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Book Review

Gender Policies in the European Union

Edited by Mariagrazia Rossilli. Foreword by Louise A. Tilly

Peter Lang Publishers, New York, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Boston, Bern, Frankfurt
am Main, Berlin, Brussels, Vienna, Oxford,
2000, 280 pp., \$35.95 (paperback).
Reviewed by Carmel L. Rosal, Ph.D.¹

The first chapter, written by Mariagrazia Rossilli, outlines the social policy of the European Community and urges for institutional reforms to overcome deficits in the exercise of women's political rights. Published widely in journals and books on international and European Community policies on women, Mariagrazia Rossilli provides the reader of this newly released book further opportunity to understand complex issues about European gender policies. She accomplishes this by putting together a solid collection of essays written by leading European feminist scholars. Ilona Olster, Catherine Hoskyns, Eliane Vogel-Polsky, Joni Lovenduski, Julia Adiba Sohrab, Francesca Bettio, Jill Rubery, Mark Smith, Myriam Bergamaschi, Jeanne Gregory, Eleonore Kofman, Rosemary Sales, and Marjan Wijers critically examine the developments in European Union policy from different feminist perspectives, and offer thought-provoking answers in the form of alternative policies that can help advance the democratic reform process in the European Union.

Ilona Olster examines in the second chapter the European Court of Justice's capacity in altering EU equality policies and how policy changes present an opportunity for Member States in the struggle against unequal treatment of women in labor market sectors. She argues that "gender policies have developed within the framework of both negative integration and regulation policies designed to remove market barriers or to increase marketization" (p. 26). The starting point in Olster's analysis of European gender policies is the Treaty of Rome. Article 119 came into fruition and was incorporated into the Treaty of Rome's social policy section as a result of pressure from France. According to Ostner, Article 119 ruled that each Member State ensured and maintained the application of the principle that men and women received equal pay for equal work (p. 28). Ostner traces the development of gender policies in the EU between 1970 and 2000 and analyzes the impact of various Directives on industrial relations.

In Chapter 3, Catherine Hoskyns focuses on the changes in women's rights policy of the European Union. She evaluates the EU women's policy by focusing on four of the EU's Action Programmes on Equal Opportunities from 1982 to 2000. Like Ostner in the previous chapter, Hoskyns mentions the importance of Treaty of Rome's Article 119 in the development of equal opportunity law across the European Union countries. Hoskyns examines each of the EU's four action programmes in terms of its aim, focus,

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implementation, and negative and positive outcomes. She refers to the Action Programmes titled "Equal Opportunities for Women" that have developed in the EU as AP1, AP2, AP3, and AP4, covering periods 1982-1985, 1986-1990, 1991-1995, and 1996-2000 respectively. Hoskyns writes about the emphasis and scope of each action programme which evolved into broader areas from addressing the rights of workers (i.e. full-time, part-time, and immigrant women workers) to the inclusion of men in the equality process. Several efforts were introduced to advance women's participation in social, economic, and political domains. For example, expert networks and training programmes, which were allocated funding by the Commission, helped in the lobbying efforts of women in position of power to represent women's interest and to reach out to a larger constituency. Issues that centred around women who were poor, marginalized, immigrants, or disadvantaged, Hoskyns observes, have been neglected in policy implementations. But she points out the problem is being investigated by a few research studies, funded under AP4, focusing on disadvantaged or marginalized women. In Hoskyn's view, greater gender equality across the EU can be attained by women's sustained efforts to participate in decision-making activities with other social groups in the future.

Elaine Vogel-Polsky, a professor of Labour Law who specializes in Belgian, comparative, and European and international law, analyses the connection between gender, power and citizenship, presents some of the major problems of legal theories on sexual equality, and offers an updated concept of sexual equality. Although political spheres in most democratic countries have included women's participation, this is hindered by their role and status as a "subordinated minority." In Vogel-Polsky's view, women's exclusion from high-level political decision making process can be attributed to sex difference. To establish equality of men and women in democratic societies, she notes that parity must be established in societies where sexuality continues to pose as a hindrance in the balanced operation of political life and organization. She discusses the notion of "parity", which has entered legal and policy discourse beginning in the late 1980s through the late 1990s, and empirical evidence from researchers, organizations, and non-governmental organizations showing the negative consequences of gender. Vogel-Polsky notes that those who argue against the parity debate seem to think that women's full participation and active inclusion in political decision making process is "wishful thinking", and that "the exclusion of women from the political sphere is perceived neither as a central element of the crisis affecting our democracies nor as an unacceptable failing of democracy" (p. 70). She emphasizes the need for political implementations and democratic procedures based on the principle of parity to make it possible for men and women to share political power and responsibilities, and true democracy can exist under this condition.

Writing from a historical comparative perspective, Joni Lovenduski examines patterns of women's representation in the context of contemporary West European politics in Chapter 5. Based on empirical data from national studies and her decade-long investigation of women's level of representation in political parties, Lovenduski observes that sex equality reform was advanced through the efforts of Western European feminists who pushed for and demanded either increased representation of women or equality of representation. She cites the increasing trend in women's representation in Norway and Britain where women who participated in political organizations promoted the cause by mobilizing and forming links with other groups to gain momentum. Despite of positive

results to counter the problem of under-representation in political life, one of the problems pointed out by Lovenduski concerns women's motivation for seeking political candidacy may be thwarted by political party systems in different EU countries that operate under political apprenticeships. For example, "some require long party service as activists, others require particular kinds of economic or employment expertise, and others seek local ties and knowledge of local issues" (p. 94). Lovenduski examines social change in the context of women's political roles and political reform process by discussing alterations in institutions and procedures, women's issues, representation, and discourse (pp. 99-104). To make a lasting effect in the political sphere, she concludes that a combination of awareness by the public, continued and increased involvement of women in political life, and attitude and behavioral changes by male politicians are necessary conditions for effective reform.

In Chapter 6, Julia Adiba Sohrab explains why women experience unequal outcomes when receiving social security benefits when compared to those received by men in EU Member States. She begins with the EEC's adoption of a Directive (79/70) which supports the equal treatment of men and women in social security entitlements, and guides its implementation in Member States. This is extended by the occupational social security focus of Directive 86/378, which was later amended as Directive 96/97 to provide eligibility criteria for receiving social security benefits. Sohrab examines the impact of the Equality Directive on three EU Member States, namely Belgium, Ireland, and the Netherlands, by investigating the extent of women's financial independence in these Western European countries. Prior to the implementation of the Equality Directive, Sohrab notes that women, who were married or cohabitating with male partners, faced direct discrimination of varying degrees in Belgium, Ireland, and the Netherlands. One example she cites is the automatic classification of married women living with their husbands as dependents in Ireland. But, according to Sohrab, when benefits were extended to women for the first time, the Belgian, Irish, and Dutch governments became concerned with the increased costs associated with the reform. She continues with a definition of equality in Belgium, Ireland, and the Netherlands based on three criteria: equality of access, equality of opportunity, and equality of outcome. Since the social security system in these countries have been based on the notion that the family is led by a male breadwinner, social security benefit schemes were designed in favor of men who were more likely to hold full time work than women. She concludes that further social policy reforms need to be implemented to address existing inequalities in benefits received by men and women.

In Chapter 7, Francesca Bettio, Jill Rubery, and Mark Smith provide a policy oriented discussion and comparative analysis of employment patterns of women and men in the European Union. Considering the increase in the availability of flexible jobs (i.e. temporary contract and part time work) in the European Union, the authors note that these arrangements "reproduce familiar gender asymmetry" (p. 156). They point out, for example, that "female labor tends to be associated with nonstandard employment (with the exception of the full-time self-employed) than male labor" (p. 125). Discussion on new employment relations in the EU is organized in two parts. In the first part, the authors scrutinize various employment relations and working time arrangements across 15 EU countries, and how these are linked to labor market organization and employment over the lifecourse patterns. In the second part, the authors examine, evaluate, and

propose alternatives to three labor flexibility strategies: employer friendly flexibility, flexibility over the life cycle, and working time reduction. The authors propose practical solutions so that current policy can be revised by shifting the focus of labor flexibility arrangement toward an employee friendly flexibility orientation.

An analysis of trade union women's programmes during the mid-1980s and late 1990s is the focus of Myriam Bergamaschi's essay. Trade union's key role in helping shape industrial relations in the European Union is the starting point of her analysis. Marginalization of women in trade union decision making is one of the major concerns of women trade union activists and EU women representatives who pushed for reforms in labor policies. According to Bergamaschi, women's rights in the workplace, career training, and family and work responsibilities are issues that must be addressed together in creating equal opportunity reforms and programs. Some of the trends in women's policy from the mid-1980s are reviewed and compared by the author, noting the problem of women's under-representation collective bargaining and policymaking activities. She points out the importance of gender democracy in challenging the existing balance of power in trade union collective bargaining process and equal opportunity policies.

The "discovery" of sexual harassment in EU Member States and the capacity of EU institutions in addressing the problem of sexual harassment are the main themes that Jeanne Gregory explores in Chapter 9. Gregory cites numerous empirical evidence as early as 1980s from several EU countries where studies have suggested the existence of sexual harassment in the workplace and its negative consequences in employer-employee relationship. Although studies, varying from case studies to large-scale national surveys, have been conducted in Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, and France, it was not until the late 1980s when a report published by Michael Rubinstein showed that "no Member State had any explicit legal prohibition against sexual harassment and that only in the UK and Ireland had the courts accepted that it was unlawful sex discrimination" (p. 178). Evidence from studies on sexual harassment strongly suggests "that sexual harassment was an endemic feature of EU labor markets and constituted a serious impediment to women's inequality" (p. 179). Gregory describes how the roles of the Irish government (early 1990s EU president), the Council of Ministers, and the European Commission were inextricably linked in defining and confronting sexual harassment in the workplace. In her view, the continued commitment of women's groups in Member States to challenge problem of sexual harassment in the workplace and sexual violence against women is necessary for social change.

In Chapter 10, Eleonore Kofman and Rosemary Sales explore some of the issues confronting refugee communities in the European Union, namely the feminization of immigrant population in Europe in the context of labor migration and family formation and reunion. Migrant women encounter difficulties in attaining autonomy and rights when they enter Europe. Kofman and Sales note that one of the difficulties faced by a migrant women applying for asylum is "when a man and wife arrive together, the husband is classified as the 'main applicant', except in cases where he is severely mentally impaired, which renders the wife dependent on his status" (p. 206). In addition, they describe the situation faced by thousands of women asylum seekers who work long hours and earn minimum wage in sweatshops in London. Lacking the legal right to reside and work in a European country becomes a precondition for exploitation by employers. Kofman and Sales observe that efforts by organizations which campaign for the humane

treatment of migrant workers seem to be thwarted by national government and popular opinion which oppose non-restrictive policies. Marjan Wijers writes about current developments and debates about European Union policies on trafficking in women in the last chapter. She points out that although European Union countries have implemented measures to confront the problem of trafficking in women, these measures are shrouded under the cloak of controlling illegal migration and regulating public order and morality. One of the major problems that confront policy makers who address the issue of trafficking in women is the lack of standard definition for trafficking in women. Based on a review of documents by leading European and international organization including the European Parliament and the United Nations, Wijers describes how the definition of trafficking in women has resulted in confusion and has evolved overtime. She identifies five shifts in the definition of trafficking in women, which varies from the traditional definition of “forced recruitment of women into prostitution” (p. 212) to the 1990s trend of linking trafficking in women and illegal migration. Noting two approaches in solving the problem of trafficking in women, Wijers writes that “two modes of strategies can be discerned—repressive strategies, aimed at suppressing what is considered ‘undesirable behavior’, and empowering strategies, used primarily by NGOs, aimed at supporting the women and strengthening their positions” (p. 227).

Gender Policies in the European Union is recommended for readers who are interested in understanding past and recent trends in key policy developments and policies that address gender inequalities in the European Union. It provides an excellent overview of the challenges that the EU’s policy makers, gender activists, and feminist writers have encountered and will continue to face in efforts to reform existing welfare arrangements and employment patterns. Furthermore, proposals for implementing key policy changes or extensions in the EU are offered from diverse feminist perspectives.