



GENDER AND POLITICS

SERIES EDITORS: JOHANNA KANTOLA · SARAH CHILDS

The NGOization of Social Movements in Neoliberal Times

Contemporary Feminisms
in Romania and Belgium



Alexandra Ana

palgrave
macmillan

Gender and Politics

Series Editors

Johanna Kantola
University of Helsinki
Helsinki, Finland

Sarah Childs

University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh, UK

The Gender and Politics series celebrates its 12th anniversary at the 6th European Conference on Politics and Gender (ECPG) in July 2022 in Ljubljana, Slovenia, having published more than 50 volumes to date. The original idea for the book series was envisioned by the series editors Johanna Kantola and Judith Squires at the first ECPG in Belfast in 2009, and the series was officially launched at the Conference in Budapest in 2011. In 2014, Sarah Childs became the co-editor of the series, together with Johanna Kantola. Gender and Politics showcases the very best international writing. It publishes world class monographs and edited collections from scholars – junior and well established - working in politics, international relations and public policy, with specific reference to questions of gender. The titles that have come out over the past years make key contributions to debates on intersectionality and diversity, gender equality, social movements, Europeanization and institutionalism, governance and norms, policies, and political institutions. Set in European, US and Latin American contexts, these books provide rich new empirical findings and push forward boundaries of feminist and politics conceptual and theoretical research. The editors welcome the highest quality international research on these topics and beyond, and look for proposals on feminist political theory; on recent political transformations such as the economic crisis or the rise of the populist right; as well as proposals on continuing feminist dilemmas around participation and representation, specific gendered policy fields, and policy making mechanisms. The series can also include books published as a Palgrave pivot. For further information on the series and to submit a proposal for consideration, please get in touch with Executive Editor Ambra Finotello, ambra.finotello@palgrave.com.

This series is indexed by Scopus.

Alexandra Ana

The NGOization of Social Movements in Neoliberal Times

Contemporary Feminisms in Romania
and Belgium

palgrave
macmillan

Alexandra Ana
Marie Skłodowska-Curie (HORIZON-MSCA)
Fund for Scientific Research (FNRS)
Université Libre de Bruxelles
Bruxelles, Belgium

ISSN 2662-5814

ISSN 2662-5822 (electronic)

Gender and Politics

ISBN 978-3-031-45130-0

ISBN 978-3-031-45131-7 (eBook)

<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-45131-7>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s), under exclusive license to Springer Nature Switzerland AG 2024

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG.

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Paper in this product is recyclable.

FOREWORD

I am delighted to provide a few reflections about this much anticipated monograph. Alexandra Ana's timely study engages with a longstanding debate among feminist movement activists and scholars on the causes and consequences of a highly institutionalized, bureaucratized, and professionalized NGO sector that, to some degree, has replaced older feminist movement paradigms. What makes her study so valuable is that she superbly supports theory and analytical claims with sound empirical evidence. Her fieldwork provides rich insights into the NGOization of the feminist movements in two contrasting cases, Belgium and Romania, with different historical legacies of feminist activism, different opportunity structures and political architectures. This research design not only allows her to engage with those who see NGOization as a purely Western concept. It also effectively takes aim at what has become a "romanticized" narrative about a pre-institutionalized social movement structure in which mobilization flourished with no power mechanisms in play and with no limiting strings attached.

Alexandra Ana also adds a fourth dimension to the NGOization paradigm. She notes how the deployment of market norms in the feminist nongovernmental sector leads to continuous exposure to precarity, which in turn informs feminist actors' scope of activity and mobilization capacity. By widening her lens on NGOization to include the gendered norms of precarious labor, she shows how financial insecurity, combined with a constant need to acquire new projects, results in a management orientation of feminist movement culture that hollows out solidarity and instead feeds hierarchies and competition.

Another compelling narrative that runs through this monograph is the challenge of putting intersectional claim making into practice under conditions of neoliberal governance. Alexandra Ana documents the continued “single issue approach” that informs much of mobilizations, even though we are well aware of the intersectional nature of activism. She disentangles the factors that inform the “boxes” within which we operate as scholars and feminist activists and highlights that the opportunity structures, in the form of government and donor grants, at this point provide little incentive to add complexity to gendered mobilizations.

In sum: this book profoundly advances our understanding of the processes that define the civic sector more broadly and feminist movement organizations more specifically. It will be eye-opening for feminist scholars and activists alike.

Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies
University of Washington
Seattle, WA, USA

Sabine Lang

PREFACE

Between engagement in official political institutions and participation in social movements or civil society organizations, how does one produce social change for collective good and social justice? It was at the end of 2000s and the beginning of 2010s that the feminist movements were not that visible publicly, not to the greater number, as mass mobilizations were scarce, yet organizations and collectives were there, addressing structural inequalities and patriarchal violence through legislation, education, and services. They seemed to act there where states and societies have failed throughout the years.

In Romania, among a handful of feminist activists, some longed to retrieve the second wave feminism and reinscribe the movement into the linear history paradigm, and others questioned the violence of the state on more intersectional grounds, their voice being considered radical and barely heard.

In Belgium, while the feminist movements are undergoing generational and ideological regeneration, long-standing activists were recalling with nostalgia the first women's day in Brussels in 1972 where more than 8000 people participated, including Simone de Beauvoir or the 2000 World March of Women in Brussels.

Certainly, feminist activists did not mobilize the masses during the 2000, neither in Belgium nor in Romania. However, some of them, part of formal organizations or NGOs, affected politics by acting in official settings once the governmental openings allowed for influence. Others chose to act outside formal political channels, more like social movements, through contentions actions. While the first thought to advance feminist

goals by focusing on single issues pertaining to women's rights, the second understood women's emancipation as interlaced with other struggles with whom they share at least a common history of oppression. Although it's hardly a neat distinction given the overlapping membership, sometimes interchangeable strategies and the varied repertoire of action, the distinction between an NGOized feminism and a Street feminism, inhabiting the wider space of women's cause go against the tendency to homogenize feminist movements and account for the trends and the less visible actors.

This book, stemming from my PhD research, conducted at Scuola Normale Superiore, between 2014 and 2019, explores the last decades transformations of the feminist movements and locates NGOization within the specific context of relations between the state and the market in neoliberalism. How does NGOization affect the life of feminist movements? What is the relationship between NGOization and neoliberal governance? Mentors, colleagues, and friends have accompanied and guided me along this journey. I am grateful to Donatella Della Porta, my PhD supervisor, for the depth of our exchanges, for her trust and inspiration over the years. Director of the Centre on Social Movement Studies (Cosmos), she built up a space of valuable exchange and intellectual reflection around social movements. Lorenzo Mosca, my co-supervisor, offered invaluable academic support and guidance. Cosmos members provided helpful comments at different stages of my research. I am deeply indebted and grateful to David Paternotte for his outright mentorship, rich and valuable academic exchanges, steady encouragement, and advice, for more than ten years now. Gratitude to the other members of the thesis jury, Ioana Cirstocea, Lorenzo Bosi, Lorenzo Zamponi, whose relevant and substantial comments guided my work for this manuscript. Thank you, Scuola Normale Superiore for supporting financially my PhD research and thesis. Thank you, Université Libre de Bruxelles for receiving me as a visiting researcher.

I would like to express my greatest appreciation to all feminist activists who accepted to participate in this research whose experience, knowledge, and their steady political commitment to bettering the lives of women, those at the margins, those excluded from power and status are cornerstones of this book. Many thanks to activists from *Vie féminine*, Université des Femmes, Garance, Cercle féministe de l'ULB, *Le monde selon les femmes*, Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes (FPS) (Soralia), Abortion Rights Platform, *Le Réseau pour l'Élimination des violences entre partenaires*

(REV), Isala, Femmes et santé, La voix des femmes, Sophia, Fat Positivity, CEFA (today Corps écrits), the group around Reclaim the Night march, European Women's Lobby (EWL), Le collectif des femmes sans papiers, Asociația FRONT (@feminism-romania), CPE – Centrul Parteneriat pentru Egalitate, Centrul de Dezvoltare Curriculară și Studii de Gen, FILIA, A.L.E.G. – Asociația pentru Libertate și Egalitate de Gen, Dysnomia collective, The feminist group of A.casă collective, Transcena, Rupem tăcerea despre violența sexuală, Rețeaua pentru prevenirea și combaterea violenței împotriva femeilor, VIF, E-Romnja, Biblioteca Alternativa, Centrul Feminist Sofia Nădejde, Asociația Plural, Accept, Romanian Women's Lobby (RoWL) and others. Thank you to the officials of Belgian and Romanian governmental bodies and ministries who accepted to discuss with me.

Thank you, Aurélie Aromatario, Catherine Wallemack, Catherine Markstein, Ariane Estenne, Cristina Rădoi for the proximity and complicity of our exchanges, for our intellectual discussions and friendly support during my fieldwork.

I am profoundly appreciative to my closest friends, Huda Alsahi, Iulia Sima, Mattia Collini, and family, Ana Ana, Constantin Ana, Lia Smochină, Camelia Urinciuc for their generosity and support during the years, helping me grow.

My deepest gratitude to my husband, Pierre Le Tortorec, whose genuine kindness, humor, love, and unconditional backing help me navigate with more ease the troubled waters of academia and remember the joys of life.

I dedicate this book to Lenou, my beloved child, to whom I am forever grateful for giving me the possibility to discover another world, another love. I wish you meaningful encounters, strong pillars, and a reliable compass, to accompany and guide you through life.

Reims, France

Alexandra Ana

Praise for *The NGOization of Social Movements in Neoliberal Times*

“NGOization of social movements is a widespread but little studied phenomenon which acquires different characteristics in different times and places. Through an in-depth comparison of feminist movements in Belgium and Romania, this book contributes to fill a gap in social movement studies as well as in gender studies by analysing the complex processes of professionalization, institutionalization and bureaucratization of contentious politics as well as the potential risks of depoliticization, demobilization and co-optation they bring about.”

—Donatella della Porta, *Scuola normale superior, Florence, Italy*

“Building on international comparison and fieldwork conducted in the late 2010s, Alexandra Ana unveils the neoliberal governance mechanisms driving contemporary feminist activist practices and subjectivities. Original and convincing, her critical analysis overcomes normative, worn-out categories that often pervade both academic literature and activist debates, such as “de-politicization”, “Ngoization”, or “bureaucratization”, to shed light on states and markets dynamics shaping women’s mobilizations.”

—Ioana Cîrstocea, *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), Paris, France*

“Alexandra Ana’s book is a must-read for anyone interested in understanding how a social movement (organization) transforms into an NGO. This book is not only a valuable contribution to the study of contemporary feminist movements in Europe; it also sheds light on an issue that has often been overlooked in social movement studies. By comparing Belgium to Romania, Alexandra Ana is able to unpack the various dynamics at play in the NGOization process, as well as to explore its consequences on actors, organisations and social struggles.”

—David Paternotte, *Université libre de Bruxelles, Belgium*

CONTENTS

1	The NGOization of Social Movements: Between Opportunities and Constraints	1
1.1	<i>What Led to NGOization? Context and Incentives</i>	2
1.2	<i>What Is NGOization? Related Process and Risks Entailed by NGOization</i>	6
1.3	<i>Critical Perspectives on NGOization</i>	9
1.4	<i>The Argument of the Book</i>	13
1.5	<i>Case Selection and Data</i>	14
1.6	<i>Brief Notes on Feminist Epistemologies and Methodologies: The Selection of the Units of Analysis</i>	17
1.7	<i>The Selection of the Units of Analysis</i>	20
1.8	<i>How the Book Proceeds</i>	22
	<i>Bibliography</i>	23
2	A Historical Overview of the Feminist Movements in Belgium and Romania	31
2.1	<i>Introduction</i>	31
2.2	<i>The Emergence and Development of the Feminist Movements in Belgium</i>	52
2.2.1	<i>From Education to the Right to Vote: 1830–1918</i>	52
2.2.2	<i>From Reconstruction to the End of WWII: 1918–1944</i>	54
2.2.3	<i>From Economic Rights to the Decriminalization of Abortion: 1944–1990</i>	57

2.3	<i>The Transformations of Feminist Movements in Romania</i>	61
2.3.1	<i>Women's Mobilizations for Civil and Political Rights: 1815–1933</i>	61
2.3.2	<i>Anti-Fascist Resistance and Communist Politics: 1933–1948</i>	67
2.3.3	<i>Women's Organizations During State Socialism: 1948–1989</i>	70
2.4	<i>A Comparative Perspective Between Belgian and Romanian Feminist Movements</i>	72
	<i>Bibliography</i>	75
3	The Institutionalization of Feminism: Inclusion and Marginalization	77
3.1	<i>Introduction</i>	77
3.2	<i>The Belgian Case</i>	80
3.2.1	<i>The Development of an Institutional Architecture: Women's Policy Agencies</i>	80
3.2.2	<i>The Road Toward Feminist and Gender Studies in Belgium</i>	81
3.2.3	<i>Institutionalizing Feminist Movement Participation: The Role of the POS</i>	83
3.3	<i>The Romanian Case</i>	91
3.3.1	<i>The Development of an Institutional Architecture for Equality Between Men and Women and Non-discrimination in Romania</i>	91
3.3.2	<i>The Road Toward Feminist and Gender Studies in Romania</i>	92
3.3.3	<i>The Institutionalization of the Feminist Movement Participation and the Role of POS</i>	94
3.4	<i>Inclusion and Marginalization: A Comparative Outlook</i>	104
	<i>Bibliography</i>	106
4	Participation in Official Settings: Between Co-optation and Resistance	111
4.1	<i>Introduction</i>	111
4.2	<i>Autonomy Versus Dependence</i>	115
4.2.1	<i>Autonomy Within</i>	115
4.2.2	<i>Autonomy Outside</i>	119

4.3	<i>Instrumentalization Versus Institutional Discursive Socialization</i>	123
4.4	<i>Occupy the Space: Resistance to the Hegemonic Order</i>	127
4.5	<i>Conclusions</i>	131
	<i>Bibliography</i>	132
5	The Routinization of Protest	135
5.1	<i>Introduction</i>	135
5.2	<i>Reactive Versus Planned and Recurrent Mobilizations</i>	137
5.3	<i>From Normalization to Internal Diversity. Bridging Social Capital</i>	144
5.4	<i>Within Movement Cleavages and Challenges to Bridging</i>	149
	5.4.1 <i>Contentious Strategies Versus Institutionalized Tactics</i>	149
	5.4.2 <i>Feminist Activists Versus Women as Constituency</i>	150
	5.4.3 <i>Untangled Lines of Oppression</i>	152
5.5	<i>External Challenges: Police Repression</i>	154
5.6	<i>Conclusions</i>	161
	<i>Bibliography</i>	162
6	The Professionalization of the Feminist Movement	165
6.1	<i>Introduction</i>	165
6.2	<i>An Overview of the Literature on Professionalization</i>	166
	6.2.1 <i>The Sociology of Professions</i>	166
	6.2.2 <i>The Sociology of Social Movements</i>	169
	6.2.3 <i>The NGOization Literature</i>	171
6.3	<i>Gender Expertise and Feminist Knowledge Production</i>	175
	6.3.1 <i>Institutionalized Knowledge Production and the Institutionalization of Expertise</i>	175
	6.3.2 <i>The Role of Feminist Knowledge Production</i>	177
	6.3.3 <i>Knowledge Production in Informal Collectives</i>	179
	6.3.4 <i>Knowledge Diffusion</i>	182
6.4	<i>The Build-up of a Profession</i>	184
	6.4.1 <i>A Web of Interactions in the NGO Sector</i>	186
	6.4.2 <i>Feminist Workers in NGOs: Versatility/Polyvalence and Professional Distance</i>	189

6.5	<i>Challenges Brought by Professionalization</i>	194
6.5.1	<i>Between the Risks of Depoliticized Structures and the Advantages of New Politicized Subjects</i>	194
6.5.2	<i>Paid/Unpaid Work Divide</i>	200
6.5.3	<i>NGO Professionals: A Nine to Five Job?</i>	201
6.5.4	<i>Emancipating on the Back of Others?</i>	204
6.5.5	<i>Power Relations: Between Vertical and Horizontal Organizing in Feminist NGOs and Street Informal Groups?</i>	206
6.6	<i>Conclusions</i>	209
	<i>Bibliography</i>	213
7	Neoliberal Bureaucratization and Feminist Movement Organizations	217
7.1	<i>Introduction: From Bureaucratization to Neoliberal Bureaucratization</i>	217
7.2	<i>Why Comply? Predictability, Risk Management, and Transparency</i>	221
7.3	<i>Governing at a Distance? The Role of Accountability</i>	227
7.4	<i>The Power of Language: Formalities, New Subjects, and New Markets</i>	234
7.5	<i>Resistance to Neoliberal Bureaucratization: Struggles and Challenges</i>	246
7.6	<i>Conclusions</i>	250
	<i>Bibliography</i>	255
8	Governing Through Insecurity: Financial Dependence and Precarization in the Feminist NGO Sector	257
8.1	<i>Introduction</i>	257
8.2	<i>Funding Sources and Mechanisms in Belgium and Romania</i>	263
8.3	<i>Financial Dependence: The Multiplication of Sources of Funds and the Fragmentation of Subsidies</i>	266
8.3.1	<i>Channeling Through Time Misappropriation and Perceptions Gap</i>	267
8.3.2	<i>Governing Through Insecurity</i>	273
8.4	<i>Conclusions</i>	283
	<i>Bibliography</i>	284

9	NGOization: The Neoliberal Mode of Governance of Civil Society	287
9.1	<i>Institutionalization</i>	288
9.2	<i>Professionalization</i>	291
9.3	<i>Neoliberal Bureaucratization</i>	294
9.4	<i>Precarization</i>	296
9.5	<i>NGOization and the Consolidation of Anti-Gender Movements</i>	298
	<i>Bibliography</i>	302
	Appendix 1. List of Interviews	303
	Appendix 2. Organizations	307
	Index	309

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	The NGOization of social movements	13
Fig. 3.1	Inclusion and marginalization	79
Fig. 5.1	Bridge-building	144
Fig. 6.1	Professionalization	174
Fig. 6.2	The challenges brought by the professionalization of the feminist movements	195
Fig. 6.3	Losing your feminist soul—the triad logic of action: political, technical versus charity	198

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	Selective chronology of contentious events and the buildup of institutional, legal, and societal infrastructures in Belgium	32
Table 2.2	Indicative chronology of feminisms in Romania	42



The NGOization of Social Movements: Between Opportunities and Constraints

A hazard facing mass movements is the NGOization of resistance.

[...]

Eventually—on a smaller scale, but more insidiously—the capital available to NGOs plays the same role in alternative politics as the speculative capital that flows in and out of the economies of poor countries. It begins to dictate the agenda. It turns confrontation into negotiation. It depoliticizes resistance. It interferes with local peoples' movements that have traditionally been self-reliant. NGOs have funds that can employ local people who might otherwise be activists in resistance movements, but now can feel they are doing some immediate, creative good (and earning a living while they're at it).

Real political resistance offers no such shortcuts. The NGOization of politics threatens to turn resistance into a well-mannered, reasonable, salaried, 9-to-5 job. With a few perks thrown in. Real resistance has real consequences. And no salary.

Arundhati Roy

At the turn of the twentieth century, scholars largely concluded that feminist movements lacked a mass mobilization dimension, had reduced visibility and impact, being moderate in their tactics, collaborating with state institutions and accommodating their agenda. As women gained access to influence politics through formal official channels, social justice

concerns of feminist activists started to be pursued through institutionalized forms of political intervention. This implied a shift in the tactical repertoire of the feminist movements, from contentious actions and disruptive protests toward institutional advocacy and lobbying within NGOs (Lang, 1997; Alvarez, 1999; Bernal, 2000; Halley, 2006). What were considered classical social movement organizations (SMOs) became specialized feminist NGOs. The proliferation of professionalized NGOs, efficient and productive, instead of loosely organized structures that mobilize large constituencies, is captured by the process of NGOization of social movements. NGOization has been theoretically discussed and empirically analyzed in Western European countries (Lang, 1997; Paternotte, 2016), Latin America (Alvarez, 1999), Central and Eastern Europe (Guenther, 2011; Jacobson & Saxonberg, 2013), Africa (Britton & Price, 2013), Arab countries (Jad, 2007), or South Asia (Roy, 2015). Sometimes it was associated with *transition* and/or EU accession, in the European semi-periphery, and with development and structural adjustment programs (SAPs), in the Global South. In Eastern Europe, scholars claimed that social movements underwent an early institutionalization, within the process of democratization and under the influence of funds available to NGOs (Della Porta & Diani, 2006, p. 246).

While reflecting the tension between NGOization as a phenomenon that is threatening mass movements and the disclaimer related to the valuable work certain NGOs do, Arundathi Roy's public address at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, in San Francisco, in 2004, pleads to understand the "NGO phenomenon" in the wider political context. What led to NGOization? In what ways is NGOization related to neoliberalism? How does NGOization affect social movements? What happens when activists pursue careers in social movements? What happens when activism becomes a paid job?

1.1 WHAT LED TO NGOIZATION? CONTEXT AND INCENTIVES

NGOization is related to the organization of United Nations (UN) World Conferences on Women (WCW), starting in 1975 in Mexico City, when a global network of women's rights activists started to crystalize, contributing to the buildup and diffusion of gender equality norms and policies, embedded in international treaties and declarations or policy

recommendations for governments, that have been largely and globally diffused (True & Mintrom, 2001). One of these recommendations, following the 1975 Conference and adopted by national governments, was the creation of women's policy agencies. Conceptualized as state feminism, these agencies functioned as national policymaking machineries (Kantola & Squires, 2012), in which femocrats worked for the advancement of women's rights and gender equality within state bureaucracies (Franzway et al., 1989, p. 133), by uploading claims advanced by feminist movement activists and implementing international norms. The creation of these governmental entities for gender equality opened a window of opportunity to further movement goals. In order to be treated as legitimate partners by the states, grassroots groups experienced the pull to consolidate as formal, professional organizations, laying down the conditions for the multiplication of NGOs (Lang, 2013). However, more than a proliferation of professional organizations, NGOization is part of the larger transformations of the relationship between states, markets, and civil societies, deeply altered by the intensification of overlapping governing processes that started during the 1970s and 1980s—neoliberalization, transnationalization, Europeanization, and democratization.

Neoliberalization—as a “politically guided intensification of market rule and commodification” (Brenner et al., 2010a, p. 184)—prioritizes market-disciplinary responses to regulatory problems, strengthening commodification in all spheres of social life, often using speculative financial instruments to create new fields for profit-making (Brenner et al., 2010b, pp. 329–330). Additional to the proliferation of norms, rules, and procedures stemming from the market at all levels of life, neoliberalization implied a high degree of formalization, resulting from operations of abstraction that enclosed the complex reality into these general formal categories, norms, and practices coming from the market (Hibou, 2015, pp. 16–25). This opened the possibility to transform empirically assembled populations—categories of governmentalities—into morally constituted communities to be managed (Chatterjee, 2004, pp. 60–75). In practice, neoliberalization translated into evidence-based policymaking, an increase in importance of New Public Management (NPM), together with the dismantling of the welfare state. These elements favored the proliferation of NGOs that have been welcomed to fill in the space emptied by the state shrinking (Fraser, 2013), while at the same time accelerating state withdrawal from social provision and insinuating that there is opposition outside the state—the antagonist civil society seeking for social

transformation (Harvey, 2005). Relying on third parties for the elaboration and implementation of certain public policies, especially those which are marginal, such as equality policies (Meier & Paternotte, 2017), states institutionalized certain forms of participation and sometimes financed civil society actors for their role in organizing the interests in the society and for their contribution in policymaking, fostering the spread of civil society representation within the state and an increase in public-private partnerships (Banaszak et al., 2003; Meier & Paternotte, 2017).

First, NGOs' contribution to policymaking is aligned to the "new relationship between government and knowledge through which governing activities are cast as nonpolitical and nonideological problems that need technical solutions" supported by neoliberalization (Ong, 2006, p. 3). As gender equality bodies are expected to supply knowledge and technical expertise for policymaking and gender mainstreaming across policy fields, feminist NGOs are pressured to provide policy-relevant knowledge in order to be included as legitimate partners of the government in the production of policies. Second, NGOs' contribution to service provisions transferred as a result of the shrinking welfare states is supervised through the use of NPM, as a new form of regulation, interested in outputs—meaning visible and quantifiable results—and that involves tools such as grants, projects, and contracts submitted to strict accountability criteria that manage the relationship between the state and the NGOs (Kantola & Squires, 2012). The multifaceted process of state reconfiguration shaped by neoliberalization included not only horizontal shifts in power and policy responsibility, but also vertical transfers and a transformed state and society relationship (Banaszak et al., 2003, p. 7). Besides delegating responsibilities to non-elected state bodies to make policy and offloading responsibilities to non-state actors such as the family, community, the market, or NGOs, states also uploaded power to international institutions, such as the EU, UN, IMF, or WTO, and downloaded power and responsibility to substate, provincial, or regional governments (Idem, pp. 5–6).

In this sense, transnationalization, Europeanization, and democratization¹ after the second half of the 1970s were part of these processes of uploading power. Transnationalization favored the emergence of a global

¹The third wave of democratization that started with the Carnation Revolution in 1974, continuing with democratic transitions in Latin America during the 1980s, followed by the Asian-Pacific countries, Central and Eastern Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union and then transitions in Africa (Huntington, 1991).

gender equality regime (Kardam, 2005) through the development of international norms and transnational networks that became crucial in the implementation of public policies (Finnemore & Sikkink, 1998). Women's policy agencies, created as a result of the UN processes, were supposed to bridge between feminist movements' claims and the governmental bodies involved in policymaking (Kantola & Squires, 2012). Europeanization, as the phenomenon related to European integration, both in member states and accession countries (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003), functioned as top-down influence on domestic politics, but also as an opportunity structure for social movements, supporting the transnational organization of activists (Čisář & Vráblíková, 2013), with groups lobbying at the European institutions (Della Porta & Caiani, 2011; Monforte, 2009; Paternotte, 2016). As EUv competencies expanded, impacting on women's policy agencies (Kantola & Nousiainen, 2009) responsible for facilitating the implementation of international norms (True, 2003, p. 380), scholars underlined both the potential benefits of the EU engagement with gender equality and the primacy of the market and neoliberal ethos that frame gender policies, such as gender mainstreaming² justified through economic goals (Squires, 2007; True, 2009; Kantola & Squires, 2012).

However, the embedding of states into these transnational circuits of power through processes of transnationalization, democratization, and Europeanization needs to be understood in the context of Cold War dynamics and the East–West divide. Support for democratization came with structural adjustment programs (SAPs) that demanded liberalization, privatization, and deregulation, among others, and whose implementation was supervised by international institutions, such as the IMF and the World Bank. Economic reforms were accompanied by state-level

²The concept of gender mainstreaming appeared for the first time in international documents, after the United Nations Third World Conference on Women that took place in Nairobi in 1985 and it was explicitly endorsed as a strategy by the Platform for Action adopted at the next United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing, ten years later. The par. 79 of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action states that:

Governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes, so that, before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men, respectively.

transformations, such as the expansion of NPM and welfare retrenchment as well as the buildup of civil society. The post-Cold War hegemonic discourse, informed by colonial and imperial differences, consolidated the idea of a geographical and temporal lag in which *transition* toward democracy and free market represented an end point in the liberal temporality. As a consequence, the widespread understandings of the institutionalization and transnationalization of feminist movements supported by the organization of UN World Conferences on Women repose on a partisan focus on Western international organizations and a lack of knowledge about the contributions of feminist left-wing international organizations and of women from the European East (De Haan, 2010; Popa, 2009). For example, the inputs of Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF)—with a large membership in state-socialist countries and in the newly independent states of Asia and Africa—were largely ignored, as the organization was boxed as highly politicized, meaning communist, instrumentalizing women’s issues to serve the Communist Party (Popa, 2009; De Haan, 2010), as opposed to the presumed political neutrality of their Western counterparts (De Haan, 2010).

Overlapping with processes of transnationalization, Europeanization, and democratization, neoliberalization, as a variegated form of regulatory restructuring, unfolded unevenly across the world, producing “geo-institutional differentiation across places, territories, and scales” (Brenner et al., 2010b, p. 330). However, it did this systematically as a characteristic of its elementary operational logic (Ibidem), building up a common, uniform, and recognizable framework in which women NGOs act (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 13). Neoliberalism became the condition of the possibility of the majority of NGOs work (Grewal, 2005).

1.2 WHAT IS NGOIZATION? RELATED PROCESS AND RISKS ENTAILED BY NGOIZATION

The NGOization literature seeks to understand the place of NGOs within social movements and civil society and has been particularly concerned with feminist movements. NGOization has been described as “the process by which social movements professionalize, institutionalize and bureaucratize in vertically structured, policy-outcome-oriented organization that focus on generating issue-specific and, to some degree, marketable expert knowledge or service” (Lang, 2013, pp. 63–64). Thought to entail a shift

from movement politics to projects that demand goal and intervention strategies (Lang, 1997, p. 116), NGOization is about “managed mobilization” (ibidem, p. 66) and reform-oriented politics (Kapusta-Pofahl et al., 2005, p. 3) that translate into “increased professionalization and specialization of significant sectors of feminist movements” (Alvarez, 1998, p. 295).

There are different processes and elements associated with NGOization. First, institutionalization denotes the inclusion into mainstream politics and decision-making of those movement actors who adhere to the established routines and who might enter career paths within political institutions (Meyer & Tarrow, 1998, p. 21; Lang, 2013, p. 73). The institutionalization of feminist movements was bolstered by the openings in the political opportunity structure (POS) brought by the UN Conferences on Women and the establishment of gender equality agencies at national level that allowed activists, after 1970s, to fight for equality from within the state, compared to the period before, when they acted more as outsiders (Meier & Paternotte, 2017; Lang, 2013). Second, in order to be recognized as legitimate partners in official settings, the organizational transformation of feminist movements in NGOs was accompanied by activists’ professional specialization (Jenson et al., 2017; Alvarez, 2009), associated with policy success (Lang, 2013, p. 72). While allowing to reconcile work with activism (Lang, 2013; Herman, 2013), professionalization required increased resources to expand salaried workforce, to adjust to the institutional norms and structures and to policy field’s language. As such, the “bureaucratization of social discontent” appeared in relation to a shift in functions historically served by the social movement base that are taken over by paid staff, with mass campaigns being financed by private foundations or the state (McCarthy & Zald, 1987, p. 340). Resource mobilization theorists argued that transformations in funding patterns contributed to the rise of professional social movements that in turn affected the career patterns of movement leaders (McCarthy & Zald, 1973, p. 20).

Among the outcomes of NGOization and the aforementioned related processes, depoliticization, demobilization, and co-optation have been the most widely analyzed in the literature. After gaining access to official politics, movement actors encapsulated their demands within the case of objective scientific knowledge (Kantola & Squires, 2012, p. 338), closing off political spaces that might be considered too politicized or unconventional (Laforest & Orsini, 2005, pp. 483–484), leading to

depoliticization, understood as the loss of the political side of framing by favoring technical, objective expertise (Jaoul, 2017, p. 3). The growth in importance of evidence-based policymaking favored the supply of policy-relevant technical knowledge, rather than of new agendas or political alternatives. Professional experts in NGOs became valued in terms of technical expertise and managerial skills more than in terms of feminist commitment and militancy—long-time drivers for policymaking and legitimacy for the feminist struggle, amplifying depoliticization (Helms, 2014; Meier & Paternotte, 2017). Prioritizing institutional means to pursue movement goals, feminist NGOs embraced advocacy and lobbying as tactical repertoires rather than mobilizing constituencies, acting as proxies for publics without necessarily strengthening their public engagement capacity (Lang, 2013, pp. 203–205). Providing expertise to policymakers, while giving up contentious modes of action (Laforest & Orsini, 2005), professionalization leads to a loss of militant interest and activist engagement within the gender equality struggles, translating into demobilization (Jacquot, 2017; Lafon, 2017; Celis & Opello, 2017). The same way, examining the civil rights movement, Jenkins and Eckert (1986) demonstrated the demobilizing effect of professionalization and elite funding on social movements.

Besides depoliticization and demobilization, co-optation of social movements emerges when moderate challengers gain access to the policy process without producing policy changes or when their discourse is appropriated by targets, antagonists, sponsors—the latter channeling the mandate of social movements through the adoption of empty-forms-without-substance (Gamson, 1968). In the case of the US feminist movement, Ferree and Hess (2000, p. 141) explored the dangers of co-optation when being absorbed in the policy structures against which the movement has been fighting or when feminist movement leaders are used to promote the goals of other groups and leaders than theirs. In the case of EU gender policies, Stratigaki (2004) explored co-optation in the case of reconciliation between work and family life and showed how the policy meaning shifted from a feminist understanding in the sense of encouraging the sharing of family responsibilities to a market-oriented understanding that encourages flexible forms of employment. Other scholars showed how feminist elements such as “empowerment” and “choice” have been incorporated into the political and institutional settings and converted into an individualistic discourse claimed by Western governments and imposed to the rest of the world (McRobbie, 2009, p. 1). The discourse on women’s

empowerment post-financial crisis context marked the rise of a political-economic project termed by Adrienne Roberts (2015) as “transnational business feminism” referring to the joint efforts of liberal feminists together with states, funding institutions, NGOs, and multinational corporations to construct women as brand-new resources capable of providing high returns in Western investment. This perspective resonates with Kantola and Squires’ (2012) argument of a shift from state feminism to market feminism today.

1.3 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NGOIZATION

The NGOization paradigm that currently assembles feminist knowledge about NGOs both obscures and reveals power relations within feminist organizing (Hodžić, 2014, p. 222). More than descriptive, NGOization is an evaluative category that understands this process as detrimental to feminism. The polarized debate that emerged in the literature reflected normative conceptualizations of NGOs—between the neoliberal imperial evil and the savers of humanity (Grewal, 2017 in Roy, 2017). Different areas of critique crystalized around feminist and women NGOs as promoters of neoliberalism, the autonomy of the feminist movements, donor dependence, and the co-optation of the feminist agenda or around professionalization and expert-driven activist politics.

More than a proliferation of professional organizations, NGOization was understood as actively promoting neoliberalism at national and global levels and endorsing particular organizational forms and strategies among feminist groups and other sectors of civil society (Alvarez, 2014, p. 287), limiting the participation of local women and fragmenting movements for social change (Jad, 2004). Scholars showed that, through NGO work, new women subjects are created, either as victims—beneficiaries of NGO projects—or as agents, with potential to become professional gender experts (Alvarez, 2014, p. 306). Feminist NGOs, while representing and constructing new subjects and benefiting certain types of women, are both a neoliberal form and a site of struggle for feminist movement activism (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 15). While NGOs might reproduce existing gender, class, racial, and social divisions, they might also contribute to politicizing new struggles related to social, political, and economic

cleavages that marginalize some women while advantaging others.³ Thus, Sharma (2014, p. 110) argues that in postcolonial context governmental programs might generate dissidence, capacity for contentious political mobilization, and openings for subaltern political struggles, showing that there is an interplay between depoliticization and repoliticization, under neoliberalism. Similarly, looking at NGO girls in Kolkata, and the femininities enabled by these NGOs under the tropes of economic independence and women empowerment, supported by the global development agendas and liberalization, Romani (2016) argues that while some women are successful in using NGO femininities to their benefit, by subverting class and gender hierarchies, other women—at the intersection of multiple marginalities of class, sexuality, (dis)ability, caste, as well as other social relations, and personal experiences—are not able to access NGO gender equality narratives to their advantage.

On the one hand, some scholars argued that professionalization allows to reconcile work with activism (Lang, 2013), giving engaged women a certain financial autonomy (Herman, 2013) and politicizing a new generation of activists that met feminist politics through paid employment in NGOs (Roy, 2015, p. 98); on the other hand, others showed that it deepened the gap between a new professional NGO elite and the gender experts, the grassroots activists, and the communities of rural and refugee women (Jad, 2010, p. 345).

Professionalization is amplified by the conditions of access to funds, since donors consider legitimating the specialized, policy-relevant expert knowledge produced within professional bureaucracies (Alvarez, 1998). With formalized structures and managerial modes of functioning, some assert that feminist NGOs begin to resemble corporations, leading to a “9 to 5isation of women’s movement” (Roy, 2015, p. 107) and the development of a “career feminism,” with professionals specialized in one area of intervention, such as sexual harassment, reproductive rights, sexuality, or micro-credit, without in-depth comprehension of the interrelatedness of these issues and the complexity of patriarchal practices (Chakravarty n.d., cited in Roy, 2015, p. 107). Furthermore, recruitment is based on competence, rather than shared values; salaries accompany normative and solidarity-based incentives; and horizontal organization is replaced by

³Women are not a homogenous category and difference does challenge solidarity building. Costa (2014, 187) shows that in Thailand, class, education level and geographic location structure the relationship between women located differently.

vertical structures (Lang, 2013, p. 67). Supported by NPM principles, the professionalization of feminist organizations translates into two additional characteristics: project-funding, subject to tendering that enhances competition between NGOs (Hodžić, 2014), and contracting out expertise, enhancing the volatility of bureaucratic structures and making it difficult to support long-term projects (Sawer, 2007), entailing depoliticizing effects on activists or women's agencies (Kantola & Squires, 2012, p. 395).

Additionally, scholars showed that contemporary funding practices involve new forms of control (Kantola & Squires, 2012, p. 392), since NGOs do not only receive funds from donors and other institutions, but also agendas that shape their strategies, practices, and discourses, diminishing the voices of feminist activists (Bernal & Grewal, 2014, p. 5; see also Aksartova, 2009) and impeding the politicization of local concerns (Hemment, 2014). Thus, while donors' accountability increases, public accountability diminishes (Lang, 2013). Reflecting an intricated relationship between donors and movements, rather than leading to depoliticization, other studies showed that foreign sponsors can contribute to the development of the organizational capacity (Jacobson, 2013, p. 35; Grunberg, 2014) or sometimes even to the radicalization of movements (Císař, 2010). While some NGOs played the funding game, others refused to do so (Henderson, 2002, p. 156) and some others developed productive relationships with local policymakers, instead of international donors (Hryciuk & Korolczuk, 2013).

Both donor dependency and participation to policymaking in the official political arena were associated with the deployment of institutionalized tactics rather than with a disruptive repertoire (Lang, 2013; Jacobson, 2013) and a moderation in strategies and ideological stances of movements (Jacobson & Saxonberg, 2013, p. 6). How can feminist NGOs engage in more structural transformations of the political agendas and not only do "social repair work," considering that they are dependent on those structures they want to change (Lang, 1997, p. 113)? While for some, maintaining autonomy in order to avoid co-optation seemed one of the possible answers—though it proved too costly to maintain (Kantola & Squires, 2012)—for others the idea of an autonomous feminism is untenable first, because it suggests a need for an *a priori* pure subject of feminism that dismisses others—such as the intersectional feminist activism or the young feminism—and second, because there was no moment in which feminism was not attached to an institution, be it the empire, the state, or the market (Roy, 2017, p. 1). In "Transnational America," Grewal (2005)

argues that if co-optation is a loss of feminism to other movements and institutions in terms of subject or strategies, we should also acknowledge that feminism was never about gender alone—aspect revealed by theories of post-colonialism and intersectionality, which showed how a gendered subject is co-constructed with other social movements and institutions. Thus, rather than seeing co-optation as the end of agency and seeking to avoid it, another strategy suggested is to critically examine the field of politics and see when engagement produces liberation versus when it contributes toward growing inequality and exploitation (Korteweg, 2017).

Beyond the normative debates and diagnoses of feminist movements, as defunct, co-opted, or as the NGOized neoliberal pawn, there are several shortcomings within the literature that analyses these transformations. First, scholars failed to show the articulation between NGOization and neoliberal governance. How does NGOization translate into the practice of today's social movements? Second, NGOization, institutionalization, professionalization, and bureaucratization are most of the times used interchangeably and the relation between them is ambiguous. Furthermore, scholars do not always seem to agree if there is co-occurrence or a causal relation regarding the outcomes of these processes—co-optation, demobilization, and depoliticization. Third, existing research on contemporary feminist movements looked at the most visible actors, be them consolidated NGOs, participating in policymaking and discernible in the public arena, or mass mobilizations, at peaks of protest cycles, covered by the media, fascinated with numbers. Equating feminist movements either with feminist NGOs during times of abeyance or with mass mobilizations during times of social unrest, scholars failed to understand how NGOization and feminist movements are articulated. Moreover, despite contributions coming from intersectionality theories, revealing and asserting the entanglements between oppression at different levels, a single-issue movement approach prevailed among scholars and activists. Scholars failed to account for the way feminist movements are entangled with anti-racist, anarchist, LGBTQIA+, workers movements and boxed their respective contributions in single struggles.