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Marian Sawyer/Lee Banaszak/Jacqui True/Johanna Kantola (eds.), 2023:
Handbook of Feminist Governance. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing.
490 pages. £ 210

Governance at large has undergone several changes in recent decades. One of these changes has been the realisation that governance, like many processes in our world, is inherently gendered, gendered in favour of men that is. With this realisation, feminist movements have set out to fight gender bias within governance institutions in a variety of ways and arenas. The *Handbook of Feminist Governance* aims to provide a systematic overview of both, the emergence and development of feminist governance and its contemporary struggles. To this end, the *Handbook* is divided into five parts and 34 short articles, each of which discusses a specific aspect of the main topic of the corresponding part.

The first part is concerned with theoretically grounding the concept of feminist governance and providing the analytical lenses necessary to understand the more substantive parts of the book. It does so by alluding to existing and well-known concepts such as institutionalism (chapter 3), multi-level governance (chapter 6) or intersectionality (chapter 7) and how these concepts interact with a feminist perspective.

Following these theoretical perspectives, the second part of the *Handbook* analyses the emergence and development of feminist governance institutions. To this end, the first chapter of this part of the book provides several case studies from different backgrounds, each presenting a different form of feminist governance, in order to demonstrate the wide variety of forms that feminist governance can take in practice. With this established, the subsequent chapters delve deeper into institutions that are pivotal to contemporary feminist governance. A notable example is *Monica Costa's* and *Rhonda Sharp's* contribution on gender-responsive budgeting (chapter 11), which describes in detail its evolution to a global movement, but also how it interacts with and is shaped by its environment. Overall, this part of the *Handbook* focuses on the national level of governance.

This changes, however, with part three, which focuses on international relations and global governance institutions. As the *Handbook* describes in detail, feminist governance is a global project, present in a myriad of institutions across a wide range of sectors. Whether it is formally institutionalised in the UN peacebuilding context, as alluded to in the contributions by *Maria Martin de Almagro* (chapter 18) and *Victoria Scheyer* and *Marina Kumskova* (chapter 19), or in the World Health Organization, as described by *Sara E. Davies* and *Clare Wenham* (chapter 17). Of course, a contemporary overview of international feminist governance would not be complete without a contribution on feminist foreign policy, therefore, *Karin Aggestam* and *Jacqui True* (chapter 16) examine how and whether feminist governance is becoming established in different approaches and areas of foreign policy. The third part of the *Handbook* concludes by putting the concepts and theories established earlier into practice, by analysing the case

of UN Women in terms of its effectiveness and success or failure, more than a decade after its inception. And while *Andrea den Boer* and *Kirsten Haack* (chapter 23) find that, while some progress has been made, the effectiveness of UN Women is hindered by its limited resources and size.

Part four returns to a smaller scale, looking at regionalised feminist governance in the context of the European Union. The first contribution to this part, by *Johanna Kantola* and *Emanuela Lombardo* (chapter 24), looks at the European Parliament in its complicated role as a promoter of gender equality and feminist governance in its formal institutions on the one hand, and as an institution suffering from gender-biased informal institutions on the other. From this overall positive example of an institution promoting feminist governance, the next two contributions by *Sophie Jacquot* (chapter 25) and *Anna Elomäki* (chapter 26) present a more alarming picture. Taking into account political and economic developments within the European Union, they provide analyses of the dismantling of feminist governance within the EU and of the effects of the ongoing economisation of gender issues within the Union respectively. *Petra Ahrens* (chapter 27) devotes her contribution to the landscape and mechanisms of supranational alliances and the cooperation between EU institutions and civil society actors, also taking into account current opposition to gender equality as a whole.

The fifth and final part of the *Handbook* focuses on exploring feminist governance in other regional contexts. More precisely, regional feminist governance in the cases of the African Union by *Toni Haastrup* (chapter 30), feminist institutions and gender equality in East Asian democracies by *Jiso Yoon* (chapter 31), contestation and cooperation in feminist governance within Southeast Asia by *Rashila Ramli* and *Sharifah Syahirah* (chapter 32), Latin American perspectives by *Gisela Zaremborg* (chapter 33), feminist governance in North America, especially Canada and Mexico, by *Alexandra Dobrowolsky* and *Tammy Findlay*, and finally feminist regional governance in the Pacific Islands by *Kerryn Baker* and *Renee O'Shanassy* (chapter 35).

In addition to the five substantive parts outlined above, the book includes a timeline of feminist governance beginning in 1878 with the International Congress of Women and continuing to 2020, focusing on conferences, treaties, resolutions and declarations relevant to feminist governance. Furthermore, the back matter of the *Handbook* consists of a comprehensive and exhaustive index, making it easy to find specific information.

Overall, the *Handbook* succeeds in its attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of contemporary feminist governance. The use of the first part of the *Handbook* to establish theoretical and methodological approaches to the field is of great benefit to the subsequent, more substantive parts of the *Handbook*, as evidenced by the fact that most of the contributions refer back to the preceding chapters of this first part. In general, the articles in the *Handbook* are quite complementary. In fact, nearly all of the articles mention or refer to other articles that precede or follow them. Furthermore, alluding to feminist governance at national, regional, and international levels seems appropriate for a handbook that aims to present feminist governance in its entirety.

However, I would argue that this strength is also the *Handbook's* greatest weakness. The contributions require significant background knowledge of the institutions discussed, such as the United Nations. This is particularly evident in the fifth part of the *Handbook*, where a single contribution is devoted to an entire region. The same applies

to the theoretical foundations of the *Handbook*, with extensive references to classics of feminist theory like Chandra Talpade Mohanty's "Under Western Eyes" or the work of Judith Butler. The requirement of both institutional knowledge and familiarity with the canon of feminist theory narrows the target audience considerably. However, scholars of institutional feminism or feminist political scientists will be able to make good use of the *Handbook*.

I will conclude this review by pointing out what I consider to be the two most important takeaways from the *Handbook*. First, although the relatively brief overview of regional feminist governance or international institutions has its weaknesses and drawbacks, as I indicated above, it does allow the *Handbook* to illustrate the problems and challenges feminist governance faces around the world. In this regard, the various authors go out of their way to include the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath, as well as the financial crisis of 2007/2008 in their analyses. This benefits the contributions in that they are not only highly relevant to the current discourse, but also provide additional lines of inquiry for other scholars and pitfalls to be aware of for policymakers and those who advise them. The second point I would like to highlight is the *Handbook's* awareness of the relevance of intersectionality. Often overlooked in both research and implementation of feminist governance, it is quite refreshing to see its necessity mentioned in most of the contributions, as well as an awareness of its absence, and an entire contribution devoted to it.

Overall, the *Handbook* provides a comprehensive overview of feminist governance for those with advanced knowledge of feminist theory and political institutions. And while it falls short in providing in-depth knowledge of certain topics, especially non-Western regions and organisations, this cannot be expected from a handbook with such a limited scope.

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