

Anna Elomäki (Tampere University), Johanna Kantola (Tampere University), Anu Koivunen (Tampere University) and Hanna Ylöstalo (University of Turku)

Changing Feminist Politics in a ‘Strategic State’

Introduction

Finnish feminist movement has been characterised as relatively weak, and it has relied on institutionalized cross-party collaboration between women’s organizations and close relationships with the state (Holli 2003; Kantola 2006). Among the feminist movement actors, as well as in public debate and feminist research, there has been a belief in the ‘woman friendly’ welfare state as a partner in advancing gender equality (e.g. Julkunen 2002). In the past, the state-centered approach has achieved lots of successes, mainly thanks to shared framings of the political problems between key feminist actors (Holli 2006). The downside has been that the Finnish feminist movement has become co-opted to state discourses and practices.

In the 2010s, the Finnish state-centered feminism faced a new situation, where the state for a moment appeared to have turned its back on gender equality. After the 2007–2008 global economic crisis, governments adopted significant cuts in public spending, which intensified the retrenchment of the welfare state that had begun in the 1990s and increased economic inequality between women and men (Elomäki and Ylöstalo 2018). Austerity politics was accompanied with the intensification of other gendered neoliberal reforms: marketization of public social and healthcare services, efforts to improve cost-competitiveness, and managerialist shifts in state governance. The political context of the 2010s was also underpinned by conservatism and nationalism, visible, for instance, in resistance to gender equality policy and the tightened immigration policy (Elomäki and Kantola 2018; Keskinen 2016). One of the visible signs of the state’s withdrawal from gender equality was the sidelining of gender equality goals from Prime Minister Juha Sipilä’s right-conservative-populist government’s government programme in 2015 (Elomäki et al. 2016). The programme contained only one sentence about gender equality: ‘Finland is also a land of gender equality’

(PMO 2015, p. 8), reflecting the common assumption in Finland that gender equality has already been achieved.

In many countries the dire political situation has had the paradoxical effect of strengthening, instead of undermining, feminist struggles (e.g. Evans 2015). This has also been the case in Finland, where the field of feminist actors diversified and the visibility of feminism in public debate increased in the 2010s. The established women's movement actors, such as state gender equality bodies and established women's organisations, have been complemented with new feminist actors and new forms of feminist activism: the Feminist Party, a feminist network at the Finnish Parliament, new feminist NGOs focused around anti-racism and men's equality, citizens movements around specific issues, and individual feminist activists. (Elomäki et al. 2020.)

In this chapter, we analyse the relationship between feminist politics and the shifting state in Finland in the 2010, with the aim of providing new insights on the state-relationship of the Finnish feminist movement in a changing political context. The most visible shift in the Finnish state in this decade was probably the intensification of welfare-state dismantling austerity, marketization and competition policies. Our chapter, however, focuses on a less visible shift in state governance, which we describe with the concepts *strategic governance* and *strategic state*. By strategic governance we refer to a particular form of neoliberal and managerial governance that aims to make government decision-making processes more strategic by narrowing down policy objectives and aligning them explicitly with fiscal objectives. By adopting strategic governance in the 2010s the Finnish welfare state has shifted towards a strategic state, which has also affected the relations between feminists and the state. We ask, i) how different feminist actors operate in the strategic state; and ii) how gender issues are politicized in the strategic state by different feminist actors. We approach these relations through three different conceptualisations of feminist politics in Finland: velvet triangle; governance feminism; and intersectional feminism. We show how the network model of velvet triangle is challenged, and how both governance feminism and intersectional feminism are strengthened in the strategic state.

Our chapter draws on our earlier research on shifts in Finnish gender equality policy and feminism in the 2010s (Elomäki et al. 2016, 2019, 2020; Elomäki and Kantola 2017, 2018; Elomäki and

Ylöstalo 2017, 2018). The research material covers gender equality policy documents and written texts of key old and new women's and feminist movement actors from the 2010s, research interviews with gender equality actors and other government actors conducted in the framework of different research projects, as well as our participant observations in some of the described processes. This chapter complements our earlier research through focusing on the shifting state-relationship of Finnish feminist politics.

Conceptualising feminist politics and the state: Velvet triangle, governance feminism, and intersectional feminism

We argue that there are three alternative ways of conceptualizing the relationship between feminist politics and the state in Finland: *velvet triangle*, *governance feminism*, and *intersectional feminism*. None of the three concepts alone captures the complexity of relations; neither are they to be seen as accounts of a chronological development. Rather they illuminate different aspects of the relationships among women's movement actors, feminist politics and the state – and, for the purposes of this chapter, the relationship between feminist politics and the strategic state. Each conceptualization brings a range of issues to the foreground and pushes other issues to the background.

The *velvet triangle* conceptualises the division of labour between feminist actors outside and inside the state (Woodward 2004). It theorizes feminist influence and power as a relationship between, first, civil society organisations, especially women's organisations, second, feminist politicians and femocrats (feminist bureaucrats within the state government) and thirdly, gender experts and researchers. It offers an account of different expertise and skills which each actor brings to gender equality policy: "technical knowledge" and expertise; an understanding of how the political and policy-making systems work; and experiences. In this understanding, influence and success are reached by working together and by utilizing the knowledge, skills and expertise produced by the different angles of the triangle (Hoard 2015; Woodward 2004).

Whilst not uncritically accepted in the Finnish context, the concept has had enough explanatory power to warrant a critical discussion highlighting problematic a priori assumptions about the

numbers of actors (Holli 2003; 2006; 2008). For instance, in Finland, Holli argues that the political parties' women's organisations are a special case. She finds them as most active of the women's groups and suggests that they should have a place in the triangle (Holli 2008, p. 175; see also Holli 2006, p. 137, for a recent critique of this see Kantola 2019). The velvet triangle also assumes stability that may not exist in these co-operation and partnership practices (Holli 2008, p. 177). The concept of the velvet triangle can, then, provide us with some useful background information about the Finnish context of feminist politics whilst not capturing all of its dimensions. By 2000s, the Finnish "velvet triangle" or "strategic partnership" (Holli 2006, p. 145) was based on co-operation between (i) state based gender equality actors and women/feminist politicians (Gender Equality Council TANE, Gender Equality Unit Tasy, Ombudsman for Gender Equality, Women MPs Network), (ii) established women's organisations (The Coalition of Finnish Women's Associations Nytkis, The National Council for Women in Finland NJKL and Feminist Association Unioni and political parties women's organisations), and, (iii) to a minor extent gender equality researchers.

The second, alternative conceptualisation is that of *governance feminism* (see Elomäki et al. 2019; Halley et al 2018). As a concept, it implies a more critical assessment of the relationship between feminism and the state than that of the velvet triangle. Governance feminism raises the question whether feminist knowledge becomes compromised or co-opted, when it engages with political processes, actors and institutions, such as states, governments and international organizations (Caglar et al 2013). Governance feminism is one of many concepts, such as 'market feminism', and 'crisis governance feminism', which have all illustrated in their distinct ways how feminism itself changes when it engages with neoliberal governance structures (Griffin 2015; Kantola and Squires 2012; Prügl 2011). At the core of these processes is the development of a particular kind of feminist knowledge: co-opted, governance-friendly expert knowledge, that fits with the prevailing logics of neoliberal governance (Griffin 2015; Prügl 2011). Notably, governance feminism has been markedly silent about the gendered underpinnings of global governance and financial governance, focusing instead on supporting institutional measures to enhance women's participation (Griffin 2015, p. 66).

The third important conceptualisation is that of *intersectional feminism*. With its roots firmly in Black and postcolonial feminisms and their diverse mobilizations (Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins 2000), intersectional feminism has become an important concept in the Finnish context too over the past years (Keskinen et al. 2009). It questions the hegemonic whiteness of Finnish feminism and women's movements, and calls for the voices and agency of black and ethnic minority women in culture, politics and society. With a focus on gender diversity, it puts transgender issues and sexual equality firmly on the agenda (Järviö 2020). In terms of feminist activism, intersectional feminism focuses on diversity of agents and agendas, foregrounding independent agents. In the context of Finnish state feminism – state oriented feminist activism – intersectional feminism occupies a more autonomous space. It underpins the work done by a range of feminist actors, which have appeared in the 2010s: the Feminist Party, anti-racist Fem-R and feminist men's association Miehet ry, as well as grassroots activists such as HelFem and Feminist Forum. In addition, cultural actors and products have brought intersectional feminism into public discussion, (Elomäki et al. 2020).

Myra Marx Ferree defines feminist politics as actions that aim to transform unequal gendered power relations, norms and practices through the politicisation of gender issues (Ferree 2006; Kantola and Lombardo 2018). Through 'politicisation' feminist politics is always rooted in the political contestations around the meaning of gender and its intersection with other inequalities. These contestations allow the expression of different voices and the inclusion of new issues to the political agenda (Lombardo and Verloo 2009). The three conceptualisations we have discussed above indeed illustrate how *feminist politics* itself can be defined in different ways. It can, for instance, have different aims and goals in relation to the state; involve different sets of actors; and use different tools. As researchers we are interested in the meanings that feminist politics takes in political processes, for example in relation to changes in the state.

In this article, we are interested in how changes in the state shape the forms that feminist politics takes in political processes. In the next section we describe shortly the shift towards a *strategic state* that is the focus on this article, after which we move on to describe the how this shift has influenced feminist politics and feminist actors in Finland. In the first instance, we discuss how state feminism in the strategic state challenges the networks conceptualised as a velvet triangle.

We then show the related strengthening of governance feminism in the strategic state. Finally, we show how the crises and changes resulted in the emergence and visibility of new feminist actors, best conceptualised as impact of intersectional feminism.

Towards a strategic state in Finland?

Feminist political science research has identified a tendency towards ‘changing state feminism’, which reflects on changes both within state practices and feminism (Kantola and Outshoorn 2007; Kantola and Squires 2012). Changes within state practice include the mainstays of a neoliberal state reform: embracing new public management, the take up of competition policy, enrolling economic actors – especially think tanks, business consultants and economists – into executive decision-making, and allocating increasing authority to finance and economy ministries (e.g. Kantola and Kananen 2013). Changes within feminism include giving primacy to those feminist claims that are complicit with a market agenda (Kantola and Squires 2012); reinforcing the ‘economic case’ for gender equality by highlighting the macroeconomic benefits of gender equality (Elomäki 2015; Roberts 2015); the professionalisation of feminist knowledge in governmental institutions (Kantola and Squires 2012; Kunz and Prügl 2019); and private and third sector actors have become key partners of states in promoting gender equality (Olivius and Rönnblom 2019). Meanwhile, the tools and techniques that follow the logic of neoliberal governance—audits, best practices, gender mainstreaming, gender impact assessment and indicators—have become central in gender equality policy, making gender equality policy a technocratic, administrative enterprise (Alnebratt and Rönnblom 2016; Marx 2019; Prügl 2011).

Here, we focus on a specific shift in state governance, the increasing emphasis on what is termed ‘strategic governance’. Strategic governance is a form of managerial governance that can be defined as a systematic attempt to use managerial techniques in order to develop overarching policies (see Kantola and Seeck, 2011). As a form of neoliberal governance it can be seen as part of the same continuum as the earlier New Public Management Reforms (see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2011) that aim to make public governance more efficient. Ideas related to strategic governance originate in business management literature, and have been advocated by international institutions such as the OECD as a way to make governments able to function in a fast-changing environment.

(Mykkänen 2016; Ylöstalo 2019). The aim has been to make government policy-making more strategic and agile by, for example, narrowing down policy objectives and explicitly aligning them with fiscal objectives.

In Finland, discussions about the need for a more strategically oriented government began already in the 1990s, and since then strategic prioritizing and more strategic political steering processes have been the aim of several central government reforms (Mykkänen 2016). The largest reform in this regard has been the strategic governance reform implemented by Prime Minister Sipilä's conservative-right government (2015–2019) in the beginning of its term. The reform changed the format of government talks and the form of the government programme as well as its implementation process, but also the way policy areas like gender equality policy are steered (Elomäki 2019; Mykkänen 2016).

One of the most visible concrete changes was that the Prime Minister Sipilä's government set a long and short term 'strategic vision' for Finland and organised its work around a limited number of horizontal 'strategic objectives' and concrete measures to reach these objectives. This has meant a shift from the earlier way of thinking about policy through different administrative sectors (e.g. social affairs and health) and policy fields (e.g. gender equality) (Elomäki et al. 2016, p. 308). Under Sipilä government, the emphasis on strategic governance has also facilitated austerity through strengthening the already prominent idea of the primacy of fiscal and economic policy over other policy goals. Strategic governance has also involved authoritarian features, as it has aimed at a stronger and more fast-acting executive arm. (Elomäki 2019.)

Strategic governance can also be seen as a further shift towards technocratic, evidence-based governance. In Finland, policy-making has steadily become characterised by governing through knowledge, and this tendency has strengthened throughout the 2010s (Christensen et al. 2017), partly due to managerial governance reforms which tend to emphasize evidence-based policy (Ylöstalo 2019). In line with that, civil servants tend to be well-educated, and the state has strong institutional mechanisms for examining societal problems and inventing policy solutions via knowledge. As stated above, experts (such as researchers, and consultants) have also been enrolled in policy-making to an extent that has given rise to questions of 'shadow government' and

‘consultocracy’ (Kantola and Seeck 2011; Ylönen and Kuusela 2018). Feminists in Finland as well as internationally have been quick to exploit the emphasis on evidence-based policy. They have supported their claims with supposedly ‘value-free’ and ‘objective’ knowledge. In doing so, they have tended to abandon contentious modes of advocacy and replace them with evidence-based claims (Kantola and Squires 2012).

In what follows, we will analyse further how the shift towards strategic governance has influenced feminist politics and feminist actors in Finland. We start with established actors – feminist within the state in charge of gender equality policy and established women’s organisations – and move then on to new feminist actors.

State feminists in the ‘strategic state’

In terms of gender equality policy, the most visible consequence of strategic governance reform in Finland was that gender equality disappeared from the Sipilä government’s agenda (Elomäki et al. 2016). The 2015 ‘strategic government programme’ that focused on a few horizontal priorities instead of sectoral issues was the first in 20 years that did not set gender equality goals and measures. The programme contained only one sentence about gender equality ‘Finland is also a land of gender equality’ (PMO 2015, p. 8), reflecting the common assumption in Finland that gender equality has already been achieved. In this way, the idea of strategic prioritizing, combined with the conservative and nationalist ideologies and the explicit anti-feminism of some of the government parties, pushed gender equality off the political agenda. It effectively challenged the conceptualisation of a velvet triangle identified above.

Strategic governance reform affected feminist bureaucrats more than other actors. Feminist state actors in Finland have for a long time suffered from lack of resources and weak institutional status (e.g. Holli 2009). Strategic governance as implemented by Prime Minister Juha Sipilä’s government limited their scope for action even further. Feminist state actors adapted to strategic governance without visible resistance. For example, when the Gender Equality Unit (Tasy) prepared the government’s Action Plan for Gender Equality (MSH 2017), it was instructed by the government to draw up a plan that would, in line with strategic governance, be a short paper

focused on a limited number of objectives. As a result, the Action Plan was a short and a rather weak document that sidelined many long-term gender equality themes and goals, such as the equal sharing of care responsibilities. The analysis of existing gender inequalities in Finland prepared by Unit was omitted from the Action Plan, and there was no room for reflecting on the meaning of gender and gender equality. (see Elomäki and Ylöstalo 2017.)

In terms of politicizing gender, the state feminists' room for manoeuvre was also affected by the ideologies of the government parties rather than by strategic governance as such. While the Action Plan for Gender Equality adopted to some extent an intersectional perspective, most of its references to migrant women were initiated by the Finns Party and were based on an idea about gender inequality as a problem of 'others' (Askola 2017; Kantola and Lombardo 2019). Policies to promote trans-rights were excluded from the Action Plan for Gender Equality due to the resistance of the Finns Party and the Center Party.

Strategic governance has therefore intensified a governance-friendly gender equality policy, in which gender equality policy has been adapted to the demands of neoliberal governance, despite the weakening effects on the policy (Elomäki and Ylöstalo 2017; Kantola and Squires 2012). In this context, feminist state actors can be seen as governance feminists who, instead of addressing existing gender equality problems and power relations, embrace the tools of 'good governance' and focus on setting goals and measuring success. However, it is important to note that not all state feminist actors have similar relationship to the state, and that not all of them reacted to the new context in a similar way. For example, the Ombudsman for Equality (Tasa-arvovaltuutettu), an independent authority in charge of supervising compliance to gender equality legislation, took a more active role that extended from supervising compliance to raising awareness of gender equality problems and politicized gender more broadly (see, e.g. Tasa-arvovaltuutettu 2018).

Established women's NGOs: weakened impact and new forms of politicisation

The strategic governance reform weakened the impact of at least some of the key established women's organizations, as their traditional influence channels and networks became ineffective. Government negotiations have been an important channel for the women's NGOs to influence the

state. In the context of strategic governance, however, their gender equality claims represented minor details, for which there was no room in the strategic government programme that focused on a few horizontal priorities. Also political ideologies contributed to this outcome: the Finns Party, one of the three governing parties, has built its very identity in opposition to feminism and in government talks it lobbied for men's rights concerns (Askola 2019; Kantola and Lombardo 2019; Palonen and Saaremaa 2017).

Furthermore, established women's organisations have largely relied on their strategic partnership to state gender equality bodies, whose powers the strategic governance reform limited. They have been less inclined to partner with economic actors or those in charge of the political steering of ministries. Also other influence channels, such as formal consultation processes, have become less effective. Sipilä government's authoritative mode of political steering that entailed disregard of the law drafting process meant that consultations and hearings during policy-making have become even more symbolic than before (Elomäki and Ylöstalo 2018).

Through emphasizing the role of the economy on the political agenda, strategic governance has also contributed to the internal paralysis of the key networks of women's organisations, Nytkis and NJKL. The primacy of the economic has been a difficult context for these organisations, which have close links to political parties and rely on cross-party collaboration (Elomäki and Kantola 2017; see also Holli 2006). This was visible in their inability to provide a strong critique of austerity - despite its gender impacts. In Nytkis, the representatives of government parties blocked direct criticism of the government and of the necessity of austerity. The result was that instead of questioning austerity Nytkis merely criticized the lack of gender impact assessment of the proposed spending cuts. (Elomäki and Kantola 2017, 2018) Nytkis' critique was thus aligned with the technical and co-opted feminist knowledge typical of governance feminism that does not question gendered underpinnings of financial governance (cf. Caglar 2013; Griffin 2015). The more independent Feminist Association Unioni (Naisasialiitto Unioni) was able to take a critical stance, but its limited resources and strong engagement with other topics, such as resistance to increasing nationalism and racism, made an in-depth engagement in a critique of austerity difficult (Elomäki and Kantola 2017; 2018).

Established women's organisations have struggled to find new ways to work in the strategic state and make themselves relevant in this context. One example of the difficulties involved in this process was the pro-bono work done for Nytkis by a communications agency in spring 2015. The agency, which on its website defines itself using concepts of strategic governance as 'a visionary communications agency with a focus on strategy', offered to help Nytkis advocate for gender impact assessment. The company advised Nytkis to influence policy through public opinion instead of contacts with policy-makers. The proposals included focusing on social media and creating a hashtag; shifting from technical expert language to concrete examples, infographics and humorous memes; replacing 'complaining' with constructive solutions to policy problems; and focusing on individuals' benefits and men. Nytkis never followed these proposals, which suggested that the proposed new ways to engage with the state were too far from its self-understanding.

It is possible, however, to perceive some shifts in the way established women's organisations have politicized gender issues in their efforts to bring gender equality back to the political agenda and make themselves relevant. There is some evidence of the governance feminism approach, such as arguments about the economic benefits of gender equality. For instance, NJKL argued in its critique of the Sipilä government's weak Action Plan for gender equality that "gender equality creates a sustainable basis for economy and growth" (Elomäki and Kantola 2018). The most visible shift, however, is the way Naisasialiitto Unioni has embraced anti-racism and intersectionality in its work, for example through framing itself as an anti-racist organization (ibid.). In contrast, the two network organisations have had difficulties to see racism and LGBTI rights as feminist issues, although NJKL has recently more openly supported LGBTI issues. The efforts of the established, state-oriented women's organisations to integrate intersectionality indicate that the organisations are not only trying to make themselves relevant to the state they aim to influence, but are also reacting to shifts in the field of feminism.

New platforms, new agendas

While the state actors and established women's organisations' have been forced to renegotiate their close cooperation with the strategic state, a number of new actors have emerged to embody

the feminist struggle in politics, among NGOs and in the public sphere. The new actors are diverse and cannot be described as a unitary movement, but they represent a new wave of feminisms introducing novel forms of activism and utilising new platforms for organising and action. Importantly, the new platforms are used to introduce new issues and approaches as well as new faces for feminism – illustrating the diversity conceptualised as intersectional feminism.

Many of the new feminist actors challenge the gender-based organisation of the established equality actors, mobilising around feminism as a broader label rather than gender, and even making a point about rejecting the idea of binary gender. Whereas the membership of Feminist Association Unioni is still restricted to ‘all women, respecting self-definition’, despite long-standing efforts by members to open the membership to men, new feminist organisations or groupings are open to all genders. While Profeministimiehet (Profeminist men) was founded in 1999 as an explicit men’s organisation to ‘support feminism, to act in favour of feminist goals and to give men food for thought’, Miehet ry (Men) was established in 2018 as forum for all who ‘regardless of gender’ wish to ‘support equality and promote non-discrimination’ (<http://miehetry.fi/>). In the field of parliamentary politics, the feminist network at the Finnish Parliament emerged in 2016 as a cross-party platform to promote gender equality issues beyond the traditional Women’s MPs Network. When launched, the feminist network with high-profile male MPs as members received public attention but has otherwise kept low profile.

As demonstrated by critical feminist scholarship, Nordic gender equality policies have been characterised by nationalism, participating in a sense of self-pride and thereby marginalising critical voices (Dahl et al. 2016; Keskinen et al. 2009; Martinsson et al. 2016). In Finland, the traditional platforms of gender equality activism have remained white and, also because of how state bodies and policy areas are structured, issues of racism are discussed as a separate agenda (Keskinen et al. 2009; Tuori 2009). In recent years, the new actors have brought these issues together in the field of feminism. Introducing in Finnish language the notion of ‘brown girl’, writer and media producer Koko Hubara have delineated non-whiteness as a positive identity and mobilised it as a position of social and political critique. With this notion, Hubara and other ‘brown girls’ not only make racialisation visible but also call into question the traditional gender equality actors: who are represented and whose voices are heard.

Explicit commitment to intersectional feminism is another key feature of many new feminist organisations and groupings that promote feminist activism beyond the established women's movement. Building on the long legacy of mobilising class politics within women's movements (Hentilä et al. 1989; Lähteenmäki 2000; Sulkunen 1989) and the LGBTQ activism since the 1960s (Mustola and Pakkanen 2007), the new actors emphasise intersectionality highlighting, furthermore, the meanings of racialisation. Questions of intersecting differences had been voiced previously by Roma activists and Sami women, perceiving themselves as distant from mainstream Finnish women's and gender equality movement (Kuokkanen 2004, 2015; Seikkula and Rantalaiho 2012; Valkonen 2009) as well as by the immigrant women's organizations since the 1990s (Pyykkönen 2007). In the 2010s, new actors raised questions of indigeneity and anti-racism to feminist agendas, challenging thereby the premises and focus of the established women's NGOs, gender equality bodies, and also feminist academics, addressing and contesting blind spots in the established, white and majoritarian equality discourse.

Among the new actors, Fem-R, founded in spring 2018, labels itself 'a feminist and anti-racist civil society organisation' and aims 'to increase the voices of racialised people in the Finnish society and build equal and safer Finland for all people' (<http://www.fem-r.fi/in-english/>). Also Miehet ry (Men) is committed to intersectional feminism and antiracism. Intersectionality and antiracism is a key feature also in grassroots activism, such as HELFEM, which is a local, Helsinki-based action group of 'feminist activists, artists, writers and professionals'. As part of annual Feminist Forum event the group organised an event with the title 'No Whites Allowed', establishing a temporary 'safe space', meeting room and peer-support space for non-white feminists (<https://helfemhki.wordpress.com/>, <http://www.femf.net>). As a gesture of making visible and critiquing mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, the action was met with both appreciation and slander. The activism, while presenting social critique and raising awareness about racism, was focused on community-making, creating spaces and platforms for actions instead of being directed towards or aiming to influence policy-makers in a particular issue.

In the field of representative politics these developments of flagging feminism rather than women as well as foregrounding intersectionality are most evident in the founding of the Feminist Party

in June 2016, following a Swedish model (Blombäck and de Fine Licht 2017; Cowell-Meyers 2017). The party foregrounds non-discrimination as the core of its political agenda, thereby sidestepping gender as the primary dimension of feminist analysis. While operating in the field of representative politics and campaigning for parliamentary elections to cooperate within the framework of the ‘strategic state’, the Feminist Party distinguishes itself from traditional equality actors by centering a critique of nationalism and racism in its policies, and profiling itself as a counter-movement to nationalism (Elomäki and Kantola 2018). While the agenda of the new activism – going beyond gender, focus on intersectionality and antiracism, questioning of binary gender – may overlap and interact with the traditional sphere of gender equality actors, when challenging the key premises of nationalism, whiteness and binary gender, the new actors clearly break new ground.

Whereas some of the new actors have assumed the form of registered associations or even political party, others have chosen more flexible forms of organisation beyond elected bodies, bylaws, annual meetings and auditing. Beyond associations, open civic movements have emerged encouraging and mobilising individuals to participate in temporary campaigns, in which decisions are made in social media based work groups or open meetings. Instead of issuing statements and participating in governmental or parliamentary hearings in the manner of traditional women’s organisations, some of the new actors focus on organising events, raise public debates and inviting mobilisation through hashtags. In Finland as well as elsewhere, social media and other digital platforms are an important arena for many of the new actors (Banet-Weiser 2018; Rottenberg 2018). Hashtags such as #Olentodistanut (#IHaveWitnessed) by Fem-R and #lääppijät (#Harasseres) have invited documentation of racism and sexism in the everyday lives, inviting social media users to make visible and identify themselves in structures of power. Social media has also enabled making global campaigns local: in 2011, slut marches were arranged in many Finnish cities following the transnational call against blaming victims for rape, and in 2017 #metoo brought the issue of sexual harassment to the public agenda in an unprecedented manner. While established women’s organisations and other civic movements have campaigned around these issues for a long time, by promoting legislation and claiming resources for prevention, counselling and women’s shelters, the public sphere, digital and popular feminisms gain more attention.

New forms of activism have also electrified classic feminist issues, such as the gender pay gap. A Facebook-based ‘popular movement’ emerged in March 2018 as a response to journalistic revelation of an unofficial ‘gentleman’s agreement’ in the capital area of Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa not to pay higher salaries when competing of competent daycare teachers in a situation where there are hundreds of vacancies and severe shortage of professionals. Ei leikkirahaa! (No play money!) started as a Facebook group and local demonstrations in the capital area but became a nationwide political argumentation and frame of reference for public debate on gender pay gap (Koskinen Sandberg forthcoming). This field traditionally dominated by traditional gender equality actors and labour organisations has also been challenged by corporate feminist activism: Finnish textile brand Finlayson launched in August 2017 a campaign granting a discount to female clients due to gender pay gap. Proposing that women would pay only 83 cents per each euro when buying company products, the campaign aroused a heated debate and was banned as discriminatory. While many feminist scholars have been critical of “business feminism” as a feature of neoliberalisation of feminism (e.g. Prügl 2015; Roberts 2015), this campaign gave more public visibility to classic feminist claims than any hearing or report by traditional gender equality actors. Furthermore, it suggests the political potential of corporate responsibility rhetoric - and the role of governance feminism.

Alongside these new forms of collective action, feminist agency has also become publicly visible through individuals, feminist activists in the media and even feminist celebrities. These modes of feminist agency echo the developments identified and labelled in the United Kingdom and in the United States as postfeminism (Gill 2016; McRobbie 2009), third wave feminism (Evans 2015) or neoliberal feminism (Rottenberg 2018), but could also be described as new wave of feminist cultural agency in the age of mediatised politics. In Finland, feminism has a range of new faces beyond representative politics or traditional organisations, not least because of the unprecedented number of popular books on feminism and gender issues in 2016–2018.¹

¹ In 2016, a pamphlet by TASAN!-network (Juntumaa 2016), *Livet & Patriarkatet* (Öhman 2016) as well as “Let Go! Guide to Funnier Life” by Meriläinen and Särmä (2016) and “How the Hell did I become a Feminist?” by Talvitie (2016). In 2017, *Brown girls* by Hubara and in 2018, “10 myths about feminism”, a new anthology of feminism activism by Swedish-speaking Finns (Nyman 2018) as well as two books on Finnish #metoo-debates (Lindén 2018) and *Dammen brister*.

Despite employing new forms of activism, the new actors have not rejected state as a partner. Instead, many actors continue to make claims and utilise the relatively easy access to policy networks offered by the velvet triangle, responding to invitations and participating in the activities of governance, such as hearings and workshops. The new feminist men's association, for example, was met with enthusiasm as an ally by established gender policy actors, resulting in the new association being quickly integrated into the velvet triangle.

Another example of the new actors' partnerships with the state is the Feminist Think Tank Hattu (Hat), which emerged in 2015 as a feminist action group and demonstrates paradoxically both a distinct mode of activism and a relative vicinity to the state feminism. The think tank presented three persons, former MP Rosa Meriläinen, political scientist Saara Särämä and journalist Johanna Vehkoo, all parading an attitude of shamelessness and breaking with the social tactfulness and decor of the velvet triangle. This was epitomised in their main 'product' of the 'feminist swearing nights' entailing open-mic occasions for loud social and political protesting. Inviting unshameful bad behaviour in a safe context, these events enabled both therapeutic acting-out and local community-building for feminist collectivities. Paradoxically, suggesting both vicinity of activists and politicians and the power of co-optation, the swearing nights have been recruited by state-funded Finnish Institutes in London and Brussels to promote gender equality as the country brand of Finland. Ideas about independent, anti-governance feminist rebellion and Nordic velvet triangle converge when state funds events like swearing nights.

The new feminist actors that have emerged in the 2010s have thus chosen different strategies in relation to the changing state, as well as politicized new issues and addressed the shortcomings of the established feminist organisations. They can be best conceptualised as intersectional feminism (see also Evans and Lépinard 2020). While many have focused on increasing the visibility of feminist activism in the public sphere through new forms of activism, some have, however, been integrated into more traditional strategic partnerships with state feminists looking for ways to make themselves relevant for the strategic state – or by the state seeking to brand itself through feminism. It is worth asking, however, which actors are invited to these strategic partnerships – for instance, while the feminist men's rights association Miehety ry has been welcomed by state feminists and media alike, the anti-racist association Fem-R has not been welcomed to the same extent.

Conclusions

We conclude with a note on the relationship of governance and party politics. The sidelining of gender equality during Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's government was followed by a move to opposing direction. In the spring 2019 parliamentary elections, the Social Democratic Party became the largest party (although with a small margin to the Finns party), the openly feminist the Greens was another clear winner of the election, and the proportion of women in the parliament became the highest of all time (46.5 per cent). At the time of writing these last remarks to this article, 34-year old Sanna Marin has just been elected as the new Prime Minister, four out of five government party leaders are women, and 12 out of 19 ministers (63 per cent) are women. Although the ideas of strategic governance continued to define the government's work, gender equality was visibly present in the government programme of the new red-green coalition government. This illustrates that governance is thoroughly politicized and connected to party political ideologies and power relations. Strategic governance does not in itself push gender equality policy aside, but can serve the political ideologies of government parties. In the case of the current left-green government, strategic governance was bent so as to provide space for gender equality in the government programme – not as an independent policy sector but as a horizontal priority that fits the logic of strategic governance. The new gender equality friendly government has re-empowered state feminists and established organisations, which saw many of their long-term goals finally taken on board.

References

Alnebratt, K. & Rönnblom, M. (2016). *Feminism som byråkrati: Jämställdhetsintegrering som strategi*. Stockholm: Leopard förlag.

Askola, H. (2017). Wind from the North, don't go forth? Gender equality and the rise of populist nationalism in Finland. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 26(1), 54–69. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506817748341>

Banet-Weiser, S. (2018). *Empowered. Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Blombäck, S. & de Fine Licht, J. (2017). Same Considerations, Different Decisions: Motivations for Split-ticket Voting among Swedish Feminist Initiative Supporters. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 40 (1), 61–81.

Caglar, G., Prügl, E. & Zwingel, S. (2013). Introducing feminist strategies in international governance. In G. Caglar, E. Prügl & S. Zwingel (Eds.) *Feminist strategies in international governance* (pp. 1–18). London: Routledge.

Christensen, J., Gornitzka, Å. & Holst, C. (2017). Knowledge regimes in the Nordic countries. In O. Knutsen (Ed.), *The Nordic models in political science. Challenged, but still viable?* (pp. 239–254). Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Cowell-Meyers, K. (2017). The Contagion Effects of the Feminist Initiative in Sweden: Agenda-setting, Niche Parties and Mainstream Parties. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 40 (4), 481–493.

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. In K. Bartlett, and R. Kennedy (Ed.), *Feminist Legal Theory: Readings in Law and Gender* (pp. 57–80). San Francisco: Westview Press.

Dahl, U., Liljeström, M. & Manns, U. (2016). *The Geopolitics of Nordic and Russian Gender Research 1975–2005*. Stockholm: Södertörn Academic Studies.

Elomäki, A. (2015). The economic case for gender equality in the European Union: Selling gender equality to decision-makers and neoliberalism to women's organizations. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 22 (3), 288–302.

Elomäki A. (2019). Governing austerity: Governance reforms as facilitators of gendered austerity in Finland. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 34(100), 182–197.

Elomäki, A. & Ylöstalo, H. (2017). Tasa-arvopolitiikan U-käännös. Hallituksen tasa-arvo-ohjelmat hallinnan välineenä. *Politiikka*, 59(2), 82–95.

Elomäki, A. & Ylöstalo, H. (Eds.) (2018). *Tasa-arvoa talousarvioon – sukupuolitietoinen budjetointi ja talousarvion sukupuolivaikutusten arviointi*. Government's Analysis, Assessment and Research Activities 58/2018. Helsinki: Prime Minister's Office.

Elomäki, A., Kantola, J., Koivunen, A. & Ylöstalo, H. (2016). Kamppailu tasa-arvosta: tunne, asiantuntijuus ja vastarinta strategisessa valtiossa. *Sosiologia*, 53(4), 257–275.

Elomäki, A., Kantola, J., Koivunen, A. & Ylöstalo, H. (2019). Affective Virtuosity: Challenges for Governance Feminism in the Context of the Economic Crisis. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(6), 822–839.

Elomäki, A., Kantola, J., Koivunen, A. & Ylöstalo, H. (2020). *Samettikolmiosta uuteen politisoitumiseen: feministisen toiminnan uudet ehdot*. In J. Kantola, P. Koskinen Sandberg & H. Ylöstalo (Eds.), *Tasa-arvopolitiikan suunnanmuutos* (pp. xx–xx). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Elomäki, A. & Kantola, J. (2017). Austerity and feminist resistance in Finland: Between established women's organisations and new movements. In J. Kantola & E. Lombardo (Eds.), *Gender and the economic crisis in Europe: Politics, institutions and intersectionality* (pp. 231–55). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Elomäki, A. & Kantola, J. (2018). Theorizing feminist struggles in the triangle of neoliberalism, conservatism and nationalism. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 25 (3), 337–360.

Evans, E. (2015). *The Politics of Third Wave Feminisms: Neoliberalism, Intersectionality and the State in Britain and the US*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Evans, E. and Lépinard, E. (Eds.) (2020). *Intersectionality in Feminist and Queer Movements: Confronting Privileges*. London: Routledge.

Ferree 2006

Gill, R. (2016). New feminist visibilities in postfeminist times. *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(4), 610–630.

Griffin, P. (2015). Crisis, austerity and gendered governance: A feminist perspective. *Feminist Review*, 109(1), 49–72.

Halley, J., Kotiswaran, P., Rebouché, R. & Shamir, H. (2018). *Governance Feminism. An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hentilä, M., Laine, L. & Markkola, P. (1989). *Tuntematon työläisnainen*. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

Hoard, S. (2015). *Gender Expertise in Public Policy: Towards a Theory of Policy Success*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Holli, A.M. (2003). *Discourses and Politics for Gender Equality in Late Twentieth Century Finland*. Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

Holli, A. (2006). Strong together? A comparative study of the impact of the women's movement on policy-making in Finland. In S. Hellsten, A. Holli & K. Daskalova (Eds.) *Women's Citizenship and Political Rights* (pp. 127–153). Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Holli, A. (2008). Feminist Triangles: A Conceptual Analysis. *Representation*, 44(2), 169–185.

Hubara, K. (2017). *Ruskeat tytöt*. Helsinki: Like.

Julkunen, R. (2002). Timanttejakin parempi ystävä? Hyvinvointivaltion murroksen sukupuolittuneet seuraukset. In A.M. Holli, T. Saarikoski & E. Sana (Eds.), *Tasa-arvopolitiikan haasteet* (pp. 32-49). Helsinki: WSOY, Council for Gender Equality (TANE) and Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Juntumaa, I., Korkeaoja, J., Meriläinen, R., Moisio, E. & Nuorgam, E. (Eds.). (2016). *Kaikki tasan! Pamfletti epätasa-arvosta*. Helsinki: Into.

Järviö, N. (2020). Translaki ja transpolitiikan nousu. In J. Kantola, P. Koskinen Sandberg & H. Ylöstalo (Eds.), *Tasa-arvopolitiikan suunnanmuutos* (pp. xx–xx). Helsinki: Gaudeamus.

Kantola, J. (2006). *Feminists Theorize the State*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kantola, A. & Kananen, J. (2013). Seize the moment: Financial crisis and the making of the Finnish competition state. *New Political Economy*, 18(6), 811–826.

Kantola, A. & Seeck, H. (2011). Dissemination of management into politics: Michael Porter and the political uses of management consulting. *Management Learning*, 42(1), 25–47.

Kantola, J. (2019). Women's organizations of political parties: Formal possibilities, informal challenges and discursive controversies. *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 27(1), 4–21.

Kantola and Lombardo 2018

Kantola, J. & Lombardo, E. (2019). Populism and feminist politics: The cases of Finland and Spain. *European Journal of Political Research*, 58 (4), 1108–1128.

Kantola, J. & Outshoorn, J. (2007). Changing state feminism. In J. Outshoorn and J. Kantola (Eds.) *Changing state feminism* (pp. 1–19). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kantola, J. & Squires, J. (2012). From state feminism to market feminism. *International Political Science Review*, 33(4), 382–400.

Keskinen (2016)

Keskinen, S., Tuori, S., Irni, S. & Mulinari, D. (Eds.) (2009). *Complying With Colonialism: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Nordic Region*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009.

Koskinen Sandberg, P. (forthcoming). Driving Institutional Change through Feminist Solidarity: A Social Movement Challenging Gendered Labor Market Institutions. Manuscript in review process.

Kunz, R. & Prügl, E. (2019). Introduction: Gender experts and gender expertise. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 2(1), 3–21.

Kuokkanen, R. (2004). Saamelaisnaiset, feministinen analyysi ja saamelaisyhteiskunnan dekolonisaatio. In K. Kailo, V. Sunnari & H. Vuori (Eds.), *Tasa-arvon haasteita globaalien ja lokaalisten rajapinnoilla* (pp. 143–159). Oulu: Oulun yliopisto.

Kuokkanen (2015)

Lähteenmäki, M. (2000). *Vuosisadan naisliike: Naiset ja sosiaalidemokratia 1900-luvun Suomessa*. Helsinki: Sosiaalidemokraattiset naiset.

Lombardo and Verloo 2009

Martinsson, L., Griffin, G. & Giritli Nygren, K. (Eds.). (2016). *Challenging the myth of gender equality in Sweden*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Marx, U. (2019). Accounting for equality: Gender budgeting and moderate feminism. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 26(8), 1176–1190.

McRobbie, A. (2009). *The Aftermath of Feminism. Gender, Culture, and Social Change*. London: Sage.

Meriläinen, R. & Särmä, S. (2016). *Anna mennä! Opas hauskeempaan elämään*. Helsinki: S&S.

Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (MSH). (2017). *Government action plan for gender equality*. Publications 2017:3. Helsinki: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health.

Mustola, K. & Pakkanen, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Sateenkaari-Suomi: Seksuaali- ja sukupuolivähemmistöjen historiaa*. Helsinki: Like.

Mykkänen, J. (2016). *Strategic Government Programme: Overview of the Procedure and its Execution*. Helsinki: Economic Policy Council.

Nyman, N. (Ed.). (2018). *Denna framtid är vår. Astra 100 år*. Helsinki: Förlaget.

Olivius, E. & Rönnblom, M. (2019). In the business of feminism: Consultants as Sweden's new gender-equality workers. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 2(1), 75-92.

Palonen and Saresma 2017

Pollitt, C. & Bouckaert, G. (2011). *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Prime Minister's Office (PMO). (2015). *Finland, a Land of Solutions. Strategic Programme of Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's Government*. Helsinki: Prime Minister's Office.

Prügl, E. (2011). Diversity Management and Gender Mainstreaming as Technologies of Government. *Politics & Gender*, 7(1), 71–89.

Prügl, E. (2015). Neoliberalising Feminism. *New Political Economy*, 20(4), 614–631.

Pyykkönen, M. (2007). Naiset maahanmuuttajien yhdistyksissä. In: T. Martikainen & M. Tiilikainen (Eds.), *Maahanmuuttajanaiset: kotoutuminen, perhe ja työ*. Helsinki: Väestöliitto.

Roberts, A. (2015). The Political Economy of “Transnational Business Feminism”. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 17(2), 209–231.

Rottenberg, C. (2018). *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Seikkula, M. & Rantalaiho, M. (2012). Naiskansalaisuus romaniuden ja suomalaisuuden risteyksissä. In: S. Keskinen, J. Vuori & A. Hirsiaho (Eds.), *Monikulttuurisuuden sukupuoli: Kansalaisuus ja erot hyvinvointiyhteiskunnassa*. Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Sulkunen, I. (1989). *Naisen kutsumus: Miina Sillanpää ja sukupuolten maailmojen erkaantuminen*. Helsinki: Hanki ja jää.

Tasa-arvovaltuutettu. (2018). Tasa-arvovaltuutteen kertomus eduskunnalle 2018. Tasa-arvojulkaissuja 2018:4. Helsinki: Tasa-arvovaltuutettu.

Tuori 2009

Valkonen, S. (2009). *Poliittinen saamelaisuus*. Tampere: Vastapaino.

Woodward, A. (2004). Building Velvet Triangles: Gender and Informal Governance. In: S. Piattoni & T. Christensen (Eds.), *Informal Governance and the European Union*. London: Edward Elgar.

Ylönen, M. & Kuusela, H. (2018). Consultocracy and its discontents: A critical typology and a call for a research agenda. *Governance*, 32(2), 241–258.

Ylöstalo, H. (2017). Organizational Perspective to Gender Mainstreaming in the Finnish State Administration. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 18(4), 544–558.

Ylöstalo, H. (2019). The Role of Scientific Knowledge in Dealing with Complex Policy Problems under Conditions of Uncertainty. *Policy & Politics*.

<https://doi.org/10.1332/030557319X15707904457648>.