**Introduction: Feminist Policymaking in Turbulent Times: Critical Perspectives**

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**Abstract**

*This introductory chapter maps the international feminist institutional landscape, outlines the contributions of the book to the gender-policy nexus and presents a thematic reading guide. On the one hand, the institutionalisation of gender has generated substantial critique for de-politicising feminist struggles and reflecting (neo)liberal and white feminist perspectives that may reproduce structural forms of injustice. On the other hand, the rapid and global growth of anti-gender and anti-feminist standpoints has raised the stakes for feminist policymaking and possibly reaffirms the urgency of incorporating gender into policy frameworks. Situating the edited volume within this tension and carving out new research questions at this political junction, this Introduction homes in on four dimensions of ‘feminist policymaking’: (1) methods, metrics and impact of feminist policies (2) opening the ‘black box’ of Feminist Foreign Policy (3) the role of the international (4) alternative imaginings of feminist policymaking.*

**Feminism and Policy: Touchstones**

Feminist scholarship, practice, policy, and activism have always been entangled, with social movements and experiential learning sitting at the heart of feminism as a way of thinking about the world (Ackerly & True, 2010). The relationship between these different areas of feminist work has been both symbiotic and fraught. Intense practical critiques have (re)shaped ongoing theoretical conversations while activist achievements have often been tempered by policy implementation, which may in turn be subjected to rigorous critical engagement by feminist academics and activists. These dynamics, mapped across and through different generations of feminism have produced a rich dialogue between feminist scholars and practitioners in which different types of thought, approaches and modes of innovation have emerged. Kimberlé Crenshaw’s conception of intersectionality (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) in particular, has had a radical impact on the feminist landscape and is a key foundation stone in feminist intellectual history (Collins, 2015; Hancock, 2007). The institutionalisation of specific policy frameworks that centre gender within global governance mechanisms, statecraft, and the workings of international organisations, has accelerated notably over the past four decades. In what follows we outline some of the most significant of these policy frameworks, and touch on different modes of feminist critique and bodies of scholarship that are useful for the reader as they engage with the chapters in this volume. In this section we also aim to illustrate a core tension explored in the book, namely that the incorporation of ‘gender’ into policy frameworks can be understood as ‘feminist’ in some senses but does not chime with all forms of feminism. For this reason, we refer to gender in policy spaces as *feminist*, while also calling attention to *feminist* critiques of gender in policy spaces.

The story of gender and institutionalisation is a long and complex one, and includes the introduction of women’s suffrage within states throughout the twentieth century, changes to the law and policy around development aid (Esquivel, 2016; Koehler, 2016), reproductive healthcare (Budde & Heichel, 2016; Calkin & Kaminska, 2020), rape and sexual violence (including policy changes and reorientations at the level of global governance, such as the post-1993 framing of sexual and gender-based violence as a ‘weapon of war’(Baaz & Stern, 2013)) as well as the introduction of quotas to enhance female political representation (Burnet, 2011; Krook, 2006), among other areas. The policy frameworks that exist now, and ongoing engagements at the international level with gender are especially linked to international institutionalisation practices which began in the 1990s. In particular, the Beijing Platform for Action, which emerged out of the Fourth United Nations (UN) Conference on Women in 1995, emphasised the still central paradigm of ‘gender mainstreaming’. As outlined by Sandra Whitworth (2008, p. 400) ‘“mainstreaming” is intended to call attention to the importance of incorporating gender through all aspects of a state's or organization's work, and to move away from simply counting the number of women who are present’.

Importantly, the conceptual foundations of gender mainstreaming, which was subsequently widely endorsed and accepted across international institutions, is premised on a notion of gender as a ‘social construct, not a biological fact’ (Whitworth, 2008, p. 400). This can be understood as *potentially* disruptive. The potential for disruption comes, as Cynthia Enloe (2014) outlines, from the fact that an acceptance of gender as a social and relational construction allows for a recognition of the relationship between gender and power. At the same time, despite feminist attempts to (re)centre power (Whitworth 2008), the relationship between gender and power has often between ignored or depoliticised within institutional mainstreaming policy as gender becomes ‘a tool of social management, a policy instrument and a governance norm’ (Cirstocea et al., 2020).

Sustained feminist activism at the transnational level has prompted significant policy change, such as the passing of Resolution 1325 by the UN Security Council (SC) in 2000. However, from the moment of its genesis, this resolution was *both* hugely significant *and* fell short of its transformative feminist potential. In her study of UNSCR 1325, Laura Shepherd (2011, p. 506) has found ‘constructions of gender that assume it largely synonymous with biological sex and, further, reproduce logics of identity that characterized women as fragile, passive and in need of protection and constructions of security that locate the responsibility for providing that protection firmly in the hands of elite political actors in the international system’. These insights are indicative of wider feminist concerns around the gender-policy nexus (Cohn et al., 2004; De Almagro, 2018; Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Puechguirbal, 2010; Wright, 2016). Additionally, a failure to address or challenge the continued existence of war and the ubiquity of the military as a solution to conflict has been a source of disconnect between UNSCR 1325 (and associated resolutions) and feminist thinking (Akibayashi et al., 2022; Chao & Gusia, 2022; Enloe, 2016; Heathcote, 2018; Otto, 2006).

To better understand this critique, it is important to note the long history of women’s peace activism that preceded it and fought for greater recognition of the gendered impact of war within global governance mechanisms. The feminist peace activism at the international level has coalesced around anti-war campaigning since the nineteenth century and was notably exemplified during First World War at the Hague Congress of 1915 which ‘was attended by women from both sides of the conflict’ (Otto, 2006, p. 114). Importantly, feminist peace activism recognises the centrality of militarism to war as a point of departure and, as a result, ‘[w]omen's international movements for peace have been characteristically anti-militarist’[[1]](#endnote-1) (Otto, 2006, p. 114). However, UNSCR 1325, and the linked resolutions collectively termed the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Agenda, side-stepped the issue of militarism and focused on the potentially more palatable themes of inclusion, protection, and participation. In line with these themes, multiple WPS resolutions centre on the protection of women from sexual violence in conflict and seek to include greater numbers of women in peacekeeping operations as well as in decision-making and negotiation roles where peace is brokered (De Almagro, 2018; Heathcote, 2018; Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Shepherd, 2021; Wright, 2016).

WPS is a successful example of the operationalisation and institutionalisation of (some kinds of) feminism within global governance, and, along with other international policy making efforts such as the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), sits well with a feminist institutionalist position that recognises the value of institutions to global politics, and to varying degrees accepts or endorses this centrality. Such an approach fits with a liberal feminism, and indeed, significant institutions of global governance such as the UN and the World Bank can be understood as ‘liberal institutions’ (Whitworth, 2008). Liberal feminism privileges the inclusion of women, paradigms of equity and the role of the state/state institutions in maintaining and attempting to guarantee or improve women’s inclusion and gender equality (Jaggar, 1983). Liberal feminism is an essential part of the feminist (hi)story, associated with the achievement of women’s suffrage, increased political representation, and other key changes in the gender order globally.

However, while seeking inclusivity and equality (for *some* women), liberal feminism tends to leave the status quo unquestioned and often privileges whiteness and elite or middle-class experience. The liberal feminism often found in policy spaces, as this book demonstrates, can act to depoliticize feminism/gender by voiding its transformational political intent (hooks, 2000). Forms of difference feminism have critiqued liberal feminism for its tendency to ‘add women and stir’, leaving masculinist and patriarchal power intact and neutering the radicalism of feminist politics. These feminisms are interested in centring the female standpoint, and women’s ways of knowing as an alternative to masculinist knowledge in a patriarchal system. Difference feminisms have in turn been critiqued for essentialising womanhood, generating a false and exclusionary universalism in the category of ‘woman’ and reifying sex divisions by asserting the distinction between male and female perspectives/knowledge (see Jaggar, 1983). North American Black feminist critiques of liberal feminism or white feminism have been particularly important in recognizing the need to conceptualise inequality and injustice as multifaceted, and structural. Organisations such as the Combahee River Collective (1979), and individual Black feminist thinkers such as bell hooks (see 2000), Patricia Hill Collins (see 2000) and Kimberlé Crenshaw (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) among others were instrumental in positing a mode of feminism that took account of race and racism, as well as class and other facets and axes of identity onto which structural injustice is crafted and maintained as part of holistic whole. From this, and particularly the work of Crenshaw, the term ‘intersectionality’ emerged. Intersectionality speaks to a mode of oppression which is greater than the sum of its parts and is built on a long intellectual and activist tradition. As outlined by Schuller (2021, p. 5):

Intersectional feminism pushes back against white feminism and advances new horizons of justice. It is both a theory and a movement emphasizing that the fight for gender justice must be approached in tandem with the fights for racial, economic, sexual and disability justice, and ought to be led by those most affected by these systems of exploitation working in coalition with everyone else. Intersectional feminism not only represents antiracist feminism – it nurtures a radically different version of society.

Postcolonial and decolonial feminisms have also critiqued the WPS agenda, and other applications of gender mainstreaming, such as that found in the development practice championed by the World Bank or in feminist foreign policy. Postcolonial critiques have centred on the ways that women in the Global South are represented within these policy frameworks and particularly the positioning of women in essentialising ways, defined as victims of circumstance, culture and/or patriarchy, lacking agency and in need of salvation by their ‘enlightened’ white sisters or even the martial white knights of military intervention (see for example Haastrup and Hagen 2020; Achilleos-Sarll, 2018; Hanifi, 2018; Mohanty, 1988, 2003; Pratt & Richter-Devroe, 2011; Shepherd, 2011). Feminist work is also attentive to the ways that colonialism influenced women’s activism (Medie, 2016) and gender relations (Mama, 2017; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Decolonial feminism recognises the fundamentally Western-centric modes of knowledge production and logics of material extraction and (neo)colonial violence through which the world has been and continues to be shaped and in which concepts of gender are formed (Phipps, 2020; Vergès, 2021). By extension, for some, feminism itself is always, already too deeply entangled with white supremacy and neo-imperial aggression, and therefore other paradigms must be sought out instead (see Obasi, 2019).

Influenced by postcolonial and decolonial thought, as well as by socialist, anti-militarist, queer and intersectional feminisms, further critical engagements with gender-focused policy as implemented by states and global governance institutions, focus on the ways that women’s labour is conceptualised and valued (Enloe, 2016, pp. 9 - 10); on the need to incorporate LGBT+ experiences (Hagen, 2017); on the instrumentalization of gender by militaries and other organisations who leverage gender equality in service of their own goals (McBride & Wibben, 2012; Richter-Montpetit, 2007; Wright, 2019); and on the ways that gender-focused policymaking supports a fundamentally unequal world order, particularly when it is situated within a neoliberal logic that values individualism and economic advancement in a (heteropatriarchal) capitalist infrastructure (Duncanson, 2016; Ferguson, 2005; Fernandes, 2017; Mohanty, 2003; Orford, 1999; Shepherd, 2017; Thobani, 2007; Whitworth, 2004). Though the critical engagements listed here are to be found in academia and scholarship, they are also echoed by practitioners, and, as chapters of this book demonstrate, in particular by feminist and minority practitioners who occupy the margins of policy spaces and advocate for different ways of engaging with policy (Gupta and Villeneuve; Sosa; Saalbrink and & Othim, this volume). Continuing with decolonial thought and inspired by Lily Ling’s (2014 p. 281) work on ‘worldist dialogics’, this book centres power at the heart of institutionalisation practices and asks:

1. Who is saying what to whom and why?, (2) Where are alternative discourses coming from and what do these mean?, and (3) How can I act ethically and with compassion?

**Turbulent times?**

There is no doubt that, since the 1995 Beijing UN Conference on Women and the establishment of the Women, Peace, and Security architecture in the early 2000s, ‘feminism is experiencing a global renaissance’ (Thompson 2020, 424) and gender has become a ‘major fault-line in contemporary global politics’ (Aggestam and True 2021, 404). States, international institutions and third sector organisations are increasingly invested in gender-sensitive policies which inform local, regional, national, and international policymaking. However, as indicated above, increased absorption of certain kinds of feminism into the policy landscape has come with substantial critique.

Moreover, the current contemporary moment signals a particularly significant and turbulent time for the nexus between feminism and policy. This is not just because of an increased emphasis on gender in policy spaces and subsequent feminist critique, but because the inclusion of ‘gender’ in policy has also been challenged from another direction in recent years. This challenge, which is intimately related to the increased institutionalisation of some feminist ideas within global governance mechanisms, is the rise of so-called anti-genderism. Within anti-genderism, the idea of ‘gender ideology’ posits that the social construction (as opposed to biological fixity) of sex/gender identity is an imposition by some external Other (which varies depending on context) and a threat to a given political community (see Ackerly et al., 2019; Edenborg, 2021; Payne & Tornhill, 2021; Zaremberg & Tabbush, 2021). The collection of ideas, activities, campaigns, and political movements that can be grouped around the term anti-genderism often has roots in Vatican mobilisations against feminist and gender-focused policy work, which began in the 1990s. As outlined by Payne and Tornhill (2023, p. 3): ‘[t]he concept ‘gender ideology’ was initially adopted as part of a Catholic counter strategy against the UN’s increasing emphasis on gender equality and sexual and reproductive rights since the mid-1990s.’

Thus, as certain feminist principles were adopted and codified at the UN and within other international institutions, anti-genderism developed and has flourished into a wider range of ideas in which anti-feminism, homophobia, transphobia, anti-immigration sentiments and the reification of the ‘traditional family’ and ‘traditional values’ feature strongly. Feminism is often framed as anti-family, and as an externally driven influence that threatens state sovereignty. As such:

[A]nti-gender movements are part of a more comprehensive, flexible and adaptable ideological construct usurping ordinary anti-feminism, anti-liberalism and selective anti-globalisation by replacing individual (human) rights with the ‘rights of the family’ and linking procreation with demographic nationalism (Fábián, 2022, p. 294).

In recent years, anti-genderism has been thriving globally, and has appeared as an increasingly useful tool to engage popular support and enhance political power (Ackerly et al., 2019). Anti-gender politics draw upon a relatively similar range of mobilising infrastructures, for example the protection of children or even women’s rights may be cited to pursue policies that are actively misogynistic, homophobic, or transphobic. Additionally, though contextually specific within states - from Trump’s America to Bolsonaro’s Brazil and Duda’s Poland - different expressions of anti-gender politics have enough in common to consider anti-genderism to be a relatively global trend (B. A. Ackerly et al., 2019).

Importantly, in the context of this book, the rise of anti-genderism has implications for feminism, feminist activism, and feminist policy work. As suggested by the fact that original conceptions of ‘gender ideology’ were a reaction to an increased emphasis on gender in global governance mechanisms, the past trajectory of anti-genderism and feminist policy work are entangled and so, equally, are their futures. One of the major implications of the increasing strength of anti-gender politics for feminist work is that it makes that work harder. This was summed up by a prominent Brazilian feminist as “before, we fought to gain rights; now, we fight against them being taken away” (Payne & Tornhill, 2023; cited in Molyneux et al., 2021, p. 19). As this quote suggests, anti-genderism attacks the basics of equality for women, LGBT+ people and migrants, and thus disrupts the foundations upon which feminists might seek to build.

Feminist policymaking is thus arguably situated between two dominant and difficult to navigate trends; on the one hand, a depoliticising liberal institutionalism, which has tended to deradicalize feminist principles or even deploy them in service of goals that further structural injustice and endorse violent global hierarchies. On the other hand, an increasingly aggressive anti-gender politics limits the space for women and minority rights, while championing a nostalgic misogyny and attacking feminism itself as (in the most extreme cases) ‘worse than fascism’ (Fábián, 2022, p. 294). The existence of these two significant trends at the same time is no accident since feminism in neoliberal policy spaces and anti-feminist politics are entangled together.

As readers move through the chapters of this volume, they will find that anti-genderism is not always an explicit focus of analysis, however, the institutionalisation of some modes of feminism, cannot be abstracted from wider contextual features. We suggest that it is important to bear in mind how elements that might be associated with feminism in policy are problematized by explicitly *anti-feminist* political positions as well as by more *critical feminist* engagements, which demonstrates the complex balancing act potentially involved in bringing gender into policy. We posit this dynamic as an important area for future research beyond this volume as well. A final contextual point to make is that academia, and the labour of scholarship, has played an instrumental role in delimiting the boundaries and significance of contemporary feminist policymaking. This is particularly salient given the scholarship that has grown up around feminist foreign policy (FFP) in recent years. Academia has played a part in implicitly crafting and legitimising FFP as a coherent and ‘knowable’ project, especially given the lack of definitional parameters around FFP as adopted by states in practice. Even though FFP is a motivating factor for the writing of this book as outlined below, we deliberately broaden the scope of our focus to consider feminist policymaking more generally, seeking to widen the conversation and bring in modes of practice and areas of concern (such as taxation, domestic security practitioners, history, methodologies, and storytelling) beyond the parameters of foreign policy. We see this *messiness* as a feminist approach, which blurs disciplinary lines and expands understandings of politics as well as binaries between the national and the international, or the local and the geopolitical. With this in mind, we now move to outline the aims and objectives of the book project.

**Objectives of the book**

The aims of this book are threefold. First, the book aims to document and take stock of the ascent of feminism in various areas of policymaking across the globe, including security policy, foreign policy, economic policy, and diplomacy. In particular, the volume pays attention to the popularity of feminist themes at the international level and the rise (and fall?) of feminist foreign policy. The global uptake for feminist foreign policy since the Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister Margaret Wallström declared in 2014 Sweden’s foreign policy to be ‘feminist’ has translated and materialised into a multitude of femocrats and government departments engaged with the concept and practice of feminist foreign policy, as well as a significant number of publications, conference papers, keynote addresses, and policy documents.

The global traction for feminist foreign policy and demands to promote gender equality internationally has created extraordinary opportunities for feminist scholars and practitioners to be included and participate in ‘high-level’ decision-making in politics. Where once ‘women’s issues’ and ‘gender studies’ were relegated to ‘low politics’, the embrace of feminist themes by states and international institutions means that gender scholars and (*some* kinds of) feminist interventions have been elevated to ‘high politics’ in international relations. Moreover, the declaration by the ‘good states’ that their foreign policy is ‘feminist’ is also an occasion for feminist scholars to collaborate with policymakers and practitioners and develop impactful research. Part of the impetus for this book came from an interest in generating new intellectual discussions relevant to policymakers and feminist activists and building cross-sector expertise and solidarity amongst feminist stakeholders. This began with a workshop in 2019 entitled ‘Feminist Policy Making – Add Feminism and Stir?’. The workshop, organised by the editors of this volume, was funded by the Gendering International Relations Working Group of the British International Studies Association, and hosted at the London campus of Loughborough University in partnership with the Race, Gender, and Sexualities research group at London South Bank University. It brought together around thirty gender scholars and feminist advocates at the forefront of civil society action towards gender equality. Thus, this book is also the creation and crystallisation of an international feminist network concerned with feminist momentum in policymaking.

Importantly, this momentum has also created extraordinary opportunities for states and military/security organisations to change the narrative that they are patriarchal institutions linked to the perpetuation of gender injustices. The state itself, which has often been considered by critically oriented feminist scholars as connected to the subordination of women and minority identities (Parashar, Tickner and True 2018, p.5), has, in some cases, claimed a ‘feminist’ label through the use of a feminist grammar and the deployment of gender mainstreaming initiatives. Yet, as feminist scholars remind us, radical feminism is ‘anti-state’ because of the nature of state power and a violent history at the heart of the construction of the liberal state, in particular the imposition of this model on racialised peoples as a civilising mission (Duriesmith 2018, p.53). Moreover, in the discipline of International Relations, state-centric theories have reinforced a masculinized formulation of the state by constructing states as abstract, timeless entities and as primitive ‘individuals’ operating in a lawless and anarchical world (Sylvester, 1992). This book revisits these tensions, and extends them to international financial, defence and military organisations that have also jumped on the ‘feminist’ bandwagon, pointing to the limitations and challenges of integrating and implementing feminist ideas into their policies.

Thus, a second objective of the book brings ‘critical perspectives’ on feminist policymaking forward, by questioning the process of institutionalising feminism and the mainstreaming of gender into policy. To do this, we focus on policy*making* as a process rather than simply policy as an outcome. Policymaking begins with the identification of social issues as political problems, the preparation and formulation of principles of action, and the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of a policy, a process which sometimes leads to the creation of new institutions, new laws, and new roles within organisations (Lombardoa, Meierb and Verloo 2016, p.1). We also take as a starting point that our use of the term 'feminist’ in feminist policymaking signals a broad notion of feminism, which can and does fall short of transformative or ‘revolutionary’ politics (hooks 2000). Policy in this book refers to state level, institutional and organisational practices that are formalised and codified. Policy spaces are those where this codification happens, and where policy is formulated and implemented, as well as (at times) challenged. As such, we are interested in the policy arenas where gender equality and a gender lens are endorsed, as well as where more complex or marginalised modes of feminism are actualised. At the same time, an interest in ‘feminist’ policymaking creates an important analytical tension in the book, since its evocation always and immediately provokes the question of how ‘feminist’ any policy framework is or could ever be, rather than simply whether it draws upon or addresses gender.

We ask how does the world of ‘expertise’ and ‘professionals’ sustain hierarchies of power? What are the challenges large institutions face when integrating radical ideas into everyday practice and what is the impact of gender policies for the intended beneficiaries on the ground? Lastly, how can more radical and ‘anecdotal’ gender accounts inform (inter)national policy or create new kinds of policies, more holistic policies grounded in experience rather than abstract and ‘scientific’ metrics? By and large, authors in this book are sceptical of liberal feminism’s premise that institutions of power can be utilised to create positive change. The book demonstrates that large-scale policies ‘hailed’ as feminist or gender-inclusive often render feminist policymaking a tick box exercise rather than an opportunity for critical self-reflexivity and addressing intersectional inequalities. Adding to these challenges, gender scholars in the academy and feminist advocates in the policy arena have often remained siloed, with few opportunities for the cross-fertilisation of ideas. This book provides a space to bridge boundaries between knowledge communities, namely those between gender practitioners and academics on the one hand, and those between academics working in different countries or disciplines on the other. As such it seeks to reassess and review feminist policymaking from a holistic, cross-sector and interdisciplinary perspective.

The book is also ‘critical’ in that it reflects on feminists’ own internal disagreements and contradictions and explores the limits of feminism, while formulating modes of critical, reflective, and original inquiry. This has led us to view policymaking as the product of a wide array of actors, organisations, and activities such as storytelling, narration, local and community action, civil society lobbying and negotiation, the practices of individuals, and of course the practices of states and institutions. In contrast to the common view of policymaking which views this process as *solely* the preserve of governments and government institutions (Lombardoa, Meierb and Verloo 2016), our take on policymaking allows us to open up the field and imagine alternative, radical and importantly more intersectional and transformative ways to include feminism in policymaking.

Finally, the third objective of the book is to examine feminist policymaking against the backdrop of rising anti-genderism in the world, and in the ‘turbulent’ and challenging context set out above. Some scholars have referred to anti-genderism as a ‘backlash’ against the establishment of gender and sexual rights and the advance of feminism (Faludi 1991; Mansbridge and Shames 2008), whilst others have refuted this idea because it falsely assumes that a consensus about gender and an organised and united view of gender equality exist (Kováts 2016, 183). As outlined above, anti-genderism can be seen as linked to the use of gender in international policy. However, if the term backlash is understood as an adverse reaction to something that has gained momentum and influence, it is not a productive concept when applied to Ukraine, Poland, or Russia where movements towards women’s emancipation have been slow and fragile (Korolczuk 2015, 52). Moreover, as Thomson and Whiting (2022) note, the fact that both Poland and Brazil – two governments which have viewed gender as an ‘ideology’ – have adopted National Action Plans as part of the UN’s Women, Peace, and Security Agenda, complicates the idea of a ‘gender backlash’. They argue that that this move not only makes the case for a ‘backlash’ less probable, but that international feminist agendas like the WPS have survived and flourished alongside growing anti-gender sentiments (Thomson and Whiting 2022). If so-called feminist initiatives are adopted by anti-gender governments, we must ask whether this reveals something about WPS, NAPs, Feminist Foreign Policy and other gender-sensitive measures. Amid these growing challenges, this book has been able to foster a productive dialogue and solidify relationships between gender scholars and practitioners and open space for difference while equally seeking to provide the reader with a collective imaginary that rejects regressive and reactionary politics.

**Thematic reading guide and structure of the book**

*Methods, metrics and impact of feminist policymaking: the predominance of rationalist methodologies*

The book is organised along four main thematic axes. The first theme focuses on the methods and metrics involved in the operationalisation of feminist ideas into policymaking as well as the impact of feminist policies on its recipients. This section comprises examples from the peace agreement with the FARC guerrilla in Columbia (Cespedes et al.), the managerial and technical priorities of international ‘experts’ such as the UN and the International Centre for Transitional Justice (ICTJ) in post-revolutionary Tunisia (Kebaïli), and a practitioner view of the prioritisation of economic growth targets by international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank and of their impact on marginalised women in the Global South (Caballero Sosa). The authors in the first section critically explore the efforts of large international and state institutions to include a gender component in existing policies and/or create new gender-inclusive policies. They present a more complex balance sheet of the ways in which gender-sensitive programmes are designed and implemented than the success stories often depicted by these actors.

The emphasis on methodological concerns in developing and measuring feminist policies enables the authors in this section to make two important arguments. First, these contributions indicate that rationalist and positivist methodologies, which often privilege quantitative data over qualitatively-produced forms of knowledge, pervade feminist policymaking at the international level. Cespedes et al., for instance, show the widespread use of seemingly neutral and objective ‘gender indicators’ to measure the progress and implementation of the peace agreement in Columbia. Kebaïli and Caballero Sosa both reveal the erasure of local women’s voices that is the result of devaluing women’s embodied experiences as relevant and important forms of knowledge production. Indeed, the international institutions these authors studied and worked with, which claim to speak with authority as ‘experts’, empower ‘scientific’ methods yet also show culturalist assumptions about gender violence which are informed by a neo-colonial and civilisational discourse (see Kebaili’s category of the ‘indirect victim’ in the Tunisian context). In so doing, these organisations fall short of lifting women and girls out of poverty and ignore significant instances of gender injustice and gender violence, for example, the repression women experienced during the pre-revolution Ben Ali government in Tunisia.

Second, the authors of the first section also point out that governments and international organisations are more preoccupied with gender indicators to measure their activities rather than designing quality gender outputs that have a positive impact on the communities on the ground. This is the central argument in Cespedes’ et al.’s chapter which demonstrates that the indicators designed to measure the implementation of the peace agreement with the FARC guerrillas are rated against arbitrary goals that often fail to reflect the realities and priorities of the people locally. Similarly, Cabellora Sosa argues that there is little appreciation of the gendered impacts of IMF and World Bank macroeconomics like structural adjustment programmes that cut public services and negatively impact women. In the third chapter, Kebaïli shows how gender mainstreaming in transitional justice programmes has transformed local organisations’ everyday praxis to access UN and ICTJ funding, which has not always served women’s interests at the local level.

With other chapters in this book, the first section contends that by focusing on the outcomes and the end rather than the means and the processes by which policies become feminist, such as dismissing feminist epistemologies and discounting lived experiences as a valuable source of knowledge, international institutions and states come to use feminism instrumentally and reproduce hierarchies of knowledge and practice. This book argues that many of the problems faced by global feminist policies stem from the utilitarian logic inherent in their design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Feminist accounts in this book point to the fact that too few feminist policies have been the product of appropriate, embodied, and theoretically informed research methodologies that consider a myriad of intersectional experiences. What’s more, when practitioners have raised this concern, their input has often been disregarded (see in particular Caballero Sosa). Yet, activists have continued their feminist engagement with international policy ‘to infinity and beyond’ (Shepherd 2011, 514). Addressing the methodological shortcomings of current feminist policymaking frameworks is paramount if we are to achieve the transformative feminist goals intended by the ascent of feminism in policy, which constitutes one of the objectives of this book. Future feminist policymaking should attempt to respond to these shortcomings by furthering collaborative work between feminist academics, practitioners, and policymakers.

*Opening the black box to Feminist Foreign Policy*

Pro-gender norms and feminist strategies are increasingly salient in foreign policy (Aggestam and True 2020; see also the Special Issue in Foreign Policy Analysis ‘Gender and Foreign Policy’). The Feminist foreign policy ‘contagion’ is a formidable example of the salience of this gendering. Importantly, Feminist Foreign Policy has enabled some states to brand themselves as ‘feminist’ and norm entrepreneurs, as FFP brings significant legitimacy and symbolic power (Jezierska and Towns 2018). Indeed, for some states, gender has become an essential component of statecraft. The second section of the book brings the state and national politics ‘back in’ to examine Feminist Foreign Policy. In her detailed comparative analysis of France, Sweden, Spain, Mexico and Canada, Thomson shows that the FFP strategies of these states have devoted a significant amount of time and space to domestic and internal measures, most notably around leadership and women’s inclusion and participation in the foreign policymaking establishment.

This section argues that the inside and domestic landscape *matter* for the outside and international realm, for three reasons. First, and in line with critically oriented literature in International Relations, the rigid boundaries, and hierarchies between inside and outside established by the discipline, mirror and reify liberal binaries that have historically kept women in the ‘private’ and ‘domestic’ sphere. Mainstream International Relations, traditionally bounded to the ‘international’ arena, has often excluded domestic politics and studies involving individuals, dismissed as irrelevant in explaining the causes of conflict and war, which were said to be rooted in the makeup and balance of power in the international system. In engaging with the *internal* dynamics of states with an FFP and the way national politics intervene in the gendering of a state’s foreign policy, this section troubles the ‘levels of analysis’ schematic at the heart of IR’s ontology and goes some way in destabilizing and disorganizing gendered orders. As such, it encourages ‘attention to the problematic relations between individual and state or state and system of states, that have, in other contexts, been identified as core sites of antagonism in the organization of modern political life’ (Bigo and R.B.J Walker 2007, p. 728).

Second, and congruent with the field of Foreign Policy Analysis, the domestic realm is important for FFP because ‘all that occurs between nations and across nations is *grounded in human decision-makers acting singly or in groups’* (Hudson 2005, p. 2, original emphasis). This means that bringing the analysis back onto actors within the state will enable a full description of state behaviour in foreign policy decision-making. Rather than ‘black boxing’ the state as a unitary rational actor, an actor-specific approach to FFP can usefully show the role played by key players such as some femocrats, domestic institutions of power, bureaucracies and political parties in the formulation of FFP. Thomson, for example, shows the actors at the forefront of FFP in five national contexts and the differences and commonalities in the national strategies of these five states. Tamang observes the importance of the Mumbai-based advisory group called the ‘Kubernein Initiative’ in leading the Indian of FFP. Equally, domestic actors can also influence decision-making in the opposite direction and undo pro-gender norms and FFP. Bergman Rosamond, for instance, reads the result of the 2022 elections in Sweden to mark the abandonment of Swedish feminist foreign policy and the renaissance of militarism and gendered nationalism. Eroukhmanoff also points to growing anti-gender campaigns and movements in France, which at best might slow down French feminist diplomacy, and at worst, contradicts the image portrayed in French FFP that France is the birthplace of feminism.

Third, as the authors in this section contend, it is paramount to engage with the national realm to demystify the idea that gender violence, injustice and inequality merely happens ‘out there’, beyond ‘our’ borders. This assumption is ubiquitous in the geopolitical imagination of FFP, for example in targeting principally the ‘average Third World woman’ (Mohanty 1988, p.98), and perpetuates the idea of a ‘secure’ Global North and an ‘insecure’ Global South (Haastrup and Hagen 2021, p.27). By investigating the gendered politics in the national context, the authors of this section argue that states with an FFP are not themselves unequivocally feminist. For instance, Eroukhmanoff rebuts the French FFP story that narrates France as entirely a feminist state by showing instead a more complex and fragile history with the concept of gender. In its outward-looking iteration, Indian FFP conceals the gendered violences and repression occurring inside India, for example in the Eastern Himalayan borderlands. Tamang poignantly shows the continuum of violence before and after independence, as well as inside and outside of India, in particular the exclusion, intolerance of difference and militarized violence toward minoritized communities, which stems from ‘postcolonial anxiety’. Yet Thomson rightly notes that Sweden, France, Mexico and Spain have put in place internally facing measures that address this concern and which should be applauded. While this is a positive step forward, we have a long way to go for states to achieve the level of self-reflection necessary to shift the neocolonial and civilizational discourse that sees the Global North as producers of feminist knowledge and expertise and the Global South as sites of FFP interventions.

*Feminist policymaking and the International*

This theme too is primarily about Feminist Foreign Policy, but the chapters also grapple with the concept of the international, bringing together wider disciplinary considerations around where the international is located and what it does as a social and discursive construct. Robinson’s chapter offers a detailed engagement with the concept of the international in feminist terms. She is interested in the ‘underlying onto-epistemological and normative commitments’ that shape policies labeled as feminist at the international level. Recognizing the limitations of Feminist Foreign Policy, Robinson’s chapter sets out a ‘ethico-ontology’ of the international, drawing on principles of relationality and reflexivity and ideas of space and place grounded in neo-materialist thought. By applying her conceptual insights to existing policies, such as on gender-based violence, Robinson shows us the importance of evaluating the normative assumptions embedded in feminism and the international in policy work. This evaluation is necessary in order to imagine policy making practices that might be genuinely ethical in nature.

Singh Rathore’s work similarly digs down to understand the foundations of Feminist Foreign Policy but attends to its historical origins. With a focus on individuals typically marginalised in the intellectual histories of the international, Singh Rathore’s chapter thinks through Cynthia Enloe’s prompt to consider who is taken seriously in global affairs. She traces the work and lives of Indian diplomats and political figures Vijaya Lakshmi Pandit and Lakshmi Menon. Singh Rathore’s interdisciplinary approach brings a historical lens to the idea of a Feminist Foreign Policy, and she argues that these female figures, often unnoticed in the debates around feminism and the international, shaped transnational alliances and crafted their political work on a global stage through feminist and anti-racist principles and through work that demonstrated solidarity and innovation. For Singh Rathore the excavation of the political lives of these women is in and of itself a feminist goal but is also vital for understanding the foundations of transnational feminist policymaking at the international level.

Wright’s chapter speaks to a key tension in Feminist Foreign Policy, namely its relationship with militarism. She critically examines NATO’s recent declaration of a feminist defence policy and although Wright recognises that defence is a feminist issue and that defence practitioners can do feminist work, she suggests that military *institutions* and defence policies more broadly*,* cannot easily be feminist, because they are deeply embedded in the logics of realpolitik which structure certain (masculinist) notions of the international as anarchial, and war-like. Her chapter shows us how institutions grounded in ideas of an anarchical international order naturalise militarism and thus, while they seek to incorporate gender, they rarely do so consistently, or they do so in a way that is irreconcilable with feminist anti-militarist traditions. This is a profoundly salient concern when considering the limits of Feminist Foreign Policy since state level foreign policy is often wedded to practices of defence, militarism, and war-making as natural and inevitable dimensions of international politics.

Collectively these chapters problematise dominant notions of the international and how the international as a site of practice is imagined within frameworks of feminist policymaking. Each chapter offers insight into key tensions that emerge around FFP, and how feminism has both facilitated such tensions and remains key to untangling them.

*Alternative imaginings of feminist policymaking are possible*

The chapters in this section somewhat reconceptualise the parameters of the book itself and play with its terms of reference. Inherent in this task is a recognition that the ability to define or delineate what ‘policy’ is and where it happens, is a form of power and indeed *power over.* Importantly, ‘feminist’ policy is not exempt from such relations of power. Kula’s chapter is particularly attentive to this, and she recognises that the infrastructure of whiteness, bolstered by histories of Eurocentrism and Orientalism, shapes the question of who can speak in the institutions where policy is formed. Kula’s chapter traces the modes of exclusion and hierarchical definition that tend to frame women in the Global South as experts in their own oppression, sought out to give voice to that oppression, but not as political actors with the capacity to shape their own policy futures. She also recognises the intersectional silences that exist at the margins of any policy’s impact and draws in her own experience to highlight how refugee lives might be erased through policy or advocacy that fails to include refugee voices, for example.

*Minorities in Peace and Security* is a network for minority practitioners working within the UK security policy landscape. In their chapter, the authors from this network are similarly speaking from the margins of policymaking spaces and call attention to the lived experience of marginal practitioners as a source of knowledge. Their chapter asks us to think about the lifeworlds of those who encounter policy work every day, and who must navigate a micro-politics of exclusion, expectation and pressure shaped by minority identities. Drawing on a survey of minority practitioners, and building in their own experiences, the chapter crafts insight from the margins of mainstream security institutions and deploys a feminist lens to think through what alternative futures might be possible in security policy.

Continuing with the contestation and re-imagining of the book, Partis-Jennings is interested in disrupting the boundaries of policymaking as a term of reference, and in using the normative and ethical parameters of feminism to do so. Drawing on some key principles and pillars of feminism, she posits grassroots storytelling as a policy space, and outlines the example of the storytelling project ‘In Her Shoes’ in the context of the 2018 abortion rights campaign in Ireland. Similarly interested in the ‘how’ of policymaking’, Saalbrink and Othim’s chapter invokes again the debates and concerns of the first section of the book, engaging with the methods of gender-focused policy work, and how far it can go in achieving transformative change. For the authors, transformative momentum in achieving gender equality must come with a mandate for tax justice, and they detail their work and advocacy in this area as practitioners with the *Global Alliance for Tax Justice Tax and Gender Working Group.*

Each chapter in this section is interested in re-evaluating the *practices* of policy*,* the how, where and who*,* and each uses the idea of practice as a jumping off point to imagine (feminist) policymaking in alternative or non-typical ways. Collectively, these chapters speak to the desire of the book to simultaneously explore and disrupt the concept of feminist policymaking and take the concept of ‘feminist’ policy beyond the recent surge of interest in Feminist Foreign Policy. We see this section as a fitting end to the volume, precisely because it entails a recognition of the always already messy, power-imbued, unequal, and unfinished work of any policy or policy community that might aspire to feminist goals in some way, and this, for us, is a foundational element of an iterative conversation between scholars, practitioners, authors, and readers.

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1. This is, however, not to negate the existence of women’s political violence or the study of women’s violence in feminist work (Gentry & Sjoberg, 2007, 2015; Gentry & Whitworth, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)