

**Tonya Haynes: Review: Negotiating Gender, Policy and Politics in the Caribbean:
Feminist Strategies, Masculinist Resistance and Transformational Possibilities,
by Gabrielle Hosein and Jane Parpart**



Book Review

Negotiating Gender, Policy and Politics in the Caribbean: Feminist Strategies, Masculinist Resistance and Transformational Possibilities.

Hosein, Gabrielle Jamela and Jane L. Parpart. 2017.

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Women's political participation has been a key area of feminist activism in the region with women's access to formal political power understood axiomatically as a resource which must be secured. The Caribbean's boast of the Americas' first elected woman head of government in 1980 and two women prime ministers serving simultaneously in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago suggest that the study of women's political participation in the region should be of global interest. This timely volume returns to familiar Caribbean feminist territory by offering a feminist analysis of the state, breaking new ground in assessing feminist strategies of various kinds of state engagement. As a text which claims that its "aim was to gather original data that examined four feminist strategies to advance gender justice – women's political leadership, national gender policies, electoral quota systems and transformational leadership", the first chapter by editor Gabrielle Hosein disappoints as it reproduces biographical summaries of women political leaders in the Caribbean, the bulk of which are taken from Cynthia Barrow-Giles' notable *Women in Caribbean Leadership* (2011). This shaky start notwithstanding, the collection resounds with the cutting voices and forceful analyses of notable Caribbean feminist activists whose reflections and thought are not frequently captured in scholarship make it a singular and delightful text.

This carefully curated work sets individual chapters in critical dialogue with each other, making for a coherent whole. Deborah McFee seeks to understand just why Trinidad and Tobago's process of creating a national gender policy remains stalled after decades, while Dominica was able to ensure that theirs was not derailed by religious opposition, state inertia or masculinist backlash. Any optimism one might feel after reading McFee's creative analysis of narrative are undercut by the Maziki Thame and Dhanaraj Thakur's subsequent chapter on the neo-liberal nature of Jamaica's gender policy. Thame and Thakur call into question the very possibility of such state mechanisms to address gendered structural inequalities of race, ethnicity and class within a *desire* for development premised on redistributing wealth upwards. Thame and Thakur offer one of the finest critical chapters in the collection that should be required reading for all Gender and Development practitioners. Ramona Biholar

examines the spaces opened up by gender policies for men's gender conscious engagement. Ultimately her detailing of reactionary discourses of male marginalization remind us of earlier feminist work in the late 1990s and early 2000s on masculinist backlash to feminist activism. That she does not read in men's narratives moments of subversive speak is suggestive less of analytical lacunae and more of the intransigence of the ongoing recourse to the tactic of asserting male marginality in the face of attempts to redress gender injustice.

Natalie Persadie's meticulously detailed documentation of the implementation of quotas for women in Guyana demonstrates the role of strong feminist civil society organisations in being able to capitalise on moments of rupture and political transformation. It is the perfect introduction to Iman Khan's analysis of just what quotas have meant or not meant for women as citizens and political leaders in Guyana. In one of the collection's stand-out chapters, Khan's nimble analysis, punctuated by the voices of noted Guyanese activists like Andaiye and Karen De Souza, suggests that in the context of patriarchal relations of gender, quotas deliver no real power for women but may paradoxically be used to buttress popular sentiment on male marginalisation, invisibilise male power and cast women as enjoying special privileges that ought to negate the very quotas which are themselves an index of women's subordination.

Having taken us along the campaign trail, in the rum shops, through the formal and informal spaces of constitutional reform and policy-making, all sites of gendered and ethnic exclusions, the collection brings us back to feminist visions for more transformational and ethical modes of leadership. Eudine Barriteau's theorizing of gender systems and the political economy of gender is foundational to the framing of the text. While the authors fill her concepts with rich empirical detail there is very little evidence of them using their data to transform her theorizing. Shirley Campbell's introduction of a hybrid analytical framework designed to analyse women's transformational leadership is therefore refreshing. In the established editorial style, we are not allowed any moments of triumphalism or celebration. Denise Blackstock's portraits of two

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women leaders from St. Lucia demonstrate how even as women leaders refuse masculinist styles of leadership, they may in fact fall short of explicitly challenging structural gender oppressions and end up “inadvertently supporting and enabling the masculinist systems that keep women subordinated.”

The voices of the Caribbean women's movement are strong in this collection as are those of a new generation of Caribbean feminist scholars – like Aleah N. Ranjitsingh - in her intelligent assessment of Kamla Persad-Bissessar's tenure. It examines multiple English-speaking Caribbean countries, including many that are not frequently the subjects of academic attention. The collection is a treasury of Caribbean feminist scholarship for its stellar documentation of women's organizing and leadership in the region, feminist engagement with a masculinist state and the imbrication of globalized and local understandings of gender transformation.

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