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Chapter 9 Conclusion

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Gender and Politics and the Changing Status of Women Today

This volume has built upon the frameworks developed by scholars that have previously summarized the emerging discipline of gender and politics. We acknowledge their conceptualizations of the new discipline as “unmasking”, “adding in” and “reconceptualising.” We also note their reliance upon traditional models of the democratic nation state and adoption of a westernized approach towards emerging societies. This volume has sought to expand the work of those gender and politics scholars by incorporating a “global” approach that highlights the different approaches taken by scholars from different regions possibly in terms of an Old World (Europe) versus a New World (North America) dichotomy but also in terms of a “Majority World” (So-called developing countries) versus “Traditional World” (Old Industrial Societies) approach. Hence this volume has been enriched by the idea that knowledge production is not neutral, but inherently linked to global power hierarchies, as articulated by the chapters on Latin America and Africa. Above all, the volume argues that gender and politics scholars in political science along with scholars from a variety of other disciplines have sought to use their research and writing abilities to identify, understand and document changes in the global economy, changes in economic and social opportunities available to women and especially changes in the ways that women have organized and become politically active to explore the reasons for the changes and to develop strategies for influencing local, national and global policy-making.

We also note that in many implicit ways, the field of gender and politics has itself emerged and developed in response to socio-economic changes in the past fifty years and to the ways that women have organized and become politically active, partly in response to such transformations. Since the 1960s, scholars concerned with gender and social movements have witnessed significant improvements for women in many countries; although in some places the well-being of women has deteriorated rather than improved. In many western countries, those movements drew upon activist traditions, especially those related to supporting women’s claims to participate in the public

spheres of education, paid work and politics, while others promoted the well-being of women in their reproductive and caring roles. In some countries, some women are more economically independent than previously. Women have greater access to education and have become educated citizens and/or educated professionals. Women's healthcare is often better as is their self knowledge and self esteem. Greater numbers of women are participating in local, regional, national and international political institutions. The picture is not entirely progressive. Women continue to be the victims of violence. For many, their labor continues to be exploited. Sex trafficking, slavery and prostitution are rife. Poverty, sickness and illiteracy continue to plague women at higher rates than for men. Discrimination against women continues. Moreover, the benefits of women's movements globally are quite uneven, with progress occurring in some parts of the world much more rapidly and effectively than in others. Even in many western countries, internal colonies of disadvantage – especially as they relate to indigenous peoples – continue unabated with poor quality of life for many inhabitants and unacceptably high levels of infant mortality, domestic violence and abuse of women and children.

Overall, the chapters in this volume are grouped according to the broad themes they represent, beginning with those chapters on Latin America and Africa that take as their starting point the global production of knowledge and power. Next come case study chapters on South Asia (Kumari), Europe (Leyenaar) and the United States' literature review (Bayes), that have largely drawn from a tradition of explaining the nature of women's engagement with the nation-state and liberal democracy. Several of these chapters, notably the chapter on South Asia and parts of the United States and international relations chapters also explore more widely the role of civil society, family and kinship networks and other factors in explaining gender and politics relationships. Chapters on gender and international relations (Prügl) and feminist theory (Hawkesworth) review much of the pioneering conceptual work that the study of gender and politics has produced. While each chapter does not approach the topic in a uniform way, taken as a whole, they present a range of questions, problems, debates and kinds of knowledge production that the field as a whole represents. The chapters in this book sample these processes at work in different parts of the world, with rich examples of scholarly research and engagement drawn from country case studies, which are illustrative rather than exhaustive or comprehensive. Work on China, the former Soviet Union, East Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East, the Caribbean and the old British Commonwealth nations such as Australia, Canada and New Zealand remain for a future volume.

Recent Changes in the Gender and Politics Field

Perhaps the most significant change in the field in the last 20 years or even the last 10 years is that as an academic discipline, gender and politics has greatly expanded its concerns and scope beyond the regions of North America, Europe and the old British Commonwealth nations of Australia, New Zealand and Canada, although it continues to be Eurocentric in much of its work. This change, triggered by the forces of globalization, has brought with it some realizations about the field concerning accepted assumptions, boundaries and distinctions. One of these is the assumed relationship of political science (and gender and politics) to universities and academic inquiry in any particular nation state. A second is the relationship of the subfield of gender and politics to the discipline and the tradition of political science. A third is the importance of the global world order and its impact on the field of gender and politics as a locus of knowledge production in any region or state.

The Relationship between Discipline of Political Science and the Nation State

Consider first the relationship of the discipline of political science to the nation-state. While the study of politics in both the East and the West is an ancient endeavor and often categorized as a branch of philosophy, the discipline of political science is not much more than a century old and is rooted in North America and Europe (Norris 1997). The American Political Science Association was founded in 1903. The International Political Science Association was founded in 1949 under the auspices of UNESCO (United Nations, Educational, Social and Cultural Organization).¹ Whether the discipline should be considered a science is a frequent source of debate. In some parts of Europe – especially Britain and in parts of the old Commonwealth – the field is known as *politics* or *political studies*. The notion of a science of politics suggests that the discipline can be “objective” or “value-free,” divorced from political agendas or political ideologies and philosophies. The emergence of the field of women and politics or gender and politics has shown that political science as a discipline has been anything but “value-free” or “unbiased” where the topics of women or gender are concerned, nor is it free of bias ideologically or methodologically as all concepts, methods and categories carry with them some form of bias (Rudolph 2005). This point is clear-

¹ There is also the case of Swedish “exceptionalism” as Uppsala University founded in the 16th century has a Department of Political Science as one of its foundational departments.

ly spelled out in the chapters by Mendoza on Latin America and Gouws on Africa.

Supported by vibrantly political grassroots women's movements in the United States, Europe and the old Commonwealth countries in the 19th and 20th centuries, white female scholars were gradually able to break gender barriers to study for postgraduate degrees in the 1960s and by the 1970s and 1980s, able to teach, research, write and publish about "women and politics" and then "gender and politics" in universities in the United States, Europe, and parts of the Commonwealth (Tolleson-Rhinehart and Carroll 2006; Rich 2007). As chapters in this volume on Africa and Latin America attest, this has not been the experience of either the discipline of political science or the subfield of gender and politics in other parts of the world at different periods of time. Countries with communist, autocratic, theocratic or military governments usually have no interest in political science as an academic discipline of inquiry. Countries wracked by poverty or warfare often have no extra resources to establish or maintain universities, much less departments of political science or subfields of gender and politics, even if they have a desire to do this. Yet in all of these regions of the world, knowledge about gender relations exists, is being produced and reproduced. However, this knowledge production is not necessarily occurring in political science departments or in universities and is not necessarily being widely communicated globally.

The recognition of global difference and the desire to respect human rights underpinned the establishment of the United Nations (UN) after the Second World War, an initiative that involved high profile feminists – notably Eleanor Roosevelt. The UN has generated new agendas and sites of activism for women, and its many non-government organizations (NGOs) have become sources of new knowledge creation and policy transfer. Non-governmental organizations concerned with the health, well-being and economic survival of women and families are quite diverse. Some of these may be indigenous, some may be influenced by church missionaries (liberation theology in Latin America), and some may be influenced by academic activists in the fields of economics, sociology, anthropology or political science who have developed the related subfields of women and development (WAD) or women in development (WID). Outreach programs not only on the part of the UN and its various agencies but also the World Bank or various programs funded by Nordic European and other governments and/or philanthropic foundations are important sources of knowledge creation that generally operate outside the boundaries of the discipline of political science but whose work and findings are often incorporated by gender and politics scholars.

Some of the tensions in the relationship between gender and politics as a field and the discipline of political science can perhaps best be understood by looking at the Mary Hawkesworth's chapter in this volume on the develop-

ment of hyphenation models of feminist theory in the 1960s and 1970s whereby scholars have articulated feminist theories that can be classified as liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, post-structural and post-colonial. Hawkesworth notes that except for radical feminism, these approaches reform "malestream" thought rather than making dramatic innovations. While feminist theorists may have recently moved on from the hyphenation models in favor of equality, difference and post structural feminism as Hawkesworth indicates, the basic assumptions of the hyphenation models continue to undergird and differentiate much of the research in the field of gender and politics. This can be observed in the chapters in this volume.

Liberal feminist assumptions support much of the research concerned with women's equality in political participation and in political representation. Some scholars go so far as to argue that almost all studies of gender and politics in the United States "have at their foundation concerns about political representation (Fox 2010, 94)." (See also Lawless 2010). Policies and research on quotas, mainstreaming, the gender gap, equal pay, affirmative action all are supported by liberal political assumptions. Anne Phillips has called this approach "the politics of presence (1995)." This reform agenda – like that of social democracy – seeks improvement in women's social well being and maintains that this can be achieved through gradual reform. Both liberal feminism and social democracy accept that the market can be humanized. This gender equality research is most relevant in countries that consider themselves "democracies" or perhaps those that aspire to be "democratic." It also carries with it the idea that current political systems can work if women are allowed to participate in an equal way. The chapters discussing women's political representation in South Asia, in European parliaments and in much of the United States literature on barriers to and strategies to improve women's political participation and representation illustrate this approach.

Radical, socialist feminist or post-colonial approaches are more likely to look at many factors in the society other than political institutions to argue that much more fundamental change must occur in a variety of ways if the well-being of women is to improve. For them, the problem and the solution are much more complex than adding more women to existing (often-failing) institutions. Radical feminists tend to argue that concepts, assumptions, language, and gender relationships in private as well as public institutions and interactions must change if women's social, psychological, economic and political situations are to improve in any meaningful way. Many feminist theorists subscribe to this view as their major concern is with concepts, assumptions and language as illustrated by the chapter reviewing feminist theory in this volume. Gender and politics scholars concerned with the field of international relations also challenge concepts, assumptions and language within the academic and policy discourse of international relations.

This radical approach is applied in a different way in the chapter on Latin America where theorist Breny Mendoza argues that knowledge creation and its propagation are shaped by the global power hierarchies of the world as well as by indigenous economic, cultural and historical conditions, a view that is confirmed by the chapter reviewing the study of gender and politics in Africa.

Marxist and socialist feminist approaches tend to emphasize the importance of economic issues as illustrated by the discussion of the parts of the gender and politics field that discuss gender and the international political economy, gender and globalization, gender and development as reviewed in parts of the chapters in this volume on gender and international relations and the gender and politics literature in the United States. Here, as with those using radical approaches, research draws on a variety of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, economics, geography as well as political science. The “political” is understood to be germane in both public and private institutions and is also considered to be historically conditioned.

Contributions of Political Science to the Study of Gender and Politics

While gender and politics scholars have been critical of how the discipline excludes women, political science as a discipline has nevertheless provided intellectual foundations for the development of the field of gender and politics. The study of the state provided a frame for research on women and politics in the 1970s and 1980s where the initial focus was on explaining, problematizing and trying to rectify women’s absence from public political life. Globalization and the collapse of the Cold War has challenged these intellectual foundations, but even in the post Cold War and globalization era, political scientists remain united by their subject matter, namely, power and the political (encompassing the state but going beyond it) and are divided by methodological diversity (Goodin and Tilly 2006).

Although many political scientists have resisted it, the field of gender and politics has ironically made important contributions to the discipline of political science. First of all, it has demanded that gender and women be included in the study of politics. It has challenged the state-centric frame of traditional political science by showing: that power resides in gender relationships and that gender has become a symbol and marker of power throughout the fabric of societies (Scott 1984); that power lies in the private as well as the public; that power is intersectional, simultaneously involving the intersections of race, class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, and geograph-

ical hierarchies. Methodologically, gender and politics as a field has opened political science to the methods and insights of other disciplines such as psychology, anthropology, linguistics, history, philosophy, geography and sociology as well as developed its own feminist methodologies (Hawkesworth 2006). This is exactly what Sawyer and Simms found in their 1984 review of the gender and politics field. (Sawyer and Simms 1984). They noted that because political science focused on the state and women were mostly excluded from the state and its institutions, gender and politics sought inspiration and guidance from a variety of sources outside of the discipline such as sociology, psychology, philosophy, history and geography. This has helped broaden the scope of political science and encouraged it to be more interdisciplinary. Gender and politics, because it is developed and propagated as a knowledge base from the grassroots, from those outside the mainstream (or “malestream”), can be radical in challenging established concepts and accepted notions of what is “normal” or “natural.” It can be and is a source of originality and creativity for the discipline of political science. Because its subject matter – the perceived power relations between men and women, masculine and feminine, – is present in all parts of the globe, it can expand the discipline of political science into geographical, conceptual and institutional arenas that are untraditional, new and progressive, thereby strengthening the discipline and making it more broadly relevant to recognizing, addressing and resolving political problems and building societies that promote the continued well-being of their members.

Gender and Politics, Political Science and Knowledge Production

A third realization that the contributions to this volume have brought to light is that the ability to produce knowledge is embedded in power configurations. A major aspect of the field of gender and politics has been to show and explain how power relationships can silence minorities, silence those without power, silence women through laws, through customs, through violence, through resource distribution, through habits and practices, through language, through institutions, through class, through race and through the control of knowledge production and distribution. Gender and politics scholars have explored how race, ethnic, and class power relations among women can silence the voices and ability to produce knowledge by women of color. Post-colonial scholars have shown how this same dynamic works in relation to the global political order. Because the United States and Europe have been the dominant political powers in the world at this point in history, their languages, their political ideas, their ways of generating knowledge and their

ideas about political science as a discipline tend to follow their influence in the world. Inasmuch as academic disciplines are recorded and perpetuated through writing, language and publication, distribution becomes important. At the turn of the 21st century, the English language is by far the most ubiquitous international academic language. Other European languages may compete to some extent – Spanish, French, German – and most people in the world may speak Chinese, but publications in English and some European languages prevail in international circuits related to political science or gender and politics, whether it be conferences, books, journals or library collections. This does not mean that knowledge is not being created in non-English languages as Mendoza details in her chapter on Latin America, but it does mean that that knowledge has difficulty being published and distributed internationally.

Agenda for the Future: Bridge-building and the New Synthesis

While scholarship or knowledge production usually is not the only agent of change, certainly it has a role to play. As indicated above, the problems that the field of gender and politics addresses are often outside the accepted boundaries of what political science understands as “political.” The field itself has helped the discipline of political science as a whole recognize that knowledge production is political and that the very boundaries defining a discipline are also political as they compartmentalize, confine and legitimate knowledge production and its distribution. Yet, political science in its focus on questions of power, policy making and governance also has much to offer that other disciplines do not. The agenda for field of gender and politics consequently calls for less emphasis and concern about disciplinary boundaries, more attention to the unspoken (and perhaps unintended) biases of the field and its language and more interdisciplinary cooperation and exchange.

A second agenda item for this century speaks to the need to address the power imbalances with regard to knowledge production in the world. The discipline of political science is Eurocentric as is the field of gender and politics. This reflects the power hierarchy of the global order. Those universities and publication houses located in Europe, North America and the Old British Commonwealth countries dominate. Their languages are the international languages. Their publications not only are more numerous within their own borders, but they travel beyond their national borders to spread their forms of knowledge in places without such resources. Another major agenda item, therefore, is to do what can be done by academic and activist knowledge producers to address this problem. On one level this involves listening, learning

new languages, traveling, conferencing, engaging in collective research, building networks and building trust among gender and politics scholars from different parts of the world. This currently is occurring among scholars in the South, among scholars in various regions such as Africa, Asia, South America, and between North and South scholars. More, however, needs to be done to give voice to the scholarship of women in the South and to encourage scholars in the North to become more knowledgeable and more informed about regions in the Majority world. More translation of texts is particularly important as English and other European languages are a major support for the current global knowledge production hierarchy and a barrier to new ways of thinking, new ideas, and new solutions to problems.

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