



Book Reviews

Gender and Civil Society: Transcending Boundaries. Edited by Jude Howell and Diane Mulligan. London and New York: Routledge. 2005. 257 pp. \$125.00.

Amy G. Mazur
Washington State University

This book provides a welcome addition to the ever-growing comparative scholarship on gender politics and the state. Editors Jude Howell and Diane Mulligan bring together a group of experts with the ideal blend of country expertise and understanding about comparative analysis and theoretical issues to systematically map out and operationalize the concept of “civil society” in a cross-national study of the interface between women’s organizations and the state. Howell raises the central analytical problem of the book in the introduction. While the concept of civil society has great promise for understanding how, why, and to what extent women organize and seek to influence the state, comparative gender and politics analysts have shied away from using the term; comparativists and political theorists have basically ignored the quite obviously gendered aspects of civil society. As this edited volume convincingly asserts, intersecting the study of civil society with comparative gender research moves the two areas much further along by compelling “researchers to gauge their understanding of empirical civil societies, to question the assumptions about the relationship between democratization, civil society and gender equality and to query the idea of civil society and feminism as universally valid concepts” (p. 246).

The authors of the eight country/regional chapters and one chapter on an international organization address the “gulf between gender studies and civil society studies” (p. xiv) by structuring their analyses around three series of questions that focus on one aspect of the highly complex concept of civil society—“an exploration of women’s participation and

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activism in the theatres of civil societies” (p. 7). The three questions are as follows: 1) How do women organize and to what degree do the “political environment” and “the nature of the state” shape the patterns of that organization? 2) To what extent, how, and why do women and their groups seek to influence the state? 3) Do women’s organizations differ from other groups in civil society? These questions are raised in the introduction, assessed to varying degrees in the analyses of each chapter, and then reexamined in the conclusion. The issue of the analytical and practical implications of gendering the concept of civil society is also dealt with in the introduction and conclusion chapters.

Three of the eight chapters focus on regions of the world—East/Central Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Middle East; five focus on individual countries—China, Indonesia, Chile, Mexico, and the United States. An eighth chapter, by Marlie Glasius, brings in an explicitly international dimension by examining women’s movement organization around the formulation and adoption of the Statute for an International Criminal Court in 1998. The development of women’s mobilization beginning in the 1970s and continuing through 2000 is traced in most chapters. Authors use both primary and secondary sources and provide quite extensive bibliographies on women’s organization and gender equality policy.

The regional chapters focus on specific countries, emphasizing the cross-national diversity as well as the regional patterns. Barbara Einhorn and Charlie Sever present the variegated experiences of women’s organization under the transformation to democracy in the state socialist countries of East/Central Europe, with specific case studies of Poland and the former Yugoslavia. Aili Mari Tripp traces the distinctiveness of women’s collective action in the democratization process in sub-Saharan African countries, with specific national variations. Nadjie S. Al-Ali assesses the impact of Middle Eastern autocracy, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the prevalence of anticolonial sentiment in women’s organization in light of the “huge difference in the historical conditions and contemporary contexts of women’s movements in the Middle East” (p. 99).

The country-based chapters develop more focused arguments about the diversity in women’s organization and their policy activities. Howell discusses the ever-increasing mobilization of women through the All-China Women’s Federation in the context of liberalization and the 1995 International Women’s Conference in Beijing. Marcela Riós-Tobar argues that women’s movements were actually disempowered as gender

equality issues were institutionalized in the consolidation of democracy in Chile. Diane Mulligan shows how women's organization was affected by the transition to democracy in Indonesia and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism through the lens of the regulation of women's sexuality in the debate over a *dangdut* dance. Laurel Weldon takes a quantitative approach to analyzing women's organization around domestic violence issues in all 50 states in the late 1990s. Linda Stevenson uses a public policy analysis framework to assess the impact of feminist civil society on gender policy in Mexico.

Gender and Civil Society is an exemplar of comparative gender and politics scholarship. It takes a central concept that has been neglected by feminist and nonfeminist analysts alike, maps it out in a new way that addresses the gender gaps, and then operationalizes it in a series of case analyses that are both empirically and theoretically rich, providing propositions that can be tested in future studies. As such, the book directly responds to recent calls made by comparative gender scholars to better operationalize and test theories in well-designed empirical studies. The editors have set up a study that speaks not only to works that use the concept of civil society but also to scholarship that has focused on the state and women's movement in a comparative perspective. Unlike many studies of social movements that neglect the state, this one makes the all-important link to state activities both in terms of women's descriptive representation—their presence within the state in women's policy agencies and public offices—and women's substantive representation—the inclusion of gender equality issues in public debates and policy outcomes.

What is truly quite distinctive about this project is that it studies the nexus between state and society in a cross-systemic manner—countries/regions from a good portion of the world are covered by experts; only one case study focuses on a Western country. The outcome is that, arguably for the first time, theory building about civil society, gender, and the state takes seriously into account the vast diversity of countries outside of the West. This study also contributes to the growing literature on transnational gender issues that looks to the development of “transnational feminist advocacy networks” as both a recent phenomenon and a driving force in women's organization and gender equality policy formation at the national and subnational levels. Most of the national-level chapters and the international case study highlight the presence of transnational advocacy networks and the importance of influences from outside of the nation-state, like the United Nations, and the

diffusion of Western feminist ideas. The issue of local-level politics is also raised by pointing to the importance of women's mobilization in local arenas when the concept of civil society is introduced in many of the case analyses. The chapter on the United States explicitly brings out a more subnational focus by assessing women's mobilization across the 50 states.

For those looking for a neat operational definition of civil society that can be used in empirical analysis, it is not in this book. At the end, the question still remains about whether the concept of civil society is too large and ill defined to be used in comparative theory-building studies that seek to test the very propositions of the study. The introduction does show how the question of women's organization relates to civil society; there is no discussion about why examining women's mobilization allows for a better elaboration of civil society in terms of some of the critiques of its gender blindness. Although Weldon and Stevenson provide operational definitions, neither these specific definitions nor the other authors' implied definitions are taken up in a concluding discussion about defining civil society for analytical purposes. Given the importance of clearly defining concepts for use in comparative analysis, particularly when gender issues are being studied, it seems that the editors missed an opportunity to provide some practical advice, based on the contributors' collective wisdom, to researchers about using the concept in empirical cross-national analysis.

In closing, this book is a "must-read" for experts of gender, the state, and public policy *and* for newcomers to that field. Its theory-building focus has an immediate appeal for comparative gender and politics scholars and their students. The clear and approachable style provides easy access to all of the potential constituencies in the various cross-cutting literatures touched upon by the book. A focus on strategies in many of the chapters alongside rich empirical analysis has the potential to appeal to a more practitioner-oriented audience as well. Indeed, Howell points out up front in the introduction that practitioners and activists involved with programs that promote civil society can take lessons from the book. Given the relatively systematic and current analyses of women's organizations, the state, and policy over time and across a wide range of countries and regions, this book should be considered for course adoption at the undergraduate level—provided the publisher decides to produce a paperback version, a decision this volume unquestionably warrants by its clarity, analytical and theoretical richness, and accessibility.

Sex and Consequences: Abortion, Public Policy and the Economics of Fertility. By Phillip B Levine. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press. 2004. 240 pp. \$35.00.

Dorothy E. McBride
Florida Atlantic University

From the title alone it appears that either the author and his editor know little about sex and gender research or they think that any book with “sex” in the title will sell, or both. Thus, it is fortunate that the subtitle does accurately describe the contents of the book: an economic analysis of the consequences of changes in abortion law and policy on fertility behavior.

Phillip Levine makes it clear at the beginning that he wants to step away from what he terms the “ideological extremes” provoked by the topic and bring in the cool rationality of economic modeling. This coolness is all in the assumptions, most importantly the assumption of the rational actor. Applied to women’s behavior relating to conception, pregnancy, childbirth, and abortion, such assumptions, along with the aggregate treatment given to women, may be protested by readers of *Politics & Gender*. Sticking with the author through the presentation of his research and findings, however, gives a different and useful perspective on a sometimes too-familiar policy conflict. It also helps that the research design and findings are carefully presented and explained for the non-economist, and that the author takes time and space to summarize the content of various, especially complex sections.

The goal of the research described in this book is to assess the impact of abortion policy changes on fertility, specifically pregnancies both wanted and unwanted, abortions, and births. Models of fertility behavior involve setting out a series of assumptions about human behavior, the predictions that logically follow, and a comparison with empirical findings. Levine offers a model based on a critique and an extension of the standard fertility models used in economic and demographic analysis. Like the standard model, it assumes that individuals choose to reduce the costs of their actions and, when presented with alternatives, will make the rational choice. Thus, as the cost of abortion becomes less than the cost of bearing a child, those who do not want a child will be likely to choose abortion. The standard model would predict that any decrease in the cost of abortion, such as legalization or the providing of financial support, would increase the abortion rate and decrease fertility. Similarly, any

increase in the cost of abortion would decrease the rate of abortion and increase the birth rate. Perfect knowledge before pregnancy would lead people to make decisions about contraception accordingly. Those who do not want a child would be likely to increase what Levine terms their “contraceptive intensity,” in other words, actively seek to prevent pregnancy.

Unlike the standard model, however, Levine’s approach does not assume perfect information before pregnancy of the costs of birth versus abortion. Since costs include not only financial but also moral, social, and cultural costs, many of these may not be known to women until after they become pregnant. Thus, he adds another variable to the model—the positive information (more likely to lead to birth) and negative information (more likely to lead to an abortion) a pregnant woman receives. The model posits an interaction among intensity of contraceptive behavior, wanted/unwanted pregnancies, types of postpregnancy information, abortion/birth decisions, and changes in abortion policy.

The major predictions of the model are as follows:

1. When costs of abortion are dramatically lowered, such as when abortion is initially legalized, the rate of abortions will increase and the rate of both unwanted births and fertility will decline.
2. When expanded access leads to even further reductions in the cost of abortion, however, it will not result in a further decrease in fertility but may actually increase births. This is because when abortion costs are extremely low, contraceptive intensity declines and more pregnancies result. Many of these may be unwanted, but because of positive postpregnancy information, many women may decide to give birth, thus increasing the birth rate. This outcome is analogous to the safety of sports utility vehicles (the author uses the example of insurance). When SUVs become super safe from accidents, drivers tend to take more risks in driving, leading to more, not fewer, accidents and injuries.
3. When there are limited restrictions on access to legal abortion, such as administrative hurdles and limits on Medicaid funding, there will be a reduction in abortion demand, thus decreasing the number of abortions without increasing the number of births. This comes about because when faced with some increase in abortion costs, people will act to increase their contraceptive use to prevent unwanted pregnancies in the first place.

Using what he terms “quasi-experimental methods,” Levine finds empirical support for the predictions of the expanded model. To support the first and second propositions, he compares fertility rates nationwide before and after legalization of abortion in 1973, as well as rates between states that repealed restrictive abortion laws before 1973 and those that

had restrictive laws. He compares states that have adopted restrictions on Medicaid, parental involvement laws, and mandatory waiting periods to test the third proposition.

Subsequent chapters compare these findings with published research on abortion policy changes in Europe, as well as with studies of their effects beyond fertility, specifically on marriage, children, and women's lives and fortunes. These chapters set forth a number of areas where well-designed empirical research is needed, such as an examination of the effect of contraceptive technology on sexual activity and pregnancy outcomes; the ways in which restrictions on abortion affect subgroups of women, especially poor single mothers; and the question of whether the ability to control one's fertility does improve women's educational and employment status.

The findings reported in *Sex and Consequences* support those in the abortion policy debate who assert that lifting excessive restrictions on abortion relieves women of the burdens of unwanted pregnancies by allowing them to exercise their choice to seek abortion at an affordable cost. These findings weaken arguments by pro-choice advocates, however, that unlimited access to abortion reduces unwanted pregnancy even more. Rather, unlimited access may increase unwanted pregnancies because it increases the relative cost of diligence in practicing contraception vis-à-vis abortion. With more pregnancies, there will also be both more abortion and more births. Placing a few hurdles on the way to abortion is likely to decrease unwanted births through greater contraceptive intensity and, consequently, unwanted pregnancies and abortion.

***Abortion Politics in North America.* By Melissa Haussman.
Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner. 2005. 209 pp. \$49.95.**

Laura R. Woliver
University of South Carolina

Abortion politics is a bellwether of women's rights in any country. Melissa Haussman analyzes abortion politics in Canada, Mexico, and the United States using social movement and political mobilization theories to access these three North American states. She finds that rhetoric and reality for girls and women is very different in all three states. In Canada, the national health service covers abortion procedures. However, it is more complicated than that because of funding and access

issues. In addition, Canada requires that only medical physicians have the ability to provide abortions, therefore excluding nurse practitioners and other qualified health care workers from providing these services. Mexico has officially criminalized and forbidden all abortions (except for rape survivors, who must petition their local state's attorney general for permission to abort). However, a thriving illegal abortion business exists in Mexico with semiacknowledgment from the state. The official ban on legal abortion is maintained despite the fact that illegal abortions are the third-largest cause of pregnant women's deaths in Mexico. In the United States, abortion is legal but highly restricted. Poor women have limited access to funds for legal abortions in a few states, while many states provide no public funding for abortions. Haussman summarizes these realities on the ground as "a gap formed between legal declarations of rights and the extent of health services provisions" (p. 1).

Particularly valuable in this study is inclusion of the transnational nature of many of the social movements and groups mobilized about abortion politics. Haussman's chapter on how this plays out at United Nations conferences on women's health, population policies, or development issues is very original, timely, and compelling. Transnational advocacy networks work the United Nations pre-conferences and official conferences to advance their agendas. In addition, the author shows how many national interest groups have transnational affiliations, if not controllers. The issue of the Catholic Church's United Nations status as a "state" is an example of these transnational networks shaping issue agendas and contesting the international status quo in the name of fairness, equality, and representation. The status of the Holy See (the Vatican) in the United Nations allows it to block important aspects of UN health care, rights, development, and population recommendations, as Haussman so deftly shows. Increasing participation of nongovernmental organizations in key UN conferences is also explained and incorporated into the analysis of transnational policy advocacy and abortion politics.

The historical and institutional context of federalism, judicial review, political party cohesion and discipline, and executive powers in all three countries is clearly examined in order to help us understand abortion politics and practices in each country. The openness of each country to influence from social movements and interest groups (civil society access) impacts all of this. In addition, perceptive observations about the impact of money on elections in the United States, as compared to Canadian elections in particular, help flesh out the full nature of the ways in which women's reproductive choices are shaped in each of the three

nation states. Haussman finds that variations in constitutional and state institutional forms and in political interpretations of federalism are the main explanatory factors for abortion policy differences in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. However, the study overlays all of these formal and informal institutions with the impact of race and social class on whether or not any girl or woman has safe abortion options in these countries.

“The unfortunate truth of all three countries, based on federal models, is that where a woman lives within them largely determines her access to abortion services,” Haussman explains, adding: “The geographical inequities are often compounded by fiscal ones, so that if a woman must travel to have an abortion and does not have the money, she faces an insurmountable barrier” (p. 3). Devolution of abortion policy to the 50 states, beginning in the 1980s and escalating ever since means that abortion laws, funding, and access vary state to state in the United States. Indeed, she notes, 11 states are on record as ready to recriminalize abortion if the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* U.S. Supreme Court decision is overturned.

Tolerance or denial of sub rosa access to abortions in the histories of these countries and in their present policies exacerbates the inequalities of race and social class. Haussman’s study is an important comparative addition to Mark A. Graber, *Rethinking Abortion: Equal Choice, the Constitution, and Reproductive Politics* (1996), Laura Kaplan, *Jane: The Legendary Underground Feminist Abortion Service* (1995), and my own book on the politics of reproduction and the dual systems for those with money and those without (Laura R. Woliver, *The Political Geographies of Pregnancy*, 2002).

Abortion Politics in North America weaves all these factors into larger theories of social movement behavior and interest mobilization. Haussman cogently explains how social movement learning occurs when one side adjusts its issue framing, political rhetoric, and evocative symbols in response to the other side’s critiques and political successes. The growing influence of transnational advocacy networks within shifting political-opportunity structures bounded by each nation’s practice of federalism, political party discipline, judicial review, and openness to civil society actors across the spectrum of abortion politics makes this an important study of movements, civil society, governmental institutions, religion, gender, and politics. The study is an excellent comparative analysis of abortion politics and women’s relative political status, which also helps advance social movement theories. The overarching influence of social class is smoothly woven into the analysis throughout. The author con-

cludes that “under these three divergent constitutional and health-care frameworks, women who have the advantages of time, money, providers, and geographical location are still ‘okay’ under the current framework, while those lacking one or more of these crucial resources will either opt for an unsafe abortion, running a one-in-three risk of dying, as in Mexico, or perhaps opting out of having an abortion altogether” (p. 185). The result is a sobering reminder of how tenuous and contingent is women’s access to safe reproductive choices.

Liberating Economics: Feminist Perspectives on Families, Work, and Globalization. By Drucilla K. Barker and Susan F. Feiner. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 2004. 193 pp. \$65.00 cloth, \$24.95 paper.

Marion Smiley
Brandeis University

Work for women outside of the home was once thought to be the basis of women’s equality and liberation. And it still may be. But the quality of that work is certainly of great importance, too. How have women fared with respect to the quality of the work that they have done in the past century? What consequences, if any, follow from globalization for the lives of female workers around the world? Is a distinctly feminist model of economics necessary for understanding women’s lives or will classical economic models suffice? Drucilla Barker and Susan Feiner pursue all three of these questions very seriously and with considerable success in *Liberating Economics*.

Barker and Feiner claim that since the prevailing (neoclassical) models of the economy construe individuals as purely rational seekers of maximum utility, they obscure both the larger value system of the community and crucial social and political differences that exist among community members. According to the authors, if we want to understand the lives of particular individuals and to grasp how they fare within particular economic systems, we cannot employ economic models that view race, gender, ethnicity, and nation status as mere descriptions attached to rational actors. Instead, we have to employ economic models that take these traits to be central to both the lives of particular actors and the economy as a whole.

In their book, Barker and Feiner develop such a model of their own both by taking group identity seriously and by expanding the criteria that

we use to evaluate particular economic systems. They claim that in order for an economic system to be acceptable, it must, first of all, be fair with respect to both opportunity and outcomes; for example, it must pay individuals according to their contribution to the community, rather than according to a system of status hierarchies. Second, it must provide an improved quality of life over time that encompasses not just goods and services but also health, education, safety, and leisure. Third, it must provide financial security over a lifetime for families. Fourth, it must avoid wastefulness. Fifth, it must provide work to citizens that validates their dignity as human beings.

How do economies around the world fare according to these criteria? What about the situation of women in particular? As many feminists have pointed out over the years, the patriarchal structure of family life in general has always gendered child care and housekeeping, and it has rendered them especially burdensome for women who also work outside of the home. According to Barker and Feiner, we cannot make women's lives better by simply fighting for equality within the prevailing system. Instead, we need to rethink the nature of work itself, as well as the notion of skillfulness associated with it, by showing, among other things, that women's work in the home is skilled and not a mere result of their "natural inclinations."

Not surprisingly, the oppressiveness of women's work increases as we go down the economic ladder. While middle-class and professional women suffer from the gendered structure of task hierarchies, the segregation of occupations by gender, and glass ceilings, poorer women confront both poverty and exploitation as well. Barker and Feiner are particularly concerned in their analysis with the situation of poor women who are paid to care for the children of the affluent. According to them, four aspects of these women's lives are key to understanding their economic lives: their low pay, their (situational) inability to take care of their own children, their subsequent perpetuation of poverty, and their lack of protection from abuse in the workplace.

Poorer women also suffer from globalization. Globalization, which the authors acknowledge has some potential for good, has meant so far that income, wealth, health, and education have become concentrated in a small group of people while the majority of the world's population is consigned to poverty, disease, and illiteracy. Women and girls experience far more than their share of this deprivation. Three-fifths of the world's billion poor people are now women and girls. Two-thirds of the one billion people who cannot read are female, and more than 80% of

the world's refugees are women and children. The trafficking in sex made possible by globalization is now expanding at a staggering rate.

Barker and Feiner are in many respects most informative when demonstrating how international development policies, which are often presented in gender-neutral language, have affected women and men differently. The case of agricultural policy is a good example. Women's status in the agricultural societies of Africa and many other countries is generally determined by their contribution to food production. Hence, when international development agencies institute a change in these countries from female to male farming systems, with men taking over the ownership of both animals and machines, if not the actual work, women lose status, as well as freedom and personal well-being.

What are we to do in this context? How, if at all, can we reverse these trends? Barker and Feiner argue that any solution to the above difficulties requires the restructuring of work along both nonsexist and democratic lines. Their recommendations here are for the most part abstract. The improvement of women's situation "requires a sea change in the way we value and compensate caring labor" (p. 57). But they do recommend the institution of various state policies that pay for care and that give men incentives to take on caring tasks in the home as well as in state-sponsored institutions, and they do lay down the social and political, if not the economic, conditions that would have to prevail if these policies were to work.

In the end, *Liberating Economics* does not provide us with a detailed blueprint for how we are to achieve the kinds of work policies that Barker and Feiner consider to be necessary. Nor, for that matter, does it uncover a completely new set of facts. Instead, it does two things to shift our understanding of economics itself. The first is to demonstrate the importance of understanding economic systems from the perspective of the particular groups who experience them. The second is to make sure that the race-based and gendered aspects of these groups' identities becomes part of economic analysis itself. Both of these things are crucial to the institution of a fair and humane economy.