
1. Introduction

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When Edward Elgar invited us to co-edit this *Handbook on Gender in World Politics*, we could not but respond enthusiastically. At the end of the United Nations Decade for Women in 1985, gender was still commonly regarded as, at best, a marginal issue in world politics. Today gender is slowly, yet surely, being mainstreamed into the day-to-day operations of all major international institutions, in regional and national policy-making bodies and development organizations and in legislatures the world over. While we might – and do – continue to debate whether or not commitment to ‘gender mainstreaming’ on the part of political elites is largely rhetorical or increasingly substantive and meaningful, it cannot be denied that gender is now widely recognized as central to the practice of international politics. Concomitantly, gender has emerged as a dynamic field of study across the social sciences. While there is a long-established literature on gender in the academic disciplines of sociology, political science and development studies, during the past three decades scholars working in international relations, international political economy, international law and geography have also made substantive contributions to cutting-edge disciplinary debates and produced weighty empirical studies.

One of the pleasures to be had in working on gender in world politics is the opportunities that it affords to engage with scholars in workshops and conferences and in academic journals that bring together academics and postgraduate researchers from many fields of study. At the same time, however, the study of gender in world politics is marked by diversity in approaches and methods. Therefore, in compiling this volume, we were immediately confronted by the challenges that lay in conceptualizing gender and defining what ‘gender in world politics’ might mean, as a first stage in delimiting the scope of this book. Gender might be approached as a social relation of inequality or as a core component of identity politics. Gender is constructed in narratives and practices of representation. Gender might refer to women and men or femininities and masculinities. According to perspective, some scholars focus on relations between the man and woman or masculinities and

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femininities, while others regard gender as inextricably linked to sexualities. Moreover, gender is not constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts. Gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constructed identities. As such gender is not easily separated from the political and cultural intersections in which gender is produced and maintained. Making women visible has been, and remains, a central plank of the project to 'gender' world politics. However, even as scholars have sought to make women visible, it has long been recognized that the terms 'gender' and 'women' cannot and should not be conflated. Some of the most innovative and challenging research on gender in world politics focuses on men *as men*, masculinities, sexualities, and lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender, inter-sex and queer identities and the political and legal recognition and rights of differently gendered people.

Since gender is constructed – and constructed differently – over time and across cultural locations and because gender is difficult to separate from, or speak about aside from, class, culture, ethnicity and other differences, it has been argued that we cannot approach gender as a discrete variable within the social sciences. And yet, in order to speak to policy-makers and to inform and influence discussion and decision making, it is often necessary to produce rigorous gender differentiated data which will elucidate myriad gender inequalities and/or better enable an effective response to, for example, conflict-related sexualized violence or humanitarian catastrophes. In order to speak to different audiences in a variety of transnational, international and global forums, it can be useful to approach gender in a strategic mode: to treat gender as if it was a coherent and stable category of analysis. In all cases, scholars are generally cognizant of and reflective about the pitfalls of binary constructions and crude forms of gender essentialism.

While acknowledging legitimate intellectual and political differences among those working on the gendered dimensions of world politics, we, as editors, took the view that we should not reproduce unhelpful polarized oppositions between positivist and post-positivist, rationalist and constructivist approaches. Instead, we should aim to showcase works that interrogate research puzzles through different theoretical lenses, employing a variety of methodological tools. We have responded to the challenge of representing the wealth of scholarship that now exists on gender in world politics by securing as many excellent contributions as we could accommodate in a book of this kind.

Limitations of space have necessitated choices on what to include and omit, but we have endeavoured to solicit contributions that, taken as a whole, provide comprehensive coverage of core areas of current research.

These are: examples of approaches and methods; thoughts on the politics of identity and belonging; developments in international law; perspective on conflict and gendered violence; literature on the instrumental use of gender in statecraft; critical studies on peace, security and peacekeeping; the gendered dimensions of global media and communications; and gender in political economy, development and global governance. We have also included contributions that reflect on issues that cut across discrete subject areas, for example the potentialities and limitations of transnational and solidarist political projects, the gender politics in political struggles and state building, the efficacy or otherwise of gender mainstreaming, and the state of play in gender studies within specific academic disciplines.

In so far as we have an ‘agenda’, it is to demonstrate that there is a wealth of critical, reflective thinking on gender in transnational, international and global contexts and to convey a sense of the numerous innovative research projects that are now actively pursued in so many fields of study. The focus of some contributions to this volume continues to be on women, while other authors interrogate masculinities, sexualities, LGBT rights and transgender identities. The diversity of this burgeoning body of scholarship notwithstanding, the research presented in this book demonstrates just how much gender has been, and continues to be, keenly relevant to and sorely needed in the theory and practice of world politics.

We have been fortunate in securing contributions from both leading experts and outstanding if as yet less established researchers who are forging valuable new research agendas and thereby ensuring the vitality of this most fascinating, vibrant field of study over the long term. Since this book is essentially a compendium of current research, we asked our contributors to write on topics on which they had expertise, from their own point of view, but requested that they also include brief literature reviews and a short bibliography to furnish readers with gateways to further study. Regrettably, it is still the case that most of the literature on gender in world politics is generated by scholars located in the Western world. This is reflected in the geographical locations of the editors and most, not all, of the contributors to this book. We have tried to mitigate, to some degree, what is undoubtedly a weakness of the text by ensuring that the 54 chapters include empirical cases and illustrations drawn from countries and regions around the world.

In short, we have aimed to produce a compendium of current scholarship on gender in world politics which reflects the diversity of gender studies within and across a number of academic disciplines. The contributions in the text elucidate the many and varied ways in which gender

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issues are central to national, regional and international policy-making and at the core of the social sciences across the globe. We hope that we have produced a book that will function as an indispensable guide to key literature, approaches and methods and central concepts, themes and issues and which will serve as a comprehensive source of reference for researchers and students alike.