of social circumstances, and has potentially tremendous consequences for their impact. The relative shift in the framing of feminist analysis from autonomous, radical, opposition based on anti-system outrage at oppression to one which is inclusionary, mainstream and based on human rights is significant and, while the selection of the frame is affected by the social context, nonetheless, has important consequences for the reception of feminist ideas.

Frame theory may help to reinterpret the claims that the feminist movement is in abeyance (Bagguley 2002; Sawyers and Meyer 1999). Changes in feminist activity should be understood as a re-framing of feminism into an inclusionary rather than anti-system discourse (cf. Diani (1996) on Italian regional movements). This strategy involves the loss of a media profile, as there is a shift away from being simply oppositional, and towards one of more involvement with government. While this may involve loss of visibility as an oppositional protest-oriented social movement, this is not the same as a decrease in feminist political activity.

Globalization constitutes a new framing actively invoked by those feminists who use a discourse of human rights. It is a major dominant framing of social relations. Its juxtaposition to human rights knowingly elides the distinction between the global and the universal (Walby 2001a).

Argumentation and epistemic communities

Some writers inspired by the Habermasian tradition (1989, 1991) have argued that power and norms are not sufficient to explain changes in political processes, but that processes of argumentation can be significant in some circumstances (Risse 1999). While processes of political change are about power, they are not only about power; rather, there is a space where argumentation plays a part. The principles of human rights are diffusing internationally, involving a process of socialization of states. Human rights have become embedded in a variety of international regimes and organizations, thus forming part of the normative setting of international society, increasingly defining what constitutes a 'civilized state' as a member of the international community in 'good standing' (Risse 1999: 529–30). The process of argumentation potentially unsettles fixed identities and perceived interests, which become subject to discursive challenges. Thus, moral persuasion can lead to a redefinition of interest and of identity,

potentially leading to argumentative 'self-entrapment' and change (Risse 1999: 531).

These processes are found at work in the articulation of feminist advocacy networks with state authorities in relation to rights-based issues of equal treatment in employment and violence against women, as described above.

The notion of epistemic community is embedded in notions of the importance of argument (Haas 1992).

> An epistemic community is a network of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area. . . . they have (1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs . . . (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain . . . (3) shared notions of validity . . . (4) a common policy enterprise.
>
> (Haas 1992: 3)

This concept is used in order to get a grip on the role of knowledge and information. Epistemic communities are increasingly important because of the increasing importance of scientific knowledge during the twentieth century.

Contemporary feminism has increasingly included epistemic communities, as described above. These have increasingly made claims to expertise and increasingly argued with key holders of institutional power. There has been a proliferation of expert feminist networks that engage on the basis of argumentation. However, feminism is not exclusively an epistemic community, since the basis of the claims for justice remains varied.

Human rights and difference in a global context

The concepts and practices of networks and coalitions (Ferree and Hess 1995) have become important in feminist practice around difference. Diversity has rightly been a major theme of social analysis in recent years (Calhoun 1995; Mohanty 1991; Taylor *et al*. 1994; Young 1990). One of the major issues for contemporary feminist theory and practice is how to address differences between women simultaneously with commonalities (Felski 1997). There is need to capture the multiple and overlapping nature of social differences, the way that individuals are simultaneously located within several different social groupings, which have varying significance and priority according to time and place. It is the complexity and the partially overlapping and cross-cutting nature of social divisions that is the central issue for feminist politics, rather than that of reified differences (Jakobsen 1998). Concepts of networks, alliances and coalitions are more helpful in an analysis of feminist politics than those of identity or difference because they foreground the practice of recognizing differences and commonalities simultaneously. They point up the social and political work that is done when engaging across difference. They are suggestive of the contingency

and of the potential for both fragility and resilience of the grouping of those supporting a political project, especially over time and space. In the examples of feminist politics in the context of globalization used above the concepts of networks, alliances and coalitions are used deliberately rather than those of identity or community in order to capture this (Walby 2001a).

One of the problems raised about the equal rights tradition is that it is considered too individualistic and too close to neo-liberalism to be able to address issues of collective and structural disadvantage (Young 2000). Such critics suggest that equal rights discourse leads to strategies which are individualistic and divided, and which therefore cannot deal with obstacles that are institutional and collective. However, this philosophical concern is misplaced in practice, since the articulation of the claim through the rhetoric of equal rights does not necessarily determine the form of the politics through which this right is pursued. In the case of improving women's conditions in paid employment or violence from men, the pursuit of this goal through the rhetoric of rights to equal treatment does not preclude the political articulation of this in a collective form. This can be seen in examples drawn from the politics of equal rights in employment and in violence against women. While it is hard for an individual to pursue a legal case through a series of expensive and time-consuming tribunals and courts in a search for redress in the UK, many of those utilizing equal opportunities legislation do so collectively, rather than individually, as a consequence of support from collective bodies (Gregory 1987). There are many instances of successful prosecution of discriminating employers that have involved either trade unions or the Equal Opportunities Commission bearing the legal costs and providing support during the long tribulations of legal processes and contested workplace relations; that is, implementation of these laws at least partially depends upon collective actors to take forward individual grievances. Indeed, trade unions today will often take forward legal claims on behalf of groups of workers who share similarly discriminating employers. So, despite the absence of a clear formal legal route to take claims collectively in the UK (as compared with the use of class actions in the US), they are nevertheless often collective cases in practice, as a result of the device of taking a representative or small group of representative claims (Willborn 1989; Gregory 1987, 1999). There is hard evidence of the impact of equal opportunity legislation on the pay gap between women and men. Econometric analysis, based on the decomposition of the wages gap into its components, such as education, work experience and discrimination, has shown that the 1970s equal pay and sex discrimination acts in the UK produced a significant narrowing of the gender wages gap (Harkness 1996; Joshi and Paci 1998; Zabalza and Tzannatos 1985).

There are parallel examples of collective action taken to secure human rights in relation to violence against women. Again the shift from a discourse stressing women's subordination by men to one of neglect of women's human rights has not led to the adoption of an individualistic political strategy. There are still collective political projects to change the law, to fund and provide places of safety, and to improve policing so as to provide better protection. So, it is important not

to assume that the articulation of a political demand through the vocabulary of rights will lead to an individualization of the claims. Rather, the notion that women's rights are human rights is an addition to the political repertoire of feminists. It is one that has much popular appeal, utilizing a political vocabulary that is very widely accepted as legitimate in many locations.

The discourse of women's rights as human rights has a powerful resonance in the new global context. While traditionally this political discourse has been associated with a liberal feminism too meek to make a difference, this is, today, an inappropriate understanding. Rather, it is a discourse that is strategically utilized by collectively organized women, in the context of developing powerful transnational political institutions. Globalization is being used creatively as a new framing for feminist politics. It is not possible to limit the horizon of feminist politics to that of local or national situations (Benhabib 1999). Although there is concern to situate feminist analysis (Haraway 1988), that situation is now not local, but global (Walby 2003). This is only partly a result of the enhanced capacities for communication across national boundaries. As importantly, it is a result of emergent global institutions and forums, which provide spaces for the development of feminist ideas and practice.

Feminist political activists have been important players in the construction of a newly globalizing world (Ramirez *et al.* 1997; Waylen 1996). New kinds of alliances, political forms, political strategies and substantive fields have been involved (Marchand 1996; Peterson and Runyan 1999) in the context of changing gendered global power relations (Mies 1986; Mitter 1986). There have been knowledge transfers around the world with lessons passed along transnational networks (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Feminists are increasingly using transnational networks to pressure 'national' Parliaments (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Emergent parts of the international level are conducive to the articulation of new political agendas and new political constituencies because they are more recently institutionalized. Those political institutions that were created later in the development of women's political organizations typically have more women friendly practices. This is illustrated by the higher proportion of women elected to the Welsh and Scottish assemblies and the European Parliament than those elected to the House of Commons.

Within the increasingly global framing of political discourse, feminists have been adept at utilizing the discourse and constitutionalized practice of equal human rights, drawing down on its universalistic logic to legitimate and concretize their claims (Peters and Wolper 1995). While the rights discourse has many well-rehearsed limitations, nonetheless it has provided a potent source of legitimation to those feminist demands that are articulated through this perspective (UNIFEM 2000a). This cuts across the contemporary privileging of difference in feminist philosophy (Braidotti 1994; Felski 1997). But many of those who practise feminist politics have found a way of working across difference while utilizing the powerful discourse of universal human rights.

The global is often mediated by institutions that are situated between the local and the global in scope (Hettne *et al.* 1999). In the context of the UK, an

important body here is that of the European Union. The understanding of politics in the UK requires an understanding of the EU since this body crucially mediates the relationship of the UK to the global. In particular, the EU is now responsible for key aspects of economic policy, such as the regulation of labour markets (Weiler 1997).

Campaigns and leverage have increasingly utilized the trans-national levels. The nation-state has been the subject of a successful pincer movement by feminists organized at both grassroots and trans-national levels. The nation-state is still important as the location of state apparatus, in particular of the implementation of the law. My argument here is that the state is no longer the origin or main focus of political activity, rather it is an object or prize along the way. Key debates, the formation of strategic political alignments, do not take place principally inside national parliaments, but rather at a range of levels. Political actors engage with states merely as one node in a wider network of relevant political forums.

There is a variety of relationships among the trans-national gendered actors, ranging from mutualism to dominance, leading to outcomes ranging from increased hostilities to hybridization. Networks may be of mutual benefit, with relatively equitable relations within them (Keck and Sikkink 1998). Or they may involve relations of compulsion, as when the EU has legal dominance over Member States in its arenas of competence (Hoskyns 1996). Further, there may be a relationship of conditionality, such as when financial aid is tied to the meeting of certain conditions, such as human rights, or the curtailment of government expenditure, which the recipient may not have otherwise prioritized (Moser 1993). The interventions of Western or global institutions may purport to be in the recipients' best interests, but prior historical relations of colonialism may call this into question (Mohanty 1991). The actual nature of specific international feminist political relations is a question for empirical analysis. The outcome of increased communications may range from increased self-definition and hostility between cultural groups, as in some fundamentalist reactions to the West (Marty and Scott 1993; Moghadam 1994), to borrowing of cultural and political forms and hybridization (Jayawardena 1986; Ramirez *et al.* 1997).

Conclusions

Feminism has changed its form in recent years. Changes in the gender regime have involved increases in economic and organizational resources as a result of increased paid employment and education for women, an increase in their organizational capacity, including increasing involvement with a variety of organizations. These changes have changed the political opportunity structure and contributed to the increase of women in formal political arenas, such as parliament and the state. Groups of feminists have re-framed key feminist projects within the powerful legitimation of the discourse of universal human rights and re-oriented political claims making towards the state. Globalization

has facilitated the development of feminist transnational networks along which ideas and political practices can spread.

Of course, there are contradictory impacts, since in some places the rhetoric of globalization has been used to legitimate the erosion of some dimensions of welfare provision in some nation-states that perceive themselves as under threat from global economic competition. However, globalization is not simply an economic process involving the development of global financial and capital markets. Rather, it is a political process as well, which has involved the restructuring of the political environment, re-positioning the nation-state in a web of trans-national networks and institutions. In this new context feminists have been adept at utilizing these networks to promote their demands.

The current framework of governmentality is too narrow to capture the range of politics which is articulated through the discourse of human rights, which includes not only governmental attempts at regulation but also projects of resistance and opposition. Rather, a broader conception of politics is required together with a multi-level analysis of the determinants of political engagement. Some aspects of feminist politics are shifting from autonomous forms of organization to increased engagement with the state. Women are just beginning to enter an era of liberal democracy.

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