Introduction  State funding for women's movement organizations and its consequences for the pursuit of feminist politics have been the objects of a longstanding debate since the 1970s. Does state funding necessarily contribute to the co-optation, instrumentalization, and depoliticization of women's groups and, eventually, to the demise of their ideals of social change? Or, as it has been argued in more nuanced and interesting ways, are its effects likely to vary and even to be found enabling in some contexts, depending on the specifics of the funding conditions in which groups find themselves? At a time when neoliberal governments in Canada have gained a reputation for making severe and successive cuts to the few funding programs available to women's groups, going so far as to singlehandedly defund a good number of national, provincial, and local women's organizations, the relevance of trying to better understand the conditions and potential impact of state funding may seem moot to many. Yet unfettered neoliberalism may not be all that is happening with the funding of women's groups across the country. Although little empirical research has been done on the situation in the provinces, there are indications that it may be less straightforward. This article aims to address these shortcomings by documenting and analyzing the institutional forms that govern state funding for women's groups in Quebec. This case is particularly interesting because Quebec—where granting core, operational funds to women's groups is the rule rather than the exception—breaks with the seeming unanimity of Canadian stories about the demise of state funding under neoliberalism.
This article takes its theoretical starting point in Beres, Crow, and Gottell’s insight that an inquiry into changing state forms is crucial to our understanding of state funding for women’s groups in Canada. Yet such inquiry, I argue, needs to do more than take stock of the transformation of the postwar social liberal welfare state into a neoliberal state and of the latter’s destructive impacts on the funding of women’s equality-seeking groups. As the fate of women’s groups’ funding is closely linked to that of the community sector as a whole, analysts also need to take into account other changes featuring a recomposition of the relations between state institutions and the third sector that comes in various, context-dependent forms. An inquiry into changing state forms, I further contend, also means delving deeper into the potentially heterogeneous, fragmented, and contradictory nature of states.

The first section of this article exposes the defining institutional characteristics of the social liberal, neoliberal, and social investment perspectives as they have been documented in the Canadian context in relation to the funding of women’s groups, with the goal of providing a theoretical framework adequate to analyzing the complexities of the Quebec case. The second section reviews the regulatory framework established in 2001 by the Politique de reconnaissance et de soutien de l’action communautaire in Quebec, underlining its progressive and more ambiguous features. It then presents the funding conditions encountered by women’s groups in the fields of health and social services and employment, and those of groups whose primary mission is advocacy. The third section analyzes the specifics of Quebec’s funding context and programs in terms of the main characteristics of the three state forms underlined above. Showing the co-presence, and sometimes hybridization, of these strains, it also highlights the uneasy coexistence of competing state projects, between Quebec and the federal, as well as within the Quebec state apparatus regarding the legitimacy of gender-equality claims, rationale for state funding, and preferred state/civil society relationships.

Changing State Forms and the Funding of Women’s Groups in Canada
In their recent article about Canadian rape crisis centres, Beres, Crow, and Gottell review the North American literature about funding for women’s
groups and aptly note that serious consideration of “changing state forms” has largely remained missing from feminist analyses of state funding. Benefitting from stronger intellectual roots in political economy, Canadian feminists may have done better than their US counterparts on this. Indeed, the argument of a shift from the postwar, social liberal, welfare state to a neoliberal one occupies centre stage in feminist accounts of the disintegration of established practices of state funding to women’s groups in Canada. Yet, suggestions of a further shift to a social investment state, I will argue, also merit consideration. Highlighting the defining characteristics of these state forms in terms of the relationship they institute between state and civil society, the place of and rationale for state funding, and the space for gender equality claims in political discourse provides both the sociopolitical and the theoretical contexts within which to situate and make sense of the Quebec case.

The welfare state that emerged in Canada’s postwar era and consolidated in the 1960s and 1970s was underpinned by the principles of social liberalism. Among these principles was the recognition, in Canada’s citizenship regime, of civil society as provider of intermediary associations representing the interests of particular categories of Canadian citizens. Starting in the mid-1960s, Canada’s Secretary of State took a proactive role towards the voluntary sector and established various funding programs to stimulate community organizations’ contribution to social development, political participation, and the enhancement of Canadian citizenship. In line with these objectives, state funding supported not only grassroots services but also the advocacy work of volunteer organizations. Pal writes that the reporting requirements of these programs were “very loose” and their guidelines “frequently vague,” at least in their early years. In political discourse, the accent on social rights and formal equality among citizens opened up space for claims to be made on behalf of women, and a women’s policy machinery was set up at the federal level as well as in the provinces. Federal funding for the Women’s Program, formally instituted in 1974, embodied recognition of the legitimacy of both gender equality claims and the women’s groups that pressed for them. The program offered operational and project funding and its budget increased:
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From a meagre $233,000 in 1973 to $12.4 million [in 1987], leaving in its wake a mosaic of national feminist organizations with the resources to generate research on women’s issues, lobby government and hold it accountable, as well as a vibrant mix of grassroots women’s organizations.11

Provincial governments also made funds available from the mid-1970s onwards,12 which helped to nourish the growth of women’s organizing.

The economic recessions at the beginning of the 1980s, however, opened the way for the deployment of neoliberal policy agendas. The exaltation of market principles went hand in hand with antistatist discourses demanding a retreat from public intervention, including from welfarist attempts to mitigate social inequality. In what became known as the rollback of the federal state, Mulroney’s Conservative government made substantial cuts not only to social programs, but also to the funding initiatives that had thus far supported the activity of community and women’s organizations: “Between 1987 and 1990...Women’s Program funds...were cut by approximately 30 per cent.”13 The Women’s Program was only one casualty of what amounted to a profound transformation of the relationship between the federal state and civil society organizations. Advocacy work by the latter was publicly berated as defending special interests far removed from those of ordinary Canadians. The 1995 Liberal budget “imposed further and more selective cuts, specifically targeting advocacy groups.”14 That same year, the Chrétien government largely dismantled women’s policy machinery by amalgamating the Women’s Program with Status of Women Canada and shutting down the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, thus cutting off major routes to representation.15 Feminism, feminists, and their gender-based claims were discredited during this period.16 What remained of core funding for women’s organizations at the Women’s Program was finally eliminated in 1998 and grants were available only for short-term projects thereafter.17

The now-classical feminist story about changing state forms and the funding of women’s groups in Canada most often stops here: deprived of federal resources, groups were forced to reduce staff, change their mission, or simply put the key in the door. This certainly rings true for many national women’s organizations—the eclipse of the National Action Committee for
the Status of Women (NAC) in 1998 is the best-known example—but the effect these cuts had on grassroots groups is less clear. Furthermore, it is generally assumed in feminist academic circles that neoliberal agendas simultaneously affected the legitimacy of gender claims and the funding of women’s groups in the provinces. For instance, Beres, Crow, and Gottell suggest that “Provincial governments also embraced neoliberal agendas, reducing funding for women’s centres and organizations and precipitating the elimination of state agencies devoted to women’s equality.” Research on Premier Ralph Klein’s Conservative Alberta in the 1990s most certainly supports these claims. Yet British Columbia did not eliminate the Ministry of Women’s Equality until 2001 and moved to cut funding to 38 women’s centres only in 2004. More strikingly, Quebec does not fit this picture. The situation of women’s groups in the provinces is, in fact, underdocumented and underanalyzed, and is thus open to overhomogenizing interpretations. Moreover, state forms kept shifting after the neoliberal highpoint.

Scholars interested in the transformations of the state/civil society relationship have developed the argument that rollback neoliberalism eventually morphed into a rollout, social investment state. Since the mid-1990s, deepening societal contradictions resulting from the retrenchment phase have been seen as having fostered a phase of redeployment of public intervention around such themes as social activation and social cohesion. Aside from relegitimizing social spending to a certain extent, the social investment state enrols voluntary and community organizations into partnerships supported by state funding, this “in areas with perceived dividends and payback potential” in terms of human and social capital—that is, children, youth, education, employment. According to Dobrowolsky, in Canada organizations whose mission is partly or mainly advocacy are at a disadvantage, if not downright excluded from these developments. Among women’s groups only those offering services valued by the social investment state are called on to participate in these new partnerships. This, she notes, “is detrimental to the women’s movement, as women’s groups face stark choices about either providing services or engaging in advocacy.” Furthermore, when women’s groups do enter into these service partnerships, it is on the degendered policy terrains left by the legacy of the previous
phase. Indeed, studies suggest that women’s antiviolence organizations in Ontario, British Columbia, and some other provinces now have to compete with nonfeminist organizations for funds provided under gender-neutral victims’ services programs.

Research documenting the specific funding conditions faced by Canadian women’s organizations in the new partnerships fostered by the social investment state is scarce and information is only fragmentary. However, studies of the Canadian voluntary sector throughout the 1990s highlight the generalization by funders of practices such as contracting out and public tendering; a shift towards funding select civil society organizations to deliver specific services to targetted populations; new efficiency requirements based on quantifiable outcomes and the imposition of stringent accountability requirements; a disciplinary regulation of funded organizations by imposing standardized best practices and professional credentialization; as well as calls to become more financially independent through user fees, fundraising, and reliance on charities and foundations.

It is important to note, however, that talking about the existence of a neoliberal state or a social investment state may ignore the complex and potentially contradictory state projects embodied within the state. Dobrowolsky, for instance, argues in her study of the Chrétien years that the two phases—the neoliberal phase and the social investment phase—“cannot be separated neatly” and “are not mutually exclusive, as strains of social investment can be detected in phase one” and neoliberal elements “linger in phase two.” In a related manner, Janine Brodie analyzes the Harper government’s shutting down of most regional offices of Status of Women Canada and the erasure of “equality” from its mandate, in 2006, as yet another hard-line, neoliberal shot against the “residuals of social liberalism” still lingering in federal institutions. A similar argument could be made about the last round of cuts by the Conservative government, in May 2010, to the project funding of 12 prominent, advocacy-oriented, national and provincial women’s organizations. As these insights suggest, it may be helpful to conceptualize state funding, be it at the municipal, provincial, or federal level, in terms of the possible copresence—often contentious and
contradictory—of social liberal, neoliberal, and social investment perspectives embodied in concrete state projects, institutional arrangements, and funding policies (or lack thereof).

**Funding for Women’s Organizations in Quebec**  In Quebec, transformations of the state/civil society relationship since the mid-1980s have followed a very different trajectory from that outlined above, with significant implications for the funding of women’s movement organizations and their pursuit of feminist politics. From an institutional point of view, the most notable event was the Parti Québécois government’s July 2001 adoption of a new governance policy aimed at harmonizing the existing funding policies directed at the community sector. The regulatory framework of the *Politique de reconnaissance et de soutien de l’action communautaire* (PRSAC) (translation: policy for the recognition and support of community action) currently governs the funding for more than 5,000 community organizations, including women’s groups.

The policy aimed at “recognizing the contribution of the community sector to the social development of Quebec.” Its founding principles stated that “women have played a front and center role in the development of the community sector” as well as “in the promotion of equality between men and women,” thus contributing in a very specific fashion “to the well-being of Quebec society.” More precisely, the policy proposed “to valorize, support and consolidate” what it presented as the community sector’s “essence”—that is, its activities of “popular education and social transformation”; its “democratic life”; “global vision of problems”; its “contribution to the development” and exercise of “active citizenship”; and its “deep roots in communities.” It proposed to do so by defining a regulatory framework for the funding of community action, a major feature of which was the government’s principled commitment “to ensure the respect of the autonomy of community organizations” (this label included women’s groups) “in the definition of their mission and orientations, their approaches, modes of intervention and functioning.” Such commitment was a repeated motif in the text of the policy. To support its central tenets, the policy institutionalized the following mechanisms:
Although already existing formulas of project funding and *ententes de services* (service contracts) were to remain part of the overall funding scheme, core funding in support of salaries and infrastructure costs associated with community organizations’ “global mission” was “to constitute the preponderant portion of the funding granted by the government to the community sector.” In turn, this global mission was understood as extending from the groups’ primary activities—for instance, services to battered women—to “education to the exercise of rights, associational life, activities of concerted action and representation.”

A special fund would provide core operating funds to community organizations whose primary activity was advocacy. The policy recognized community organizations’ “contribution to the vitality of democratic debates” as well as the legitimacy of undertaking, under the label of “the collective defense of rights,” activities of social mobilization, representation, and policy analysis.

On the issue of accountability, the policy restated its commitment to respect community organizations’ autonomy. As a consequence, “supple” requirements, “sensitive to the reality of community organizations” and not placing “an additional burden” on them were favoured.

Participatory mechanisms, in the form of an Advisory Committee to Community Action, ensured that the community sector was represented in the further definition of funding parameters and accountability requirements in the implementation phase of the policy.

Finally, provincial contributions to the sector were increased. Since the policy was adopted, provincial funding to the community sector almost doubled, from 472 million dollars in 2000–2001 to 844 million in 2009–2010.

The type of relationship between the state and civil society privileged by the 2001 policy stands in stark contrast to that associated with rollback or social investment. The policy gives primacy to core funding over contractual arrangements; advocacy is supported rather than punished; accountability requirements involve respecting the groups’ autonomy; and funding for women’s and community organizations has been on the rise since. How did this come to be?
First, Quebec was not left untouched by neoliberalism or social investment perspectives over the past three decades. It did go through a phase of retrenchment in public spending; retrenchment, however, did not translate into significant cutbacks to the funding of community organizations in the 1980s and 1990s. Available funding data on the most important source of funds for women’s and community organizations, the Quebec Ministère de la santé et des services sociaux (MSSS) (translation: Ministry of Health and Social Services), shows a regular ascending curve throughout the 1980s and 1990s. If contracting with community organizations for the provision of specific services is taken as the hallmark of the social investment perspective on state/civil society relations, then Quebec did experiment with social investment, first in the mental health field in the mid-1980s, and then in others, such as employment and home care. Proposals for the generalization of service contracts were put forward in the reform of health and social services at the turn of the 1990s, but were fiercely combatted by well-organized and militant coalitions of community and women’s organizations. As a result, recourse to service contracts was sidelined, respect for the autonomy of the community sector was written into the 1991 Health and Social Services legislation, and the practice of core funding became further entrenched at MSSS.

Second, and as the above example suggests, the peculiar trajectory regarding state/civil society relationships taken in Quebec, from the mid-1980s onwards, owes, in large part, to the agency of the community sector and, more specifically, to its ability to establish a balance of forces sufficient to influence its funding context. Such ability rests, in part, on organizational capacity: in contrast to Canada or even Ontario, the third sector in Quebec is dense, unified, well-networked, and dominated by small organizations identifying with movements for social change. The Quebec women’s movement itself is seen by Canadian feminists as more densely organized and more actively mobilized than in any other province; its organizations participate actively in community sector coalitions. The sector’s ability to shape its funding conditions also rests on its long-lasting insertion in Quebec’s neocorporatist model of governance and on its capacity to gain leverage in resultant political dynamics.
Retracing the events leading to the adoption of the 2001 “Policy for the recognition and support of community action” highlights the role the community sector played in its elaboration. A major event in the genesis of the 2001 policy was the Bread and Roses March, which was first held in Quebec in June 1995 under the leadership of the Fédération des femmes du Québec (FFQ). The March was not solely a feminist event, but rather an element in “a show of the community movement’s mobilization capacity” in which “a massive coalition of community groups, women’s groups, [anti-]poverty groups and students’ associations descended on the National Assembly in Quebec.”

One of the coalition’s demands was for public investment in social infrastructures, a claim put forward by women’s groups that included not only the development of what would be later called the social economy, but also increased funding and public support for women’s and community organizations “as centers of economic activity and developers of community resources.”

There were many significant outcomes to this show of strength by the Quebec women’s movement, community movement, and their allies. One was to inflect the work of the Secretariat to Community Action, established a few months earlier in March 1995, as a liaison unit between the government and community organizations. Finally responding to long-standing demands by women’s and community groups, the Secretariat announced in October 1995 the creation of a special fund in support of community action, part of which would be specifically designated for the funding of advocacy groups, thus institutionalizing state support for the community sector’s advocacy role in Quebec’s policy process. The Secretariat also had the mandate to develop a governmental policy regarding community action in consultation with the actors concerned. The latter mobilized: 125 delegates from different domains of community activity met, in November of 1996, to create an Advisory Committee for Autonomous Community Action, obtaining an official advisory role regarding the elaboration of the policy in 1997.

Comprised, for the most part, of the more militant sections of the community and women’s movements, the Advisory Committee worked hard to influence the development of the 2001 policy. Many of the latter’s key princi-
ples—such as respect for the groups’ autonomy; recognition of women’s community work and their role in the promotion of gender equality; as well as the importance of core funding for a global mission that includes popular education, democratic practices, research, and advocacy—attest to this influence. The main stakeholders’ involvement in consultations and public policymaking is not surprising—it has been a staple feature of Quebec’s neocorporatist model, established during the 1990s. Such participation politicizes policy development and creates possibilities for more progressive outcomes. The 2001 policy thus should be seen as a co-construction: the result of collaboration as well as conflicts and tensions between governmental actors, on one hand, and representatives of community and women’s groups, on the other. If the successful exercise of political agency by the community sector helps to account for the policy’s progressive features, there were nevertheless important compromises inscribed in its very structure.

The 2001 policy was first and foremost a governance policy that aimed to establish a regulatory framework involving 22 ministries and governmental agencies. It was a horizontal, multisectoral policy whose objective was essentially to harmonize the existing provincial funding programs regarding community action. Responsibility for these programs ultimately remained in the hands of the different ministries and agencies. As such, part of the compromise embedded in the policy lay in its nonprescriptive character. It was based on voluntary compliance: it could incite ministries and agencies to adopt its guidelines, but it could not impose them. As a result, the policy remains the locus of often problematic articulations between the principles it advocates and the orientations of the different funding programs it purports to homogenize. Such uneasy coexistence makes for a differentiated and complex funding context for Quebec’s women’s groups.

I will now illustrate this point by exposing, in more detail, the funding conditions encountered at MSSS, Emploi-Québec, and the Secrétariat à l’action communautaire autonome et aux initiatives sociales (SACAIS) (translation: Secretariat for Autonomous Community Action and Social Initiatives). The first grants core operating funds to the vast majority of Quebec women’s groups; the second provides a strong contrasting case to the policy’s principles; and the latter, finally, supplies us with a striking example of institutional
support for groups whose primary mission is advocacy. This is followed by a discussion of ways in which the state forms identified previously relate to the Quebec case.

**Funding at Health and Social Services** The Ministry of Health and Social Services (MSSS) has been funding a wide variety of community organizations since 1973. Many provincial *Regroupements* (provincial peak or umbrella organizations) fought successfully throughout the 1980s and 1990s to secure funding with conditions that would not impinge significantly on the autonomy of their member groups. This has been the case for women's shelters, rape crisis centres, and women's centres whose early struggles with the ministry for funding and recognition are described elsewhere. The relationship that took shape between MSSS and the community sector over this period was dynamic and highly politicized; it was also one through which the preponderance of core funding in support of the groups' global mission, as well as light accountability requirements, were institutionalized in MSSS's funding program: the *Programme de soutien aux organismes communautaires* (PSOC). On the basis of what was deemed a relatively satisfactory history of state/civil society relations, representatives of both sides favoured the PSOC model as the blueprint for the 2001 policy.

Current eligibility criteria for receiving MSSS funding include being a nonprofit community organization and working in the field of health and social services. Funding is not limited to organizations that provide services, such as counselling, support, and shelter; eligible activities also include those oriented towards popular education, research, and advocacy if groups operate within the (broadly defined) purview of the health and social services field. Three modes of funding are available: recurrent, core funding to the groups' global mission (representing 83.5% of the total monies allocated by MSSS in 2009–2010); service agreements (12.5% of the total that same year); and project funding (3.8%). In 2009–2010, MSSS granted some $452.8 million to 3326 community organizations—a number said to include more than 150 provincial *Regroupements*. Accountability requirements at MSSS are limited to producing the organization's annual activity and financial report duly adopted by its general assembly of members, except for women's and
Youth shelters, which have to provide additional statistics on occupancy. Since 2001, participatory structures have engaged MSSS officials and umbrella organizations representing the community sector in negotiating funding levels and other policy issues.

Since MSSS finances three out of five community organizations in Quebec, it is not surprising that it also provides core funding to the vast majority of state-funded groups in the Quebec women’s movement. A wide variety of organizations—from Montreal’s Collectif des femmes immigrantes, which offers help and support to women of immigrant origin, to the provincial Regroupement québécois d’action pour la santé des femmes, which voices a strong feminist critique of health and engages in popular education—is accredited by MSSS and receives core operating funds on a triennial basis. Funding levels vary greatly according to groups’ preferred domain of intervention and scale of activity (local, regional, or provincial), as well as to past and present histories of mobilization. For instance in 2009–2010, among the groups with the longest and more militant collective histories of securing funding policies at MSSS, local women’s shelters received between $435,000 and $735,000 in core funding; local rape crisis centres were granted between $100,000 and $420,000, and local women’s centres about $170,000. By way of contrast, local women’s groups organized around issues of breastfeeding, birth, midwifery, and perinatal care typically received around $50,000, while their provincial Regroupement Naissance-Renaissance was granted about $100,000.

**Funding at Emploi-Québec** Since the 1997 Canada-Quebec agreement consecrating the transfer of powers from the federal government to the province in matters of employment, Emploi-Québec has been in charge of managing employability measures for populations at the margins of the job market. Funding levels at Emploi-Québec are attractive: the mean grant was about $330,000 in 2009–2010 and 439 community organizations received funding that year, for a total of $146.7 million. Among these, 15 women’s groups providing services, support, and training to help women integrate into the job market received a mean grant of about $300,000 each. Despite the small number of women’s organizations funded by Emploi-Québec, it is
worth examining these groups’ funding conditions because they stand in stark contrast to the ones that prevail at MSSS (see above) and at SACAINS (see below).

Owing in large part to the contract culture that already characterized the relationship between federal agencies and community groups before the transfer of powers, Emploi-Québec’s funding for community organizations has been available almost exclusively through service contracts, which are renegotiated yearly but are not subjected to public tendering. Service agreements are not intended to fund organizations per se, but only those services that fit governmental employability goals. Participants of the groups’ activities must be registered in Emploi-Québec’s database and referred by Local Employment Centres. The government determines the numbers and types of participants, as well as objectives to be met (i.e., the number of participants who find a job). Monthly or quarterly reports, depending on the details of the service agreements signed with Local Employment Centres, are required and controls are tight.66

Despite the prevalence of a contractual model at Emploi-Québec, the role of interest intermediation of community and women’s groups is recognized. National forums bring together agency representatives with those from the major provincial Regroupements in the employment sector to discuss issues related to the job market and the relationship between Emploi-Québec and funded organizations.67 The Conseil d’intervention pour l’accès des femmes au travail (CIAFT) acts as a provincial Regroupement for the 15 women’s employability groups and is an active participant in Emploi-Québec’s Women’s Advisory Committee on the Development of the Feminine Workforce, which advises and makes recommendations to the agency on matters related to women’s employment.

An interesting twist in the history of the Emploi-Québec’s funding of women’s employability groups was the latter’s successful negotiation, in 2007, of supplementary funds to support activities that were not included in the existing service agreements. Arguing for the crucial importance, for women, of their holistic, feminist-inspired modes of intervention, each of the 15 groups represented by CIAFT obtained an additional $80,000 annual core funding grant from the Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity.
to support their global mission. These funds, however, were not to come from *Emploi-Québec*, but from the Québec Fund for Social Initiatives at the Secretariat for Community Action, and were tied to the implementation of the recently released 2007 Québec Action Plan for women’s equality.

**State Funding for Advocacy Groups at SACAIS** Since 1995, SACAIS has managed a fund supporting autonomous community action (FAACA), the main component of which is *la défense des droits*, that is, advocacy. Unsurprisingly since the SACAIS is responsible for the implementation of the 2001 policy, FAACA funding is very much in line with the latter’s main principles. Eligibility criteria are: being a nonprofit community organization qualifying as autonomous (that is, being grassroots-based, operating according to democratic principles, and pursuing goals of social transformation), and being primarily engaged in the (non-partisan) collective defense of rights through social mobilization, popular education, political representation, and action. The program grants core funding on a renewable, three-year basis, and accountability requirements are limited to producing the organization’s annual activity and financial report, approved by the group’s general assembly of members. In 2009–2010, 336 community organizations whose primary mission was advocacy benefitted from this fund. Women’s groups funded under this program include a number of high-profile, politically active organizations, such as the *Fédération des femmes du Québec* (FFQ), the *Association féminine d’éducation et d’action sociale* (AFEAS), and the Provincial Network of Regional Tables of Women’s Groups, as well as less visible but no less important organizations representing lesbians and handicapped women. There are some drawbacks: funding levels are considered low (the mean grant was $55,400 in 2009–2010) and the fund itself has remained small over the years (currently $18.6 million). Community and women’s groups have mobilized within and outside existing participatory structures at SACAIS for an increase in funding levels with some success in 2006, but further pressure has not brought results. New recipients are admitted to the fund only sparingly, thus raising questions about the access to funding of newer women’s advocacy groups.
Discussion  The defining characteristics of the social liberal, neoliberal, and social investment state forms, as documented in the Canadian context, provide the analytical means to further assess the specificity of the Quebec case with regard to funding for women’s groups. In contrast to the neoliberal policy decisions that have resulted in the foreclosing of institutional spaces for gender equality claims at the federal level as well as in a number of other provinces, successive Quebec governments have maintained a social liberal commitment to gender equality. Women’s policy machinery is supported, spaces for discussing issues related to women’s equality exist in various ministries, and Quebec’s Secrétariat à la condition féminine has been endowed since 1999 with a small funding program supporting projects aimed at increasing women’s participation in decisionmaking (À égalité pour décider). On 17 June 2011, the Minister responsible for the Status of Women unveiled the province’s 2011–2015 Action Plan for Equality between Men and Women, involving 18 ministries and agencies for a total cost of $290 million.73 If there have been attacks on the legitimacy of feminism, feminists, and women’s equality in recent years, such challenges have come from the ranks of masculinist activists and, although relayed by some media, have not gained substantial legitimacy in government. In addition, the fact that equality between men and women has recently been elevated to the status of a defining marker of Quebec’s identity in the recent debates around les accommodements raisonnables (reasonable accommodations) and la laïcité (secularism) in state institutions may further prevent the disappearance of gender as a basis for legitimate claims-making in Quebec.

The continuing influence of social liberalism is also visible in the 2001 policy, as the latter founds its rationale for state funding in the community sector’s role in democratic life, social transformation, and the development of citizenship, and proposes funding principles that respect the autonomy of civil society actors (i.e., the preponderance of core funding; light accountability requirements). SACAIS funding for advocacy groups does not detract from the social liberalism of the 2001 policy, but lower funding levels indicate the lesser worth granted by state institutions to supporting groups whose primary mission is advocacy compared to those providing targeted services (Emploi-Québec) or a mixture of non-targetted services, popular
education, and advocacy work (MSSS). The strong presence of a social liberal strain, and indeed the very existence of the policy and of SACAI's advocacy fund, are clearly related to the success of the community sector's demands and mobilizations. They have also benefitted from an overall sociopolitical context that, despite the advances of neoliberalism and social investment, continues to display a stronger attachment to state intervention and social solidarity than elsewhere in Canada—decades of mobilization by strong women's and community movements, although not the only factor, have made a difference. Yet the nonprescriptive nature of the 2001 policy has tempered the influence of the social liberal strain, opening it up to an uneasy coexistence with institutional forms embodying different perspectives on state/civil society relations.

Tensions between state projects—the policy's and others—regarding the rationale for the funding of community organizations, the nature of this funding, and its conditions are most visible at Emploi-Québec, where the implementation of the policy's regulatory framework has met with a resistance firmly anchored in a pre-existing contract culture. With its language of partnerships supporting specific services for targeted populations and its highly constraining monitoring and strict accountability requirements, funding at Emploi-Québec exemplifies the social investment perspective documented at the federal level and in Ontario. Nevertheless, this funding also expresses traces of social liberalism because the agency does not shun groups that engage in advocacy and maintains institutional spaces for discussing women's equality issues. Finally, the fact that women's employability groups have been able to gain core funding at SACAI in addition to their service agreements with Emploi-Québec further testifies to the possibilities offered by the entanglement of different state projects under the auspices of the 2001 policy.

At MSSS, in contrast, the predominance of core funding institutionalizing support for missions that remain defined by women's and community groups themselves, the inclusion of advocacy in the support for the global mission, and the PSOC's minimal accountability requirements are in line with a social liberal perspective. Although the ministry adheres to the policy's regulatory framework and to its social liberal elements, the situation at
MSSS is more complex. On one hand, it is not that of a continued expansion of the social liberal welfare state. There have been cuts in health and social services programs (retrenchment) in the 1990s and 2000s, yet rollback neoliberalism did not take hold of state/civil society relationships. These years witnessed a growing financial investment in the work of women's and community organizations, and a shift in the welfare mix took place that involved a stronger role for the community sector in distributing responsibilities within the welfare diamond. On the other hand, despite the influx of funds and the deployment in the early 1990s of a language of partnerships, the ways in which the relationship between state and civil society have reconfigured at MSSS cannot be unconditionally ascribed to social investment. The small share of targetted contractual arrangements, as well as the funding of a vast array of groups rather than only those corresponding to a logic of fostering human and social capital, do not correspond to the way social investment has shaped state/civil society relationships in other Canadian contexts, nor to how it has been described in the broader literature. This is not to say that an interest in social investment is not present at MSSS; in fact, its proponents jostle periodically with the defenders of the social liberal legacies embedded in the PSOC, who are to be found inside the ministry as well as in the community sector. But up until now, the situation at MSSS has remained that of relatively progressive, hybrid institutional arrangements for which there is no readily available analytical label.

The most negative impacts of state funding, according to feminist and other literatures, are linked to the constraints associated with contractual arrangements and project-driven funding. In this regard, our data suggest that funding conditions in Quebec may actually be more enabling than constraining for women's groups. The overwhelming majority of them are funded (at MSSS and at, or through, SACAIS) in support of the missions they have themselves designed. Triennial core funding ensures stable levels of financial resources, and the continued legitimacy of gender-based claims and advocacy in the Quebec context further sustains their capacity to pursue feminist politics through services, popular education, advocacy, and coalition work. The amounts granted in core funding are, however, judged insufficient by most to fully meet their objectives. A good number of groups
thus enter the round of grant applications for project funding, either to move beyond mere survival, or to give more breadth and scope to their activity. It is in this context that the federal Conservative government’s cuts at Status of Women Canada have hurt women’s groups and that the clash of state projects—one (Quebec) supporting gender-based advocacy and the other (federal) set on extinguishing it—becomes the most apparent.

**Conclusion** Offering an inquiry into the changing state forms related to state funding (or the lack thereof) in support for the work of women’s movement organizations, this article shows the need to break with overly homogeneous accounts of the funding conditions in which women’s groups find themselves in Canada. It does so, first, by contrasting the characteristics of social liberal, neoliberal, and social investment perspectives with regard to such funding, and by suggesting the potential copresence in the Canadian context of these strains expressed in concrete state projects, institutional arrangements, and funding policies. Second, by documenting the Quebec case, it exposes the existence of funding conditions for women’s groups that, for the most part, contrast markedly with both the neoliberal and social investment forms documented at the federal level and in some of the other provinces. These findings are consistent with analyses of Quebec as an exception in the Canadian context, and in particular with those that point to the “historical condensation of a different place for the community sector” in a model of restructuring state/civil society relation “that finds no equivalent in North America (or even in the world).” What has been dubbed the Quebec model has, in fact, been variously described as “a collectivist version of liberalism,” a “communitarian liberal model,” a coexistence of neoliberal measures with “concerted, solidarity oriented reforms,” and a paradoxical hybrid of neoliberalism, communitarianism and social democracy.

However, the implications of the analysis presented in this article go further than providing a deeper understanding of Quebec’s exceptionalism regarding the funding of women’s organizations. To feminist scholars and political economists interested in the interrelated issues of state/civil society relations, state funding, and movement politics, it makes a case for fine-
grained, institutional analyses of funding conditions that are attentive to context-specific and program-specific variations, as well as to the potential impact of women’s and community groups’ mobilizations. Not all state projects, rationales, and programs are created equal regarding the conditions they impose on funding for women’s and community groups and the opportunities they offer them to pursue their missions in the manner they see fit. How are elements of neoliberalism, social investment, and social liberalism expressed in the different funding programs that women’s and community groups are still able to access at the federal level and in other Canadian provinces? How are these potentially heterogeneous and contradictory configurations producing different sets of constraints and opportunities for women’s and community groups to pursue movement politics? A better appreciation of the possibilities offered by a potentially fragmented state apparatus and the ways it may embody “warring principles for redesign” \textsuperscript{86} remains crucial.

Finally, I am aware that focusing on the state and its changing forms makes my analysis vulnerable to interpretations that would present the Quebec case only as providing better conditions through which women’s groups still find themselves instrumentalized, enrolled in a hegemonic, postwelfare state project in which increased responsibility for a variety of community and women’s needs is assumed by the mostly female, underpaid, and overworked staff of community and women’s movement organizations. What is sorely missing from structural narratives of that sort is an account of the groups’ action, activity, and agency—that is, of the very movement projects that are enabled, wholly or in part, by state funding, or that are enacted despite the latter. To paraphrase feminist geographer Lynn Staeheli, funding policies may very well reflect instrumental understandings of women’s organizations, but the values and meanings expressed in such policies are not necessarily the same as that expressed in the work they do.\textsuperscript{87} This suggests that women’s groups’ experience with state funding carries with it a whole other order of meanings, one that is not captured by analyses that focus on their insertion into social liberal, neoliberal, social investment, or even hybrid state projects. To attend to those meanings that “exceed...the confines of governmental projects,”\textsuperscript{88} we need to decentre our gaze to
examine the movement projects and countervailing strategies\textsuperscript{89} of women’s
groups that attempt to develop and carve out space for feminist definitions
of citizenship, caring, social justice, and social change.

Notes

I would like to thank the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting
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on which this manuscript is based. My knowledge of Quebec’s PRSAC stems from an earlier association
with Deena White’s research team, whose relevant reports are referenced in the endnotes.
Most sincere thanks to Jean Rousseau and Rianne Mahon for their substantive and editorial
comments, as well as to the evaluators from \textit{Studies in Political Economy}.

1. A review of these debates is available in M. Beres, B. Crow, and L. Gottell, “The Perils of
Institutionalization in Neoliberal Times: Results of a National Survey of Canadian Sexual
Assault and Rape Crisis Centres,” \textit{Canadian Journal of Sociology} 34/1 (2009), pp. 135–163.
2. Rodgers and Knight write that, over the past years, “funding was not continued for at least
thirty...national and provincial-level advocacy organizations such as Women’s Future Fund,
Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, the Legal Education and Action
Fund, the National Organization of Women and the Law, New Brunswick Pay Equity Coalition,
the Alberta Networks of Immigrant Women, and the Centre for Equality Rights in
Accommodation.” K. Rodgers and M. Knight, “‘You Just Felt the Collective Wind Being
Knocked Out of Us’: State Funding and the Survival of Women’s Organizing in Canada.” Paper
4. Feminists, Marxists, and Neo-institutionalists alike have underlined the fragmented and poten-
tially contradictory picture of state intervention that results from the uneven deployment of
institutionalized power relations, actors, discourses and capacities between branches of the state
and among policy areas. See S. Franzway, D. Court, and R.W. Connell, \textit{Staking a Claim. Feminism, Bureaucracy and the State}
6. Among the most influential accounts is J. Brodie, \textit{Politics on the Margins: Restructuring and the
7. And, the author hopes, will be helpful to other scholars to analyze the situation in other
provinces.
11. J. Brodie, “Canada’s Three Ds: The Rise and Decline of the Gender-Based Policy Capacity,”
16. See Brodie, “Canada’s Three Ds,” for further detail on the fate of women’s policy machinery
and the shrinking space for gender equality claims.


28. But see the references in note 27.


34. Gouvernement du Québec, Politique, p. 19.

35. Gouvernement du Québec, Politique, p. 16.

36. Ibid.

37. Gouvernement du Québec, Politique, p. 27 and p. 25, respectively.

38. Gouvernement du Québec, Politique, p. 28.


41. Gouvernement du Québec, Politique, p. 36.

42. Gouvernement du Québec, Politique, p. 42.


44. See Table 4 (1979–1980 to 1990–91) and Table 7 (1991–92 to 2000–01) in C. Jetté, Les organismes communautaires et la transformation de l’État-providence (Québec: Presses de l’Université du Québec, 2008), pp. 229 and 314–315, respectively. As these numbers show, the steady growth of provincial funding for the community sector actually predates the adoption of the policy.


52. The label of “autonomous” community action is a self-defined identity marker for community and women’s organizations “concerned with social change and contesting government practices perpetuating poverty, exclusion and injustice” (White, “Can Advocacy Survive Partnership,” p. 29). It is designed to differentiate them from community action at large.

53. D. White et l’équipe d’évaluation de la politique, La gouvernance intersectorielle à l’épreuve. Évaluation de la mise en œuvre et des premières retombées de la Politique de reconnaissance et de soutien de l’action communautaire. Rapport final, Équipe d’évaluation de la mise en œuvre de la

54. See Masson, “Constituting ‘Post-Welfare State.’”

55. White and the équipe, La gouvernance intersectorielle, p. 12.


57. SACAIS, État de situation, p. 28.


59. MESSS, Programme de soutien.

60. At the moment, these umbrella organizations are the TRPOCB (Table des Regroupements provinciaux d’organismes communautaires et bénévoles) and the CTROC (Coalition des Tables régionales d’organismes communautaires). Women’s movement provincial regroupments are involved in the former; local and regional women’s groups are part of the latter’s constituency.

61. Guay et al., La mise en oeuvre, pp. 15–16 and 31.


63. Among individual shelters, variation in funding levels is largely a reflection of the total number of spaces available for occupancy.


65. SACAIS, État de situation, p. 30.


67. White et al., La mise en oeuvre, p. 13.

68. The Ministry of Employment and Social Solidarity is the ministry responsible for both Emploi-Québec and the Secretary for Community Action (SACAIS).


70. SACAIS, État de situation, p. 30.

71. SACAIS, État de situation, p. 30.

72. Dufour et al., La mise en oeuvre, p. 31.


76. For an overview of such tensions as they played out at the Ministry of Environment, see Garon and Dufour, “Comprendre la mise en oeuvre.”

77. For more detail on the Ontario case, see White, “Can Advocacy Survive Partnership?”


79. Closely related to a social investment perspective, the 2003 reform of Health and Social Services, piloted by a new Liberal government set on “re-engineering” Quebec institutions, privileged the implementation of population-based approaches, clinical projects, contracts and results-based evaluations in the public sector. Such proposals fostered a climate of fear and uncertainty among women’s and community organizations, who firmly opposed being included in the reform. In 2004, MSSS responded by restating its commitment to the 2001 policy’s vision and has not altered its PSOC funding program since (Jetté, Les organismes communautaires; White, “Can Advocacy Survive Partnership?”).

80. P. Graefe, personal communication.