Critical Dialogue

No Shortcut to Change: An Unlikely Path to a More Gender Equitable World. By Kara Ellerby. New York: NYU Press, 2017. 288p. $89.00 cloth, $30.00 paper.
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— S. Laurel Weldon, *Purdue University*
— Mala Htun, *University of New Mexico*

Kara Ellerby's book aims to illuminate a key problem with the term "gender equality" as "it is used in international policy and political practice," namely the tendency to use "gender" or "gender equality" and "women" interchangeably (p. 2). She claims that this tendency blunts the transformative impact of the concept of gender by reducing it to a focus on women, a move that reinforces gender binaries. But gender equality cannot be reduced to fixing women through policies that seek to remedy their inadequacies, taking men as the reference point for equality-as-sameness. Gender interacts with other systems of domination to define social groups and position them in relation to each other.

The book argues that many policies that purport to be about gender equality—such as those that address representation, economic rights, and violence against women—are really just policies to advance women's inclusion. Advancing women's inclusion is necessary but not sufficient for gender equality: more is needed, meaning policies that advance gender justice and challenge "kyriarchy," defined as "interlocking structures of domination" (p. 6). For Ellerby, liberal feminists adopting a "discrimination" frame have pushed for these limited (and limiting) policies and in so doing have inadvertently reinforced neoliberalism.

For example, the World Bank has recently adopted the position that gender equality is good for business. It has appropriated feminist language to justify policies aiming to bring more women into financial, land, and labor markets. As a result, the book seems to conclude, liberal feminists have contributed to the legitimacy of market-oriented, individualistic, achievement-oriented policies. Real gender justice policies, in contrast, will not contribute to the legitimacy of neoliberal agendas, but will simultaneously work to undermine neoliberalism and other interlocking structures of domination that comprise kyriarchy. What seems like a "shortcut" to gender equality, Ellerby argues, is really a dead end for social justice.

A major contribution of this book is that it explores through empirical analysis the shortcomings of contemporary feminism or perhaps, more accurately, feminist-inspired policies and initiatives in the financial and corporate world. Ellerby seeks to elaborate and apply theoretical and normative arguments by Nancy Fraser and others about the dangerous liaison between feminism and neoliberalism to a broader discussion of issues of gender equality. She adds new perspectives to the growing controversy over efforts by governments, international organizations, and private corporations to include women in "positions of power" and bring them more fully into markets.

Ellerby's broad claim about the risks of using "shortcuts" or simplified understandings of gender is important. Why does this happen? Is gender too complex for practitioners (or even some political scientists) to understand? Why do people equate gender and women when they clearly know better? Many scholars have pointed out that analyzing gender means analyzing social relations, not counting bodies, and many international organizations specifically define gender as being about more than men and women. So why do we keep coming back to "women"? The greatest strength of the book is that it asks that question. The answer the book offers is not entirely convincing, however. In addition, the book inadvertently privileges some faces of oppression over others and adopts the gender-blind approach to justice that feminists have rightly been wary of. In the process, the argument discounts feminist history and undervalues the struggles —and important successes—of feminists all over the world.

Taking a global perspective, Ellerby argues that the adoption of policies that promote women in elective office, address violence against women (VAW), and expand women's economic rights are liberal antidiscrimination policies, with no transformative potential. There is a long-standing criticism of "add women and stir" politics in many areas, but this argument has not been applied to VAW before. It should not be, because the concept of VAW itself is transformative: it did not exist before feminists proposed it. It is a feminist creation, the product of discursive power struggles both among women and

between women and men, and an important product of feminist activism and history.

Ellerby's critique of formal liberal equality, of feminist antidiscrimination policies, might seem to apply most obviously in the realm of equal economic rights. Still, it is odd to characterize women's equal access to land, labor, and capital—which is at best partially realized in 90% of the world's economies, and is often thought of as the linchpin of power in a capitalist system—as a superficial or easily accomplished goal, as a "shortcut." It is certainly not the only aspect of gender inequality that needs to be remedied, but it is hardly inconsequential. Dismissing women's equal access to property rights, a bank account, or a loan as an "easy" goal reveals a First World bias, because it is in wealthier countries that such equality of access is greatest, though again, achieving these equal rights has been a product of feminist struggle.

Another version of the argument might be that, although in principle policies on VAW or economic rights are transformative, in practice these policies tend not to spark social change because of problems arising at the stage of implementation. Indeed, Ellerby argues that, despite their wide adoption, most gender equality policies have not been transformative, at least in part because of policy implementation failures or processes. But this argument is unsupported in critical respects.

Specifically, the book contends that efforts to redress VAW have not reduced violence against women, have not changed attitudes, and have been accompanied by increasing violence. But these claims are wrong. The main evidence the book cites for this claim is a 2013 WHO report describing global variation in patterns of violence across regions, but not over time. This excellent analysis cannot (and does not claim to) examine over-time trends within countries, because it draws on reports covering a wide range of dates across countries. Indeed, the report points out that data gathered before the mid-1990s are unreliable and incomparable across countries. In fact, we do not have the data needed for a global, comparative impact assessment of the policies adopted to address VAW. Most national policy adoption in the area of VAW occurred after 1995, and many national governments adopted VAW policies well after the dates of the studies used in the WHO study. Such policies can hardly have caused, contributed to, or reduced, violence that occurred before they were enacted.

As this example suggests, looking at global rates is not a very good way of evaluating the effects of policies adopted by individual national governments. Evidence from those countries, such as Canada and the United States, that were early to adopt policies on VAW and that had a fairly comprehensive policy by 1995 does not support the claim that comprehensive policies have been accompanied by stasis or increased rates of violence. In fact, Eurobarometer data and data from Mexican national surveys show that changes in attitudes and norms have accompanied the expansion of national VAW policies. The continued persistence of VAW as a global problem thus tells us little about what national policies work or do not work to reduce violence or change attitudes. The evidence we do have is inconsistent with the claim that attitudes have not changed and that violence has increased, or has not decreased, in the states with the most comprehensive and longstanding policies.

There is more to the argument of this book than the claim that gender equality policies have made no difference. Ellerby claims that the problematic aspects of gender equality policies—the way "gender equality" comes to mean "inclusion for women"—arises in the process of implementation. This is an important idea. However, in many cases the focus on women comes from design, rather than implementation. For example, Ellerby criticizes quota policies because they focus on women as a group, rather than on dismantling kyriarchy. Such policies, Ellerby argues, "only" challenge male elites, leaving larger structures of power intact. However, these policies are often designed to address women, so it is not a puzzle that they end up focusing on women. Indeed, different designs benefit different groups of women and men and leave structures of power intact to greater or lesser degrees (Melanie Hughes [2011], "Intersectionality, Quotas, and Minority Women's Political Representation Worldwide." *American Political Science Review* 105(3): 604–20).

Similarly, the US "Violence Against Women Act" (VAWA) is focused on women. If the argument is that these policies should not be written to focus on women (which Ellerby sometimes seems to be claiming), then this is a problem of design, not implementation. And again, in the United States, there is at least some evidence suggesting that violence has decreased over the period since the adoption of VAWA in 1994, in spite of the explicit focus on women.

Ellerby also argues that in their implementation, policies to address VAW focus too much on "protection" for women or on women's safety, a move that reinforces gender binaries at the same time as it challenges them. But arguing that policies cannot focus on "women" (rather than that we need an inclusive reading of such policies) results in a gender-blind approach that has proved problematic in the past, which is one reason for the current insistence on policies targeted to women. What is more, the idea that protecting women from violence flows from the principle of market supremacy ignores the fact that the violent sexual exploitation of women has been and still is compatible with unbridled capitalism and free markets. Nor is the idea that women need protection from male violence, and that the state ought to provide it, the traditional idea of the role of the state with respect to male violence, as Ellerby acknowledges. The difference between policies on VAW that come closer to feminist ideal and

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state action that embodies the traditional idea of the role of the state with respect to sexual violence has less to do with whether or not these policies aim to protect women and more to do with who these policies count as a woman, more to do with whether these policies also aim to empower women, and what the consequences of these policies are for women's security. But arguing that women-focused policies should adopt an inclusive notion of "woman" that includes a wide range of people situated as women sounds like it circles back to women and inclusion, the approach the book seeks to eschew.

Ellerby argues for an approach to gender that draws on social justice as an ideal, taking account of the multifaceted nature of oppression. But insisting that all progressive policies directly confront neoliberalism is actually an account of social justice that denies the multidimensionality of oppression, that privileges one face of oppression above the others. Similarly, although gender binaries are part of the structure of gender, gender injustice (or class or racial injustice, for that matter) cannot be reduced to the creation of binaries: there are other aspects of gender justice. Social justice advocates should call for policies to address the full range of dimensions of oppression, but this does not require us to reject or dismiss hard-fought progressive victories just because they are incomplete nor to eschew the socially and politically meaningful categories of "women" and "men" in our analyses and policies (though it does require us to take care as to how and when we use these terms). What it does imply is the need to confront the complex, intersectional, even messy nature of struggles for gender justice and to devise strategies for broadening and deepening the struggle. Reducing complex, multidimensional systems to a single concept, "kyriarchy," in which all axes of oppression move smoothly and functionally in the same direction, working as one interlocking system, is the real shortcut. There are multiple pathways to change.

Response to S. Laurel Weldon and Mala Htun's review of *No Shortcut to Change: An Unlikely Path to a More Gender Equitable World*

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— Kara Ellerby

I appreciate Laurel Weldon and Mala Htun's thoughtful comments, although I challenge their underlying assertion that I want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. The authors claim my main argument "discounts feminist history and undervalues the struggles—and important successes—of feminists all over the world." However, I went to great lengths to note the effectiveness of many of the policies of which I am critical. I was careful to assert that women's inclusion should not be abandoned, is not doomed, and is creating (some) meaningful social change. Rather, my major assertion is that these add-women policies are not enough to actually create gender equality. My research is informed by my concerns that because gender equality today almost entirely focuses on women's inclusion, "we" have limited the opportunity for more radical approaches to emancipation in favor of those that seem to work within the status quo, rather than dismantle it.

For example, I know and believe that having women in public office matters, and the research solidly confirms quotas work. But my issue is that women-in-government has become one of *the* central objectives/measures to promote gender equality (as I note when I address how gender equality is measured and discussed across the policy and academic world in Chapter 2). Defining gender equality by the number of women in government obscures quotas' limits in radically altering masculinized patterns of behavior. Do institutions change because women are there? Of course. But is promoting some more women in government going to drastically alter gendered patterns of relations in societies? No, it will not.

The authors write that I argue that policies aimed at including more women are "gender shortcuts," but this is a misreading of this term as I use it. My claim is not that the policies themselves are gender shortcuts, but that our focus on these policies *as* gender equality requires and reproduces shortcuts in understanding the underlying causes of women's oppression. My argument is that policies aimed at including more women via increased economic rights and violence against women laws are not sufficient to create gender equality; these policies themselves are not shortcuts, but the way they implicitly and explicitly engage gender = women *is* the shortcut.

For example, Weldon and Htun assert that economic rights are hardly realized anywhere, that I show a "First World bias" in not understanding that women have gained more economic rights because of feminist struggle, and that these rights matter. Again, I state that they matter and that I am aware of the struggles to promote such rights, but this does not diminish the need to complicate the logics informing the promotion of women's economic rights. States and feminists have aligned to promote more women in formal labor because it boosts economies and (some) women's autonomy, but this has coincided with a large scaling back, in both developing and developed states, of social safety nets that many women rely/relied on. So the "gender shortcut" here is the underlying message/belief that alleviating poverty anywhere means women need to work and have access to sometimes predatory capital systems. The shortcut means skipping vital discussions about what constitutes work, how we value and monetize people and places, and how poverty is created and remedied.

The authors took issue with my assertion that violence against women may actually be increasing in the world, stating this was based on World Health Organization data from 2013. Although I did assert violence against

women is increasing, it was not based on this data. All I asserted from the data was that levels of violence against women are surprisingly uniform across the world, at around 33%, with regional variation ranging from only 25–37% (pp. 40–41). My argument that violence against women is increasing is based on Jacqui True's award-winning book, *The Political Economy of Violence against Women* (2012), that argues violence results from destabilized gender roles, which have increased as a result of neoliberal globalization.

Although I think it is vital to continue women's inclusion, I also think it is productive to acknowledge that women's inclusion is necessary but not sufficient for gender equality. I recognize that there are different pathways to promoting gender justice, but these pathways have similar roadblocks and pitfalls, which are also worth acknowledging. Although it is important to focus on improving woman-centered policy design, adoption, and implementation, this should not replace more critical engagement with the limits of adding women or the radical potential of future ideas about gender equality less tethered to liberal feminist and neoliberal ways of thinking.

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— Kara Ellerby, *University of Delaware*

In explaining a key contribution of their book, it is perhaps best to start toward the end of Mala Htun and S. Laurel Weldon's *The Logics of Gender Justice.* Chapter 7 aptly illustrates both why scholars and practitioners need more nuance in their discussion of women's rights and the importance of recognizing that a "one-size-fits-all" model for promoting women's rights policy is simply not borne out by the data. In this penultimate chapter the authors compare the five policy areas discussed previously: violence against women (VAW), women's work status, family law, family leave and child care, and reproductive rights (abortion and contraception). They use each policy area as a dependent variable and then test their main independent variables from the previous chapters. One of their key arguments is reinforced by their statistical analyses: each policy area operates according to distinct dynamics—including different underlying logics, actors, and institutions—that result in distinctive pathways to promoting varying women's rights policies. In other words, violence against women policy may be an "easier" policy area for states to address than abortion because VAW policies engage with states, markets, and organized religion in distinctive ways.

The Introduction lays out Htun and Weldon's overall framework for understanding aspects of women's rights, which is one facet of *gender justice*, defined as "equality and autonomy for people constructed by gender institutions, including people of all sexes, genders, sexual identities, and gender identities" (p. 2). They frame women's rights pathways as varying along two key themes: (1) the "class-status dimension," which distinguishes whether the policy focuses on women's socioeconomic "class" or their social/legal "status," and (2) the "doctrinal-nondoctrinal" dimension, or the degree to which gender equality policy challenges the state–religion status quo. Based on these two dimensions, they create a 2 x 2 typology table that plots the five different women's rights issues listed earlier. Although I think this table certainly works in framing and organizing their study, I found its binary nature limiting, as it does not adequately represent how their later analyses focus on degrees rather than either-or indicators. A four-quadrant figure based on two intersecting continuums would have allowed for more nuance in theorizing the degrees to which gender–class and doctrinal–nondoctrinal variables play a role in shaping policy outcomes.

Intersecting continuums would have been especially helpful for the discussion on reproductive rights. According to their typology, public funding for abortion/contraceptives is doctrinal and class based, whereas the legality of abortion is also doctrinal but status based, so there is overlap that cannot be easily mapped in this table. In using continuums, one could more easily see how reproductive rights vary primarily, though not entirely, on their relationship to class and gender designations, but even this is not an either-or outcome. Abortion, even when framed as an issue of public funding, is still gendered: gender is just not as significant as class for explaining when states support abortion. Additionally the authors include policies in this initial table not discussed in the book, such as gender quotas and reproductive freedom, so one wonders if the same factors analyzed for those policies in the book would have had the same effects.

Based on these dimensions, the authors focus on how different actors matter for different women's rights issues. Strong autonomous feminist movements, international norms on women's rights (specifically the Conventions of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women [CEDAW], and leftist parties are key actors in promoting women's rights (though to varying degrees depending on the issue), whereas strong state–religion relations are a key deterrent to them. The authors offer far more nuance than this, however, noting how leftist parties really only matter when women's rights issues are considered "class" politics. This may be a surprising finding for many: that policies related to women's status as *women*, such as violence against women, are not determined by political parties or even women in parliament, but

instead autonomous feminist movements are what matter most. International pressure/agreements only seem to matter for violence against women and legal equality policy, whereas level of economic development matters for class policies like parental leave and publicly funded child care.

Each chapter then explores one particular policy area of women's rights at four points in time: 1975, 1985, 1995, and 2005. The layout of each chapter is important because it demonstrates both the scope and depth with which this book treats these issues. In general the chapters first outline the meaning of a particular right and how it is informed by their typology. For example, Chapter 4, "Doctrinal Politics, Religious Power, the State, and Family Law," explains what family law is and why it is considered a doctrinal issue focused on women's status. Then each chapter outlines global variation in these policies (some, like Chapter 2 on VAW, do so more extensively than others). The authors then put forth their hypotheses based on the literature and offer statistical analyses based on those hypotheses. Each chapter concludes with discussion and explanation of the findings. The content, analyses, and discussion are extensive and easy to follow, even for those not particularly interested in statistics.

One of the many significant contributions of this book are the original data and indexes Htun and Weldon produced based on this research. They developed indexes for 70 countries, which cover 85% of the global population, on each issue at four points in time. These indexes vary in what they measure and how, but aim to offer a more robust assessment of the variation in women's rights policies. There are indexes that measure policy adoption and/or implementation of VAW, economic equality, family law policy, family leave "generosity," and both the legal status and funding for abortion and contraception. For example, to measure abortion laws, the authors created a 10-point scale based on the time period during which an abortion is available to pregnant women and reasons it is allowed, rather than simply asking if abortion is legal or not.

These indexes are theoretically informed in ways that will satisfy feminist scholars seeking to engage empirical work while trying to maintain a feminist critique that binary measures and thinking limit our substantive understanding of policy realities for women in various countries. The cross-national and longitudinal scope of Htun and Weldon's research is a monumental feat, and although it "ends" at 2005, nearly 15 years ago, I do not see this as a limitation. Rather I think this means they have laid the necessary and time-consuming foundation for the next era of feminist scholarship on women's rights on which other scholars can continue to build. And they have done so with the necessary rigor and transparency that are hallmarks of their work: this book is an excellent example of how to do quality political science research.

I also think Htun and Weldon's engagement with religion offers a much-needed (re)framing for political science. Religion plays a varying role in shaping states, and although it seems obvious this role would affect women's rights, it is often only used to specify how particular religions, like Islam, are bad for women. But the authors argue that it is not necessarily a particular religion that is inimical to women's rights, but rather the relationship between the state and religion that shapes women's rights, and they note how varied Catholicism and Islam may be regarding different aspects of this issue.

There are many substantive results that are significant contributions as well, to which I can only briefly allude here. Some of their findings were somewhat surprising and interesting to me. For example, I was struck by how small a role having women in parliament played in explaining policy adoption. Although it did matter for some issues, such as women's legal work status, its overall impact was much smaller than other factors. The authors note that women in parliament play a greater role in preventing rollback of rights rather than in promoting them, but also caution how a focus/belief that "women's representation is a causal driver of women's rights. . .may have colored our conventional wisdom. . .about politics" (p. 240). Coupled with their assessment that public policy research does not include many indicators of social movements despite their significance (p. 30), scholars may want to rethink how to model women's rights and activists may want to rethink strategies for promoting them. This book offers a strong case why these issues matter.

Having said that, the authors tend to conflate gender justice, women's rights, and gender equality. For example, in the Introduction, Htun and Weldon are specific in claiming that they are focused on women's rights, which is a subset of gender justice and sex equality (p. 7) focused on "equality and autonomy for men and women" (p. 7). However, in the footnotes on the same page, they also note how they treat not only gender justice and gender equality as synonyms but also women's rights, gender equality policies, and gender issues as synonyms (p. 7). They explain that this is purposefully ambiguous because women's rights and sex equality are in fact part of gender equality issues. Given the attention that the authors pay to the nuance and meanings of different aspects of women's rights, conflating gender justice, gender equality, and women's rights seems like a problematic assumption to make and a missed opportunity to intervene against the normalizing of gender equality as woman-focused policy.

Empirically women's rights and gender equality can be measured very differently: women's rights may focus on policy outcomes, such as voting rights and legal access to resources, whereas gender equality may also include policies focused on outcomes like education rates and maternal health, so their conflation could actually limit the potential of the gender justice research agenda. For

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example, it is possible that gender justice could simply become the new name for the gender equality research paradigm, missing the important potential for broadening the meaning of gender beyond women. I imagine gender justice as an agenda that does more than study women's right's issues, but as the authors note, it could focus on heteronormativity and queer politics as well (p. 7). So being clear about the relationship between these ideas and what is actually being theorized and measured is important. Today's gender equality research agenda has been co-opted globally to focus almost entirely on adding women, so clarifying how the gender justice frame moves beyond this in ways that will push scholars and practitioners to think more broadly about gender, sex, and sexuality could be better developed here.

Ultimately, this is an agenda-setting book, full of rich data, insight, and contributions that will have a lasting and formative impact for those studying gender, women, and politics.

Response to Kara Ellerby's review of *The Logics of Gender Justice: State Action on Women's Rights Around the World*

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— S. Laurel Weldon and Mala Htun

We are grateful for Kara Ellerby's generous and incisive review of our book. As she points out, we aim to bring greater precision to debates about the politics and logics of women's rights by explaining why and how different issues follow different logics of reform. For example, whereas change on *status* issues involves autonomous feminist movements leveraging international norms to contest women's subordination, *doctrinal* issues trigger conflicts between religious groups and the state and unsettle old bargains over state–religion relations. *Class* issues, by contrast, expand the state's role in redistribution to shift the division of labor between family, market, and the state for social provision.

To explain these patterns, our book presents a typology that disaggregates women's rights policy issues along two dimensions: whether the issue involves women as a class or a status group, and whether the issue confronts religious doctrine or sacred traditions. In her review, however, Ellerby portrays the first dimension as a distinction between gender AND class, when in fact, we refer to both class and status as dimensions of the gender system. We see the gender system patterning women as both a class group, defined by their position in the sexual division of labor and in relation to markets (e.g., for land, labor, and capital), and as a status group, constituted by institutionalized patterns of value and violence. The distinction we pose distinguishes among gender issues, not between gender and class.

Ellerby takes issue with the way we treat the concepts of women's rights, gender equality, and gender justice. She writes that we conflate these terms and thus run the risk of limiting the agenda of gender justice to focusing merely on women. We explain in the introduction that we consider women's rights to be a subset of gender equality, a far larger concept that includes the politics of sexuality, queer and transgender identities, heteronormativity, and more. We go on to explain in a footnote that, even though one concept is a subset of the other, we sometimes use the terms interchangeably in the book.

We agree with Ellerby that gender is a broad and complex concept that includes, but is not limited to, the system that defines women's identities and shapes their social position. However, recognizing the breadth of gender and the range of issues affected by the gender system should not deter us from analysis and advocacy of women's rights, nor should we refrain from characterizing women's rights as part of gender justice.

Laws and policies in much of the world continue to discriminate against women, deny women recognition and dignity as human beings, subject them to violence and abuse, and limit their opportunities to get educated, work, and support themselves and their families. We do not endorse an approach to gender justice that prevents us from naming and criticizing these laws that define and denigrate women as a group. A broader concept of gender justice ought to incorporate, even as it goes beyond, women's rights. Eschewing talk of "women" in favor of a gender-neutral approach runs the risk of being blind to the myriad injustices perpetrated on account of gender.