

## Book Reviews

Gender-Competent Legal Education edited by Dragica Vujadinović, Mareike Fröhlich, and Thomas Giegerich. Cham: Springer, 2023. 709 pp. US\$59.99 (cloth), ISBN 9783031143595; also available open access.

This book is the result of a mega-research project involving five European countries (Germany, Italy, Serbia, Spain, and Sweden), five universities, and 52 authors. Funded by Erasmus120, the book offers 19 chapters authored by multinational teams. These chapters address key gender-related legal themes in clear and accessible language. The authors manage to show with convincing evidence and reasoning how many ostensibly gender-neutral laws are instead gender-blind. They achieve this through an extraordinarily coherent and complete assessment of the dominant legal system in the world, namely, civil law, in use in over 150 countries.

For those who might still be unsure of what “gender equality” means, this book will illuminate the multiple ways women have experienced and continue to experience an asymmetrical world. The book is organized into three parts. The first introduces the reader to comparative legal history, gender and structural inequalities, and feminist judgments; it also comprises a chapter on gender research and feminist methodologies. The second addresses “gender in a public context,” which deals extensively with human rights, criminal law, taxation, social security, and international law. The third part, titled “Gender in a Private Context,” addresses family, labor, economics and management, and business.

Progress, it asserts, has taken place at the national level, as more rights have been gained by women that up to a few decades ago would have been heavily contested: the right to engage in higher education and thoroughly choose from among all fields of study; the right to access labor markets; to enjoy equal rights in such areas as inheritance, marriage, divorce; the right to form (or not) family unions; the right to receive sexual and reproductive health services; the right to enjoy a life free from gender-based violence; the right to exercise control over one’s body; and the right to re(define) themselves as sexual beings. Progress is also discernable in the increasing legal recognition of persons who do not fit the sexual binary. Indicative of the global extent of progress is the large number of international and regional conventions that have established principles and guidelines intended to commit countries to eliminating gender-based violence, the most extreme expression of gender inequality. Substantial progress has been made in typifying the various types of such violence—a significant conceptual achievement, for if we cannot identify a crime, it is rendered invisible and thus not punishable legally.

Law is the public expression of a country’s commitment to justice. But, unfortunately, there is a distance between aspirations and reality. The book shows clearly that, while jurisprudence has advanced in many areas of social life, implementation of the

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law tends to follow behind, with the lag attributed to a lack of resources, commitment, and training. As the editors show, patriarchal ideas can still be found “even in the secular modern legal systems of Western developed countries, either in the content of legislation or in its implementation and interpretation” (1–2).

The book seeks to serve as an educational tool. It succeeds admirably. Most chapters identify learning goals. Key legal and social justice concepts are explicitly defined. The various legal arguments under discussion are clearly stated and their application to local situations is meticulously reviewed. Each chapter offers about 10 questions for individual reflection and group discussion; these questions are designed to foster deductive and inductive thinking and invoke one’s own experience. In addition to an extensive bibliography, each chapter offers a list for further reading.

The chapter covering formal education reaffirms that all human rights treaties state the right to schooling/education. Continuing inequalities in access to education, to an equal curriculum, and to an unrestricted selection of field of study characterize the experience of many girls and women throughout the world, and this is undoubtedly an unresolved battle. Arguments by leading global institutions in defense of education for women and girls continue to see it mainly as a means to economic wellbeing. Yet, I would argue that the struggle should be wider. Schools worldwide foster social expectations associated with masculinity and femininity; they do not discuss power asymmetries confronting women. In higher education, even though women now make up the majority of students, advanced graduates, professionals, and academics in the fields of education, law, and the social sciences, little has changed to make women more gender-competent in those fields. Education is a critical area for the introduction of progressive ideas about social arrangements. Parents and conservative groups often identify issues they do not like as “controversial” or a threat to society; deeper knowledge of pertinent law should help smooth the brunt of such arguments as being outdated.

The book describes two promising efforts in the direction of gender equity. One is gender-responsive budgeting, established in a growing number of countries. Although more effort is needed to integrate gender-responsive budgeting into national fiscal policy, gender-disaggregated budgets are essential to identify required resources; without them, perennial and exhausting negotiations would consume much of the struggle for equality and equity. The second effort is an innovative exercise by feminist legal scholars to rewrite major legal decisions (i.e., those by supreme courts or their equivalents) from a gender perspective. Called the Feminist Judgment Project, it comprises feminist scholars and practitioners in various countries in many parts of the world.

To achieve gender equity, knowledge of gender is indispensable for jurists, judges, lawyers, and legislators; and knowledge of the law is useful for all: women, men, nonbinary persons, teachers, and students. That is to say, we all need training in both gender and the law if we truly seek to have a better social world. This book is highly pertinent to the fields of comparative and international education in that it provides the intellectual resources to move toward a better society. We cannot seek to remedy the ills of society if we ignore its legal and formal foundations. New knowledge to educate future citizens remains to be framed as an essential goal of education. This book conveys a remarkable amount of solid legal information; simultaneously, it inspires new appraisal and contestation of the legal status quo in many countries. It is a precious source of material for class discussion and future research on multiple issues. For its

intellectual and pedagogical contributions, this book highly merits inclusion in one's digital library as a constant companion.

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*Emergent Trends in Comparative Education: The Dialectical of the Global and the Local* edited by Lauren Misiazek, Robert Arnove, and Carlos Torres. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2023. 301 pp. US\$49.00, ISBN 9781538145579.

Scholars and practitioners in the field of education continue to challenge the epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western epistemologies at the expense of equally valid ways of knowing from non-Western traditions. Driven by the globalized capitalist neoliberal machinery, the dominant knowledge systems have over the years relegated rich indigenous histories and knowledge to the margins, terming them as mere superstitions, opinions, and inconsequential subjectivities. However, new imaginaries are now being charted across the globe with the important mission of undoing the West's totalizing claims perpetuated in the Western geopolitics of knowledge and challenging the deliberate exclusion, suppression, and even erasure of knowledge from the epistemic canon. The imaginaries are exposing (sometimes cruelly) the limits of bodies of knowledge from the Global North in addressing the collective contemporary and future problems of the universe that we collectively inhabit. The new assemblages are calling for an urgent methodological, conceptual, and thematic renovation of the contemporary paradigms and the reconstruction of a new body of knowledge that is pluriversal, one that draws from the long memory and history of societies. *Emergent Trends in Comparative Education* comes at a time when calls to decolonize epistemology continue to intensify. Drawing from critical and postfoundational traditions, this updated volume, edited by Lauren Ila Misiazek, Robert E. Arnove, and Carlos Alberto Torres, offers a dialectical voyage that spans across various disciplines, linguistic contexts, geographies, and fields of education theory and practice.

The book is organized in 15 chapters to which Lauren Ila Misiazek provides an excellent introduction. Brief biographies of the eclectic mix of contributors are provided at the end of the volume. The contributors hail from diverse interdisciplinary backgrounds in the social sciences and comparative education spheres. Conceptual tools to navigate and understand the content are provided as Misiazek underscores the utility of de Sousa Santos's "alternative thinking of alternatives" and the "infinite diversity of the universe" as a conceptual framework for understanding the content.<sup>1</sup> The topics are varied and include low-fee private schools, environmental pedagogies, globalization and teacher education, philosophy of education, technology, political economy of education, democracy and multiculturalism, and STEM and social movements, among others. Bringing such a diverse range of chapters to conceptual unity can be daunting. However, the constellation around

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<sup>1</sup> B. de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice against Epistemicide* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 6.

thematic areas includes epistemological and ontological linkages with the global power dynamics and knowledge production,