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Signs and Regimes:

Rereading Feminist Work on Welfare States

Abstract *This paper reviews and reconstructs recent feminist work on welfare states and social policy regimes. We argue that the concept of "regime" should be stretched to incorporate the way that signs organize the relations among subjects authorized to operate on the field of power. We focus on feminist debates over the status of "maternalism" in welfare movements and states to put forward our expanded, culturalist conceptualization of gender regimes.*

Feminist research on welfare states has been an intellectually adventurous as well as a passionately political enterprise. Feminists have boldly broken with key conventions that inform sociological explanations of state social provision and regulation. So, for example, feminists no longer assume, as modernization theorists and structuralist Marxists do, that the main contours of welfare state development can be explained by the requirements of capitalist economic reproduction; nor do they insist, à la power resource modelers, that what matters most is the balance of forces between labor, and capital. Feminist researchers *do* assume from the get-go that gender—that is, in the most minimal sense, definitions of femininity and masculinity—has a formative role in state making, as it does in all known social arenas.¹ But feminists have been increasingly open to

exploring linkages with other domains of social action and other dimensions (especially race and class) and more agnostic about theories of their relationship. Gone are the days when the welfare state was simply portrayed as "the Man" or "the patriarchy," and a good thing, too! We need to proceed even farther toward surrendering old conceptual anchors, postponing but not abandoning the inevitable return to synthetic feminist and state theory building. Meanwhile though, the demise of patriarchy as a synoptic concept has left re-searchers with troubling questions. How *does* gender matter to welfare politics? To state policies of social provision and regulation? To the people who are objects of regulation and recipients of resources? To public opinion about social welfare? These continue to be crucial questions, and in this era of global political restructuring, they are bound to be with all of us for some time to come.

Here, however, our focus is more specific. We are interested in the conceptual tools employed by the feminist theorists and sociologists who study state policy making and governance. The best recent feminist sociological work on welfare states offers promising ways to think about this terrain, theorized as "gender regimes," "paradigms," and so on, and we propose to take a closer look at these concepts. We also see serious obstacles ahead. Some theorists still hew to mainstream versions of interest-based institutionalism that foreclose important avenues of historical and political investigation, and should be called into question. But if welfare politics do not follow from women's or gender-specific "interests," if indeed we problematize the concept of "woman" and perhaps abandon the concept of interest altogether, then what can a gendered perspective I have to say about governance and social provision that is in any way distinctive? This is not a simple problem, and this article, part of a larger project, takes a first crack at it. We will argue that the concept of "regime" makes most sense when it incorporates the way that signs-particularly, in this context, prevailing images of and emotionally charged judgments about what counts as feminine and masculine-organize the relations among individuals, groups, organizations and other agents authorized to operate on the field of power. What's at issue for feminist scholars is understanding how changing definitions of femininity and masculinity are temporarily fixed; how they constitute, disrupt, and in general play into the mechanisms of rule embodied in welfare states. We begin by examining the work that key concepts in the feminist literature are doing in grappling with these concerns, interrogate the easy assumption that regimes are nationally or locally bounded, and then move on to make an argument for an expanded, culturalist conceptualization of gender regimes.

Let's start with the concept of "regime," an enduring buzzword in the social sciences, and one increasingly prominent in feminist welfare-state analysis. Social policy regimes, defined as "patterns across a number of areas of policy," are the focus of Julia O'Connor, Ann Orloff, and Sheila Shaver's *States, Markets, Families* (1999, 12), the most sophisticated of the recent feminist forays into comparative welfare state analysis. This concept, they note, "has affinities to institutionalist concepts of policy legacies or regimes as they developed historically. ...," but they want to give it a gendered twist (O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver 1999, 12).² One of their practical political goals is to use the idea of "regime" to figure out how the state can be used to "push back the frontiers of institutionalized male dominance"(p. 19). Step one, then, involves sorting and labeling the vast array of past and present policies that have congealed in distinctive institutional arrangements-some of which will be enabling, some limiting. This approach to welfare states is often associated with Gosta Esping-Andersen, whose three "regime types"-liberal, social democratic, and corporatist/conservative-figure largely in the feminist literature (Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999). O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver (1999) set out to study four examples of the liberal state (Australia, Canada, Great Britain, and the United States), in part to see how "gender relations" inflect or crosscut ostensibly similar state forms-and to see how important gender was in a range of social outcomes. They argue that a pattern of "class-related" policy that privileges market solutions over social provision is common to all four countries, and is in fact what makes them "liberal." This very similarity enables us to see how gender enters into the picture autonomously, in a variety of important ways: by means of state policies that emphasize gender difference (or not); via policies that inscribe visions of female autonomy or dependence; through policies privileging particular family arrangements, like the male breadwinner/female housewife family; and by means of the political regulation of biological reproduction, among others. They thus disagree with Esping- Andersen's (1990, 20) implicit assertion that "the class-related dimensions of regimes determine gender outcomes," but themselves draw no neat conclusions. In fact, the political terrain they describe is so messy that it is not obvious what the effect(s) on gender relations and stratification might be. Rather they show-and we believe that this is an important contribution-that one upshot of attending to gender in the context of liberalism and global political restructuring is that a range of potentially contradictory "policy logics" are made visible.

Despite some uneasiness (e.g., pp. 232-35), O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver seem to want to stick with the concept of "regime" as

defined by nationally bounded patterns or "families" of state policy. And it is clear why some such concept is appealing, on several counts. Like all handy ideal-types, it enables us to sort conceptually, before trying to interpret or explain something. It also identifies what we sort: synchronic cross sections or snapshots of the panoply of social policies within each country. At each moment, just as in Saussure's famous chess game analogy (1959, 87-88), what we get is a system-in this case a matrix of policies that is both the result of many previous struggles over national policy and the battlefield for the next round of engagements. And "regime" also suggests something further-a sort of ordering hand or principle. The concept conjures up etymologically built-in associations of management, rule making, and enforcement, invoking not simply efforts at regulation or discipline but a more organized mode of governance. Now this raises a number of questions. To begin with the obvious one: when is an array of policies a "regime"? In mainstream analysis, analysts typically assume a totalizing principle specific to nation-states and then point to policies that fall under that rubric. For Esping-Andersen (1990), the commodification of labor power is the master key to the state's role vis-à-vis market and family in social provision, for it unlocks two necessary features that dovetail to organize institutional arrangements and policy regimes: particular coalitions among economic classes and distinctive class-linked ideologies. A "liberal" ideology, for example, is one in which "public obligation enters only where the market fails: the commodity-logic is supreme" (Esping-Anderson 1990, 43). These features are class based, they are internally coherent, they produce predictably patterned class-based effects, and they constitute a nationally bounded system.³ O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver have adopted Esping-Andersen's terminology and analytical strategy, and with it, unavoidably, have taken some of his baggage on board. When strong claims for the causal autonomy of gender are introduced, this can be confusing. There is no mention, for example, of the articulated pacts among men and women that would parallel the class coalitions that dot Esping-Andersen's arguments and help define his ideal types. The absence of "gender bargains" is surprising because O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver have borrowed Esping-Andersen's fundamental concept, and with it the notion that particular class coalitions underpin regime types.

Perhaps, however, this absence is a signal, for although O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver are too modest to take credit for improving on the idea of a "liberal policy regime," they do begin to diverge from Esping-Andersen and his followers in important ways. First, competition *among* logics is important in their account. They chart consistencies and inconsistencies across existing policy areas, painstakingly

mapping relationships between the logics of welfare and abortion policies. Thus *States, Markets, Families* takes a nascent deconstructive stance on mainstream analysis; it indicates that the relationship, among policy logics is an open one, even within nation-states supposedly governed by liberal regimes. Second, O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver (1999, 43-65) explicitly recognize that the liberal ideological heritage is historically complex, an uneasy coupling of discourses of market supremacy and possessive individualism. They also recognize points of tension and contradiction in its portrayal of men and women. Are women atomistic, "free" and autonomous individuals, for example; are they not individuals at all in that sense but rather a basis or fundament that enables men to act in the world and children to grow up to take their place in the future? Or are they somehow both? (These sorts of discursive dilemmas may have been formulated centuries ago in early modern Europe, but they continue to bedevil politics in today's America.) O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver admit cultural complexity-possibly even contradiction and incoherence- into the frame of the liberal regime type, leaning against the conceptually overextended uses of regime that have become increasingly influential in the field of sociology. However, this move raises serious problems for their own use of liberal regime as a nationally consolidated system. A liberal political order may exist, forged out of an internally diverse liberal heritage and sets of social practices, and it may be coterminous with the boundaries of the nation-state, but we strongly believe that this should be argued rather than asserted as an ideal typical point of departure.

Precisely these problems-the importance of cultural meaning and the extent or boundaries of governance-are central to George Steinmetz's book on the making of the German welfare state, *Regulating the Social* (1993). Steinmetz substitutes for "regime" the expanded and more culturalist definition of "paradigm" of social regulation, encompassing "the intellectual and cultural elements that precede and accompany institutionalized and social-reform practices" (1993, 41).⁴ Whatever we end up calling it-paradigm, regime, or some- thing else-this initial expansion makes sense, for policies, which sound like such hard-nosed things, are also myths of rationalization: visions that define social ends as desirable technical outcomes and "specify in a rulelike way the appropriate means to pursue these technical purposes rationally" (Meyer and Rowan 1977, 343-44). Steinmetz tries to reconstruct the mindset or culture of the policy makers, who mingle these social imaginaries. He also situates these regulatory paradigms at different levels of the state: they may be locally specific, or centrally institutionalized, or both; in fact one of the goals of the book is to explore the gendered aspects of local and

central state politics, and to show that the two forms of politics should be studied together.⁵ Such paradigms are potentially mobile templates that can in principle be transplanted, may coexist with other, partially conflicting logics, and may be abandoned or transmuted into new paradigms of social regulation. This is very useful, if still too hazy on why local or nation-state or any other conventional institutional boundary can be assumed to delimit a gender regime as well.

Although gender is "always-already" there, it may become "a central and explicit object of social regulation" (Steinmetz 1993, 52) only at certain critical historical moments. Earlier paradigms of German social policy were not gender neutral; for example, they assumed the family wage and accompanying gender relations as tacit givens. But, Steinmetz argues, overt preoccupations with masculinity and femininity pervaded the paradigm of scientific social work that characterized German welfare policy in the early twentieth century (see also Horn 1994, on Italy). For our purposes it suffices to note that the policy paradigm of "scientific social work" was distinctive in foregrounding women's bodies and biological reproduction as core preoccupations (one might say obsessions) and rendering them explicit objects to be worked on and transformed. Why gender might emerge as a core principle of state regulation only in certain ways at certain times-if indeed this is accurate-is not obvious. Steinmetz (1993,41-54) argues that no one theory can explain why different social policy paradigms are adopted; this is tied to different causal variables and depends on configurations of historically situated causal mechanisms.⁶ His general argument, too complex to examine fully here, offers one potential route away from class reductionism. But of course this argument also challenges feminist theorists, including Steinmetz himself, on a couple of counts. Before we ask why gender is more salient in some moments of state policy making than at others, we need better analytical tools with which we can examine whether that is indeed the case. How would we do that? What are the implications of this problem for arguments about the "gendered" character of policy paradigms or regimes?

No wonder some theorists have tried to refuse these theoretical categories altogether, gravitating toward more diffuse and seemingly less ambitious analytical strategies. Lynne Haney's captivating "Homeboys, Babies, Men in Suits: The State and the Reproduction of Male Dominance," a theoretical ethnography of women staff and clients in institutions in the juvenile justice system in a California city, inveighs against "top down" analyses; against seeing the state as "a uniform, male-dominated... apparatus;" against representations of the state "as a national structure, embodied in policies or

abstract principles, which seeks to advance female dependency" (1996, 760-61).⁷ Haney's evocation of the terrain of politics as "fragmented and layered, with various sites of control and resistance" (1996, 773) is close to Michel Foucault's (1978) evocative metaphor of capillary power. The story Haney tells is Foucauldian in another sense as well. Although she does not use these terms, she describes a "discursive regime" in which institutionalized assumptions about female sexuality, appropriate patterns of fertility and re- production, motherhood, and gender relations are mobilized in order to categorize and control, and in which discipline and resistance to discipline are mutually imbricated. These assumptions and practices are crosscut by other discourses-of race, class, and governmentality. Along the way, Haney traces some ironic twists on the old-style feminist theme of the state as the Big Patriarch invested in the Little Woman's continuing dependence. One probation officer, a lower- level state agent, actually tries to chivvy her charges into being more autonomous, while her "girls" resist and persist in longing for boy-' friends to depend on (Haney 1996, 762-68). At another site, where the female staff want to wean adolescent mothers from dependence on state social provision, the girls counter by setting up a "Welfare Club" and insisting on AFDC-"the usefulness of Men in Suits and babies" (Haney 1996, 772-73). This part of the analysis is beautifully executed, and we longed for the book-length version.

But a difficulty arises when Haney remarks that these sites exemplify different forms of social regulation, forms of control that are defined against private and public patriarchy, respectively, and that they stand in opposition to each other and to other state institutions. There is no "totality," even in a limited sense. We are not so sure. *All* these actors-counselors and clients-invoke recognizable elements of the liberal discursive tradition. The trope of (in)dependence that Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1995) construe as genealogically foundational in U.S. welfare politics is much in evidence. So is the schizophrenic discourse on and orientation toward women- especially mothers-as both "other than" and "the same as" men that has tormented liberalism from its foundational moments. This does not mean that these elements compose anything as integral as a liberal policy regime, but they might. The jury is still out. Further- more, these lower-level state actors who are situated in various apparatuses may not be making decisions and pursuing policies that contradict each other. Haney raises this interesting possibility, but doesn't give us enough information to decide. In fact, it isn't clear from Haney's account how an observer would know.

For starters, one would need to ask which policies were sustain- able and which were overturned when they failed to garner support

from other key actors-and why. A neofunctionalist approach of this sort can be extrapolated from Frank Dobbin's (1993) excellent article on industrial policy paradigms in France, Britain, and the United States during the Great Depression.⁸ Dobbin argues that each country had a "traditional" policy paradigm, based on a shared national cultural understanding about how causal processes work, but that the strength of the economic crisis appeared to call those paradigms into question, so that countries tried to switch gears in response. When things looked up again, however, the novel policy solutions were the first things to go. Dobbin (1993, 3, 5) says that they jarred with more ingrained notions of appropriate means-ends relationships, some so intractable as to qualify as "industrial cultures" or national economic "policy styles." Thus Dobbin begins with national policy logics, as do O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver, and then looks to see how certain policies do or don't function as part of an ensemble. Whether these policies were adequately supported with institutionalized state capacities, especially sanctioning mechanisms, is a critical variable in whether they persist as part of the policy landscape. We will return to this point below, because we see it as an important ingredient in defining the boundary of a regime.

But what such an ensemble might be more generally-which policies or constituent elements are included in a regime, and what ties it all together-remains a bit of a mystery. The mystery deepens once the analyst drops the assumption (though not the possibility) that regimes are bounded by nation-states. We are reminded of the riddle posed by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who wondered how to "specify 'elements' independently of the articulated totalities," and vice versa (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 93). One understandable response to this chicken-and-egg problem would be to throw up one's hands and dispense with totalizing concepts altogether. In fact, while sociologists and feminist theorists of welfare politics were hunting for clues to drawing conceptual boundaries around regimes large or small, the core concept of paradigm or regime with which we launched this article has been weakened or dispensed with elsewhere. "Paradigm" was the flagship concept in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), which insisted that paradigms were not just separable but incommensurable. But post-Kuhnians like Ian Hacking have softened or flatly disagreed with Kuhn's claim, arguing for example that one "style of reasoning" may embrace a variety of ways of making truth claims and that, conversely, analogous forms of truth claims may appear in different styles of reasoning. Foucault's closely related concept of "episteme," less widespread in sociology than in some allied disciplines, has been watered down as well, for some of the same conceptual reasons. Perhaps the con-

cept of regime or paradigm will eventually be junked in the philosophy of science. But in feminist work on welfare states, at least, we think that these concepts still have their uses. The challenge is to continue to use such Big Concepts as long as they are helpful, but not to reify them. We have already argued against one form of reification—identifying a policy regime with a single determining principle, an essence like class, and then taking the further step of claiming that that principle explains those policies. Talcott Parsons ([1937] 1968, 69-72) castigated this approach as "empiricist," and decried the assumption that the categories of a theoretical system exhaust the empirical space they are supposed to map. We would like to avoid the Scylla of empiricism without falling prey to the Charybdis of theoreticism, or reifying one's concepts rather than registering their provisional closure.

To get a better idea of how we might do so, and how to better incorporate culture and discourse en route, let's turn to a more concrete examination of Theda Skocpol's controversial book *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (1992). Skocpol argues that the prevailing image of the United States as a "welfare state laggard" is too simplistic. It is true that the classically worker-based social democratic policies that typify European welfare states were less successful in America. In part because corruption was perceived to be endemic to post-Civil War party-dominated patronage politics, policies aimed at "insuring" the workingmen and the elderly couldn't amass sufficient support. "This was especially true for social-spending measures that closely resembled Civil War pensions, which epitomized 'political corruption' for many reform-minded citizens" (Skocpol 1992, 262). Instead, according to Skocpol, the United States pioneered an alternative style of social welfare: "gender-based" programs for mothers and their children in the early twentieth century.⁹ Surprisingly, women succeeded in launching a series of initiatives that transformed the nascent welfare state. These included protective legislation for women workers, mothers' pensions, and perhaps the apogee, the passage of the 1921 Sheppard-Towner Act for the Promotion of the Welfare and Hygiene of Maternity and Infancy. This success appears counterintuitive to us now, because women did not have the franchise at the time, but Skocpol articulates several intertwined causal mechanisms. That women were organized in an extensive and geographically dispersed network of voluntary groups, for instance, would seem to have been disabling. But it actually helped them make their claims heard, because this network extended throughout an equally dispersed and federated polity (Skocpol, 530).

For our purposes, the most interesting of Skocpol's causal mecha-

nisms is the role of maternalist ideas. Here Skocpol draws explicitly from the work of many feminist historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Paula Baker (1984) and Sonya Michel and Seth Koven (1990), who have shown that women made claims to social benefits based on a broader concept "of citizenship couched in terms of motherhood."¹⁰ These claims and visions, most prominently articulated by a group of upper-class reformers, resonated powerfully with the federation of women's clubs, which drew members from across social class lines. The reformers-both women and their male advocates-also envisioned a specific political care-taking role for women, issuing in a more maternal state¹¹ (Skocpol 1992, chapter 6). This ideological and programmatic legacy was rudely truncated, however. "U.S. social policies for mothers and women workers enacted during the 1910s and early 1920s never quite crystallized into a full-fledged maternalist welfare state..." (Skocpol 1992, 534). The "maternally organized" federations lost strength, for one thing, and the franchise had some ironic effects, demobilizing and disempowering women in the short run. The advent of votes for women provoked infighting over political strategy and rapidly revealed that women didn't vote as a bloc, and were therefore less of a force to reckon with than legislators had feared. By 1929, Sheppard-Towner was no more.

A vast critical edifice surrounding *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* has already emerged. This is not the place to pursue a detailed engagement with critics of Skocpol's historical argument. Rather we are concerned with two influential criticisms, leveled from inside the community of scholars who work on feminist theory and welfare states, that are most relevant to our goals of clarifying welfare "regimes." The first concerns issues of gender. In a heated exchange in *Contention*, Linda Gordon contends that Skocpol "is uninterested in ideas or ideology" and therefore misses the "gendered meanings of welfare strategies" (1993, 148). Now in one way this criticism is contradicted by the wealth of material in the book on women reformers' ideas about political motherhood. For Gordon though, the book omits the role of "traditional, non-institutionalized patterns of social helping," as well as ideas of "charity, moral reform and women's rights" (1993, 148). That seems a reasonable objection. Nevertheless we think that both Gordon and Skocpol underestimate the degree to which discourses of maternalism shaped social policy debates, negotiations, and outcomes. Both assume that ideas are primarily to be explained by interests, positions, or experiences that lie outside of and preexist the ideas themselves. For Gordon, at least in the *Contention* debate, individuals manipulate these ideas strategically; for Skocpol, these ideas are rooted in socially patterned per-

sonal histories, including the reformers' educational backgrounds and settlement house experiences (Skocpol 1992, 340-54). The ideas themselves are conceived of as unitary and self-contained wholes.

We think that it is more useful to approach the terrain of ideas and cultural meaning in politics in terms of signifying processes. *Signs* should be the first building block of a retooled concept of "regime." Initially, making the sociological claim that maternalist ideas matter in politics involves showing how the sign of "motherhood" organizes and links together a number of otherwise separate and subordinate signs. This means looking more closely at how the category of mother is simultaneously represented as opposed to other less politically productive categories (such as worker, etc.) at any given historical moment, and linked to other signs that evoke citizenship and public participation. Women under a maternalist regime are represented as ideal citizens principally because of their presumed capacities to mother; correlatively, the state is represented as a possible maternal utopia. This more culturalist slant on maternalism helps us address Gordon's second significant criticism of *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*: the claim that Skocpol fails to deal with male domination. "In the entire book there is no discussion of the fact that the forms of political power with which Skocpol is so concerned are shaped by their maleness... She does not discuss the fact that the maternalist outlook was a strategy developed in adaptation to lack of political power in relation to men" (Gordon 1993, 148). We are sympathetic to this criticism, but see it as overly circumscribed by an instrumentalist treatment of the relationship between maternalists and male power. Surely signifiers of masculinity featured crucially in this relationship! In particular, the forms of "brotherhood" signified by fraternal associations and political parties came to be identified and rejected as a conduit of public corruption, while "motherhood" was reinterpreted and politically elevated in contrast to these visions of brotherhood gone sour.¹² Would a different conceptual articulation of "motherhood" and "brotherhood" have fared differently in the political field? Perhaps. This is an interesting question, which would need to be tackled empirically.

The relationship between maternalism and patriarchal fatherhood was still more fraught. Here too we differ from Skocpol and Gordon. Where Skocpol (1992, 480) seems to assume that maternalist ideas and institutional forms entailed "statebuilding for mothers and babies" separate from and substituted for "paternalist" values and forms, Gordon positions maternalist "strategies" in direct cultural competition with the "political power of men." But it is also clear that maternalism succeeded to the limited extent that it did because it coexisted with concepts of patriarchal fatherhood-monetary ben-

efits, for example, were directed toward the gaps in the family wage system. But it was a troubled coexistence. If women-as-mothers were recognized as potential independent recipients of benefits, this suggested an alternative to ideas of the family wage and potentially undermined the sovereignty of the father. In this context, the "signified" of motherhood, and reformers' desire to differentiate "good mothers" from "bad," was bound to become a terrain of ambivalence and contention. Thus some maternalists argued vehemently for the family wage and sought to show that women without husbands were not responsible for their woeful state (Mink 1995, 31,46). The reformers were attempting to fix, however temporarily, an intrinsically plastic and malleable concept, and to give that concept a positive emotional valency.

The second important area of criticism of *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* deals with race and ethnicity. Gwendolyn Mink argues, for instance, that Skocpol's maternalist politics were actually "middle-class women's politics" (1993, 16). In portraying them as universal, Mink states, Skocpol overlooks the ways in which those politics tacitly or overtly relied on subordinating black and immigrant women. "Skocpol assumes that because maternalist rhetoric and policies invoked common responsibilities of womanhood, they worked to universalize the ideological and material benefits of honored motherhood. There is no room in this analysis to consider the effect of systematically imposing middle class Anglo-Saxon cultural norms on poor and working class immigrant women and their families" (Mink 1993, 16). In her own book, *The Wages of Motherhood* (1995), Mink also provides examples of how poor and immigrant women were monitored and regulated as a condition of receiving benefits. In effect, Mink's response to Skocpol makes a three-step argument. Mink first agrees with Skocpol that there was an influential group of women maternalist reformers who were white and middle class. Second, these women espoused certain ideas about political motherhood that derived from their social position and life experiences. Finally, these women sought to make adherence to their own ideas and norms about motherhood a requirement for others who would stand to benefit from maternalist policies. The punchline of Mink's argument, and where she differs from Skocpol, is the insistence that those ideas and norms were racialized. As she says in her book, "welfare activists understood the cultural practices and individual choices of immigrants in racial terms-terms given scientific validity by the Teutonic and Nordic theories of racial hierarchy and backed up by the new science of intelligence testing" (Mink 1995, 4). And what was true for southern and eastern European immigrants went double and triple for African American women, most of whom were defined

as "outside the boundaries" of "motherhood" as a racially specific ideal (Mink 1995, 51). Mink is not the only scholar to have made this argument, but she has articulated it most forcefully with respect to Skocpol's book, and to the period that we are examining.

We agree that the array of maternalist discourses highlighted and valued some concepts of motherhood rather than others. We also agree that as these discourses informed policy making, they had a systematic disciplinary effect, regulating the mothering practices of less privileged women and therefore their perceived qualification as American citizens. In a deeper sense, however, Mink's position differs not at all from Skocpol's, and this is evident in such locutions as "middle class women's ideology" (Mink 1993). Mink assumes that social position-analytically independent of and prior to consciousness-generates ideas and even identities. The latter are simply assumed to be aligned with actors' positional interests and preconceptual experiences. Further, she assumes that these identities apply not just to an aggregate of people with the requisite demographic characteristics, but that these actors form a natural group and that their actions can be interpreted accordingly.

Our view is quite different, for we see cultural meaning as having its own emergent logic, which cannot be read off of or deduced from social position or interests. The categories of maternalist discourse were more hospitable to some people than others. Some "kinds" of actors were invited to recognize themselves in its rhetorical claims and to join in forwarding them. As Louis Althusser put it-in terms that are, if not felicitous, at least widely familiar-ideology "hails," "interpellates," "addresses" and "recruits" individuals as subjects, in both senses of the word (Althusser 1971, 173-74). The actors who come to recognize themselves as the subjects of these signifying practices, perhaps even to identify themselves as part of a group, perhaps even to act in its name, are re-created and transformed. The maternalist activists and their antagonists tried again and again to define and fix the field of political meanings, to join together and put asunder specific signs, and on that basis to mobilize actors, both individual and organizational, into effective political networks. This recruitment of *subjects* is the second part of our regime concept. The process of recruitment necessarily rests on the effective mobilization of subject positions-that is, identities that discourses make available to actors. When these subject positions resonate, emotionally as well as cognitively, they enlist people in certain social categories. These individuals then imagine that they are acting "under the sign of" or on the basis of those identifications. Why certain discourses appeal to some actors as opposed to others remains a crucially important area to investigate. Whichever methodological angle we adopt -

reception theory, psychoanalysis, or what have you- it is clear that the usual concept of "interest"- signaling ideological dispositions that are held to derive directly, without cultural mediation, from social positions of one sort or another-is no longer tenable for sociological analysis, although it remains very important as a possible construction of the actors themselves.

There is no one correct way to study the field of political discourse. One could enumerate the key categories of a discourse, "saturate" them, and go on to study their rhetorical linkages.¹³ One might assess the mechanisms that link multiple signifiers and signifieds, including processes of condensation and displacement, as in linguistically based or neo-Freudian analyses of social processes as texts. Another tack would be to set out to describe the distribution of "subject positions" prescribed by the discourse itself; one could also analyze the "ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true" (Foucault, as quoted in Stoler 1997).¹⁴ There are still other possibilities, inscribed in the hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions, including some that remain to be explored, for the theoretical and empirical work that addresses this methodological challenge is in its infancy. Nevertheless, discursive approaches can already illuminate the ways in which networks and groups of actors are created and bounded by signifying processes, and how the manipulation of signs incorporates some subjects and excludes or actively repels others. They also point up the political possibilities present in certain historical moments and cultural conjunctures. The range and fate of those possibilities are never dictated by the "essential" characteristics or experiences of those to whom politics appeals, but some may well be foreclosed on a specific field of politics.

Take, for example, the black women welfare activists of 1890- 1945 whose ideas are so admirably recovered and explored by Linda Gordon (1991). These women espoused some ideas about social welfare that dovetailed with those of their white counterparts engaged in maternalist welfare reform. They would therefore seem to have been natural political allies in the project of building a maternalist welfare state. But any chance of meaningful alliance was crippled by the fact that the concept of maternalism was already stabilized, in a racialized fashion, that interpellated white welfare activists as the rightful speakers. That boundary resulted in two sorts of exclusions. First, topics like lynching and access to basic education, deemed by many white activists to lie outside the core of legitimate maternalist concerns, were sidelined in the political process. Second, black women activists were shut out of maternalist networks and the insti-

tutional perquisites, like local and federal government jobs, that those networks could deliver. These exclusions limited the field of policies that were proposed and therefore those that could be enacted.¹⁵

And this brings us to the third component of a "policy regime": *strategies*. The process of policy making is strategic, although it is a much richer process than a utilitarian concept of means-ends chains would lead us to believe. For some like Esping-Andersen, for example, policy is simply what gets enacted, and the study of policy regimes is the study of congealed rational choices. Not for us. By "state policy" we mean a set of ends that actors envision and measures that they consider or adopt when they are authorized to act on behalf of a state or states. Embedded in our portmanteau concept is an array of constituent ideas that reference various theories of agency and properties of action like chains of unintended consequences, ideas of personhood and psyche (for strategic action can be unconsciously as well as consciously undertaken); processes of authorization and legitimation, perceptions of what counts as a state, and so on. Sociologists understand these constituent ideas and processes in very different ways, of course, and by mentioning them we hope to enliven rather than truncate debate. But at a minimum, the way in which the field of social possibilities is envisioned, narrowed, and becomes actuality-what is-should form part of the analysis. An analytical approach to policy should embrace what people desire as well as what they manage to obtain. The approach is preferable not just because it does a better job at capturing the arational as well as rational components of strategic action, but because it can tell us something about the making and unmaking of the policy regime itself.

To its credit, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* discusses policies as a field of strategic possibility. Negotiations among maternalists, and between maternalists and established politicians, for example, figure largely in the reasons for what Skocpol (1992,535) describes as the "throttling" and "killing" of Sheppard-Towner in Congress. Because signs are excised from the argument, however, and because subjects' desires are purged, we need to know more before we can tell why the maternalist state building initiative ran aground. Could the end of "state-building for mothers and babies" have been influenced by some of the problems and tensions within the symbolic arsenal of maternalism that we have discussed above? What of competing discourses, like liberalism, that may have done a better job of appealing to women as political subjects after they had secured the franchise? Such questions would seem to be essential for Skocpol's

account, but they are not addressed. They haunt us now, in the midst of recent attempts to revive maternalism as a means to rebuild the American welfare state. We return to this issue in the conclusion.

Ultimately, however, only some meaningful claims will be enacted; some of these categories will come to organize state policy and some will not. And even enactment does not guarantee institutionalization. Whether a policy or set of policies has effects depends finally on the *sanctions* that give it teeth. However important they may otherwise be, political conversations about policy goals and subjects' strategies should not be considered regulatory "regimes" until such patterned sanctions are put in place—whether they be positive sanctions, like monetary benefits, or negative ones, like jail time. Sanctions are present when action abuts in "a promise or reward for fulfillment of the norms of behavior that are socially recognized and accepted" or "the liability to suffer the consequences that attend their breach" (Epstein 1968, 1). Discourse itself "polices" boundaries, of course, as those who adopt Foucauldian notions of "discursive regimes" are wont to insist. Our major focus in this article has been on the neglected discursive component of policy regimes, including the political subjects who are symbolically positioned as agents by discourses. But we also want to draw more complex distinctions than those notions afford between the policing of the boundaries of cultural intelligibility and desirability on the one hand and regulation of subjects' strategic action on the other. It is conceptually and politically worthwhile to be able to distinguish welfare policies that impugn people's humanity while still delivering benefits to them from welfare policies that simply cut people off from sources of state support.

So how do we know a regime when we see one? We would first assess the presence of a regime by means of the dominance of a sign or allied signs in policy language and subjects' stated allegiances. Maternalism rests on the sign of "motherhood" in both these senses. But a fully institutionalized regime consists of all four components we have articulated: *signs, subjects, strategies, and sanctions*. A state policy regime, then, can be defined as a set of policies with accompanying sanctions, which are in turn the precipitates of subjects' actions undertaken on the basis of ordered signs. Those policies both reach beyond and operate within recognized national and local state boundaries, and we would argue even contribute to creating our perception of those boundaries—our ideas, for example, of what counts as "public" and "private." To argue that these culturally defined boundaries are important in processes of political regulation is absolutely right, but it is not the same as assuming, in the manner of Esping-Andersen and his followers, either that each nation-state has a policy regime or that policy regimes are primarily features of na-

tion-states. We presume that there would be multiple regimes in the political field, that the field may be local or transnational as well as national or international, and that they may be related in a number of ways that change over time—one may be dominant and the other subordinate; they may be equal and interdependent, and so on. The nature of these relationships remains to be spelled out in theoretical and historical work.¹⁶ We can only hope that gender analysis and feminist theory continue to inform that work.

With this in mind, let us close with a comment on one of the most exciting of the new maternalist initiatives—the "Immodest Proposal" of the Women's Committee of One Hundred/Project 2002, subtitled "Rewarding Women's Work to End Poverty." In anticipation of the 2002 expiration of the infamous Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Restoration Act, and Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and its potential reauthorization, the proposal calls for a "broadened perspective on women's poverty, including attention to the special economic vulnerability arising from the caregiving responsibilities that women often assume" (Women's Committee of 100/Project 2002 2000, 1). The document proposes replacing TANF with a "caregiver's allowance," a gender-neutral term, although the proposal's language as a whole explicitly addresses women in their familial roles. We believe that the committee is correct in thinking that the signs of "mother," "sister," "daughter," etc. are still live ones, and potentially productive for the recruitment of subjects of social action and policy making. But as the committee makes its case, we would like to see it reflect more seriously on some of the lessons inscribed in America's earlier experience with signs and subjects in maternalist discourse. If maternalism was increasingly at odds with liberal appeals to women as well as men in the early twentieth century, how much more is it disqualified by these interpellations now?¹⁷

Even more important, it is now historically possible to re-value caregiving as an indispensable social activity that is divested of its gendered character. The field of signs has been reconfigured, presenting us with a real political opportunity. As it is currently couched, the Committee of One Hundred's appeal is too narrowly directed at women; it largely misses the genuine political possibilities that have been opened up since the earlier era, particularly the possibility of claiming the allegiance of men who see themselves as struggling to combine parenthood and work or—equally important—who identify with women who are trying to do so. These men may not be overwhelmingly numerous, but they do exist and they are important potential allies.

Finally, as we have seen, the sign of "the mother" is always an ambivalent one, and in America those ambivalent images of good

and bad mothers are overlain with racial meanings. The Women's Committee of 100 has made an admirable attempt to register racial differences in women's vulnerability to poverty. But they have not acknowledged the crucial fact that these signs have become conduits for strongly felt emotions about women and the welfare state. Given that fact, a "tactical universalist" rather than "tactical essentialist" strategy may be warranted. One example might be a policy platform organized to appeal to women *as workers* in order to create the possibility for their mutual identification as *mothers*.¹⁸ Such a platform could mount an appeal to men as well. Its effects might finally enable some resistant whites to imagine racial others to be mothers or fathers who are not objects of fear or disgust, but people "just like them," possibly with compatible political goals! Naturally, "tactical universalism" and cagey uses of liberal discourse have their own fearsome pitfalls. Liberal discourse is thoroughly invested in a fundamental ideological distinction between "public" and "private," for example, and that distinction is by now inscribed in dualistic welfare state commitments that are particularly strong in the United States. Some people rely on forms of state support, while others draw more on market or family for resources; the former are seen as dependent, the latter as independent, and these seemingly insubstantial terms wear chains longer than those of Marley's ghost-chains of signification, but no less powerful than iron ones. These institutionalized discourses are going to make certain political coalitions very difficult, and rule out others completely.

Given those limits, however, our strategy should be to mobilize subjects as inclusively as possible through new representations of caregiving, incorporating but transcending old signs of motherhood. Our ultimate goal is to create policies that will recognize caregiving as a legitimate and valued pursuit, and to give those policies lasting force.

NOTES

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1 This definition of gender is an extremely terse one, conceptually distinguished from biological sex but otherwise undeveloped. This article details an; ways in which those discursive distinctions between (and among) masculinities and femininities get embedded in subjects and social and cultural structures. See also Joan Scott's (1988,42-49) discussion of gender as an element of social relations and a mode of signifying relationships of power.

2 They take their fuller definition of social policy regimes from Shaver (1990, 6): "institutionalised patterns in welfare state provision establishing systematic relations between the state and social structures of conflict, domination and accommodation."

3 Esping-Andersen's (1990) actual analysis is more multidimensional, but his starker theoretical statement of his project has been influential on its own account. His more recent work has changed. It preserves the three basic regime types and continues to occlude the concept of gender. But it clearly highlights the family as a key institutional site and portrays the tension over the commodification or decommodification of women's labor as economically significant. See his *Social Foundations of Postindustrial Economies* (1999).

4 Nevertheless, Steinmetz continues to deploy the term "gender regime" as a subsidiary concept (1999, 33-34, 52).

5 In principle, one might add, a regulatory paradigm may extend beyond and in fact organize national boundaries. See the essays in *International Regimes*, edited by Stephen Krasner (1983). There a regime may designate everything from an explicit international agreement among states to a tacit bargain that guarantees a particular distribution of power. There are problems with such an idea (see, e.g., Susan Strange's objections [1983]). Yet the broader idea of regularized linkages among actors is important, and we will return to it later.

6 This has proven to be a controversial aspect of *Regulating the Social*. In his review, Esping-Andersen (1994, 787-89) takes Steinmetz to task for "pure eclecticism," while Peter Baldwin (1994, 789-91) laments his "polymorphous perversity in a methodological sense." Given their preferences for a more "unitary," perhaps even monocausal approach, and one that would duck the complications of incorporating gender, it is not surprising that both reviewers give the feminist dimension of Steinmetz's argument short shrift!

7 Note, however, that these two claims are logically divisible. It would be possible to undertake a "top down" analysis that treats the state as a national structure embodied in policies and abstract principles without considering the state to be irreducibly committed to women's dependency. That is, in fact, what O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver (1999) have done.

8 Functionalism is still a dirty word among many sociologists and feminist theorists, but it

needn't be, for "responsible" functionalists never assume, tautologically, that a policy (or any set of actions) exists because it secures some outcome. See Arthur Stinchcombe (1968) on what is involved: in rigorous functional reasoning.

9 Civil War pensions were also "gender based," of course, inasmuch as they were directed at soldiers. However, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* analyzes motherhood as a political discourse and does not attend to the masculinist discourses implicated in the policies directed at veterans. For that reason we too focus on maternalism, but that does not mean that we think that discourses of masculinity and family were unimportant in the inception of Civil War pensions. Quite the contrary.

10 The concept of "maternalism" is certainly in the academic air, not simply in the social sciences or history, but in the humanities as well (see, for example, Domna Stanton [2000] on seventeenth-century French discourses and performances of maternity and maternalism). Is maternalism merely "feminism for hard times," in Lisa Brush's lovely phrase? Brush (1996) thinks so—see her useful critical review of a slew of recent books I that have dealt with the maternalist politics and maternalism as political I strategy.

11 As Seth Koven and Sonya Michel (1993, 2) put it, maternalist discourses envisioned a transformation of motherhood "from women's primary private responsibility into public policy."

12 At least on the basis of the historical evidence offered by Skocpol and Gordon, it appears that we simply do not know—without further re- search—the extent to which social reformers made consciously or unconsciously strategic use of these discursive possibilities.

13 According to Glaser and Strauss (1967, 61-62), a category is "saturated" when the social researcher finds no additional data that changes the properties of the category, as the researcher has defined them

14 Here we will give just two examples: there are many more. For a marvelous and readable combination of a neo-Freudian analysis with a discourse-theoretic take on subject positions, see Carol Clover's *Men, Women and Chain Saws* (1992). Clover's topic is the horror film, but her approach could certainly be applied to a much wider field, including conventional political discourse (not always far from the field of horror, at that). An exemplary effort to spell out a Foucauldian discursive regime is Ann Laura Stoler's "Racial Histories and Their Regimes of Truth" (1997). This essay deals with the analytic "grids of intelligibility" that have come to define Euro-American accounts of racism—the "scholarly accounts of its emergence, its datings and its unique and recurrent attributes" (p. 183).

15 See Jane Jenson (1987, 65) for a very interesting argument about how the major impact of "the universe of political discourse" is to "inhibit or encourage the formation of new collective identities and/or the reinforcement of older ones." Jenson sees discourse in a more unitary and limited fashion than we do, however. For example, she persistently argues that "social conditions" affect the universe of discourse. She does not seem to interpret those conditions as discursively mediated.

16 This does not commit us to arguing that there is a systematically organized overarching (or underpinning) "gender order" (or systematic set of relations among gender regimes), to borrow R. W. Connell's influential terminology (1987, 134-37; 1990, 523). This remains an open question. We certainly cannot assume, as Connell sometimes seems to suggest, that gender regimes or gender orders pay a "patriarchal dividend" (Connell, 1995). For an unusual and important argument about the decline of patriarchy, see Robert Jackson's *Destined for Equality*:

The Inevitable Rise of Women's Status (1998).

17 Ann Shola Orloff makes this trenchant argument in her "Ending the Entitlements of Poor Mothers" (2000).

18 This is simply one alternative, although it is one that we prefer. But it would also be possible, even desirable, to mount a populist campaign that represented women's concerns as not "workers' or mothers' issues" but as "people's"-as long as the latter term is understood as a sign and not a referent. On the general topic of hegemony, populism and radical democracy, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 145-93).

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