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Boekbespreking van: Destabilizing theory: Contemporary feminist debate

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In the third part of the book the editors summarize the main findings of the country chapters and relate them to their central research question. This part again consists of two chapters. In the first one M. Franklin presents these results in a comparative format, highlighting findings that are similar for most countries and analyzing deviant cases. The editors find a declining effect of social variables on party choice for all Western countries. They assert that this decline in cleavage politics in some countries was already completed before the 1960s and started in other countries only during the 1980s. In the last chapter the editors and C. van der Eijk spell out some of the implications of these findings. These pertain to the nature of the electoral change in the societies under consideration and the consequences of the shift of their occupational structures towards post-industrialism. The authors draw attention to the particularization of voters' choices. One cause of this particularization they suggest is the increase of cross-pressures on voters. Another is the existence of political parties that have been successful in the past, but that are presently unresponsive to change. Cleavage politics decline when long-standing social conflicts are being resolved and present social problems are no longer adequately articulated by parties based on those resolved conflicts. Under these conditions, individual citizens are increasingly occupied with their individual interests as compared to their group interests.

However great the merits of the book, a few critical remarks are in order. The first of these concerns the research questions. This study contains an example of conflating different questions into a single one. Furthermore, it provides an example of an explanatory question that is based on false descriptive statements. The central question of the book is: if social change makes for electoral change, why did electoral change occur so late? On p. 3 the reader, almost by accident, learns that according to the editors 'electoral change' comprises three things: the extent to which the electorate votes for new parties, changes in the electoral strength of parties, and changes in the predictability of voting behavior. In effect this formulation implies three distinct subquestions about electoral change. The first subquestion, the one about new parties, is shelved by the editors. They do so by restricting their core analyses to voting for all leftist parties taken together (p. 16). The second subquestion, why the strength of parties has changed so much, turns out to rest on a false assumption (p. 46). It was assumed that the strength of parties would have changed a lot, but for a majority of countries virtually no change was found. Taking this into consideration, the editors had to refocus their major research question (p. 49). They do so by narrowing it to their question of voter (un)predictability.

Our second critical remark concerns the conclusions. We find it somewhat disappointing that only parts of the results presented in each country chapter are used in the concluding chapters. The comparisons among countries remain restricted to the percentage of variance in voting behavior within a country explained by social variables. This leaves unanswered other descriptive and explanatory questions contained in the central research question of this volume, for instance: are there any differences between countries with regard to relative effects of social background variables on voting?; do changes in the relative impact of these variables display patterns?;

why is the effect of religion in some countries smaller than in others?; and: why did the relative impact of a certain variable increase? Attempts to answer these questions would have placed this book squarely in the tradition of Rose's seminal study *Electoral Behavior: A Comparative Handbook* (1974).

Our last point of criticism concerns the presentation and reliability of the results of the country specific analyses. These are open to some doubt. For any reader interested in answers to questions as the ones we formulated above, the similar coding schemes, analytical techniques and substantive cores in the country chapters would appear to offer an opportunity. However, some difficulties arise. First, although regressions are meant to be comparable, analyses contain different numbers of variables (compare for instance tables X.2 and X.3). Second, readers are warned in appendix B: 'In practice, there are many indications in the analyses reported in this book that too much reliance should not be placed upon the exact value of effects computed in our regression analyses'. For this reason the editors only compare the percentage explained variance and not the values of effects computed in the regression analyses. The reader wonders why the indications for the unreliability of the effects computed do not apply to the percentages of the computed explained variances.

P. Nieuwebeerta en W.C. Ultee

Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips, **Destabilizing Theory. Contemporary Feminist Debates**. Polity Press, Cambridge 1992.

Feminism has changed dramatically. This view is presented by all feminist theorists who contributed to this collection of essays: Sylvia Walby, Rosemary Pringle and Sophie Watson, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Biddy Martin, Moira Gatens, Griselda Pollock and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak as well as the two editors. The feminist debates, which the subtitle refers to, are concerned with the status of theory, which is correctly indicated by the main title: *Destabilizing Theory*. It is predominantly old feminist theory that has been destabilized, though other political and sociological theories have been challenged in the same sweeping movement. 'Grand', 'universal' theories still working in the tradition of the Enlightenment project are declared useless for feminism. The book reveals that the old pacts between feminists and liberals, marxists and socialists are definitely broken up in favour of a new pact between feminists and post-modernists. The editors speak of a 'paradigm shift' between 1970s feminism and 1990s feminism.

What, then, was wrong with the feminism of the 1970s, when these and other grand theories still, explicitly or implicitly, inspired feminist thinking? The editors mention several defects. First, the assumption that a cause of women's oppression could be specified. Secondly, the fact that the notion of oppression as the general condition of all women was not questioned. Thirdly, the fact that 1970s feminists searched for the cause of women's oppression at the level of social structure. Finally,

that the sex-gender distinction 'became almost talismanic'.

How simplistic this 1970s analysis was became clear, according to Barret and Phillips, in the 1990s when, after the attack by black feminists, differences amongst women were emphasized. It appeared that there was no common condition of women and that a micro-level of analysis would be needed to examine the complex interplay of different aspects of inequality. Moreover, sexual difference came to be viewed as more intransigent, but also more positive. Interaction between feminist, post-structuralist and post-modernist ideas undermined furthermore the sex-gender distinction. No single area could be mentioned in the end that was considered to be completely free from the constructing power of language, not even biology. Sex was shown to have been gender all along.

This is the shift in 'Western feminism' the editors trace from the 1970s to the 1990s. Although the images of feminism are caricatures and although 'Western feminism' turns out to be British, American and Australian, as general images they are not bad at all. Besides, if post-modernism has even reached Britain, there must be a genuine 'paradigm shift'.

The contributors try not only to describe this shift, but also to reflect upon its implications and it is at this point that this collection has many interesting views to offer for political scientists. For those not familiar with recent discussions about the influence of post-structuralism, post-modernism and deconstructionism the collection gives many insights in the constructive power of language and the way in which this eliminates any fundamental distinctions between 'words' and 'things' or ideology and reality. Power is perceived as a negative and positive influence, which is repressing and coconstructing, operating via languages, images and practices at all levels. Power is not only productive at the level of government and parliament, but also at the levels of, for instance, art, sexuality and translation. About the latter, Gayatri Spivak comments that the whole notion of translation needs to be seriously questioned, because it still presupposes that 'things' are not changed by changing their words. Language for Spivak is not a tool ordering and controlling material. It is a vital clue to where the self loses its boundaries. All contributors seem to say that we need to accept this. The loss of the Enlightenment idea of 'the autonomy of the subject' needs to be acknowledged before we can play the important game of intervening in cultural-political representations.

What is the structure of this intervention game? *First* of all, as Chandra Mohanty points out, we need to give up the assumption that a specific experience will naturally lead to a particular political position, such as that of being a woman to becoming a feminist. We need continuously mapping and transforming of our political location. The multifarious and conflicting identities within one person force us to historically interpret and theorize our experience and the intersection of several struggles. Mohanty's 'politics of location' is based on 'a "temporality of struggle"', which disrupts and challenges the logic of linearity, development and progress which are the hallmarks of European modernity'. Uncomplicated forms of identity politics are also criticized by Moira Gatens and by Bidy Martin. *Secondly*, this intervention game implies a critique on the types of universalism and humanism that presume an abstract, impartial, degendered, 'neutered' individual. This is particularly argued by

Anne Phillips. Nevertheless, she says, we also need something which stretches outside of ourselves, some capacity of self-reflection and self-distance, tools for linking up with those who are different. The need to go beyond ourselves and beyond particularism is acknowledged by some other contributors too, yet it remains unclear whether the old universal theories working upon the Enlightenment project can still be used for this aim or whether we need something else. Only one lesson is offered: consider differences first before proclaiming some kind of universalism. *Finally*, the interventions in cultural-political representations do not only take place in texts and through ever changing political subjectivities, but also in the classic domain of political science, namely the state. The article by Rosemary Pringle and Sophie Watson offers a rethinking of the state, seeing it neither as a coherent nor as a contradictory unity, but as a 'diverse set of discursive arenas which play a crucial role in organizing relations of power'. The discursive struggles that take place in these arenas not only constantly redefine and constitute particular interests, but also the state itself. This article by Pringle and Watson offers also an overview of feminist thinking about the state, a welcome and helpful contribution.

There are nevertheless also some points of critique one should make with respect to this collection. First of all, several rather common questions most political scientists would ask about the current 'feminist programme' have not been answered. What is the feminist list of demands for the current political agenda? What would the world look like if the feminist requirements of today would be accepted? More specifically, what are the current factions within feminism? What kinds of confrontations are there among them? What is the condition of women today; what kinds of distinctions need to be made (between groups of women or countries) in order to specify this condition; and what should be done to improve women's conditions?

Political scientists who look for answers to these types of questions will only be very disappointed by this collection of essays. There is no political programme, no analysis of women's condition or 'oppression'. Women are no longer the object of feminist debates. Instead, the focus has shifted to feminism itself. The types of implications of the new feminist paradigm centre primarily around feminist political theory. It is not clear what the implications for political practice will be. Yet, readers will not learn much about factions in feminism either. Despite all references to differences in this book, the new feminism that is presented here has a remarkably homogeneous character concerning its philosophical orientation (post-modernist) and its method (deconstructionist).

Though in her contribution Michèle Barrett spots the danger that the new deconstructionist method, which questions all assumptions and oppositions, and post-modernism will develop into 'disciplinary truth apparatuses', which will hinder the openness of perspectives, this lesson is not taken seriously enough in the other contributions. The choir of feminist theorists in this collection sings far too much in harmony for that. Only Sylvia Walby whistles a welcome false note in her argument that post-modernism has gone too far in fragmentation, that race and patriarchy remain virulent social divisions, and that this requires comparative research. In the other contributions the difficulties inherent in post-modernism are hardly recognized, not to mention discussed or resolved. It is indicated that feminists need some-

thing beyond particularism for reflection, solidarity and change, but it is not articulated what exactly this will be. It is indicated, too, that there might be a potential loss attached to any wholesale abandonment by feminists of traditional approaches in sociology, political economy or political science. Yet, we do not obtain an idea what the new approaches in these fields will be. Moreover, it is denied that post-modernism implies depolitization, but the authors have not succeeded to envision in some detail the new type of feminist politics. The idea of undermining standard concepts in politics and intervening in cultural-political representation is still too vague to give the reader an idea about 'what to do?' Finally, it is unfortunate that the erudition of the essays appears to have been bought at the price of having constructed a dispassionate, anger-less feminism.

In conclusion, this collection of essays challenges in many ways the traditional discipline of political science. It questions all kinds of standard concepts, such as 'gender', 'women', 'reality', 'body', 'state' and 'interest'. The collection deals with many subjects of philosophy, political theory and sociology, but it is still a unity, and it gives a good indication of the way in which feminism has changed. On the other hand, reading the book raises more and more questions about post-modernism as source of inspiration for feminist politics and about deconstructionism as the major method for women's studies. I guess that this will be the content of the next feminist book published by Polity Press.

R. Voet

A. Weale, **The New Politics of Pollution (Issues in Environmental Politics Series)**. Manchester University Press, Manchester 1992.

Since the 1970s, Albert Weale argues, a new way of looking at the ecology-economics controversy has evolved, and with it new policies against pollution. The ideology of ecological modernization, as expressed in the influential Brundtland report, basically asserts that environmental protection is not at odds with, but is rather a precondition for, long-term economic development (p. 31, 76). It has played an important role in legitimizing post-1980 styles of anti-pollution policies, which are characterized by the expansion of the policy community (i.e. actors represented in the policy formation process), the creation of new government institutions (notably ministries of the environment), reforms in the structure and process of policy development, new techniques of pollution control, and the internationalization of pollution policy (p. 28 ff.).

Weale, professor in the Department of Government at Essex University, attempts to describe and explain the evolution of these new anti-pollution policies. The format he has chosen is that of a comparative analysis of explanations rather than one of national and international developments. The introductory chapter 1 being dedicated to distinguishing the old and new policy styles, Weale presents four scientific 'idioms' (paradigms) in chapter 2 and applies these in five case-studies (chapters 3-7)

to recent developments in Western countries. Within the rational choice approach, the first of the four idioms, the answer is sought in terms of rational individuals seeking optimal want-satisfaction, while on the other hand the systems idiom looks at the responses of interrelated parts of the social system. At an intermediate level, the institutional idiom identifies the organizational and institutional conditions under which distinct types of political strategies emerge. All three idioms overlook the importance of the cognitive aspects of the formulation and development of policies. The policy discourse or social learning idiom fills this gap by focusing upon understandings rather than upon interests (p. 57).

In chapter 3 Weale compares the differences in the content and pace of development of policies towards acid rain in Great Britain (the 'dirty man of Europe') and Germany (a classic example of ecological modernization). Unlike their British colleagues, German politicians preferred the principle of precaution to the (ostrich) principle of the scientific burden of proof (p. 81). Weale argues that the rational choice and institutional approaches, although both do indeed explain part of the developments in either country, obscure the importance of the discursive and legitimating aspects of policy development. A change in ideology might tip the balance of argument in one or the other direction – which is what happened in Germany.

Subsequently, the tension between, what is called, nature's interconnectedness and the fragmentation of pollution control arrangements is examined. As environmental problems are always interrelated, policies directed at the alleviation of one problem may well worsen others, e.g. because pollution is merely moved from one area to another. In order to be successful pollution policies should be attuned to one another. In chapter 4, Sweden, Great Britain, and the USA serve to illustrate both structural constraints of a more integrated administration and the implications of actual fragmentation for pollution control strategies. Weale convincingly argues that new processes, rather than a new structure, of administration should be developed in order to cope with environmental problems. As an example, Weale introduces the Dutch experiences with the National Environmental Policy Plan (NEPP, chapter 5) and the authorities' attempt to overcome the fragmentation of environmental policy.

Chapter 6 gives an account of two kinds of critique of, and alternatives to, regulatory environmental policies and their implementations: economic instruments (in particular Pigovian taxes) and public participation in decision-making. Neither one can really compete with, or solve the implementation problems of, traditional policy. Moreover, rational actors in an institutional setting often have good (i.e. self-protective) reasons not to change their traditional approach to pollution. According to Weale, the frameworks of rational choice and institutions suffice to explain bureaucratic inertia, but not to understand why these seemingly infeasible alternatives, and the issue of policy reform in general, keep reappearing in public debate. That can only be explained by turning to the policy discourse idiom: systems and institutions need legitimation, and the policy community is thus forced to discuss alternatives, whether it likes it or not.

The internationalization of pollution policies is described in chapter 7. Given Weale's initial characterization of the international system as a hobbesian state of na-