

and “difference,” “reality” and “post-reality,” and it might be a good idea to think over how such implied binary regimes can be reworked into transitional modes of thinking and action.

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Euromed Feminist Initiative, editor. *Citizenship, Gender, and Democracy Building*. 76. Beirut, Euromed Feminist Initiative, 2018. ISBN 978-2-9565916-0-3.

Over the last few decades, gender equality, human rights – women’s rights in particular – and democracy have been among the chief preoccupations of feminist activists and scholars concerned with women’s issues. Admittedly, the problems related to citizenship, gender, and democracy have been more acute in some parts of the world than in others. This volume comprises some of the papers given at the “Citizenship, Gender, and Democracy Building” International Conference, held in Beirut, Lebanon, in 2015. The objectives of the event are specified in the Introduction. One of these objectives – to discuss issues related to “infringements of gender equality and the continuing exclusion of women from public participation on account of their presumed inferiority” (6) – is discussed by most of the volume’s contributors. Some of the contributors are academics from European universities while the rest are social activists.

Hassan Abbas’s article “Citizenship as a Culture First” focuses on gender equality. The author’s starting point is the premise that citizenship is the only framework capable of “enabling different identities, whether natural or acquired, to live together in a reality that guarantees dignity, freedom, and equality for each individual” (7). Further on, he argues that citizenship needs to stop being a mere political concept and should become an ethos if any real equality is to be achieved. Abbas is not overly optimistic about such a prospect and admits that it could be viewed as somewhat “utopian” (10).

Birte Siim and Pauline Stoltz’s article has a wider scope, reflecting on nationalism, as well as on gender and citizenship, in a Scandinavian context. The authors challenge some popular assumptions, arguing that “gendered approaches need to evolve beyond notions premised on family values and motherhood” and that the concept of citizenship needs to be rethought “beyond the nation state” (11).

In her article “Women, Ethnicity, and Citizenship,” Umut Erel aims to take the concept of citizenship – with regard to ethnic minority women – out of the context of the fixed relationship between the individual and the state and bring it into a “wider sociological understanding of belonging and participation” (23). This problem is tackled well by the author, who also examines three different – though related – ways in which minority women challenge normative understandings of citizenship.

In “Male Leaders and Female Caretakers: Gender Dynamics in the Political Life of a South Eastern European Society in Protracted Transition,” Ludmilla Kostova discusses gender dynamics in Bulgarian political life. She states that the gender imbalance in political decision-making bodies is largely due to three factors: the insufficient strength of Bulgarian civil society, the persistence of the notion of “separate spheres,” and the reluctance of many women to participate in the political process. The author illustrates her points by referring to specific political events – the Bulgarian parliamentary election in 2014 and the country’s presidential election in 2016 – and notes that “traditional systems of gender relations have proved very resistant to change in the European south” (28). She makes the observation that while in some north European contexts decisive steps have been taken to oppose and do away with

patriarchal attitudes, Bulgarian women, who have not been relieved from their traditional duty to do most of the house work, still carry a “double burden... sanctioned by inherited patriarchal values” (29). Kostova uses strong inductive reasoning to support her points: she provides statistical and factual data, which allows her to arrive at well-supported conclusions. What makes her article particularly valuable is that it not only diagnoses the problems but – in contrast with other articles in the volume – offers concrete solutions, such as a tentative reintroduction of gender quotas in politics. The author ends her article on a positive note, stating that despite the persisting inequalities, “there is hope” (31).

Helena Popović tackles similar issues in her article “The Gender Equality Struggle in Croatia: Potentials and Constraints in the Democratization Process.” She, too, focuses attention on a south-east European country, although the political and cultural contexts are substantially different. Popović concludes that while there have been some positive changes in the direction of achieving gender equality in Croatia, they have been few and far between, mostly hindered by two factors: the rising “re-traditionalization” trend and the lack of an appropriate legal framework. She also criticizes the broader neoliberal trends in the west which, in her view, have aided reactionary local forces.

In “The Legal Background of the Discrimination and Violence against Syrian Women” Sabah Al-Halak examines how military conflict has exacerbated the problem of violence against Syrian women and has reinforced gender-based discrimination. Like other contributors to this volume, the author outlines the connection between gender, democracy, and citizenship. She looks at a number of UN documents, which could contribute to the prevention of discrimination and violence against women and states that gender equality can be achieved only in a state whose political system is based on citizenship.

Most contributors to this volume display a moderately optimistic outlook and express the opinion that certain advancements have indeed been made. The texts, however, make it clear that as far as the reversal of the disenfranchisement of women and other disadvantaged groups is concerned, the perspectives are not exceedingly bright at present, with many of the feminists’ efforts remaining unsupported or downright opposed, and the activists – vilified by ideologically rigid and misogynist societal segments.

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