

Book Review: The Remaking of Social Contracts: Feminists in a Fierce New World edited by Gita Sen and Marina Durano

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In The Remaking of Social Contracts, feminist thinkers and activists urge a new interpretation of the synergies, tensions and contradictions between social movements and global, regional and local power structures and processes. Olivia Mason recommends this book to students of globalisation, feminist activism, or social contracts.

The Remaking of Social Contracts: Feminists in a Fierce New World. Edited by Gita Sen and Marina Durano. Zed Books. 2014.

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In *The Remaking of Social Contracts: Feminists in a Fierce New World*, editors Gita Sen and Marina Durano present fascinating new insights into the efforts made by women to challenge social issues facing women today. Written from a southern perspective, this book is based on the work of feminist organisation DAWN ([Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era](#)) and provides a platform for numerous voices to share their thoughts and experiences on global economic governance, militarism, ecological tipping points, the nation state, movement-building, sexuality and reproduction, and religious fundamentalism. The book's main success is its ability to link the global and the local through an examination of the ways in which women challenge social norms at the local level and how women should be rewriting social contracts at the global scale of analysis. This book speaks to the audience by using real world experiences and a wide range of case studies to present exciting and diverse accounts of feminist action today.

In Part I the authors set out that social contracts are imbued with power and often imposed from above, while fought from below. This book contends that feminists should be concerned with the economic and power structures imposed from above which shape and alter the environment within which power relations of gender, ethnicity, and other inequalities and social hierarchies function. Although women are often affected on the everyday scale, it is globalised forces such as trade, finance, climate change, and militarisation which impose restrictions and alter the environment women live in. As the authors contend, 'understanding the drivers of gender relations requires delving beneath gender roles and their effects on underlying power relations that govern the daily realities of people's lives' (p.20).

Following the introductory chapters, the four remaining parts of the book skilfully detail the many global arenas in which the authors feel feminists should be involved. Part II explores the global financial system and presents a critique of the gendered reproduction of inequality. In Part III, sustainability and climate change and their gendered affects are discussed, with Part IV looking to biopolitics and the struggle for control over women's lives and bodies. The book finishes with a discussion of states and explores problems at the nation state and current approaches to global governance.

In Chapter 7, "Land grabs, food security and climate justice: a focus on sub-Saharan Africa", Zo Randriamaro addresses the particularly gendered ways in which food security should be conceptualised. Women will often bear the brunt of the impact of hunger and food insecurity, despite making up at least 75% of agricultural workers in sub-Saharan Africa, and being the main food providers and managers of food security at the household and community levels. Randriamaro asks then why women are often excluded and not given a greater say in issues of food security. From a global viewpoint, Randriamaro contends that 'hunger and food insecurity do not happen in a vacuum but a global food system which is an integral part of the global economic system' (p.145). Global issues

such as climate change, post-colonial land grabs, and wider patriarchal systems further exacerbate the problem. Food security is often only discussed in global arenas, failing to link the global and local, and include women's voices. Randriamaro's chapter successfully discusses the importance of linking the local and global and asks how localised knowledge should be conceptualised at the global level to grant more rights to women.

In Chapter 10, "Sexuality as a weapon of biopolitics: rethinking Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill", Rosalind P. Petchesky combines Foucauldian theories of biopolitics with feminist intersectionality, highlighting the intrinsic link between the body and politics. Petchesky's chapter uses a 'deep intersectional approach' to explore Uganda's anti-sexuality bill and to show the many sectors in which biopolitics plays out. Uganda's anti-homosexuality bill was tabled in December 2009 and has received international attention. Although homosexuality was already illegal in Uganda, the new bill means harsher prison sentences and even the death penalty, and criminalises anyone who defends or fails to report homosexuals. The international media and numerous world leaders have condemned the bill, but in 2013 it was passed by the Ugandan Parliament and is now law. The passing of this bill should not be understood in separation to intersectional and feminist issues, argues Petchesky: 'Securitization of bodies and borders...not only serves global capital but also develops its own logic in the division and hierarchical ordering of human, and all, life' (p. 205). Additionally, this bill is not isolated within a national Ugandan context but can be located within a global one; many countries have [retracted aid and restricted trade](#) since Uganda announced the bill. From another global angle, Petchesky suggests the bill is a decoy to 'blind the world to everything else that is going on in Uganda right now' (p. 217). Understanding the bill in a wider global and intersectional context can help make sense of something that for many can be read as a unique and isolated incident.

In the final chapter, Josefa Francisco and Peggy Antrobus conclude that women's movements and feminist encounters should connect horizontally and vertically with well-connected organisations such as the UN where real alternatives can be tested and developed. 'For feminists, the United Nations has been a complicated but necessary global site for waging important political struggles...there is no other inter-governmental spaces in which an overwhelming number of states are represented' (p.295). Feminists are urged to engage with global events and use global platforms such as the internet to project their voices and let [diverse actors including men](#) to engage in these projects. This final chapter sums up what makes this book so important; it offers suggestions for new ways in which feminists can unite and make progress: utilising attention in global arenas, working with men and other groups, and using the internet and social media to fund projects are just some examples.

The contributors to *The Remaking of Social Contracts* show that there must be less fragmentation within feminist movements, particularly the separation between the local and the global. All too often feminist theorisations focus too heavily on the everyday scale of enquiry, and this book offers alternative ways in which feminists should start engaging with these issues. This book is an engaging and thought-provoking read and is relevant for anyone interested in globalisation, feminist activism, or social contracts.

Olivia Mason is currently undertaking an ESRC funded PhD at Durham University. Her research interests lie in geopolitics, space, power, and feminist methodologies. Previously she has studied the role of tour guides in shaping the tourist gaze in post-conflict Bosnia; and the role of female blogging in Palestine as offering counter geographies and emotional narratives of place. Her current research explores tourism in Palestine; particularly questions around knowledge production, heritage, and power. [Read more reviews by Olivia.](#)

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