

Gender and the Discursive Construction of the State: Comparisons on Finland and Britain, 1960s to 1990s

Introduction

There is a considerable amount of feminist theorising on state and gender to date. Traditional categorisations of the feminist understandings of the state tend to reduce feminist strategies in dealing with the state into two: either integration (inside the state) or autonomy (outside the state). In particular, feminist academics have focused on the impact that states have on women, gender and gender relations.¹ There is less theorising, however, on the question of how feminist understandings of the state shape feminist engagements with the state, which in turn impact on the state and shape gender relations. The aim of this article is to analyse how dominant feminist discourses about the state shape women's engagements with it. In particular, the goal is to challenge the dichotomy between the strategies of working within or outside of the state.

The article is a comparative study of Finland and Britain.² Finland represents the Nordic tradition of a woman-friendly welfare state, while Britain is a more liberal, top-down democracy. Nordic feminist understandings of the state have been dominant in Finland and the state is viewed in positive terms as a woman-friendly welfare state. In Britain, in contrast, radical and Marxist feminist ideas have been more influential and the impact of the state has been understood as negative. There is a tendency in the comparative feminist literature to represent these two cases stereotypically. At the same time as this article challenges the dichotomy between in and out of the state, it also questions the stereotypical portrayals of Finland and Britain.

In order to show dominant discourses at work, the article analyses one important feminist debate in each country. The two debates stem from the two different contexts. Whilst childcare was a key concern for Finnish feminists in the 1970s, violence against women was an important issue for feminists in Britain. The choice of the debates shows how both feminist dis-

1 Nira Yuval-Davis/Floya Anthias (eds.), *Woman – Nation – State*, London 1989; Diane Sainsbury, *Gender, Equality and the Welfare State*, Cambridge 1996.

2 The focus will be on England and the policies of Westminster. It is notable that the political traditions of Scotland, as well as the history of the feminist movement in Scotland, are different from England.

courses and feminist issues are context specific. Conversely, until the 1990s, domestic violence was a hidden problem among feminists in Finland, and childcare was not regarded as a feminist concern in Britain. Examining the debates conversely, domestic violence in Finland and childcare in Britain, is an important and interesting project, but beyond the scope of this article.³ Despite this, the broader theoretical aim in this article is to avoid the construction of a binary between the two countries and instead to emphasise diversity within them. A close examination shows that there were feminist discourses on both topics in both countries. At present feminist discourses on violence against women in Finland and on childcare in Britain are proliferating, which indicates the importance of temporal comparisons. Feminist discourses appear at different times in different contexts and are influenced by past discourses in complex ways.

1 Theoretical and Methodological Underpinnings

Theoretically, the article draws upon poststructural feminist insights. Methodologically, it conducts discourse analysis and uses some of the insights of the comparative method. Both methods are useful in avoiding some of the pitfalls of traditional feminist perspectives on the state. The feminist approaches to the state are frequently characterised by a dichotomy between integration (inside the state) and autonomy (outside the state). The categorisations are archetypes and theoretical simplifications that aim to capture the essence of the feminist state theory. In the typology, radical and Marxist feminist accounts represent a position where the state is theorised as essentially patriarchal or capitalist.⁴ Consequently, the concept of the state is rejected as an agent for progressive social transformation. Liberal and Scandinavian feminists represent the opposite strategy, where the state is recognised as a means to achieve equality. Liberal feminists argue for state legislation against sex discrimination as a way forward. Scandinavian feminism, in turn, is grounded in a historical and cultural experience of a 'woman-friendly society'.⁵

3 See, however, Johanna Kantola, *Doing Feminist Discourse Analysis: Domestic Violence in the Women-Friendly Welfare State of Finland*, in: *European Political Science*, vol. 4 (2004), no. 3, pp. 85-96.

4 Catherine Mackinnon, *Towards a Feminist Theory of the State*, London 1989; Mary McIntosh, *Mary, The State and the Oppression of Women*, in: Annette Kuhn/AnnMarie Wolpe (eds.), *Feminism and Materialism: Women and Modes of Production*, London 1978, pp. 254-289.

5 Helga Maria Hernes, *Welfare State and Woman Power*, Oslo 1987.

Marxist and radical feminist on the one hand, and liberal and Scandinavian approaches on the other, have become increasingly untenable. They have resulted in rigid essentials (of the categories of women, men and the state) and dichotomies which have unnecessarily reduced the options available for feminists in engaging with the state. Poststructural feminism aims at a more sophisticated analysis of the state. It is not the state that is too homogeneous but the feminist analyses of the state. The poststructural approaches have contributed greatly to feminist debates on the state by highlighting the differentiated nature of the state and by questioning the unity of state response.⁶ The analyses allow the complex, multidimensional and differentiated relations between the state and gender to be taken into account. They recognise that the state can be a positive as well as a negative resource for feminists and challenge the meaningfulness of the 'in' and 'out' of the state dichotomy that emerged from previous feminist work on the state.

Whilst emphasising the gendered nature of concepts such as the welfare state or citizenship, poststructural feminists also take into account national variations. Helpfully, the approaches turn away from the theorisation of relations between gender and the state in general terms, and focus, instead, on the construction of gender within specific state discourses and practices.⁷ Within a framework of diverse discourses and power relations, gender diversity and differences in women's experiences come to the fore. Poststructural feminist theorising has made it imperative for any analysis to draw attention to the gendered diversity and multiple identities of women and men. As such, poststructural feminist theory provides a starting point for this article.

Methodologically, the article employs discourse analysis to deconstruct feminist understanding of the state and its impact on feminist engagements with the state. Discourses are historically variable ways of specifying knowledge and truth. They are structured ways of knowing which are both produced by, and at the same time shapers of, culture.⁸ It follows that discourses constitute what they claim to have discovered. Therefore, feminist theorising on the state is not merely describing the object of study but is also constitutive of it. For example, feminists who argue that the state is essentially patriarchal add to its patriarchal powers by refusing to engage with it. Alternatively, arguments about the women-friendliness of states can blind feminist

6 Rosemary Pringle/Sophie Watson, *Women's Interests and the Post-Structuralist State*, in: Michele Barrett/Anne Phillips (eds.), *Destabilizing Theory*, Cambridge 1992, pp. 53-73.

7 Veronique Mottier, *Feminist Political Theory*, in: *European Political Science*, vol. 4 (2004), no. 3, pp. 79-84.

8 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* by Michel Foucault, London 1980.

analysis to key problems associated with turning to the state. Discourses are constituted by power and institutionalised as practices. Power is relational, dispersed and everywhere: there is no one central source of power and there is no outside of power relations. A problematic attempt to remain outside power relations has characterised some feminist engagements with the state, which has diverted attention away from actually engaging with the state.

Discourse analysis problematises women as subjects. The juridical formation of language and politics that represents women as 'the subject' of feminism is itself a discursive formation and an effect of a given version of representational politics. Thus, it is not enough to inquire into how women might become more fully represented in language and politics. Feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of 'women' is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.⁹ 'Real' women are as much an effect of women's discourses as men's. The dividing line between feminist discourses and patriarchal ones cannot be drawn with any a priori certainty.¹⁰

The article also employs the comparative method, which places abstract feminist theories of the state in specific contexts. While mainstream political science worries about 'concept stretching',¹¹ the fact that apparently similar concepts, such as feminism and state, have different meanings in different contexts serves as an interesting starting point for this study. Comparisons give rise to new, perhaps surprising, questions that would not be asked otherwise. On the institutional level, comparisons allow the mechanisms at work in each society to emerge more clearly, challenging what is often taken for granted. On the discursive level, comparisons reveal silences. They force the researcher to consider discourses that are dominant in one context but perhaps cannot be articulated in another. This, in turn, has the potential to expose the limits of the discursive. At best comparative research is a process, a dialogue, where new questions are posed throughout the research.¹²

The concept of mapping applied in this analysis exposes the differences between more traditional comparisons and those inspired more by discourse analysis. The purpose of mapping is not to provide a complete or coherent picture of each society, represent a found world, or produce a map in the tra-

9 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London 1990.

10 Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion*, London 1995.

11 T. Mackie/David Marsh, *The Comparative Method*, in: David Marsh and Gerry Stoker (eds.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, London 1995, pp. 173-188.

12 Linda Briskin/Mona Eliasson, *Preface: Collaboration and Comparison*, in: Linda Briskin/Mona Eliasson (eds.), *Women's Organizing and Public Policy in Canada and Sweden*, Montreal, Kingston 1999, pp. vii-xiv.

ditional sense. Rather it resists the somewhat inevitable tendency, especially in a comparative text, to produce 'ideal types' in order to contrast, for example Finland and Britain, and to set up a binary opposition between the two. Instead of a seamless picture of each country, what emerges from discourse analysis inspired comparisons is a 'map' of contradictions, tensions and interrelationships.¹³

2 Finland

The case studies focus on Finnish childcare policy and on British domestic violence policy. The two case studies have been selected because they have been the most dominant concerns of the women's movements in the two countries. Finnish feminists and the women's movement have emphasised childcare issues and ignored domestic violence, while the British feminists and women's movement have concentrated on domestic violence and seen childcare as a less pertinent concern for women. In the case studies, the focus will be first on feminist activist discourses and then on the state level discourses to see the ways in which feminist discourses have filtered through to the state level.

Four discourses have informed Finnish feminist engagements with the state on the issue of childcare: (i) working mother discourse, (ii) benign state discourse, (iii) state responsibility discourse, and (iv) choice discourse. In what follows, these will be explored among the feminists in the women's movement and in the parliament.

Association 9, formed between 1965 and 1966, was the first feminist movement in Finland to stress that childcare plays a central role in achieving gender equality. It promoted a new emancipatory concept of a woman based on the demand to combine family and work, and accepted only one model: the working mother. Association 9 actively formulated a working mother discourse which it promoted by appealing to gender equality: "Women's participation in the labour market furthers gender equality and therefore, it also furthers mutual respect between the spouses and other family members."¹⁴ For Association 9, the place of the woman was in the labour market and labour market participation was fundamental for gender equality. Equality in the other spheres, such as politics, would follow equal participation in

13 Linda Briskin, Mapping Women's Organizing in Sweden and Canada: Some Thematic Considerations, in: Linda Briskin/Mona Eliasson (eds.), *Women's Organizing and Public Policy in Canada and Sweden*, Montreal, Kingston 1999, pp. 3-47.

14 Association 9, Alustus keskusteluun ns. "äidinpalkkiosta" t. "äidinpalkasta". *Yhdistys 9:n syyskokoukseen 3.12.1967*. Ritva Majuri. (A paper prepared for a discussion on mother's wage for the Association 9 autumn meeting).

the labour market. Well organised childcare, in turn, was the only way to make women's labour market participation possible.

According to Association 9, the state was responsible for organising childcare. The movement criticised the state for its lack of a coherent policy and co-ordination on the issue in the 1960s. Also childcare in private families was to be subjected to state regulation: "Family day care has so far been outside the regulation of social services. This is extremely unfortunate, especially when we know the problems that are associated with private childcare. [...] Organised family day care has to be the responsibility of municipalities. The goal should be that all children are given a safe and monitored childcare place."¹⁵

Association 9 articulated a benign state discourse, where the state was a vehicle for achieving equality and women could turn to the state with their demands. Here Association 9's arguments resembled liberal feminist arguments about the state, and, indeed, the activists were influenced by the writings of Betty Friedan, a leading liberal feminist. They considered the state to be in the wrong hands, but in the hands of the radicals it would become an active defender of equal rights. Patriarchy was associated with the society rather than with the state. The state became a benevolent instrument for turning against patriarchy, both private patriarchy in the family and public patriarchy in society.¹⁶

According to Association 9, the responsibility for organising childcare lay with the state, a discourse which is labelled here the state responsibility discourse: "The starting point for the new family policy is that in a modern industrialised society it is not for the benefit of the nation if parents alone are responsible for the education and upbringing of the children. Similarly, as the society has taken the responsibility for securing income and living for elderly and sick people, it has to participate in taking care of the generation which is growing up."¹⁷ It was not families alone, and certainly not women alone, who were responsible for childcare, but also the state had to actively participate in the provision of childcare. Association 9 made no distinction between the concepts 'state' and 'society' but used them interchangeably, which is typical for the Nordic political discourses in general.¹⁸

15 Association 9, Lasten päivähoidon raportti, 21.2.1967. (A Report on child day care).

16 Anne Maria Holli, Why Politics: Reflections on the Finnish Equality Movement Association 9, in: Marja Keränen, (ed.), Finnish Undemocracy, Helsinki 1990, pp. 69-88.

17 Association 9, Yhdistys 9: kannanotto lapsenhoitolisän puolesta. Sosiaaliministeri Juho Partaselle. 9.11.1969/LR/hk. (Association 9's statement on childcare benefits).

18 Pauli Kettunen, Mitä yhteiskunta tekee Pohjoismaissa? In: Tiede & Edistys vol. 4 (2001), pp. 257-269. (What does the society do in the Nordic countries?)

The previous quote also illustrates that Association 9 had more confidence in the public sector in providing childcare than in the private sector. Privately organised childcare was considered dubious and had to be closely monitored by the state. The impartial and 'good' state set the standards, the rules and the regulations for all childcare arrangements. Despite recognising the need and the usefulness of the family day care, the movement stressed that 'organised family day care must not thwart the establishment of new municipal kindergartens'. The status of the persons employed in family day care, mostly women, was to be made 'as professional as possible, for example, they could be employed by the municipality'.¹⁹

Nevertheless, the views on childcare were deeply polarised in Finland. The debates were also shaped by a competing discourse, the choice discourse. For the women's sections of the parties on the right, Centre Party and National Coalition Party, women were primarily mothers, not workers. For these women, the family not the state was responsible for care.²⁰ The choice discourse was most evident in the support of the right-wing party's female members for the mother's wage. They argued that it would protect the emotional bond between the mother and the child and that child welfare was best realised at home. Mother's wage would also be a signal of the way the society appreciated the work done by mothers. And finally, practically, it would be cheaper to support childcare at home than in municipal kindergartens.²¹

In conclusion to the section on early feminist discourses, there was an emerging consensus among some women about childcare and the state in Finland. Association 9, the Committee on the Status of Women, the Council for Equality, and the women's sections of the left-wing parties all promoted the working mother and state responsibility discourses. They also argued that municipal childcare was of good quality and good for the children. However, the positions on childcare were still polarised between the female activists on both sides of the political spectrum. Mother's wage in particular was being debated heatedly and the women in the right-wing parties supported it strongly. For them, childcare was still the responsibility of the family and the primary place for mothers was at home.

In the 1980s, the two approaches were institutionalised in two childcare systems supported by the state: the municipal day care system and the Home

19 Association 9, Lasten päivähoiton raportti (note 15), p. 9.

20 Riitta Alanen, Päivähoidon yhteyksistä naisen asemaan ja perheeseen – Päivähoitokeskustelun piirteitä 1970-luvun Suomessa. Sosiaalipolitiikan pro gradu-tutkielma, Helsingin yliopisto, University of Helsinki 1981. (The implications of childcare arrangements to women's position and family – Characteristics of the childcare debates in 1970s Finland).

21 Alanen, Päivähoidon (note 20), p. 28.

Care Allowance, which offered parents the choice for either being paid to take care of the child at home, to pay someone else to come and take care of the child, or to use the municipal childcare. In 1991, it became the duty of municipalities to ensure that all children under the age of seven were guaranteed a place in a kindergarten. The law was to come into being in August 1995. In addition, the Home Care Allowance was extended from all parents of children under three to include parents of children under the age of four. This was scheduled to become law at the beginning of 1993 but was later delayed until 1995.

In 1994, a heated debate took place in the parliament under the right wing government. The government proposal aimed to delay both the law on municipal childcare and the Home Care Allowance. The argument for the delay was financial: it would save money for the state and the municipalities. Unemployment had reached a 20 percent peak and there were cuts in all sectors of the welfare state. The panic surrounding the increasing national debt created a consensus that it was legitimate and necessary to cut down welfare spending in all sectors. Also, the government argued that as a result of the dramatic increase in unemployment the need for childcare places had declined and the municipalities were able to deal with the demand without a change in the legislation.

The working mother discourse, which had not been emerging until the beginning of 1970s, was by 1994 the dominant discourse in Finland. Childcare was generally accepted as pivotal in enabling women's labour market participation. This is seen for example in the Social Affairs and Health Committee's report which criticised the government proposal to delay the childcare act.²² The report argued that childcare had a great meaning, first, for the social skills of the child and, second, for the parents' ability to work: "Childcare, in addition to free meals at school, is perhaps the most important factor in influencing equality in the labour market because the responsibility for care still lies with the mother. Childcare gives both parents the chance to work. Municipal childcare is also a safe care method. The work is done by qualified personnel and care is guided and balanced."²³

22 Report number 47, STVHE211.M94. Committee's chairman was Jouko Skinnari (SDP), vice chairman Anneli Taina (National Coalition Party). 14 out of 17 members of the Committee were women. The Social Affairs and Health Committee is responsible for handling matters related to social services and healthcare, social insurance, pension legislation, alcohol and temperance work, occupational and environmental healthcare. The committee also reviews the annual report on substance abuse and the annual report of the Commissioners of the Social Insurance Institution.

23 STVHE211.M94.

The parliamentary cross party Women's Network, in particular, drew on the working mothers discourse and was very active in the debate.²⁴ The network, which had members from all political parties, both left and right, was able to agree on the importance of the issue and to formulate a common position on it. The Women's Network wrote an open letter to the parliament on 15 December 1994, which was read out aloud in the parliamentary session by Outi Ojala (Left-Wing Alliance). The Women's Network was ready to accept a delay in the extension of the Home Care Allowance as long as there were no delays to the extension of the statutory right for municipal childcare for all children under the age of seven.

The MPs from both left and right appealed to the working mother discourse in the parliamentary debate. The recession had increased women's unemployment but it had not challenged the norm of the working mother. Therefore, many MPs who supported the extension of childcare rights to all children under the age of seven based their arguments on the fact that proper childcare would decrease women's unemployment: "In research done in 1991, 69 per cent of under seven year old children's mothers were working and 55 percent of under three year old children's parents. Parents', specifically women's, participation in the labour market would be higher, if childcare arrangements were better." (Sinikka Hurskainen, Social Democratic Party, 17 December 1994) Maija Perho-Santala from the National Coalition Party argued similarly: "In my opinion, it is important to enact the law. Then the municipalities are not indirectly given the right to bring down the existing service structures. What has already been constructed in the municipalities has to be maintained for many reasons, not least, because childcare services are the most central prerequisite for the equality of working women." (Maija Perho-Santala, National Coalition Party, 4 October 1994) Again, as was evident already in the Association 9 statements, women's labour force participation is closely linked to gender equality in other spheres of life.

24 The Women's Network of the Finnish parliament was founded in 1991 when the biggest amount of female MPs ever, 77 all together, (38.5 percent – also a world record at the time) were elected to the parliament, 14 more than in the previous elections. The aim of the network is to influence legislation. It acts across party lines and has no official tasks. It is an informal and voluntary discussion forum and all its decisions are based on consensus. The core of the network consists of MPs from both government and opposition parties. One of the achievements of the network has been to reduce the late night parliamentary sessions. Also, Leena Harkimo (National Coalition Party), the current chairperson, argues that one of the most significant achievements of the network was exactly this debate on childcare: managing to bring forward the enforcement of the childcare act (Helsingin Sanomat 10 October 2001).

The state responsibility discourse was well established by 1994 and all MPs shared the view that the state carried a big part of the responsibility for childcare. In this state responsibility discourse, the state, not the family, was responsible for care arrangements. Furthermore, it was the state's responsibility to realise the equal opportunities for care for all children (see below for a discussion on regional inequalities). For example, Eva Biaudet from the Swedish People's Party²⁵ argued: "In my opinion, if children's equality is not realised, the responsibility lies with the state. The state enacts laws, so that we can protect the realisation of equality. If the municipalities would realise fully their responsibility, we would not, of course, have this problem. But currently children are in an unequal position depending on where they live." (17 December 1994) Therefore, in the Finnish parliament, the state and state led childcare were regarded to have positive and necessary functions in realising the equality between children from different regions.

Whilst in 1973 some sections of the society were still suspicious about the quality of the municipal childcare, in 1994, public childcare was universally seen as good quality childcare: "In a Swedish research, which is the most extensive research done in this field, and which researched children from birth until the age of sixteen, the conclusion was that the children, who had been in municipal childcare, were the best ones at school, particularly so that those, who had gone to the kindergarten under the age of one, did especially well. The worst performance at school was by those who had been at home all the time before going to school." (Tuulikki Hämäläinen, SDP, 20 December 1994) This view was shared in stronger and weaker versions across the political spectrum.

The earlier benign state discourse had been consolidated as a women-friendly welfare state discourse, which was widely shared in Finland.²⁶ Childcare, in turn, was considered to be the key to the Nordic women

25 The Swedish People's Party is the Finnish Swedish people's party in Finland. Finland has a 5 percent Swedish speaking minority and the support for the party has traditionally been around 5 percent. It has been an important coalition government partner in post-war Finland. For example, Eva Biaudet was appointed Social Affairs and Health minister in 1999.

26 For feminist analyses, see for example, Liisa Rantalaiho, Sukupuolisopimus ja Suomen malli, in: Anneli Anttonen et. al. (eds.), Naisten hyvinvointivaltio, Tampere 1994, pp. 9-30. (Gender contract and the Finnish model, in: Women's welfare state); Raija Julkunen/Liisa Rantalaiho (eds.), Hyvinvointivaltion sukupuolijärjestelmä, Department of Social Policy, University of Jyväskylä, working papers number 56/1989. (The gender system of the welfare state); Raija Julkunen, Suomalainen sukupuolimalli – 1960-luku käänteenä (The Finnish gender contract – 1960s as a turning point), in: Anneli Anttonen et. al. (eds.), Naisten hyvinvointivaltio, Tampere 1994, pp. 179-202.

friendly social democracy. For example, Erkki Tuomioja (SDP) argued: "In the Social Democratic Parliamentary Group, we have all, regardless of our gender, held to the point that the childcare act and the services that it requires are the basic service of any welfare society, and we cannot question this even at the times of difficult economic decisions and cuts in the public expenditure." (17 December 1994)

Finland was about to join the European Union when the debate took place, which was reflected in the arguments. The MPs understood childcare issues as fundamental to the Finnish identity as a woman friendly welfare state: "To a great extent now, when after a few weeks we become members of the European Union, the question is about equality, the question is about our basic pillars: childcare, free school meals, workplace meals, issues, that we are proudly taking with the other Nordic countries to the EU, and even before we become members, we'd be slowing down and destroying these." (Virpa Puisto, SDP, 17 December 1994) According to this discourse, women had a vital interest in the childcare system and childcare was seen as an issue which united all women. This was also seen in the co-operation and consensus that enabled the cross party Women's Network to function and to make a shared decision about a policy recommendation on childcare.

In the 1973 parliamentary debate, the feminist discourses on working mothers and state responsibility for childcare were opposed by more conservative views on mothers' place at home and families' responsibility for childcare. In 1994, no one suggested that the mothers' place would be at home or that the family alone should take care of the children. Instead, the government appealed to an economic reality to counter the demands for childcare. For example, Martti Tiuri (National Coalition Party) claimed: "The expenses of the state are 70 billion bigger than its income. If we go on like this, soon we can't guarantee any of these [welfare services] because Finland is given no more loans." (20 December 1994) Vesa Laukkanen (Christian Democratic League) argued: "The issue is so that market forces have a determining role in this society. Governments are totally subjected to the market forces. Thus it does not matter who is in the government." (4 October 1994)

During this period a right-wing coalition government consisting of the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party was in power. The policies of the government were characterised by a constant need to save in all sectors in order to bring Finland out of the recession. Another actor, which opposed the legislation, was the Central Association for the Local and Regional Authorities in Finland. Especially the municipalities who had failed to increase municipal childcare places (Espoo and Vantaa in South Finland) made loud

complaints. The municipalities argued that the legislation was attacking their self-governmental rights.

The choice discourse played an important role in the parliamentary debate. In the end, it divided the female MPs of the Women's Network and resulted in a breakdown of the consensus among the women. The parliamentary debate illustrates the depth of the division between the municipal childcare and Home Care Allowance arrangements, which were constructed as two opposing strategies (see also Anttonen 1999). The female MPs of the right wing parties, who endorsed the choice discourse, did not want to accept that the two would be developed separately and the municipal childcare arrangements would be prioritised, as was suggested by the Women's Network initially.

The women from the Centre Party and the parties affiliated to it (for example the Agrarian Party SMP) appealed strongly to the choice discourse: "In my opinion, equality means that the families should have the freedom to choose whether children are taken to municipal day care or if they are given the possibility for Home Care Allowance." (Lea Mäkipää, SMP, 17 December 1994) And: "The starting point for the Centre Party has been that the municipalities have to take care of their responsibilities, the ones that have been set for them, and that on the other hand childcare has to be developed on the basis of freedom of choice." (Maria Kaisa Aula, Centre Party, 17 December 1994)

The choice discourse was closely related to the regional inequalities. In the north/south divide, the Centre Party represented the farmers of North Finland who did not benefit from the municipal childcare network to the same extent as families in the cities. The Home Care Allowance was stigmatised as a farmers' welfare benefit. The Centre Party MPs constantly referred to the fact that it was also widely used by small income families in South Finland.

The coalition government of the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party compromised on the issue and proposed that both the childcare act and the Home Care Allowance come into effect on 1.1.1996 (during the next government) instead of being delayed until autumn 1997. The Centre Party women opted for this compromise because it did not separate the Home Care Allowance from municipal childcare arrangements. Also the National Coalition Party women voted for the new compromise. The women on the left (Green Party, Left-Wing Alliance, SDP) were furious. During the third round of the parliamentary debate, they suggested that the whole government proposal should be rejected. They saw this as the only way to ensure that the childcare act would come into force already in the autumn of 1995. In the

final vote, 109 votes were cast for the government compromise and 71 against it.

The debate illustrates the discourses, which construct the Finnish state as women-friendly and accessible for women, at operation. The state has been defined as a legitimate actor in questions of gender equality and the discourses have made it possible for the Finnish feminists to engage with the state and to become part of its structures. The discursive construction coincides with that of the early women's movement, Association 9. Women from all parties shared the first discourse that childcare was the responsibility of the state and, therefore, the responsibility for care did not lie with the parents alone. Childcare services were explained to be the backbone of the Finnish welfare society and crucial for equality between women and men. However, the choice discourse shows the existence of divisions and conflicts among women. The female MPs in the parties on the right provided alternative understandings of the relationship between the state and childcare arrangement and placed more emphasis on private care at home.

3 Britain

Unlike in Finland, in Britain, violence against women became a key concern for some parts of the women's movement from the 1970s onwards. Three discourses can be discerned from the British feminist debates on violence against women: (i) universal domestic violence discourse, (ii) autonomy discourse, and (iii) crime discourse. The British refuge movement, Women's Aid, grew out of and drew upon radical feminist ideas. It became the most prominent actor of the women's movement on the issue of domestic violence and started setting up a network of refuges for battered women in the 1970s. Women's Aid articulated a universal domestic violence discourse. In this discourse, any woman could experience domestic violence – it was not a problem of working class families or alcoholic men only: "Until men no longer see women as their possessions, but as people with equal status and rights, women will always be beaten. We are fighting not only to stop battering, but also to change the position of women in our violent society."²⁷ Women's Aid's feminist explanation saw domestic violence as a reflection of unequal power relations both in society and in personal relationships, and as a symptom of the more general male violence and domination over women.²⁸ In other words, for Women's Aid, domestic violence was a serious

27 National Women's Aid Federation, *Women! You Don't Have to Put Up with Being Battered: How to Get an Injunction*, London, Manchester 1978.

28 Gill Hague Ellen Malos, *Domestic Violence: Action For Change*, Bristol, Cheltenham 1993.

societal problem and its root causes could be tackled only by making the general position of women in society better.²⁹

In relation to the state, these feminists drew upon an autonomy discourse that was underpinned by distrust towards the state as an institution and a belief in the autonomy of the women's movement. Autonomy from the state was important in order to maintain and discover feminist ways of working. Women were made strong through self-help and through sharing experiences with other women in similar life situations.³⁰ Women's Aid was both for women and run by women, and its feminism was inspired by a 'women only' strategy. Women were treated not as victims but as survivors in order to both challenge victim-blame and to make visible women's resistance strategies. The organisation was non-hierarchical and it was based on democratic functioning. Conflict was dealt with collectively and distinctions between helper and helped were overturned. In the autonomy discourse, every engagement with the state had its price. For example a turn to the state might result in compromising on societal critique and feminist practice.³¹

Over time, a third discourse, a crime discourse, emerged as an important feminist strategy to highlight the seriousness of domestic violence. The crime discourse articulated domestic violence as a serious crime that equalled beatings by strangers on the street. The aim of the crime discourse was to push for more police intervention and involvement in domestic violence cases: "When a man is found guilty of domestic assault, he should receive an effective sanction which recognises domestic violence as a serious crime."³² The discourse was based on the recognition that the police was the first institution to which most women in need turned to, but the police tended to refuse to get involved in cases of domestic violence.³³ The discourse was not so prominent in the early statements of Women's Aid's but became more so towards the end of 1980s and 1990s. The discourse coincided with

29 Anna Coote/Tess Gill (with Jo Richardson), *Battered Women and the Law*, London 1977; Angela Weir, *Battered Women: Some Perspectives and Problems*, in: Marjorie Mayo (ed.), *Women in the Community*, London 1977, pp. 109-120.

30 National Women's Aid Federation, *Battered Women, Refuges and Women's Aid*, 1977.

31 Hilary Rose, *Women's Refuges: Creating New Forms of Welfare?*, in: Clare Unger-son (ed.), *Women and Social Policy: A Reader*, London 1985, pp. 243-259.

32 Women's Aid Federation England, *Written Evidence to the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee Inquiry into Domestic Violence*, Bristol 1992.

33 Jalna Hanmer/Jill Radford/Elizabeth A. Stanko, *Policing, Men's Violence: An Introduction*, in: Jalna Hanmer/Jill Radford/Elizabeth A. Stanko (eds.), *Women, Policing and Male Violence: International Perspectives*, London, New York 1989, pp. 1-12.

Conservative governments' rhetoric to be tough on crime and was therefore an important strategy to push for recognition of the issue and for police action.

In Britain, the discourses on domestic violence were diverse. Competing discourses explained domestic violence in terms of individual pathology and emphasised that also women were violent.³⁴ The parliamentary debates in the 1970s demonstrate that there was deep unease among Conservative male MPs about the appropriate means to deal with domestic violence.³⁵ They were particularly worried about the role of the police in surpassing the public/private distinction and intervening in 'domestic disputes'. They argued that the police should respect the unity of the family, and questioned whether it was justified to increase the burden on the police. Courts, in turn, stressed men's property rights. These ideas are extremely important in explaining resistance to feminist discourses.

Diversity existed also within feminists. Black feminist theorising highlighted black women's different experience of 'universal' domestic violence.³⁶ Women's Aid in England had to confront questions about the oppressive racist patriarchal state. The black feminist discourses about the state and state policies were often more radical than Women's Aid's discourses. For instance, in the 1980s, the Southall Black Sisters systematically rejected multi-agency approaches, which were becoming increasingly popular in dealing with domestic violence and required voluntary sector collaboration with different state sectors. They argued that the multi-agency approach "serves to extend the net of corporate policing".³⁷ Because of the different experiences black women had when dealing with domestic violence and their deep distrust towards the police, the feminist discourses of empowerment and autonomy had special value for black feminists. Also non-feminist actors, such as the Women's National Commission, Victim Support, the Home Office, and the Law Commission, started to contribute to the debates. Their arguments, in turn, impacted upon and shaped Women's Aid's feminist discourses.

Despite its distrust towards the state as a patriarchal institution, Women's Aid's autonomy discourse was always informed by a pragmatic need to turn to the state for support. In the 1970s, Women's Aid campaigned for domes-

34 For a classification of different explanations see Hague/Malos, *Domestic Violence* (note 28).

35 See for example the debate in the House of Commons 13 February 1976.

36 Southall Black Sisters, *Two Struggles: Challenging Male Violence and the Police*, in: Christina Dunhill (ed.), *The Boys in Blue: Women's Challenge to the Police*, London 1989, pp. 38-44.

37 Southall Black Sisters, *Two Struggles*, p. 44.

tic violence legislation and demanded state recognition of domestic violence as a crime. In 1976, the Domestic Violence and Matrimonial Proceedings Act (1976) was passed. The Act permitted non-molestation and exclusion injunctions independent of any other proceedings before the court, and without the need to undertake such proceedings. Also, powers of arrest could be attached to any order thus ensuring that the police had responsibility should the order be breached.³⁸ Disappointingly for feminists and other campaigners, the judiciary in general favoured a restrictive interpretation of the Act which served to undermine much of its political improvements and thereby hardened feminist attitudes towards the state in Britain.

The de-radicalisation of the legislation had a significant impact on feminist discourses on domestic violence and the state. Feminists in academia not only endorsed Women's Aid's discourses on domestic violence and the state but also radicalised them and provided academic research and theories to back up the arguments. Liz Kelly employed the concept of the *continuum of sexual violence* which emphasised that sexual violence existed in most women's lives and only the form sexual violence took, how women defined events and the impact of the events on them at the time and over time varied.³⁹ Feminist academics confirmed the importance of autonomy and empowerment as strategies to deal with domestic violence and warned against tokenistic and divisive reforms: "In the context of demanding reforms from the police, it is essential to recognise that we are dealing with an institution known for its sexism, racism and 'cult of masculinity'".⁴⁰

The autonomy discourse had its cost in Britain. The refuge network had been established in accordance with the ideas of empowerment and autonomy, which also came to mean that they received no national funding and faced severe funding problems. Many commentators described how physical conditions in refuge centres 'vary between shabby or scruffy'⁴¹ and there were great regional variations. This became an unresolved, core campaigning issue for Women's Aid in the 1980s and 1990s. Police practice was another target and here some positive changes were achieved with the Home

38 Susan Maidment, *Domestic Violence and the Law: The 1976 Act and its Aftermath*, in: Norman Johnson (ed.), *Marital Violence*, London 1985, pp. 4-26; Kathryn McCann, *Battered Women and the Law: The Limits of the Legislation*, in: Julia Brophy/Carol Smart (eds.), *Women-In-Law: Explorations in Law, Family and Sexuality*, London 1985.

39 Liz Kelly, *The Continuum of Sexual Violence*, in: Jalna Hanmer/Mary Maynard (eds.), *Women, Violence and Social Control*, London 1987, pp. 46-60.

40 Hanmer/Radford/Stanko, *Policing* (note 33), p. 11.

41 Rose, *Women's Refuges* (note 31), p. 254.

Office issuing guidelines for better practice.⁴² Multi-agency work, where different bodies work together to confront domestic violence, became the key government approach to domestic violence in the 1990s. It grew out of the fact that domestic violence was not the responsibility of any particular statutory agency or government department, but could be the responsibility of many, or, as feminists pointed out, none at all.⁴³ Multi-agency approaches received a cautious welcome from some feminists and were rejected by others.⁴⁴

How are the feminist discourses about domestic violence and state played out in the parliament? What are the continuities and the differences between the feminists' and the parliamentarians' discourses? The women's movement endorsed the autonomy discourse but fought to secure more funding from the government for the refuge centres and campaigned for better police practice. Here the focus will be on one parliamentary debate that took place in July 1993. The long Conservative rule had had a lasting impact on British politics. The rule had been particularly detrimental for feminist struggles.⁴⁵

The 1993 parliamentary debate on domestic violence followed the publishing of the Home Affairs Select Committee's inquiry into domestic violence 1993. The Home Affairs Select Committee consisted of six Conservative and four Labour members and it made 42 specific recommendations for tackling domestic violence in society. The committee had consulted Victim's Support and the Women's Aid Federations from different parts of the country. In what was seen as an exceptional process, the members from the two main parties had reached a unanimous conclusion about the seriousness of the problem and the need to tackle it. Therefore, the government's half-hearted response was particularly disappointing.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the feminist universal domestic violence discourse had had an impact on MP's statements in parliament. Like Women's Aid, the government portrayed domestic violence as a universal problem, which was not restricted to certain social groups or classes only: "Domestic violence is not limited to any particular social group or class, but, as has already been said, occurs across the social spectrum." (The Minister of State, Home Office, David Maclean, Conservative Party, 29

42 Home Office, Domestic Violence, Home Office Circular No. 60, London 1990.

43 Ellen Malos, *Supping with the Devil?: Multi-Agency Initiatives on Domestic Violence*, in: Jill Radford/Melissa Friedbergand/Lynne Harné (eds.), *Women, Violence and Strategies for Action*, Buckingham, Philadelphia 2000, pp. 120-135.

44 Compare Malos, *Supping* (note 43); Southall Black Sisters, *Two Struggles* (note 36).

45 Joni Lovenduski/Vicky Randall, *Contemporary Feminist Politics: Women and Power in Britain*, Oxford 1993.

March 1995) To clarify this had been one of the key feminist aims and the discourse had clearly filtered through to the parliamentary debates.

Although all the MPs in the main parties agreed upon the seriousness of the issue, there were significant differences in explaining its causes. The MPs on the left related domestic violence to the wider socio-economic frame and the female Labour MPs shared the feminist understanding of domestic violence as a symptom of male dominance over women: "Domestic violence is a part of a wider social problem of womens' unequal position in society. Too often still, women are dependent on men socially and economically. Attempts by women to assert their independence and leave the marital home when necessary are constrained by that basic inequality." (Joan Ruddock, Labour MP for Lewisham, Deptford, 21 July 1993) The female MPs acknowledged the institutionalised dependency relations between men and women and the ways in which these related to domestic violence.

The Conservative male MPs, in contrast, saw domestic violence as a moral problem resulting from alcoholism, "wrong kind of men" and women who were unable to leave their partners: "There are many cases where a woman, probably unwisely, has taken a man in or formed a liaison with him, and then discovered to her cost that he is a violent type because of drink, or is naturally violent, she then has the utmost difficulty in getting rid of him." (Dudley Smith, MP for Warwick and Leamington, 21 July 1993) These interpretations on the causes of domestic violence drew upon ideas about men as 'naturally violent' and were in direct contrast to feminist discourses. The emphasis was placed on individuals, in contrast to societal structures, and the woman was found responsible for being in a violent relationship.

The second feminist discourse identified above was the autonomy discourse, which framed the ways that domestic violence should be dealt with. The funding problem that related to the autonomous status of the refugees was recognised in the parliament: "As the report points out, and as has already been said, the present number of refuge places is less than one third of the number, recommended as an initial target by the Select Committee on Violence in the Family which reported in 1975, of one family place per 10,000 of the population." (Barbara Roche, Labour MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, 21 July 1993)

The Committee's report, the government and the MPs shared the view that the refugees were in funding crisis. However, the party divisions emerged early on in the debate, with the Conservative government resisting far-reaching commitments: "The whole thrust of the Government's response is that all funding issues are for local authorities. At the end of the day, local authorities are largely funded by the Government, so there must be role for

central government finance. If the Government are putting all this emphasis on local authorities, why cannot we have ring-fenced money specifically for refuges?" (Malcolm Chisholm, Edinburgh, Leith, 21 July 1993) Also, Baroness Cumberlege (Conservative, House of Lords) was quoted as stating when asked whether the Government had any plans to encourage the provision and funding of women's refuges: "The provision of funding for women's refuges is primarily a matter for local agencies."⁴⁶

Labour MPs, by contrast, advocated a bigger role for the state in solving the funding crisis and emphasised government responsibility on the issue: "Local authorities cannot be expected to bear the entire financial burden. It is clearly the responsibility of central Government to put resources into a network of women's refuges." (Joan Ruddock, Labour MP for Lewisham, Deptford, 21 July 1993)

The committee report not only recognised the lack of funding but also the lack of both a central body and a co-ordinated response to domestic violence. Accordingly, the Committee recommended in the report mentioned above that "the first priority of Government action on domestic violence should be the establishment of a central, co-ordinated policy for refuge provision throughout the country". This could also be seen in the Labour MPs statements: "Local authorities are responsible for refuges, of which there are very few. [...] Part of the problem is the fact that a range of Departments must deal with domestic violence." (Liz Lynne, MP for Rochdale, 21 July 1993) And: "We should have a proper refuge network throughout the country, centrally co-ordinated and funded by the Government." (Harry Cohen, MP for Leyton 21 July 1993). The lack of central authority dealing with domestic violence is reflected in the lack of central legislation: "The law is spread among different Acts of Parliament [...] That means that a woman has to deal with a maze of legislation." (Jean Corston, Labour MP for Bristol East 21 July 1993)

Despite the Labour MPs' attempts to highlight the importance of a co-ordinated national policy on domestic violence, the Conservative government remained resistant and emphasised the role of local actors: "However, in principle we maintain the view that effective local support services, including refuges, are best provided at local level. Such provision can be based on an assessment of local needs and take into account the wider local response. The Government have a role in encouraging local action and in disseminating good practice." (Minister of State, Home Office, David Maclean, Conservative Party, 21 July 1993)

46 Official report, House of Lords, 29 April 1993, quoted by Barbara Roche, Labour MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, 21 July 1993

The Conservative government was willing to recognise only a very limited role for the state in confronting domestic violence. The focus on funding and a co-ordinated government response reflect the parameters of legitimate state action. For Labour MPs, funding and co-ordination were the issues that the state could associate with and the Labour MPs shared this frame with the women's movement. For Conservative MPs, the role of the state was even more restricted, but it could be regarded as reflecting the Women's Aid's concern for autonomy from the state.

The parliamentary debate was dominated by the crime discourse, which was shared by the MPs from all parties. The police were not required separately to identify domestic violence incidents in their statistical returns to the Home Office or to record the relationship between victim and offender. This was seen as a major problem requiring remedy by the parliament in the form of legislative change: "Domestic violence is a crime – it is that message that we have to get across. We have to change the culture of our society from an early stage." (Barbara Roche, Labour MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, 21 July 1993) And: "Of all crimes, it is perhaps the hardest for the Government to tackle. We can put more police on the streets, try to make houses burglar proof, and encourage neighbourhood watch schemes, but none of that will protect a woman or a child from domestic violence." (Ray Michie, MP for Argyll and Bute, 29 March 1995) This discourse was shared by MPs from both political left and political right. In addition, Women's Aid articulated the crime discourse, and it was an important tool for highlighting the seriousness of the issue. Other feminists cautioned that to use the crime discourse represented an attempt to locate feminist definitions into man-made legal categories.⁴⁷ Feminist definitions should rather be based on women's experience and they should not necessarily be forced into the state discourse on crime.

Diversity and the different concerns and experiences that black and ethnic minority women encountered when experiencing domestic violence did not occupy a prominent position in the parliamentary debate. The specific problems of immigrant women were referred to and kept on the agenda by female Labour MPs but they did not receive government attention.

In conclusion, the government's response to the progressive Home Affairs Committee's report was disappointing. Feminist discourses had informed the work of the Committee and were reflected in some of its recommendations. In parliament, feminist discourses were mainly employed by

47 Jill Radford/Elizabeth Stanko, *Violence Against Women and Children: The Contradictions of Crime Control Under Patriarchy*, in: Marianne Hester/Liz Kelly/Jill Radford (eds.), *Violence and Male Power*, Buckingham, Philadelphia 1996, here 68f.

female MPs in the Labour Party. These discourses had less impact on the work of the government. Two discourses, the universal domestic violence discourse and the crime discourse, had filtered through to the parliamentary debate. All MPs taking part in the debate recognised domestic violence as a prevalent and serious crime. However, unlike feminists, many MPs placed the emphasis on the individual and not on the societal structures when explaining the causes of domestic violence.

The combination of emphasising the crime discourse but downplaying the wider social inequalities impacted upon the ways in which solutions to the problem were sought. The government did not react to the arguments that the general position of women in the society needed to be made better and their economic, social and political rights secured. Instead, they emphasised in a public awareness campaign that domestic violence was a crime and urged the police to act against it.⁴⁸ Furthermore, arguments about scarce resources resulted in the outcome whereby the refuges continued to receive inadequate funding. As a consequence of the traditionally strong position of the feminist autonomy discourse, it was relatively easy for the government to refuse to take full responsibility for funding the refuge network. Despite the ministerial working group, national co-ordination of domestic violence policy remained patchy and the government placed its rhetorical emphasis on the perceived need to act on a local level.

4 Conclusion

The state is heterogeneous and often contradictory in its processes and policies. This article has discussed two different feminist discourses about the state, one positive and the other negative, and their consequences for feminist engagements with the state. The article has not attempted to draw causal links between discourses and state institutions, but suggests that discourses set powerful parameters for feminist and state actions.

In Finland, Association 9's discourse on the state was very positive: the state was seen as the guarantor of equality. The movement was integrated into the state structures at the beginning of 1970s. Its discourses on childcare were institutionalised into the woman-friendly welfare state policies. The

48 The government established a ministerial working group to co-ordinate the government response to domestic violence, which was led by the Home Office. It launched a public awareness campaign in October 1994 with the slogan "Domestic Violence is a Crime – Don't Stand for It". The campaign consisted of 500 000 guidance leaflets and 100 000 indoor posters that were distributed to voluntary and statutory agencies. A short public information film was shown in 350 cinemas for a period of six weeks.

continuities between the parliamentarians' and the feminist discourses on the beneficial nature of state responsibility for childcare and the woman-friendly welfare state were clear. However, also a second approach existed in Finland exemplified by the choice discourse. The choice discourse emphasised the parents' right to stay at home and look after their children. It represented a competing discourse that placed limits on government interference.

The British women's movement in general and Women's Aid in particular valued their perceived autonomy and attempted to stay out of the state. A negative construction of the state informed the movement's attempt to remain outside. However, the analysis in this article shows that the autonomy discourse was compromised and Women's Aid depended on the state for funding, police action and legislative changes. The state response was positive in some areas, such as a national campaign against domestic violence in 1995 and increase in state funding for the refuges. Some feminist discourses, such as the crime discourse and the universal domestic violence discourse, had filtered through to the debates in parliament.

The analysis, therefore, challenges accounts where Finland is thought to represent an uncontroversial integrationist feminist strategy (inside the state) and Britain an autonomous strategy (outside the state). The choice discourse debate illustrates that the idea of functioning outside the state is also a powerful one in Finland. The crime discourse, in turn, points to the importance of the idea of working inside the state in Britain. Furthermore, the discussion in this article has challenged the whole dichotomy between the in- and out of state approach. The article has shown that being 'inside' makes 'outside' possible, as in the case of the Finnish Home Care Allowance, which allows parents to stay at home to look after their children. Similarly, being outside is illusionary as the case of Britain demonstrates.

Such comparisons suggest that it is important not to create ideal types or stereotypical accounts of Finland and Britain, where Finland represents pro-state and Britain anti-state strategies. Unfortunately there has been no space in this article to concentrate on differences within states and to point to diversity within countries. Such analysis would be important to reveal the differences and discontinuities within state policies in different fields and their differentiated impact upon women. However, this article does conclude that rather than assuming a universal analysis of the state, there is a need to place analyses within specific contexts. The analysis indicates the benefits for feminist analyses of turning away from the theorisation of relations between gender and state in general terms and focusing instead on constructions within specific state discourses and practices.