

Book Review/*Ulasan Buku*

Gender, Ethnicity and Political Ideologies by Nickie Charles & Helen Hintjens (Editors). London: Routledge. 1998. 193 pp. ISBN 0-415-14821.

For the book, Charles and Hintjens have assembled an international cast of scholars with abilities to address major questions such as “Why do women support ideologies that depend on their own subordination?” and “Does the use of women as symbols of cultural identity legitimise a denial of their own rights as human beings?”. The task of each author is to examine these questions by taking into account the notion of identity creation, the emergence of nationalism, and the role of the state in projecting certain political ideologies which tend to favour men rather than women. Thus, one can find many similarities and differences in terms of findings through the case studies put forth by the eight chapter contributors.

In the first chapter, Charles and Hintjens indicate that the post-Cold War era provides an opportunity to study the relationship between democratisation, ethnicity, and political ideologies. This is because of the emergence of a number of ethnic conflicts such as in the former Yugoslavia, Chile, and even in West Yorkshire, England. In the case of the reconfiguration of Yugoslavia, women have to find spaces for themselves within the boundaries assigned by the state. Women were displaced by the war. They were mothers and they were “others” (rape victims). In many cases women transgress the boundaries and begin to form new identities in order to adapt to new political environments in which they find themselves in. Such acts that do not condone the universalisation of women’s issues are also known as transversalism.

Once the setting is understood, it facilitates readers to draw similar and different conclusions made by the chapter contributors. Sarah Benton, Sheila Allen, Mirjana Morokvasic, and Valerie Bryson discuss the role of the state in the creation of women’s identity. In general, women are usually defined in relation to men. While the citizen-warrior is recognized as a full citizen of a nation state, women’s rights are given or denied based on their reproductive capacities. Furthermore, in the name of nationalism, it is argued by these authors that rape is legitimised, not only in order to shame the enemy, but also to complete the conquest of men over other men. The contribution made by these authors on the role of the state and the usage of political ideologies is important since the impacts of such ideologies transcend the public sphere into the private sphere, thus making politics very personal to all individuals.

At another level of analysis, the case studies by Eleonore Kofman, Haleh Afshar, and Georgina Waylen provide a lot of empirical data on the strategies used by women in order to negotiate new positions in societies with political ideologies which prescribe and dictate the appropriate roles which should be played by women. Both Kofman and Afshar deal with the issue of religious

revivalism in France, and in West Yorkshire respectively. On the one hand, Kofman points out that immigrant women's position in the public sphere has caused great insecurity among French men, thus creating a greater division along gender and ethnic lines. Here, women in the Far and New Right applied a mix bag of strategies to cope with the culturally bound sexual division of labour. On the other hand, Afshar who studied three generations of Pakistani immigrants found that Islamic knowledge newly acquired by younger generations of women can be a source of empowerment, as well as a source of discomfort for the patriarchal Islamic men of the West Yorkshire society. In other words, women are not complacent in the new environment they live in; instead, they can be very pragmatic in order to ensure their families' economic and spiritual survival.

When gender is used as a category of analysis, it can and should provide readers with new insights and perspectives on the subject matter under study. The main drawback with this book is the major emphasis on women as the unit of analysis. As such, the treatment on gender relations cum power relations between the two sexes are not well drawn out by the editors. One has to read between the lines in order to extricate the relationship between gender, ethnicity and political ideologies. While Nira Yuval-Davis tries to make a reconceptualisation on these variables, it would have been more appropriate if the editors had written a concluding chapter which would adequately provide a summation as well as answers to the two major questions posed by the editors. As it is, while the conceptual framework is adequate for the usage of all chapter contributors, it does not provide new insights for gender studies.

Despite the apparent weakness of the text, the editors and chapter contributors should be commended for being brave enough to tackle controversial topics such as nationalism and rape, deconstruction of citizenship and differential rights associated with it vis-a-vis men or women, and undemocratic practices in the private sphere. The treatment of the topics at various levels of analysis is an important scholarly contribution not only to gender studies, but also to disciplines such as politics, sociology, and economics. In international politics, for example, these topics are generally deemed as incompatible with the discipline. However, once the veil is lifted, such topics actually constitute airing the hidden, and invisible partial realities which are in stark contrast of *realpolitik* within the international system. After deconstructing the notions of identity and nationalism, one is left with the task of rebuilding society and the state. It is hoped that the future may allow for greater parity as well as a deeper understanding between the sexes, thus ensuring a more balanced fulfillment of the sexual contract.

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