



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN SOCIAL SCIENCE
SOCIOLOGY, ECONOMICS & POLITICAL SCIENCE
Volume12 Issue 10 Version 1.0 Year 2012
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Feminist Conceptualisations of the State: One Major Critical Paradigm

By Dr. Elcin Kurbanoglu

Abstract - This paper presents a literature review of liberal feminist, Marxist feminist, radical feminist, socialist feminist, all the “other”, i.e. lesbian feminist, ecofeminist, race and ethnicity based feminist and Third World feminist, and postmodern feminist accounts of the state. Keeping in mind the fact that feminism, as listed under the contemporary Western critical paradigm, carries the potential to transform the state, the paper ends with a brief overview of the possible inheritances of the above mentioned feminisms. Choosing to use gender inequality rather than patriarchy as an all-encompassing phrase, the paper concludes that in order to develop a common sense on the relationship between the state(s), the market and the (civil) society, finding historical data that are not contaminated by malestream knowledge remains at the top of the agenda of the feminist political struggle.

Keywords : Nation-state, feminist theories, gender inequality, the market/the (civil) society.

GJHSS-C Classification: FOR Code: 220306 JEL Code: B54



FEMINIST CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF THE STATE ONE MAJOR CRITICAL PARADIGM

Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



RESEARCH | DIVERSITY | ETHICS

Feminist Conceptualisations of the State: One Major Critical Paradigm

Dr. Elcin Kurbanoglu

Abstract - This paper presents a literature review of liberal feminist, Marxist feminist, radical feminist, socialist feminist, all the “other”, i.e. lesbian feminist, ecofeminist, race and ethnicity based feminist and Third World feminist, and postmodern feminist accounts of the state. Keeping in mind the fact that feminism, as listed under the contemporary Western critical paradigm, carries the potential to transform the state, the paper ends with a brief overview of the possible inheritances of the above mentioned feminisms. Choosing to use gender inequality rather than patriarchy as an all-encompassing phrase, the paper concludes that in order to develop a common sense on the relationship between the state(s), the market and the (civil) society, finding historical data that are not contaminated by mainstream knowledge remains at the top of the agenda of the feminist political struggle.

Keywords : Nation-state, feminist theories, gender inequality, the market/the (civil) society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens. We should then love them with true affection, because we should learn to respect ourselves.

Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Women, 1792

Feminist conceptualisations of the state range from a highly militant stand point evident in the motto “The state is the greatest pimp” used by the English Collective of Prostitutes in the 1980s, to a more “naive” demand of the recognition of the personal as the political on the part of the radical feminists of the post World War II era. Throughout modern history (both written history and the feminist praxis with its various forms within the household, or outside in the “public” arena), we encounter not one but several feminist perspectives. Liberal feminist perspectives see the state as a neutral arbiter between different interest groups whereas Marxist feminist perspectives theorise the state as a capitalist superstructure that reproduces familial ideology, hence that also reproduces the basic source of women’s oppression. Radical feminist perspectives underline the state’s patriarchal nature while other feminist perspectives argue that a specific form of the state; i.e. the welfare state, had a woman-friendly structure through which women’s empowerment was

signified (Kantola, 2006: 4-8, 5-10). Postmodern feminists challenged all and saw the state as a differentiated rather than a unified institution.

My aim in this study is to prepare a brief literature review of the conceptualisation of the state in liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, all “other” and postmodern feminist accounts. Such a literature review might contribute to the future feminist political struggle. In addition, analysing how various feminist approaches view the relationship between the state, the market, the (civil) society and patriarchy (or as I prefer to use in my own account, gender inequality) might help us refrain from ambiguous definitions that some feminist theoreticians have been making for a couple of centuries. In this regard, I will deliberately neglect the arguments of culturalist, essentialist and psychoanalytic feminisms¹ since I think they undermine the strength of feminism as listed under the critical paradigm in contemporary Western literature.

First and foremost, feminist political struggle is frequently held in relation to probably the most oppressive institution of the capitalist world-economy, i.e. the nation-state. If the state is an important creator and/or reinforcer of gender inequality, how shall feminist political activism relate to this institution? To what extent is it “emancipating” to continue the struggle in light of or by trying to change the legislations prepared by governments and oppositions? How shall we then further “emancipate” ourselves by trying to change the entire mentality of the legal system, by going and actually begging every single judge? What role does institutions such as the UN, the EU, and civil society institutions in the national scale have to play? Clarifying and criticising major feminist theories on the state is significant in order to be able to answer these questions and hold the feminist struggle accordingly.

Secondly, there is a commonly held view in Turkey and probably among lots of peripheral or semi-peripheral countries that state building process in the periphery and semi-periphery had emancipating effects on women. Indeed, it is a commonly stressed argument here in Turkey that the Ottoman Empire was highly misogynistic. Yet there are also Islamist feminists, who think that a different interpretation of Islam can have its part for the emancipation of women. Still the commonly

¹ For a more detailed discussion of these feminisms, see Donovan, 2006.

held belief is that when Mustafa Kemal and the Kemalist elite founded the Turkish Republic, they did not only rescue the people living in Anatolia from colonisation, but also rescued the women of Turkey from oppression. Most probably, similar arguments are made in other peripheral and semi-peripheral countries like Egypt, Afghanistan, Iran etc. since one of the major tools of the legitimisation of Third World nationalisms was the alleged emancipation of women brought by the foundation of the nation-state. However, if the state creates and/or institutionalises gender inequalities this may be quite the opposite. So it is crucial to investigate the theoretical conceptions as well as historical reality on the state and the state's attitude towards women as a social group in order to clarify several popular misconceptions.

In addition, many feminists neglected to examine whether the state is patriarchal or not, even though they linked women's oppression to capitalism (read the market). However, the state is the main producer and reproducer of the market. Given the argument that capitalism and patriarchy are mutually dependent, it can be suspected that the pioneer institution of capitalism, i.e. the nation-state has a role closely intertwined with patriarchy too. Thus, this rather blind-spot of feminist theory has to be investigated more closely.

While thinking on the state, we have to keep in mind the fact that the state is not an undifferentiated institution. Feminist scholars as well as mainstream/malestream ones have recently begun to accept this fact thanks to the contribution of postmodern social scientists. Keeping in mind the work of Foucault, this paper will recognise that "rather than there being a 'unity of state power' there is a 'complex strategical situation in a particular society'" (Pringle & Watson, 1998: 206). The paper will also recognise that the state and its history differ between the core, the periphery and the semi-periphery. However, due to the fact that both malestream and feminist literature about the state is based on the form that the state takes in the core, I will mainly be elaborating on the core section of the capitalist-world economy. One also has to keep in mind the unique characteristics particular states have, based on other important factors such as religion, customs and traditions, ethnicities etc. Such contingencies cause differences between various states and their relation to and attitudes towards women as a social group. However, since this paper will be a theoretical discussion rather than a historical research, it would be extending the limits of this paper to take into account each and every such difference.

II. LIBERAL FEMINIST ACCOUNTS OF THE STATE

Yes, ye lordly, ye haughty sex, our souls are by nature equal to yours; the same breath of God animates, enlivens, and invigorates us; and that we are not fallen lower than yourselves, let those witnesses who have greatly towered above the various discouragements by which they have been so heavily oppressed.

Constantia, On the Equality of the Sexes, 1790

Liberal feminism was born roughly in the 18th century and went through some changes over the last three centuries. Early liberal feminists of the Enlightenment, such as M. Wollstonecraft, J. S. Mill and H. T. Mill, E. C. Stanton etc. adhered to the basic premise of the Enlightenment, as given in the Encyclopédie, that underlined "...the autonomy of men, the secularisation of knowledge and thought, the natural goodness and perfectibility of human nature, and belief in reason and experience, science and progress" (Anchor, 1967: 69-70). Following the same line of thought but being highly critical of Enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, early liberal feminists insisted that women, as well as men, have the capacity of rationality; they maintained that men and women are alike, so that they should have the same rights and opportunities (Donovan, 2006: 33). In the struggle for equal rights, they saw the state as "a neutral arbiter between conflicting interests and a guarantor of individual rights" (Radtke & Stam, 1994: 141). While acknowledging that the institution was dominated by men and state policies pursued male interests, they adhered to the idea of the alleged distinction between the public and the private, between the state and the market and between the state and the society. Hence their primary goal was to include more women in the state in order to entail more women's policies (Kantola, 2006: 5). One of the greatest efforts made in this direction was the movement of suffrage, which was among the first steps towards defining women as citizens whereas previously only men were accepted as citizens of the state. It has to be noted that while some suffragists, like the British suffragists had a more militant political stand that involved the use of legitimate violence, others did not.

The idea that the minimal state, which belongs to the public sphere should interfere in the matters in the private domain was common in early liberal feminism. Although the most revolutionist voice of early liberal feminism, M. Wollstonecraft proposed that marriage was common and legal prostitution (Wollstonecraft, 1792: 626)², for the majority of the early liberal feminists the

² Wollstonecraft's arguments as presented in this paper are cited from the 1995 dated book, *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, which is edited by Kramnick (Kramnick, 1995).

main duty of the minimal state was to protect women's property and inheritance rights within the "private" domain of the family. However, the liberal tone began to change in the mid twentieth century in dialectical tension with other feminisms of other political stands. As liberalism "came to be understood not as individualism and laissez faire but as a sense of social responsibility coupled with a more activist, bureaucratic and 'efficient' government", liberal feminists began to argue that the state was responsible for what is going on in the private domain via also social policies (Gordon, 1990: 72). These social policies would address to issues like male violence, child care, abortion etc.³, which were assumed to be aspects of the allegedly private sphere.

Although the liberal feminist approach that is based on the idea that the two sexes are essentially the same led to considerable improvements in especially areas like employment and divorce (Haney, 2000: 645), it still receives major criticisms, mainly from Marxist feminism.

III. MARXIST FEMINIST ACCOUNTS OF THE STATE

One of the reasons Marx is now rejected by many feminists is because he is wrongly thought to have believed in a static reality and possessed an empiricist concept of the objective.

Judith Grant, Gender and Marx's Radical Humanism in The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844, 2005

Early liberalism and early Marxism both adhered to the norms and values of the Enlightenment. However, since the birth of modern history, liberal feminists have been criticised severely by Marxists feminists for not struggling for the transformation of capitalism but rather for what Clara Zetkin called "the ladies'" rights⁴ (Akal, 2003: 51).

Early Marxist feminists of the late 19th and early 20th century like Alexandra Kollontai, Clara Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg followed Engels' arguments presented in the *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884) (Donovan, 2006: 89) that taming of cattle brought by men's acquisition of surplus value, which in turn led to the introduction of the father right in order to leave heritage the private property that men now acquired, resulting in the transition to monogamy (Engels, 1972: 220-221). This asymmetric material relation between husband and wife also held in modern industrial family, since it was the man, who brought food to the family by working outside the house, and the woman, who engaged in the so-called non-productive

household management, which lost its "public" character and became a "private" act in modern industrial society according to Marxist feminism (Donovan, 2006: 88). Hence Engels and early Marxist feminists claimed that women would be emancipated under socialism by entering into the public sphere and through the socialisation of housework and childrearing (Tong, 1989: 49).

Following this line of thinking but changing its path throughout the 20th century mainly with the rise of radical feminism, contemporary Marxist feminists do not see the capitalist state solely as an institution but as a form of social relations. According to Marxist feminists, oppressive gender relations are caused by the state's relation with the bourgeoisie:

Marxist feminists have argued that the male breadwinner family and women's dependence within it are supported by capitalist states because they have to ensure the reproduction of labour power and that women's unpaid domestic labour is the cheapest way of doing this (Charles, 2000: 17).

It is the dependence of women on men that consolidates men's power over women and it is the alliance between the state and capital that helps to produce and reproduce this dependence via the familial ideology.

Although such analyses focus solely on women's reproductive power, in due course came along later Marxist feminists that began to include in their analysis of the state the allegedly non-political issues belonging to the "private" sphere. One of those Marxists feminists was Margaret Benston, who defined women as a class of people producing simple use-values, and she was the first among many Marxists to realise that even when women entered into the labour force, they had to struggle with the "double day"⁵. Hence Benston argued that the socialisation of housework and childrearing is the single factor that will end women's oppression as a group (Tong, 1989: 53-54). Benston was followed by Mariarosa Della Costa and Selma James, who realised that domestic work, contrary to Engels' thesis and Benston's argument, is productive; i.e. housework produces surplus value. Thus, they started a campaign to wage housework rather than promoting women's entrance into the labour force in order to be emancipated (Tong, 1989: 54).

Despite all these efforts, contemporary Marxist feminists too examine issues concerning the allegedly private sphere in light of the dominant conceptualisations of orthodox Marxist theories and see law as an institution of the state that is constructed around the exchange and commoditisation of women

³ For a more detailed elaboration, see Charles, 2000.

⁴ Zetkin used this term to refer to the struggle for suffrage, which was the main motive of the feminists supported by social democrat leaders in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. For a more detailed discussion, see Akal, 2003.

⁵ "Double-day" is the term used to indicate that women working outside the house have to deal with the double burden of both housework and their work outside the house.

(Haney, 2000: 644). Hence despite the Marxist feminist approaches that try to overcome the alleged distinction between the public and the private as well as the state and the society, the fact that Marxist feminists stick to Marxist categories makes them fall into the trap of reductionism and an overemphasis on economics just like Marxists do (Kantola, 2006: 9). In addition, the Marxist feminist argument that the dependent-breadwinner family form serves for capital, hence for capitalist states have shown to be empirically inconsistent (Charles, 2000: 18). This indicates, quiet ironically, that Marxist feminism remains rather a-historical in its approach to the state despite Marxism's own adherence to historical materialism.

IV. RADICAL FEMINIST ACCOUNTS OF THE STATE

It was part of women's long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no power for anyone. The original production: the power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained, we'd never be equal. And males never would be humanised to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers.

Marge Piercy, *Women on the Edge of Time*, 1976

Radical feminism that reached its peak after World War II was critical of both liberal and Marxist feminist perspectives, and the rise of radical feminism was probably the most important factor that created this notion I have used so far, as early and later/contemporary liberal and Marxist feminist accounts of the state. The rise of radical feminism challenged both liberal and Marxist feminist accounts. In fact its rise was a "reaction against the theories, organisational structures, and personal life styles of the male 'New Left' (Donovan, 2006: 155)". Unlike liberal feminists, radical feminists argued that men and women are essentially different. Unlike Marxist feminists, radical feminists claimed that it was patriarchy, or male-domination that cause women's oppression, not capitalism (Donovan, 2006: 156).

One of the most well-known radical feminists, Shulamith Firestone argued that patriarchy is the systemic subordination of women, the origins of which are based on biology, not economics as Marxist feminists claimed (Tong, 1989: 72-73). Firestone benefited from Marx and Engels' work and redefined the economic notion of class as "sex class" as a biological concept; i.e. men and women were two opposite sex classes (Eisenstein, 1990: 126). Firestone argued that just as the proletariat would be liberated once they seized the means of production, women's emancipation would be possible via artificial reproduction technologies since women would regain control over the means of reproduction⁶ (Tong, 1989: 74).

Other radical feminists like Mary O' Brien, Adrienne Rich, Andrea Dworkin, Margaret Atwood, Gena Corea, Robyn Rowland etc. criticised Firestone's approach, claiming that giving up biological motherhood would not liberate women (Tong, 1989: 77-81). Such radical feminists embraced women's reproductive powers and emphasised that women's power to create life makes men so jealous that they try to control reproductive technologies. Rather than using male-dominated technologies, according to these radical feminists, women would have to embrace their reproductive powers, realising that "the source of [their] oppression is also the source of [their] liberation" (Tong, 1989: 78).

The greatest accomplishment of radical feminism for the analysis of the state was the motto "the personal is political". In her famous work, *Sexual Politics* (1969), Kate Millet explained that the relationship between the sexes is political⁷ (Millet, 2000: 23). Millet argued that patriarchy is "a political institution built on status, temperament, and role [i.e. gender], a socially conditioned belief system presenting itself as nature or necessity" (Millet, 2000: xi). According to Millet, such an institution could be eliminated by eliminating status, temperament and role; i.e. gender as constructed under patriarchy (Tong, 1989: 96). Radical feminists like Millet and Marilyn French suggested that androgyny is a solution against patriarchy while other radical feminists like Mary Daly saw the solution in embracing genuine feminine values, and not the ones that are constructed under male domination (Tong, 1989: 98, 105).

In contrast to Marxist feminism that sees the state as representing class interest, radical feminist argue that the state represented "the interest of the dominant groups, that is, men" (Charles, 2000: 21). Radical feminism stresses the patriarchal nature of the state and argues that the state has an important role in perpetuating gender inequalities (Kantola, 2006: 5-6). Contrary to the popular view, radical feminism argues, state policies are related to the seemingly private issue of sexuality, which is neglected by both many liberal and Marxist feminists.

The radical feminist point of view is that states are not contingently but essentially patriarchal and that patriarchy is global. "The particular forms that states take are not particularly significant as are all patriarchal states (Kantola, 2006: 6)". Radical feminists have

⁶ Firestone praised artificial reproduction technologies since she saw biological motherhood as "the root of all evils, especially the vice of possessiveness that generates feelings of hostility and jealousy among human beings" (Tong, 1989: 76). This approach was also embraced by Marge Piercy.

⁷ Millet states that "the term "politics" shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (Millet, 1970: 23).

argued that “the basis of patriarchal power lies in male violence... Male control of women (and hence male dominance) is dependent on force – the state therefore supports male violence against women (Charles, 2000: 21)”. This means that as the legitimate monopoly of violence, it is the state that gives men the right to be violent against women (Charles, 2000: 21).

Radical feminists are hostile to state intrusion into women’s lives as individuals. According to the radical feminist account, it is the civil society rather than the state, which is the sphere, where women should fight against patriarchy (Kantola, 2006: 6) since it is the state that makes it possible for patriarchy to develop as a system of repressive power (Hoffman, 2001: 103). Hence they develop consciousness groups and non-governmental organisations to struggle against patriarchy and help support women’s problems.

As Betty Friedan explained in her famous work, *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), after World War II in the West, women began to be envisaged as solely housewives and were imprisoned within their homes. In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Friedan suggested that women should participate in the labour force and spare as little time to housework as possible (Bryson, 1992: 160-161). However, two decades later Friedan recognised that this suggestion was causing “the double day” and began to speak about a Feminist Mystique, in which “Superwoman” was this time trapped within the career-marriage combination (Tong, 1989: 24-25). This recognition; i.e. the recognition that equal rights are not enough to emancipate women led to what I called contemporary liberal feminism. In contrast to early liberal feminists, who believed that there was nothing that we can do to “emancipate” women other than struggling for equal rights and for the abolition of discriminatory practices, contemporary, so-called “welfare”, liberal feminists argue that it necessary to eliminate socio-economic, as well as legal, impediments to women’s progress today, via policies like preferential hiring or reverse discrimination (Tong, 1989: 29).

Although radical feminism managed to overcome the dichotomy between the public and the private spheres and did not simply see the state as belonging to the former sphere and the family belonging to the latter, it failed to understand that the distinction between the state, the (civil) society and the market is an illusionary one. Yet by putting into the analysis of the private domain the conceptualisation of sexuality, radical feminism left its heritage to feminist analysis other political waves tended to ignore. As a matter of fact, through their position against the state, radical feminists undermined the role of the social as the all encapsulating sphere. Still, through their slogan, “personal is political” and thorough their attempts to put both private and public experiences of women into the centre of the analysis of the state, radical feminists have

made significant contributions to the existing feminist conceptualisations of the state. Without the insights they offered, the allegedly private sphere would neither enter into the theory of the state, nor would feminist activism try to address to individual problems that women face in their everyday lives.

V. SOCIALIST FEMINIST ACCOUNTS OF THE STATE

As a socialist feminist, I argue that oppression and exploitation are not equivalent concepts, as they were for Marx and Engels. Exploitation speaks to the economic reality of capitalist class relations, whereas oppression refers to power as it is defined within patriarchal and capitalist relations.

Zillah Eisenstein, Constructing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism, 1990

In order to overcome the biological reductionism of radical feminism and the economic reductionism of Marxist feminism, socialist feminists like Zillah Eisenstein analysed the society in terms of capitalism and patriarchy and saw the state as a mechanism to reconcile the two systems (Randall & Waylen, 1998: 4). Inheriting the notion of patriarchy from radical feminism as a system of oppression and inheriting class oppression from Marxist feminism, dual-system theorist Eisenstein defined capitalist patriarchy as the existing mutual dependence of capitalist class structure and male supremacy (Eisenstein, 1990: 114). Within this framework, Eisenstein identified the state as serving simultaneously both bourgeois and male interests. She drew attention to the fact that there is no real distinction between the public and the private spheres. She argued that the liberal feminist conception of the state failed to recognise that “the structural relations of women’s lives – the family, the sexual division of labour, sex-class oppression” was indeed a part of the political life of the society.

Scholars like Kate Ferguson and Barrett took Eisenstein’s argument a step further. Ferguson underlined that “an exclusive focus on integrating women into state institutions produces a situation that perpetuates dominant patriarchal discourses and norms rather than challenges them” (Kantola: 2006: 5). On the other hand, Barrett sought the particular channels through which the state promotes women’s oppression. She argued that by excluding women from certain types of work through protective legislation, by exercising control over the representation of sexuality via pornography laws, by implementing housing policies that makes it rather difficult to satisfy the needs of the nuclear-family, the state becomes a major factor in women’s oppression (Kantola, 2006: 8).

Like Marxist feminists, socialist feminists like Barrett generally built a strong “link between the family and the economy as the theoretical key to women’s

oppression" (Radke & Stam, 1994: 143). However, this link seems rather secondary to some socialist feminists, who have claimed that the state's role in oppressing women is rather indirect. For instance McIntosh argues that since the state regulates both the family and wage-labour, the policies they pursue are usually implemented under contradictory pressures. What she implies, as does Heidi Hartmann in her analysis of the family wage (Hartmann, 1979: 18-19), is that the interests of capital and men may be contradictory. While the former might need women as cheap labourers in the work place, men might want them as unpaid domestic workers at home. Thus, McIntosh claims that due to these contradictory pressures, the state's gender policies are rather ambivalent (Radke & Stam, 1994: 143). Though her analysis is certainly different from that of Eisenstein or Barrett, McIntosh shares a common view that all socialist feminists share: though state policies' may have ambivalent results in terms of oppressing women or though they may seem like indirect or secondary, the state legitimises itself via the claim that it is a gender-neutral institution when in fact it is not (Radke & Stam, 1994: 144).

In her well-known article "Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex" another important socialist feminist⁸, Heidi Hartmann tried to make a more historical analysis of the interrelation between the state, capitalism and patriarchy. She suggested that men's interests begin to alter as a non-statist society transforms into a statist society:

With the advent of public-private separations such as those created by the emergence of state apparatus and economic systems based on wider exchange and larger production units, the problem for men became one of maintaining their control over the labour power of women. In other words, a direct personal system of control was translated into an indirect, impersonal system of control, mediated by society-wide institutions. The mechanisms available to men were (1) the traditional division of labour between the sexes, and (2) techniques of hierarchical organization and control. These mechanisms were crucial in the second process, the extension of a sex-ordered division of labour to the wage-labour system, during the period of the emergence of capitalism in Western Europe and the United States (Hartmann, 1976: 138).

Hartmann basically claims that social-male authority that was present in tribal customs turned into public-male authority through the political structure imposed by the state. "Since the state is interested in the alienation of the tribal resource base-its land and its

labour power -it finds it convenient to use the traditional gender division of labour and resources in tribal society and places them in a hierarchical relationship both internally (husband over wife and children) and externally (lords over peasants and serfs) (Hartmann, 1976: 145)". She gives some historical examples to show how the promotions of the state served male interests. For instance, she indicates that the men of the medical profession could only forestall midwifery through the state's assistance. If it was not for the state's promotion of "scientific" skills that are presumably gender-neutral, medical profession could not find a legitimate base for replacing midwifery (Hartmann, 1976: 151); undermining a very important occupation for women that did not only provide them economic independence but also a high social status.

Probably the greatest contribution made to feminist conceptualisations of the state came from Catherine MacKinnon in her 1989 dated book, *Toward A Feminist Theory of the State* (1989). MacKinnon argues that the state is a male institution. It institutionalises its power in its male form (Hoffman, 2001: 95). The state is assumed to be and acknowledged as rational, which is popularly considered as essentially a male trait. Its rationality translates into point-of-viewlessness, which is accepted as a norm and it is this objectivity and rationality that makes the state a male institution (MacKinnon, 2003: 189). In this framework, the law is a crucial element as it "perfects the state as the mirror of the society" (MacKinnon, 2003: 189). It is seen as the most important institution of the state that is the basic tool and symbol of male power that distorts "social reality in the interest of men and [is] thus integral to patriarchal culture" (Haney, 2000: 644). Thus, MacKinnon stresses that "even if the laws on rape, abortion and pornography are formally there, they are never fully enforced"⁹ (Kantola, 2006: 6).

Despite the fact that socialist feminist theories on the state are more comprehensive and include aspects that are underlined both by Marxist and radical feminists, they have been subjected to certain criticisms, mainly by black and Third World feminists. Despite the criticisms that it faces, socialist feminism has managed to analyse capitalism, the state and patriarchy in relation to each other. It has filled various gaps that neither radical nor Marxist feminists had not been able to fill for decades.

All the "others": Lesbian Feminism, Ecofeminism, Race and Ethnicity, Third World Impacts

All of the above mentioned waves of feminisms have been criticised by all the "others": lesbian

⁸ Some authors prefer to list Heidi Hartmann as a Marxist feminist because unlike Eisenstein, she was a single system theorist. I chose to list her under socialist feminism.

⁹ In fact, due to her efforts to integrate the "private" issues into the analysis of the state, some authors like Johanna Kantola regard MacKinnon as a radical feminist. However, she will be regarded as a socialist feminist in this paper since her theory of the state is based on the analogy between work in a Marxist sense and sexuality in a feminist sense. See MacKinnon, 2003.

feminists, ecofeminists, feminists of different colours and ethnicities, and feminists of the Third World.

One of the strongest attacks that feminisms of all sorts in the Western world had to encounter came from black feminists, who claimed that both Marxist and radical feminist analyses of the state fail to address the fact that state policies are shaped also in the light of race and ethnicity, not solely in accordance with class interests as Marxists claim or not solely in accordance with gendered interests as radical feminists claim (Charles, 2000: 21). Third World feminists have also criticised both radical and liberal feminisms with regard to the fact that they do not take into account the experiences of Third World women under post-colonial states (Kantola, 2006: 7). To the feminists of the Third World, feminist theories seemed to address only to the problems of white, middle class, First World women:

Third World feminists and feminists of colour began to talk about race, class and gender as intrinsic to each other, as social constructions, realities, identities emerging in particular social moments and local places, but shaped by processes such as colonialist capital expansion, nation building, and war (Acker, 1999: 51).

Roughly starting from the 1960s and the 1970s, lesbian feminist accounts also began to criticise other Western feminist branches for being homophobic and heteronormative. For instance Charlotte Bunch criticised the socialist feminist concept, family-wage, for not taking into account lesbian workers (Donovan, 2006: 177).

In 1971, a group of lesbian feminists called *Radicalesbians* set the grounds of lesbian feminist theory. "Trying to get away from the concept of lesbianism as a strictly sexual identity, the *Radicalesbians* argue[d] that the lesbian [was] really a natural, 'unconscious' feminist, a woman who devote[d] her energies to other women, who refuse[d] to be identified in terms of a man (Donovan, 2006: 174)". They refused "male-identified" categories and argued that "only women [could] give to each other a new sense of self", calling for "woman identified" women (Donovan, 2006: 175).

Among the most important contributions of lesbian feminists to feminist literature was the attempt to define heterosexuality. For instance Adrienne Rich saw compulsory heterosexuality as a political institution that was a beachhead of male dominance (Rich, 1980: 633, 637). According to Rich, this institution curtails woman-identification, which is a potential springhead of female power (Rich, 1980: 657).

Lesbian feminists' suggestion for women's emancipation was lesbian separatism; i.e. nonparticipation in the institution of heterosexuality (Tong, 1989: 125). Lesbian feminists like Martha Shelley and Elsa Gidlow saw "the lesbian" as a model for an independent strong woman (Donovan, 2006: 176) and

others like Sydney Abbott and Barbara Love argued that lesbianism was a model for egalitarian bonds (Donovan, 2006: 177).

Ecofeminism, which began to emerge roughly in the 1990s, was also critical of mainstream feminist accounts. Although feminists of various branches had also taken into account animal rights, it was not until the rise of ecofeminism that ecological issues began to be an integral part of feminist theory and practice:

One of the main theoretical projects of ecofeminism is to construct new ways of thinking about the relationship between human and nature, including animal, replacing the dualistic, objectifying mode characteristic of Western science (Donovan, 2006: 219).

Many ecofeminists establish a positive identification between women and nature (Donovan, 2006: 217). Ecofeminists argue that "the domination of women and the domination of nature are integral. (Donovan, 2006: 218)".

The problem with all these forms of "otherness" is that it carries contemporary feminist literature to postmodernism as a unifying social theory. While the ecofeminist cherish of the nature may sound lovely, it can not escape from the Enlightenment dichotomy between the natural and the rational as has been used to further marginalise women in various feminist accounts. Lesbian feminists' attempt to build "the lesbian" as the role model is also problematic. Quiet ironically, such a viewpoint becomes highly biphobic and transphobic, further ignoring the differences between women arising from sexual orientation and gender identity.

VI. POSTMODERN FEMINIST ACCOUNTS OF THE STATE

Postmodernism challenges the metanarratives of Western civilisation, particularly the Enlightenment idea of the presence of a historically progressive science (Donovan, 2006: 213). Hence postmodernists "make us sceptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are often taken for granted within and serve as legitimation for contemporary Western culture (Flax, 1990: 41)". Postmodernists like Foucault also reject the grand institutions of Western civilisation, which reify dominative practices (Donovan, 2006: 213).

Contrary to all the above examined waves of feminism, postmodern¹⁰ feminism defines the state as a "differentiated set of institutions, agencies and

¹⁰ Kantola prefers to use the term post-structuralism instead. I used to think in line with Kantola on this manner, yet in the 21st century, it seems that what we name as post-structuralism is actually postmodernism. Hence I would like to associate, from here onwards, structuralism with Marxist conceptualisations instead.

discourses” rather than a unitary body (Kantola, 2006: 12). Hence, postmodern feminists focus on state policies and discourses rather than state institutions per se. In this analysis, the state is not essentially patriarchal but “was historically constructed as patriarchal in a political process whose outcome is open” (Kantola, 2006: 12). In such an analysis, neither the state nor masculinity appears as singular sources of power (Kantola, 2006: 7). Postmodern feminists claim that all of the above mentioned theories analyse the state as if it was a unified, singular institution. They claim that the state is indeed composed of “a set of arenas that lack coherence” (Kantola, 2006: 12), thus that we cannot conceptualise it as a unified body. Drawing attention to the differences between and within states, postmodern feminism examines how states and state institutions like municipalities, home care centres etc. pursue various policies and discourses while constructing gender (Kantola, 2006: 137).

The most important criticisms that postmodernist feminists direct towards previous feminist theories are the conceptualisations, “woman” and “patriarchy” (Walby, 1992: 33). Postmodernist feminists argue that such concepts are essentialist, and are unable to deal with questions of difference:

...Not only is there no unity to the category of “woman”, but an analyses based on a dichotomy between “women” and “men” necessarily suffer from the flaw of essentialism. Instead, there are considered to be a number of overlapping, cross-cutting discourses of femininities and masculinities which are historically and culturally variable (Walby, 1992: 34).

In Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory, Jane Flax defines “gender relations” as a category meant to capture a complex set of social processes that are constituted by and through interrelated parts (Flax, 1990: 44):

Through gender relations two types of persons are created: man and women... Nevertheless, gender relations so far as we have been able to understand them have been (more or less) relations of domination. That is, gender relations have been (more) defined and (imperfectly) controlled by one of their interrelated aspects- the man (Flax, 1990: 45).

Flax adds that “to the extent that feminist discourse defines its problematic as “woman”, it also ironically privileges the man as unproblematic or exempted from determination by gender relations (Flax, 1990: 45)” when in fact men too are prisoners of gender, “although in highly differentiated but interrelated ways” (Flax, 1990: 45).

Despite acknowledging the differences between and within states in constructing gender,

postmodernism faces severe criticisms. Some poststructuralist feminists like Chris Weedon stick to the argument that the state has a hegemonic language in reproducing both the fundamentals of capitalist mode of production and patriarchy (Weedon, 1987: 29). However, since they see language as a “site of disunity and conflict” in which social actors are active agents in interpreting and reinterpreting discourses, they believe that language carries the potential for feminist political struggle as well as the preservation of the status quo (Weedon, 1987: 12-29).

Another criticism that postmodernist feminism receives is that while analysing the state, they focus too much on discourses and undermine the role of institutions and policies (Kantola, 2006: 13). I think that the emphasis on discourses and the conceptualisation of the state as differentiated and constantly changing are meaningful contributions to a feminist theory of the state. Yet the political implication of postmodernism is that it blocks the possibility of generic political identity and political action (Donovan, 2006: 214). In addition, as Walby argues, postmodernist feminism not only neglects the social context of power relations, but also that “woman” and “man” as signifiers still have sufficient cross-cultural continuity (Walby, 1992: 36).

VII. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION: ONE MAJOR CRITICAL PARADIGM

Bir yandan “kayıt düşmek” için, diğer yandan, harekette kadınların kendileri ve birbirleri üzerine düşünmelerinin, bu düşüncelerini paylaşmalarının değerine olan inancımızın bir ifadesi. Bizce ancak böyle bir düşünme/tartışma süreci yapıp ettiklerimizle birlikte bizi bir “hareket” haline getirebilir.

Aksu Bora-Asena Günel, 90'larda Türkiye'de Feminizm, 2002

It is obvious that existing feminist theories on the state provide important insights regarding the relationship between the state and the asymmetrical social relations. Though eclectic approaches are usually criticised for having inherited the flaws in the theories that are taken into account, I think that within the limits of this paper, it may still be meaningful to combine the strongest emphases of the theories that are elaborated.

The liberal idea that the state is a neutral arbiter should be abandoned. Socialist and radical feminisms express that historically, this is not the case and that all states have favoured the interests of the powerful. The socialist feminist argument that despite the interests of men and capital are at times contradictory, mostly through its allegedly neutral and rational institution, the law, state pursues policies that produce and reproduce the dominance of men over women, makes it easier for capital to benefit from women's cheap labour while

simultaneously defining women as housewives so that both men and capital benefit from women reproducing the labour force gratis, creates a potential for further analyses. At the same time, the state is an active agent in the commoditisation of bodies and sexualities through the legislations on pornography, prostitution/sex work etc.

How should the feminist political struggle approach the state is the important question to be answered after this literature review. I think that the radical feminist argument, which offers an anti-statist political struggle might appear fascinating in the first glance, but it has its own limitations. Although Marxist and socialist feminisms envisage that state policies, institutions and discourses are oppressive against women, none of them realise, as do radical feminists that it is the civil society rather than the state, which is the sphere, where women should fight against gender inequalities. Historically, no nation-state has ever struggled against unequal gendered relations. Anthropologic work has even shown that non-patriarchal societies were turned into patriarchal ones through divide and rule policies between men and women pursued by nation-states. The fact that historical socialisms have failed to emancipate women and other minority groups despite their theoretical claim to do so initially leaves a room for women to organise in their own right. Feminism, as one critical paradigm and various women's struggles all over the world indicate that active involvement in state policies may carry a potential to change how the state functions. In order to develop a common sense on the relationship between the state(s), the market and the (civil) society, finding historical data that are not contaminated by mainstream knowledge remains at the top of the agenda of the feminist political struggle.

REFERENCES RÉFÉRENCES REFERENCIAS

- Acker, J. (1999). "Rewriting Class, Race and Gender: Problems in Feminist Thinking" in *Revisioning Gender*, (eds.) Ferree, M. M., Lorber, J. and Hess, B. B., Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, pp. 44-69.
- Anchor, R. (1967). *The Enlightenment Tradition*, New York: Harper & Row.
- Akal, E. (2003). *Kızıl Feministler*, İstanbul: TÜSTAV.
- Bora, A. & Günal, A. (2007). "Önsöz" in *90'larda Türkiye'de Feminizm*, (eds.) Bora, A. & Günal, A., İstanbul: İletişim, pp. 87-108.
- Bryson, V. (1992). *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction*, Hong Kong: Mac Millan.
- Charles, N. (2000). *Feminism, the State and Social Policy*, London: MacMillan Press Ltd.
- Constantia. (1790) "On the Equality of the Sexes" in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, (ed.) Kramnick, I., New York: Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 601-609.
- Donovan, J. (2006). *Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions*, New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Eisenstein, Z. (1990). "Constructing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism", in *Women, Class and Feminist Imagination: A Socialist Feminist Reader*, (eds.) Hansen, K. and Philipson, I.J., Philadelphia: Temple University Press, pp. 114-145.
- Engels, F. (1972). *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, (ed.) Leacock, E. B., New York: International Publisher.
- Flax, J. (1990). "Postmodernism and Gender Relations in Feminist Theory" in *Feminism and Postmodernism*, (ed.) Nicholson, L., London: Routledge, pp. 36-62.
- Gordon, L. (1990). *Women, the State and Welfare*, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Grandt, J. (2005). "Gender and Marx's Radical Humanism in The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844", *Rethinking Marxism*, Volume 17, No 1, pp. 59-77.
- Haney, L. A. (2000). "Feminist State Theory: Application to Jurisprudence, Criminology, and the Welfare State", *Annual Review of Sociology*, Volume 26, pp. 641-666.
- Hartmann, H. (1976). "Capitalism, patriarchy, and job segregation by sex", *Signs*, Volume 1, Number 3, pp. 137-69.
- Hartmann, H. (1979). "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union", *Capital and Class*, Volume 8, pp. 1-33.
- Hoffman, J. (2001). *Gender and Sovereignty: Feminism, the State and International Relations*, New York: Palgrave.
- Kantola J. (2006). *Feminists Theorize the State*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- MacKinnon C. A. (1989). *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Millet, K. (2000). *Sexual Politics*, Illinois: First Illinois Paperback.
- Pringle R. & Watson S. (1998). "'Women's Interest' and the Poststructuralist State", in Phillips A. (ed.), *Feminism and Politics* (1st ed., pp 203-223), New York: Oxford University Press.
- Radtke, H. L. & Stam, H. J. (1994). *Power/gender: Social Relations in Theory and Practice*, London: Sage Publications.
- Randall, V. & Waylen, G. (1998). *Gender, Politics and the State*, London: Routledge.
- Rich, A. (1980) "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" in *Signs*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Women: Sex and Sexuality, Summer 1980, pp. 631-660.
- Tong, R. (1989). *Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction*, London: Routledge.

26. Walby, S. (1992) "Post-post Modernism: Theorising Social Complexity" in *Destabilising Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, (eds.) Barret, M. and Phillips, A., Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 31-52.
27. Weedon, C. (1987). *Feminist Practice & Poststructuralist Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
28. Wollstonecraft, M. (1792) "Vindication of the Rights of Women" in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, (ed.) Kramnick, I., New York: Penguin Books, 1995, pp. 618-629.

