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State Antifeminism¹

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Abstract

'State feminism' is a concept that refers to the integration of feminists and feminist issues into the state apparatus. Yet, while the feminist movement must regularly contend with an antifeminist counter-movement, it is worth considering whether a 'state antifeminism' is also present or emerging, and how this presence or emergence is affecting efforts by feminist organizations to address the needs of women and advance women's equality. With this objective in mind, this article focuses chiefly on two Western countries and is based on more than twenty semi-structured interviews with feminists in Belgium and Quebec, Canada.

Keywords

Antifeminism; masculinism; countermovement; feminism; State feminism; State antifeminism.

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State antifeminism

Since there are many feminisms, and feminists' relationships with the state vary according to specific political and social context, feminists have proposed a range of conceptualizations of the relationship between the state and women and feminists. Some feminists claim that feminists or women should have no relation with the state, which is patriarchal – and racist and colonial (Smith 2011) – or with an institution that structures not just feminist action but even women's individual and collective identity; others view the state as a space to occupy or an effective tool for promoting women's rights and the redistribution of resources in favour of women, especially the most underprivileged (Kantola 2006; Masson 1999; Rhode 1994). The term 'state feminism', reputedly coined in 1987 by Helga Hermes (Mazur and McBride 2008), denotes the integration of some feminists or feminist issues into state institutions, including public and social policy. Consequently, because the antifeminist 'countermovement' situates itself in opposition to the feminist social movement (Blais 2012; Blais and Dupuis-Déri 2012; Goulet 2011), it seems legitimate and relevant to ask whether 'state antifeminism' is present or emerging to oppose feminism, state sponsored or not. While the patriarchal state is about male domination in general, state antifeminism is a reaction to feminist efforts to address women's needs and to advance freedom and equality for women.

Methodology

My goal in this article is to address the question of whether 'state antifeminism' is emerging to oppose feminism and its effects on feminism. In order to do so, sixteen feminists in Quebec in 2010 were interviewed as part of a research project initiated by *L'R des centres de femmes du Québec* (Quebec Network of Women's Centres), and nine feminists in French-speaking Belgium in 2011, where there was only sufficient time to do preliminary field research. When choosing interviewees, the project team aimed for a plurality of perspectives from activists working on specific issues – male violence, women's rights, lesbians' rights – or in 'women committees' in specific sectors – student movement, unions, and so on. The semi-structured interviews focused on the impacts of antifeminism on feminists' organizations, and the results were analyzed through qualitative and thematic approaches (forms of antifeminist attacks, effects on feminist organizations, and feminist's defensive reactions). This approach, proposed by Mélissa Blais, involves exploring, through interviews, how feminists perceived antifeminism and its effects (Blais 2012: 128), while the literature on antifeminism generally focuses on antifeminist discourses.

The interview guide did not include any questions on 'state antifeminism'. Yet several interviewees noted that their experience confirmed that antifeminism is at work inside the state as well as in the European Commission and the European Parliament. Thus, the idea of 'state antifeminism' comes from the interviewees themselves. Thus one should keep in mind that the data on which this discussion rests have not been collected with the intent to work specifically on 'state antifeminism'. As a result, this discussion is necessarily exploratory, and these two groups (feminists from Quebec and Belgium) cannot be taken as representative of feminist groups across Western democracies. Yet they can serve to illustrate what is happening in two distinct Western jurisdictions.

Interviewees are identified throughout the article by an alphanumeric code. The letter Q stands for Quebec feminists (for example Q1, Q2, Q3), and the letter B, for Belgian feminists (for example B1, B2, B3). One interview involved two women (Q6a and Q6b); another involved three women (B6a, B6b, B6c). Some quotations have been edited slightly to make reading easier, as the interviewees' words required translation from French to English.

Definitions and Contexts

Feminism is not unitary, and many feminists are very critical of the state, and even of other feminists willing to work with and within the state. (This is the case, for instance, with anarcha-

feminists and anti-colonial and some Indigenous feminists, although many Indigenous activists women do not claimed to be 'feminists'). However, almost all the feminists interviewed in this research were working in organizations that interact with the state or get part of their funding from the state, while some interviewees even worked in state-organizations.

According to Mazur and McBride (2008: 255), the notion of 'state feminism' denotes 'the actions by women's political agencies to include women's movement demands and actors into the state to produce feminist outcomes in either political processes or social impact or both'. This definition implies a question of degree; the number of women in the state apparatus, the number of institutions devoted to women, and the number of state services for women influence how feminist the state is believed to be, an implication that masks diversities within feminism (Mazur and McBride 2008). The question of degree arises because there can be either progression or regression. In her study on the 'Fall of the Femocrat' in Australia, Marian Sawer (2007) identifies a number of causes for the regression of state feminism in the 1990s, including neo-liberalism and the 'new management' (Knight and Rodgers 2012) as well as the emergence of a men's rights movement – in particular, groups of separated and divorced fathers – protesting the gains made by women.

The notion of state antifeminism cannot simply mirror the definition of state feminism essentially because in Western liberal states there are currently no political agencies whose mandate is to work against women and feminists (although specific decisions and policies can have a negative impact on women, for example, with regard to contraception and abortion). As a result, and as will become evident in the course of this discussion, it would be more accurate to refer to antifeminism *within* the state rather than to state antifeminism.

If one defines antifeminism in general terms as any collective or individual gesture (action or statement) whose effect is to slow, stop, or push back feminism – a movement for the equality and freedom of women *vis-à-vis* men – then state antifeminism signifies the actions of agents or agencies of the state that slows, stops, or pushes back the mobilizations of the feminist movement (whether in or outside the state). Thus defined, antifeminism can be supported by both men and women (with regard to antifeminist women, see amongst others Dworkin 1983; Klaus 2010; Lamoureux 2013; Marshall 1991), but its aim is to protect patriarchy; that is, the power and privileges of men *vis-à-vis* women. But how can one differentiate the antifeminism of a politician or civil servant from ordinary sexist and patriarchal resistance to the transformation of gender relationships? As Anne-Marie Devreux and Diane Lamoureux (2012: 5) have acknowledged, 'it is sometimes difficult to distinguish antifeminism from misogyny' (see also Descarries 2005). And when it comes to the state, an additional source of confusion must be taken into account. Although feminists may view them as antifeminist, the motivations of politicians and civil servants might have little or nothing to do with gender politics. For instance, reduced funding for women's organizations can result not from misogyny or antifeminism but from the adoption of management norms favouring budgetary austerity. Indeed, the success of Western feminist movements since the 1970s in obtaining substantial subsidies, which make it possible to pay salaries and provide women in need with resources and services, has entailed a degree of dependence on the state, a situation long deplored by some Scandinavian, Afro-American, and anarchist feminists (Laurin-Frenette 1981; Marques-Pereira 1990; Nadasen 2002: 272). But one can hardly associate such dependence with state antifeminism; instead, it is a form of co-optation that is not entirely detrimental to feminists, except inasmuch as their feminism is more moderate, and many of them are busy providing services to women rather than organizing and protesting. The complexity and ambiguity of the dynamic relationship between the state and feminism do not obviate the possibility of analyzing state antifeminism in greater depth.

Mélissa Blais (2012: 133) notes that it is fairly easy to identify a number of tendencies or 'forms' of antifeminism (see also Bard 1999), such as conservative, religious (primarily Christian) and

nationalist antifeminism, as well as ‘post-feminism’, liberal antifeminism, and masculinism. ‘Masculinism’, in French, refers not so much to male domination, but more specifically to the lament of the ‘male identity crisis’. This discourse claims that feminism has gone too far and that men – especially separated and divorced fathers – are suffering today because of the domination of women in general and feminists in particular (Blais 2014b; Blais and Dupuis-Déri 2011, 2012; Palma 2008). With regard to social movements and activism, masculinism is associated with the men’s rights or fathers’ rights groups (for Canada, see Boyd 2004, 2008; Ruth 2008; for the United-States, Dragiewicz 2011).

A number of these antifeminist tendencies confine their discourse to statements. Other tendencies, including religious antifeminism (especially ‘anti-choice’) and masculinism, constitute full-fledged social movements or, more specifically, countermovements (several studies on antifeminism take up the notion of ‘countermovement’: Blais 2012; Goulet 2010; Staggenborg and Meyer 1996). Antifeminism is in effect a backlash (Mansbridge and Shame 2012); that is, a counter-attack in response to the real or imagined threat that feminists and emancipated women are supposed to represent for the legitimacy and stability of patriarchy, or to men’s identity and interest. As a social movement, this countermovement (Mathieu 2004: 166-170; Sommier 2009) involves not only male but also female activists, ideologues and organizations conveying a discourse that identifies an enemy – feminists, emancipated women – and a cause to be championed – the nation, the family, ‘life’ and the foetus, men. The countermovement engages in a variety of actions: public declarations, lobbying, lawsuits, vigils, rallies, disruptions of feminist events, and so on (Blais and Dupuis-Déri 2008; Dupuis-Déri 2013; Saint-Pierre 2008). As a countermovement, antifeminism resists feminism *explicitly and in an organized fashion* in order to *oppose* the demands, actions, gains or even the very existence of the feminist movement. At the same time – and this is important to bear in mind – for rhetorical or rather for political purposes, an antifeminist may deny being antifeminist or may even claim to be a feminist.

Our interviewees’ stance on masculinism

In this research project, interviewees discussed ideological currents like conservatism and liberalism, but their main focus was on masculinism, which they saw as the most problematic form of antifeminism. Moreover, in Belgium (Pape 2010) and Quebec (Dupuis-Déri 2013; Goulet 2011), many feminists or feminist organizations have publicly expressed concerns about masculinism. In Quebec, the *Collectif pro-féministe* went so far as to denounce ‘state masculinism’ but without defining this notion. Karine Foucault (2008b: 14), however, has defined state masculinism as follows:

[State masculinism is] the support that different state bodies give to men’s demands in order to promote the status of men. Under ‘state masculinism’, the state sets up mechanisms as well as organizations meant to respond to the needs of men ‘who experience discrimination because they are men’.

Yet as our interviewees described it, masculinism does more than simply demand resources for men; it criticizes women in general and feminists in particular, and sometimes directly targets feminists with insults and death threats, women’s organizations with administrative complaints and harassment, break-ins and vandalism, and feminist events with threats and disruptions (Blais 2012; Dupuis-Déri 2013; Saint-Pierre 2008). Groups of divorced and separated fathers make up the vanguard of the masculinist movement, which is also the case in Australia (Flood 2010, 2012), North America (Boyd 2004, 2008; Crowley 2008; Dragiewicz 2011; Ruth 2008), and various West-European countries (Palma 2008), especially Great Britain (Jordan 2009, 2013; Mitchell and Goody 1997). Thus, the views expressed by Belgian and Québécois feminists on state antifeminism will be interpreted while keeping in mind the impact of what must be seen as a mobilized masculinist countermovement that reaches across jurisdictions.

State antifeminism as a political phenomenon

While basing analysis on the interviewees' statements, this paper focuses primarily on the position of antifeminists within the state to identify the various areas where antifeminists may be active (an approach also put forward by Banaszak [2010] in her research on state feminists). These areas occur:

- 1) at the highest level of the state; that is, in the government or the party in power (Tremblay 2005);
- 2) in the state bureaucracy; that is, the civil service; and
- 3) in quasi-public bodies and sites where representations are made to the state (public hearings, lobbying, petition, and so on).

Antifeminist governments or parties

Right-wing conservative and neo-liberal governments are broadly seen as inimical to the interests of women, and they endeavour to curtail the influence of feminists (see Bashevkin 1996; Kantola 2006; Kantola and Squires 2012). In an editorial in the Montreal daily *Le Devoir* (28 April 2011), Marie-Andrée Chouinard summarized the different setbacks that the Conservative government of Stephen Harper has imposed on Canadian women:

Cancellation of the child-care strategy. Abolition of the Court Challenges Program, which gave underprivileged groups, including women, a voice. Shutdown of twelve of the sixteen Status of Women offices. Reduction or elimination of funding for numerous groups devoted to defending women's interests. Impugment of the right to pay equity [project team translation].

And this is not to mention the stratagems of Conservative backbenchers trying to re-criminalize abortion, and the destruction of the arms registry created after the lethal antifeminist attack against women on 6 December 1989 at the *École polytechnique* in Montreal (Blais 2014a). The Harper government can legitimately be called antifeminist, just as the George W Bush administration was in the United States, where feminists denounced it for waging 'war on women' (Finlay 2006).

A government's antifeminism can also be expressed in the intimidation of progressive movements, including feminism, particularly those receiving public funds. An interviewee from Quebec observed that:

Q19: [T]he Harper government is very antifeminist. It creates conditions such that we are afraid to protest ... In particular, through funding. So we understand that there is a price to pay for speaking out against them.

She added:

What better way to destroy a movement's capacity to organize than to remove everyone paid to do this work ... An organized, powerful feminist movement no longer exists in Canada.

One Belgian interviewee presented the situation from a somewhat different angle:

B5: [C]onservative means antifeminist. That's clear ... Though I would say that there are less conservative countries, with less conservative governments, but where antifeminist movements don't dress up in conservative clothes. Look at all those fathers' movements; they wear extremely modern clothes, don't they? They want shared parenting; that looks very modern indeed.

This comment is a reminder that antifeminism can be found both on the left and the right of the political spectrum, as academics have long recognized (Bard 1999; Capitan and Guillaumin 1997; Dworkin 1983). Meanwhile, studies on politicians in various countries from the 1980s forward have found evidence of misgivings about and even hostility toward feminists and feminism, among both men and women, regardless of their political affiliations (Australia: Simms 1993; Austria: Nowotny 1981; France: Sineau 1988; Sweden: Hedlund 1988). Investigative reports have detailed the ambient misogyny in the world of politics (Koskas and Schwartz 2006). Answering a questionnaire submitted in the 1990s to some fifty legislators in Ottawa and Quebec City, one parliamentarian averred: 'Feminism is something that makes me, as a man, feel insecure . . . because it calls into question who we are, as men' (Tremblay and Pelletier 1995: 175). Another one stated that, in the presence of representatives of the feminist movement, he wonders 'if they were going to castrate me', while still another declared that feminism 'is abject!' (as cited in Tremblay and Pelletier 1995: 177). It should come as no surprise, then, that our twenty-first century interviewees identified politicians as potentially antifeminist actors.

State antifeminism can thus be found at the highest echelons of the state; that is, governments and legislative bodies. The situation becomes even more complicated in interactions with civil servants who, theoretically, should remain neutral and confine themselves to applying the laws, policies, and programs, and to responding to requests made by the public.

Antifeminist civil servants

There is nothing new about the presence of antifeminists in different parts of the state apparatus. One study, for instance, shows that, in the public education sector of early twentieth century France, there were 'antifeminists at the very top of the administration' (Verneuil 2012: 18). When the administrative branch comprises a majority of men, the prevailing atmosphere can be one of machismo and antifeminism. A Belgian interviewee (B6c) employed in a 'communal administration' noted that many of her colleagues espoused 'the discourse about the new fathers ... and said that they wanted to join these movements because they defended the fathers' position'. Consistent with this, some previous studies have concluded that, for a female employee of a state agency, to be identified as a feminist may damage her career prospects. Drawing on norms of neutrality, the personnel of state agencies are usually not well disposed toward extra-parliamentary activism in general and feminism in particular, an attitude also observed in international institutions such as the World Bank (O'Brien, Goetz, Scholte et al. 2000).

A number of our interviewees attested to having dealt with antifeminist and, especially, masculinist officials employed in various governments departments. In the opinion of our Quebec interviewees, antifeminism pervades the public (provincial) civil service. According to interviewee Q19, 'More and more often, antifeminists hold positions from which they can influence policy', particularly 'in health-related services'. This observation was corroborated by several other interviewees (Q2, Q6a, Q12), who specifically mentioned the Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services.

The impression that there are more and more antifeminist officials can be understood in two ways: either there are more antifeminists in the civil service; or those already there are increasingly willing to express their distrust of feminists. Antifeminism, furthermore, can be an expression of sexism or misogyny. In the opinion of interviewee Q3: 'In the Ministry of Health, there are out and out misogynists who think that women have nothing better to do than to sit in waiting rooms'. Another interviewee, Q19, remarked that employees of the Ministry of Education take up the masculinist grievances concerning 'boys dropping out of school, for example'. Similar masculinist-friendly positions were ascribed to other ministries. Q12, who reported that she had been advised that the 'strategic planning' of the ministry in charge of

families, for example, was told that the government ‘will not abandon the other groups, but “more support will be given to fathers’ groups”’. It can be assumed that there are antifeminists as well in ministries with which our feminist interviewees had fewer dealings.

The tension between feminists and antifeminists employed by the state can lead to contradictory discourses, a situation that prompted interviewee Q2 to make the following comment:

Q2: [W]hen it comes to research, there are individuals and approaches that are feminist and others that are antifeminist. This is also true of all areas of activity. In Quebec, there is a researcher in the *Institut de la Statistique du Québec* (ISQ, Quebec Institute of Statistics) who makes ample use of data from Statistics Canada to show that there is [gender] symmetry in domestic violence, in verbal and psychological violence. So this is a credible organization, and antifeminist groups constantly rely on the data published by this ISQ researcher ... [W]e, however, are more comfortable with the data provided by the Department of Public Safety ... This is factual data.

The statistician referred to here is no doubt the same one who took part as a speaker in the *Paroles d’hommes* (Men’s words) convention in Montreal in 2005, which was targeted by a mobilization of the Coalition antimasculiniste (Anti-masculinist coalition). Anti-masculinist feminists had also mobilized for the first edition of this convention, held in Geneva on March 8 2003, as they would again in 2008 for the third edition in Brussels.

Turning to Belgium, interviewee B2 spoke about an employee of the state television network who took the pain to publicly criticize a study that she, the Belgian interviewee, had published:

B2: He attacked me several times in conferences, on radio programs, and through articles in the press. But without ever naming me ... He got a great deal of exposure because he works for public TV.

Feminists who engage in discussions with bureaucrats may also be faced with attempts to discredit them in public, under the guise of pro-feminism. Interviewee B6 described a situation where she was presenting her organization’s position to an audience. Suddenly, a bureaucrat belonging to the Belgian Socialist Party laid into her:

B6: He said, ‘But not all feminists see things the same way as you do, you know?’ I answered, ‘I’m sorry, but I see things as a left-wing feminist’. That is, ‘as a left-wing feminist, I’m attentive to the reality of women’s lives and not just to the grand principle of equality’. So, in fact he was trying to play on my territory ... he was not even attacking me on the level of arguments, but on the level of our identity ... He was playing the one-upmanship game.

The institutions

As mentioned earlier, within contemporary liberal states there are no ministries, agencies or councils with explicitly antifeminist mandates. That said, in recent years, various administrations have charged officials to give consideration to the question of the status of men. In 2012, for instance, the canton of Zurich created the position of officer in charge of men’s issues.

Even more disturbingly, our interviewees identified problems with regard to state institutions whose mission is to defend women’s interests and to promote gender equality. On this issue, there are significant differences depending on the political environment and the approach

adopted in, respectively, Quebec and Belgium. In Quebec, in addition to Status of Women Canada, which is a federal agency, the provincial-state apparatus includes a Ministry of the Status of Women (*Ministère de la Condition féminine*) and a Council on the Status of Women (*Conseil du statut de la femme*, CSF), whose role is consultative. Nothing like this exists in Belgium, where the UN-promoted ‘equality-oriented approach’ has been adopted, and where an institute on gender equality (*Institut de l'égalité entre les hommes et les femmes*) has been established. Although the two approaches seem to have the same objective, the one adopted in Quebec stresses women’s interests, whereas the equality-oriented approach endorsed by the UN focuses on both sexes. Specifically, the CSF’s ‘mission’ is:

... [to] promote and ... defend the rights and interests of Québécois women. With the aim of achieving gender equality, the Council: advises the minister and the government of Quebec on all matters relating to the equality of and the respect for the rights and status of women; provides women and the general public with relevant information [research team translation]. (CSF official website)

Conversely, the ‘tasks’ of the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) do not focus so directly on women because they involve, among other things, gathering and analyzing comparable data on gender equality and developing methodological tools, with the goal, in particular, of promoting the integration of gender equality into all areas of political life. Amongst its ‘areas’ of activities, there is ‘gender mainstreaming’, ‘gender-based violence’ and ‘men and gender equality’ (EIGE web site).

In Belgium, the Institute for Gender Equality has been charged with ‘ensuring and promoting equality between women and men and with opposing all forms of gender-based discrimination and inequality’ (*Institut pour l'Égalité des femmes et des hommes* web site). A number of Belgian interviewees stated that the equality-oriented approach raises problems because it ‘opens the door’ to men’s groups presenting themselves as partners in the pursuit of equality and, hence, eligible to receive resources hitherto earmarked for women. To quote interviewee B4:

B4: If the approach is based on gender equality ... it cuts both ways. If there are no men, men have to be included. When there are no women, women have to be included. So, automatically, the issue of domination is glossed over in favour of gender equality. No, this doesn’t challenge patriarchy. It operates a shift. It’s a way of managing patriarchy, of mitigating it, of not discussing it, of evading the fundamental issue of domination.

In 2005, the CSF in Quebec proposed to change its mandate and to adopt the equality-oriented approach. During the proceedings of the parliamentary committee created to look into this question, various men’s organizations and groups of separated and divorced fathers submitted briefs calling for the CSF to be transformed into a council of equality, while the briefs submitted by a number of feminists argued for the maintenance of the existing mandate of the Council on the status of women.² The CSF’s own submission suggested that resources be given to men’s groups examining issues of male identity, men’s roles, fathers and paternity.

The discourse articulated in the briefs presented by the masculinists was centred on four main lines of argument: the denial of discrimination towards women, the ‘indictment of feminism’, the victimization of men, and the portrayal of the ‘status of men’ and the ‘status of women’ as identical and symmetrical (Foucault 2008b: 114). Furthermore, in their briefs, the men’s and fathers’ groups put forward demands such as the ‘abolition of policies favourable to women’ and the establishment of a council on the status of men and of a secretariat of the status of men (and fathers). These two bodies would be charged with (critically) assessing the policies and programs in favour of women and mothers, producing studies on the status of men, and securing funding to assist men (Foucault 2008b: 19, 57).

Ultimately, the status quo of the CFS was maintained, and the equality-oriented approach was rejected (Foucault 2008a). Nevertheless, Quebec feminists have observed that state institutions whose priority it is to defend women's interests can integrate the notion that men must be invited to work for equality. This situation opens the door to masculinist demands for resources that should, in the view of our interviewees, be allocated to women.

Q3: [I]t's apparent in the public discourse: 'men must be included', 'men have problems too'. To hear this from the minister in charge of the status of women ... signals the integration of masculinist and antifeminist discourses.

The same interviewee added the observation that, when feminists adopt this discourse, 'it's the result of antifeminism and of the wish to make amends *vis-à-vis* a certain male clientele', while at the same time demarcating and dissociating one's position from that of the 'damned radical feminists'.

Interviewee B3 stated that she too found it troubling that self-identified feminists insist on concerning themselves about men's situation and on wanting to include them in feminism, instead of attending to problems specific to women that ought to be prioritized by the feminist movement and by any state truly committed to the ideal of gender equality:

B3: I'm not sure we need to raise so many questions about men ... Isn't that precisely the secret of antifeminism? When we raise all these questions about men, we slow ourselves down.

It is worth noting that, despite women's concerns about men and their wish to include men, studies suggest that very few men take advantage of the many opportunities offered them by feminists to get actively involved in supporting women and feminism (Bard 2012: 213; Jacquemart 2015) and that there are problems posed by the involvement of pro-feminist men (Blais 2008; Taylor 1998).

Aside from wondering about the role men can or cannot play in favour of women and feminists, our interviewees feared that resources by rights earmarked for women would ultimately go to men, as noted above. Our Belgium interviewees observed that an equality-oriented approach has prepared the ground for a sharing of financial resources between women and men:

B6a: [O]ne senses that there is currently large-scale lobbying going on with the message: 'This must not be granted to women'. Elaborating on her comment, she said that the masculinists 'already have their relays ... for instance, regarding violence it has become systematic ... [E]ven for the Institute for Gender Equality, it's always violence between partners and not violence against women'. There's always this so-called symmetry in the discourse and even with respect to means.

Similarly, interviewee B3 has come to the conclusion that the equality-oriented approach is actually a trap:

B3: [Based on] good intentions, policies are introduced ... that are inconspicuously tinged with antifeminism, which in fact promotes not equality but social peace and the maintenance of order ... and women are told: 'Look, we are doing a little something for you'. And because a little something is being done, they won't be able to complain too much. At the same time, they're told: 'What about men? Come on, make an effort, you're going to have to make a few concessions, but, hey, you keep the rest'.

Note that what these interviewees are discussing here is not the already existing programs centred primarily on men and receiving considerable public resources; programs such as the suicide prevention campaigns of health departments, the programs to reduce school dropout rates of education departments, or men-only resources for homeless people. Rather, the interviewees are worried about programmes that, in principle, are dedicated to women for the purpose of combatting gender inequality and intimate partner abuse, of which men are now demanding a share. This raises the question of the relationship of the state to social movements, particularly with respect to funding and the determination of public priorities.

The antifeminist influence on the state

Antifeminists, just like feminists, try to influence the state by lobbying more or less overtly and more or less concertedly. Among other actions, they write to politicians and visit their local parliamentarians. In some occasions, representatives of divorced or separated fathers' groups have even managed to secure a meeting with a Canadian prime minister (Sawer 1999) or with a French minister (Direct Matin 2013). In Canada, 'fathers'-right lobbying' is particularly active in legislative hearings about family law, child custody and access, and domestic violence, some taking the opportunity to lament about 'man hating' and 'misandry' (Mann 2008: 63) and the influence of 'ultra-radical feminism' (Mann 2008: 61). According to Ruth M Mann (2008: 65), tens of groups submitted briefs and testified, with the result that they 'have shaped legislative compromises ... although men's rights advocacy has not yet achieved its goal to level or equalize the playing field for men by eliminating protections and supports for abused women, it has succeeded in raising questions about the justice of these policies in a series of high-profile government forums, which has produced a new official discourse on abused men or husbands'. (With regard to the Violence Against Women Act in the United States, see Dragiewicz 2008; for Australia, see Flood 2010.)

The interviewees expressed their concern, more specifically, with regard to the stratagems used by masculinists on public bodies that manage the distribution of financial resources. As previously mentioned, cutbacks of public funds granted to feminist aligned agencies and services can be motivated by antifeminism, although it is often difficult to determine the bases of such financial decisions. For interviewees in Quebec and Belgium alike, however, this hardly matters. As B5 stated, by cutting back the financing of civil society organizations, the state has reduced the stature of 'feminist, anti-racist, and other counter-powers', and by the same token undermined the foundations of a democratic society.

Belgium interviewees B3 and B5 identified another phenomenon relevant to grants and feminists' dependence on public funding: the fact that some associations avoid calling themselves 'feminist' so as not to risk being denied a grant. That risk is heightened by the equality-oriented approach. In Quebec, a group defending the interests of separated or divorced fathers has endeavoured to demonstrate that women's organizations, especially those representing victims of sexual and domestic violence, obtain too much public funding. The fathers' group contends that '90 percent of financial resources allocated for community work goes to women's organizations', that 'the recourse to shelters as a basis for policies of assistance to victims of domestic violence is highly problematical', and that 'the assistance provided apparently involves to a large extent the inculcation of feminist thinking on domestic violence' (Boucher and Gagnon 2010: 94, 96-97).

As interviewee Q2 pointed out, without naming a specific men's groups, 'the granting of funds is contested. For example, outside large urban centres, precautions had to be taken because [men's groups] would insult the people in charge of "violence" issues in the agencies'.

Other interviewees from Quebec (Q4 and Q12) explained:

[T]here were appalling verbal attacks against community coordinating groups on health and social services with regard to money for women's shelters: 'They've got too much money'. At other times they said, 'You people, you've got money and men's groups get nothing'. Yet there's not even a single men's community group in their district.

Similarly, a Belgian interviewee remarked:

B5: A lot of antifeminist movements put on a neutral, 'soft' face, which enables them, for instance, to receive a number of equality-related grants. So this has a direct impact ... because it cuts the available funds in half or, at the very least, reduces them. I've always said to male feminist movements, 'Okay! Keep up your very important discourse and establish pro-feminist men's movements, but make sure to find your own funding sources, develop your own financing, and don't dip into the already woefully inadequate funds intended for women'.

Conclusion

One initial conclusion is unavoidable: from an analytical and conceptual perspective, state antifeminism is neither a copy nor a mirror image of state feminism, and feminists affected by the emergence of the former recognize this. Drawing on Mazur and McBride (2008), several distinct phenomena can be identified when discussing state feminism: the position of feminists within the state; the laws, policies, and services introduced by the state that help to advance women's emancipation; and openly feminist state institutions. However, as noted above, in Quebec, Belgium and to our knowledge other Western jurisdictions, there are at yet no institutions whose mandate is explicitly antifeminist – notwithstanding the case of the 2012 establishment of an officer in charge of men's issues in Zurich, which demonstrates that some state-sponsored distinctively pro-masculinist initiatives are emerging. While in Quebec, Belgium and presumably elsewhere there are no policies or laws specifically designed to combat feminism and feminists, there are indeed antifeminists within the state legislatures, civil service and in various quasi-public bodies in these jurisdictions. The paper hence concludes that it is more accurate to refer to antifeminism *in* the state, rather than to state antifeminism.

Given that 'antifeminism' should be considered as an actor in relation to the state and within the state, this leads state feminist actors to a form of competition for legitimacy, for the right to define public policy issues and for resources. Such a challenge is perceived by feminists to be a major concern for contemporary feminism.

Like any investigative approach, the interview based research we have employed has its limitations. Specifically, this study has not enabled us to confirm the statements of a number of interviewees to the effect that the presence of antifeminist tendencies within their state legislatures, the civil service and other institutional sites is responsible for cuts in the financial assistance feminist affiliated agencies and services receive from the state, a reduction that our interviewees made clear they believe benefits men and the 'status of men'. To empirically address this, future studies need to be conducted to specifically address allocations of public funds and the lobbying and ideologies behind these allocations. Only future research can assess the extent to which the fears of the feminists interviewed in our study are justified.

In future research it would be important to develop a more comprehensive comparative analysis across different times and places. For instance, it would be desirable to conduct comparative studies like the one conducted by McBride, Stenson and Mazur (1995) in fourteen countries with regard to state feminism, so as to identify the presence and influence of antifeminism across states. In North America and Europe, the presence of masculinist activism is well documented, whether inside the state or even in feminist associations, as noted by

interviewee B6a. Though previous research documents that the discourse on the 'crisis of masculinity' has spread beyond 'the West' (Dupuis-Déri 2012), forms of state antifeminism will inevitably be different in different jurisdictions, given the contingencies of regional cultural and political contexts (Trat, Lamoureux and Pfefferkorn 2006). Indeed, it should be noted that openly misogynist states sent antifeminist delegations to the UN-organized Women's Conferences (Druelle 2000). This signals that there is an international dimension to state antifeminism. Just as state feminism asserts itself in the international arena and in international institutions, so predictably does antifeminism. Future research is needed to document and explore this development, and its effects on feminist organizations and women globally.

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² See in the *Journal des débats* (Journal of Parliamentary Proceedings) for 2005-2006 the documents pertaining to the 'Consultation générale sur le document intitulé (general consultation on the document titled) *Vers un nouveau contrat social pour l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes*, of the Commission permanente des affaires sociales (Standing Commission on Social Affairs).

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