

*Negotiating Gender in the Global South: The Politics of Domestic Violence Policy*, edited by Sohela Nazneen, Sam Hickey and Eleni Sifaki. London, New York: Routledge, 2019.

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Three decades have passed since dramatic changes in authoritarian societies – the collapse of the Soviet Union, the fall of one-party and military regimes in Africa and Latin America – generated feminist interest in formal political institutions. A substantial body of literature in the social sciences began to seriously address the question of what kinds of gains could be made by engaging the institutions of liberal democracy. It is possible now to trace the trajectory of these debates: from the theorisation of the possibilities of processes of transition for inserting feminist (or at least gender equality) claims into democratic pacts, to the building of transnational coalitions, to designing “friendly” institutions (such as national machineries and quotas representation), to studies of the performance of women in parliaments (both celebratory and, inevitably, critical), to studies of the impacts of legislation and policy. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) was ratified forty years ago by the United Nations, inaugurating forms of transnational engagement that foregrounded the centrality of formal institutions. Laws, rights, policies and parliaments have become the nexus institutions acting as the depository of feminist hopes and dreams.

In *Negotiating Gender in the Global South: The Politics of Domestic Violence Policy*, the team of authors revisit a central animating question: what conditions, institutions and politics facilitate the introduction and implementation of policies to address gender inequalities? They use a single issue – addressing domestic violence – as a lens to explore the complexities of institutional and political opportunities and constraints, and they proceed from the experiences of activists and policy advocates in the Global South. Both are productive framings. Gender-based violence, it could be argued, is a problem that can be a fulcrum for

broad-based feminist politics with an appeal beyond class and race. As a policy issue, it can allow feminists of various stripes to craft alliances and make the connections between public and private expressions of power. As the book also highlights, it is an issue that crosses the terrains of global norm-setting and local agendas. Additionally, and not least, given the preponderance of theory based on the particular experiences of engaging European and North American political institutions, the use of a series of case studies in the Global South (Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda) to build theory is very welcome. The book also serves as an opportunity to review the literature on the politics of gender equity policies with the advantage of being able to analyse policy interventions over a relatively long period of (feminist) time. Since the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action and subsequent global campaigns for increasing women's representation in the state, there have been generational shifts in the composition of parliaments, allowing an assessment of presumed virtuous relationships between descriptive representation and substantive outcomes.

The book is rich both empirically and theoretically, and will be a touchstone for work on understanding the nexus of politics, institutions and equality outcomes. It is organised in four parts, with each containing fascinating empirical and theoretical insights. A scene-setting first section establishes the core propositions of the book. Sam Hickey and Sohela Nazneen argue for a "power domains" approach which disrupts the idea that increased inclusion in spheres of formal politics leads to greater influence of gender equality discourses. They expand the conversation by suggesting the need to look at how coalitions develop (or not) across multiple institutional domains, including informal institutions. Sophie King and Eleni Sifaki provide a well-written and clear outline of how a global norm against gender-based violence emerged and rooted itself in a growing network of transnational and regional women's networks with the United Nations as the core.

This nicely sets up the next section, which takes readers into thickly argued case studies that address how domestic violence policies emerged, and what kinds of coalitions and interests came into play. Josephine Ahikire and Amon Mwiine, looking at Uganda, update Ahikire's earlier work on the Domestic Violence Act. Jennie E. Burnet demonstrates the importance of political commitment and will in the implementation of the laws in Rwanda. Lilian Artz and

Valerie Grand-Maison trace the three-decade-old process of attempts to finalise and implement legislation and policies in South Africa. The Ugandan and South African cases show how easily the issue of gender-based violence morphed from being a transformative one to an ameliorative project. Both explore the poor implementation and incoherence of policies. By contrast, in Rwanda, Burnet offers a relative success story in which strong political commitment and political will translated into effective judicial and policing mechanisms. All three are countries characterised by high levels of representation of women. One key difference that is only hinted at in this section (and picked up later by Georgina Waylen) is that of colonial trajectories of institutional development. Another, also barely analysed, is the strongly technocratic-authoritarian nature of the Rwandan state.

In Section Three, attention shifts to countries that have strong informal institutions countervailing the politics inside the state. In these chapters, we see how certain kinds of gains can be made in the context of states wishing to signal modernity or compliance with global norms. However, as Nazneen shows for Bangladesh, elite consensus may not lead to actual policy implementation. In Ghana, Beatrix Allah-Mensah and Rhoda Osei-Afful demonstrate the difficulties women's movements face in negotiating the terrain of electoral politics where formal multiparty competition is underpinned by clientelism rather than competing substantive policy agendas. Similarly, Asmita Basu shows how powerful competing discursive social frames can hinder the implementation of gender equity policies in India, especially when gender concerns clash with other socially powerful identities.

In the final section of the book, the editors draw together these themes, in part by bouncing them off the influential comparative work of Mala Htun and Laurel Weldon. Here they make the argument that transnational actors may have had much less influence on local agendas than assumed, because of the wariness in the Global South towards ideas that are seen to have Western provenance. More important, they suggest, were South-South influences and networks. Hickey and Nazneen reiterate scholarship in the field of gender quotas, which shows that dominant party systems (especially those with proportional representation electoral systems) are more likely to drive equity agendas in contexts where there are contending social groups. They also suggest the importance of understanding how democratic political settlements are reached and sustained

for predicting the fate of gender equity advocacy. These are cogent arguments but I was not convinced that they are particularly novel; the inclusion-influence relationship has long been questioned by scholars tracing the impact of women's entry into parliaments but that literature is not systematically addressed in the book. History matters - of course. As scholars in the Global South have long argued, attention to the deep trajectories of institutional development and political organisation and mobilisation are key to understanding feminist politics. Most comparative studies of gender elide those histories, aiming at theory building that valorises broad tendencies and patterns. Despite the hat tip to deep history in several places in this volume, there is inadequate attention to scholarship that is country-specific and yet makes exactly the theoretical arguments that are presented here.

Georgina Waylen and Anne-Marie Goetz reiterate those points (although not in the way that I am suggesting) in their reflective chapters at the end of the book. Waylen makes the case for deeper institutional analysis, and Goetz cautions that the book overplays the inclusion-influence thesis. Both draw attention to other areas of scholarship: Waylen to areas with different colonial trajectories, and Goetz to the rich literature on political settlements and peace-building.

This reader would have valued a more explicit and critical approach to the framing of gender-based violence itself. The chapters in the book are striking in their demonstration of the political and discursive plasticity of this nexus problem of patriarchy, especially in the context of colonial capitalism. The notion of domestic violence has both positive and negative consequences that mimic a central tension in gender equity work between transformative anti-patriarchal emphases and more patriarchally compliant approaches that may stabilise the heteronormative society. How do feminist movements frame their claims when the colonial state and legal system were so deeply implicated in violence, not only against women but also against men? Indeed, what was the feminist content of women's organisations in different contexts and how were competing understandings of the projects of gender equity navigated? How does the post-colonial state recast institutions from oppressive to emancipatory, and with what tools? Can LGBTI groups and women's movements become allies, and with what opportunities and costs? These aspects of politics are not firmly put on the table.

Finally, readers of *Feminist Africa* have been part of a long conversation

on the power relations in knowledge-building projects. They will be interested in how successfully this volume, excellent in so many respects, builds theory from the South (and not just theory about the South). I hesitate to be too critical. This book is a very important addition to scholarship on the state, social movements and policy making. Yet it retains the logic of asymmetrical power: a section that lays out the main theoretical questions written by Northern-based scholars, followed by deep empirical chapters mostly by scholars from/in the South, followed by theoretical reflections by Northern scholars. Citations of work by scholars in the case study countries, while extensive (and incomplete), are not citations to theory but to examples and historical detail. It would take another long review to show how many theoretical arguments were made by scholars in the South; for example, Sylvia Tamale's cautionary tale of women entering parliaments, and it is inappropriate in this case where – truly – the team writing this book has given us a scholarly gift. But it is time to pay attention to the politics of theoretical attribution and citation.