

# Plurality and Presence

*Gender Politics in Global Governance*, Mary K. Meyer and Elisabeth Prügl, eds. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999). 315 pp., cloth (ISBN: 0-8476-9160-8), \$69.00; paper (ISBN: 0-8476-9161-6), \$26.95.

*Beyond Zero Tolerance: Discrimination in Military Culture*, Mary Fainsod Katzenstein and Judith Reppy, eds. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999). 300 pp., cloth (ISBN: 0-8476-9315-5), \$65.00; paper (ISBN: 0-8476-9316-3), \$23.95.

While feminist theorists struggle to delineate what they mean by “equality” and “difference” among persons, women are engaged politically and economically in ways that deny both the implied uniformity of equality and the implied essentialism of categorization by gender, race, class, or nationality. Throughout the excellent contributions to both of the books under review, we observe strategies of feminist politics in ecological settings.

The authors remind us repeatedly that men can be feminists, women masculinists, and interests far more complex than international relations theory or conventional wisdom tend to reflect. The juxtaposition of a book on governance that emphasizes women’s efforts to achieve world peace and extend human rights with one that numbers a woman’s right to make war among its guiding normative assumptions also provides a valuable corrective to stereotypical thinking. Not only individually but also together, these books offer richly textured descriptions of social movements that are changing our world.

Among the greatest riches to be found in feminist writings is an intellectually sophisticated exploration of the range of human possibilities. To borrow a term from Hannah Arendt, feminists generally incorporate in their work an appreciation of *plurality* in human existence—that is, the uniqueness of the person and its expression as a vector of action shaped by the composition of the ensemble of persons occupying a venue or forum for public life.

In contrast, conventional scholarly approaches tend toward reductionism in their theoretical models and in how empirical data are identified and interpreted. Human beings as individuals or in groups are generally treated as similar—or similarly motivated—units of analysis. “What do women want?”

asked Sigmund Freud. Feminists are as unlikely to ask this question as its shadow, “What do men want?” What any person wants simply is not reducible to what every person wants, even regarding such basic issues as life and death—after all, where would soldiers and martyrs come from if everyone thought alike about life and death?

One of the chief accomplishments of the Meyer and Prügl book is its location on the intersection of theory and practice in precisely this sense. Its various essays provide a broad take on international movements and organizations in which women are active participants and the range of results they achieve depending on the interaction of their visions, goals, and capacities with the constraints imposed by the institutionalization of conventional thinking.

An example is Erin Baines’s essay on Guatemalan refugees, which reveals the practical consequences of reductionist thinking. These include the starvation of women and children when food aid is dispensed only via male networks and the denial of basic human rights on issues like the repatriation of refugees by aid institutions that regard a husband’s interests and preferences as synonymous with those of his family.

Property rights are the issue in Elisabeth Prügl’s essay, showing how defining “worker” as “male” or even as “a person engaged in waged labor outside the home” relegates home-based women and their work to an out-of-sight, out-of-mind, out-from-under-equal-protection-of-the-law private sphere. Although “women’s work” may earn a substantial proportion of a family’s income, such a definition ensures that it will not count in the public sphere of social and economic authority, rights, and entitlements.

The feminist activism reflected in many of these essays is itself a direct attack on the assumptions and rules underlying sex–gender systems that deny basic human rights to women. Feminist struggles to achieve goals ranging from world peace to improved health care to effective legal regimes to combat violence against women (essays by Mary Meyer, Jutta Joachim, and Emek Uçarer) depend for success on parallel struggles to avoid the marginalization and repression that result from casting their efforts as motivated by “special”—i.e., illegitimate—interests.

Anne Phillips’s point that “presence”—direct participation by individuals with different attributes, ideas, and standpoints—is critical to effective democratic representation of a whole people is confirmed repeatedly in essays describing the results of setting institutional priorities (chapters by Alice Miller and Lois West) and making policy (chapters by Francine D’Amico, Judith Stiehm, Catherine Hoskyns, and Irene Tinker) in forums where women are either absent or grossly underrepresented. The absence of women normalizes their exclusion and confirms the prejudices of those who might find their demands intolerable for other reasons; it permits placeholders in the mainstream to continue to speak and act as though women’s voices are illegitimate intrusions in the public sphere (chapters by Anne Runyan and Stephanie Johnson).

At the same time, these essays emphasize how much feminist activists are themselves a plural population. Not only the choice of goals, but also decisions about which strategies to adopt to achieve them are occasions for fierce contention. For example, Amy Higer's chapter shows the divergence in styles and priorities among women's health activists at the 1994 population conference in Cairo, a conflict Higer says was won by "pragmatic insiders." Yet these feminists also work side by side with others who do not, like them, choose to work with the world that is, preferring an oppositional strategy to replace that world with one they hope will be better. When the various insiders and outsiders engage in discourse together, their respective capacities to effect social change are strengthened. In her conclusion to *Gender Politics in Global Governance*, Deborah Stienstra emphasizes the positive contributions of feminist plurality to both social activism and the development of norms of democratic global governance.

The erasure of plurality is a major goal of military institutions, which, by design, work to refine difference down to a single dimension separating military members from outsiders. As Mary Katzenstein and Judith Reppy discuss in their introduction to *Beyond Zero Tolerance: Discrimination in Military Culture*, military ideology and an "exclusionary male and heterosexist politics" leave a very small space for insiders in the U.S. military. Although exogenous recruitment produces a limited permeability of military institutions to shifts in social values and practices, military organizations in the United States try their best to ignore or deny them. As a result, they find it difficult to project an inclusive unity among their diverse members by bridging differences, especially those like sex, sexuality, and gender, which the institution itself uses to mark and reinforce the boundaries between insiders and outsiders.

Underlying current military objections to full gender and sexual integration are contending genealogies of earlier incorporations of ethnic minorities as equal military members. I join those who believe that the same arguments used for decades by civilian and military opponents of racial integration have merely been refurbished to be used first against women and then against gays, lesbians, and bisexuals to keep these potential newcomers—and rivals—out. Others, including top military leaders, deny this view of history and argue that race, sex, and sexuality are inherently divergent as categories of difference, both in ethical terms and with respect to their potential to impair the effectiveness of military institutions. In consequence, racial differences become rhetorically transparent or invisible, while preferred categories of sex, gender, and sexuality become defining qualities of military identity.

This is not to say that race has disappeared as a dimension of discrimination in the military. It is to say that minority *male* Americans are more likely to find in the military an environment in which equal protection norms operate more effectively than in the civilian political economy. Some would argue that the military, as opposed to the civilian political economy, also provides minority

*female* Americans with a more egalitarian environment. Yet the sophisticated analyses by Brenda Moore and Gwendolyn Hall show convincingly that race and gender impose double disadvantages on minority military women.

At my previous university, I taught a course about female peace and war activists. Along with the arguments about how women (or whichever other aspiring new entrant to the full responsibilities and rights of citizens under discussion) would ruin military fighting capabilities and make small unit cohesion impossible, we also read (and gathered) first-person accounts by military women that reveal a secular change in the military working environment over the past fifty years. On the one hand, rule changes regarding access to benefits, a wider range of job categories, and prospects for promotion have opened additional opportunities for women. On the other hand, the persistence of a “chilly climate” for women—one characterized by sexual harassment, including rape—appears to be more prevalent. Chapters by Elizabeth Kier, Carol Burke, Elizabeth Hillman, Judy Stiehm, Madeline Morris, Sue Guenter-Schlesinger, and Mady Segal offer sensitive and sensible examinations of these ambiguous trends, how they reinforce or cancel one another out, and what they mean for both the effective functioning of the military and the well-being of military members.

Several of these essays and two others, one by Paul Rousch and the other by Michelle Benecke, Kelly Corbett, and Dixon Osburn, show that the strength and substance of the opposition to sex/gender integration lie less in the performance of the individuals who are the targets of harassment than in the fact that their harassers can operate with impunity. Guenter-Schlesinger terms it “a leadership issue.” Benecke, Corbett, and Osburn cite several cases where harassment takes the form of spying, libel, and/or slander, which superiors accept as licit behavior and use against even exemplary military members. But impunity for discrimination comes from other sources as well.

Former secretary of the Navy James Webb, the focus of Rousch’s critique, openly advocates violations of the constitution, U.S. law, and military regulations regarding the rights of women and subordinates. Yet he is feted publicly by admiring members of Congress and the media, as well as by many of his peers. Webb’s sexualized vituperation against women and wimps echoes hate propaganda in other contexts. Examples include radio broadcasts by Parmehutu against Rwanda’s Tutsi and the characterizations of non-Serbs by Yugoslavia’s Slobodan Milošević which, when acted out, incorporate massive amounts of institutionalized—even ritualized—sexual (and other) violence. The failure to enforce rules protecting military members and their families from sexual harassment, violence, and other violations of their legal and civil rights ensures that this behavior not only will continue but also may intensify.

In spite of these hazards, what David Segal, Mady Segal, and Bradford Booth term “the citizenship revolution” draws increasing numbers of persons who reflect the diversity of their national societies into military service. Whether and under what terms ethnic minorities, women, and homosexuals are accepted

as members of national military organizations often exaggerates, though rarely contradicts, their situations in civilian life. It is here that the messages of these two volumes converge.

Presence is crucial for the normalization of difference and for effective representation, as well as civil and human rights protection. As Phillips observes, democratic processes in the absence of plurality in presence are unlikely in themselves to produce democracy—or liberty, or equality, or any other of the cardinal virtues modern societies advocate for themselves and their peers. In their theoretical and empirical examinations of representation and presence, the essays in these two books are informative reports from the field. They tell us both how far we have traveled and how much further we need to go.

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