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“The 21st century must be the century of inclusion and that has to include women’s equal leadership and participation. We will not realize our goals for building true citizen democracies, ensuring peace and a development that is sustainable and for all, if we fail at inclusion.”¹— Michele Bachelet, UN Women

The last forty years have been marked by unprecedented changes regarding women’s rights. States all over the world have and continue to adopt policies to include more women in governments, economic activity and legal codes, often in the name of promoting ‘gender equality.’ This includes the adoption of: gender quotas in parliaments to ensure greater representation; the creation of bureaucratic agencies dedicated to women’s issues; and increasing numbers of women as national leaders and judges. States are also adopting more woman-friendly property laws to ensure single, married and widowed women have access to land and livelihoods on their own terms. Finally, states are passing laws criminalizing gender-based violence such as sexual assault, domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual harassment. The scale by which such policies have been adopted is impressive, the result of women activists’ organized work to pressure governments, international organizations, and their own ‘fellow’ citizens to acknowledge the importance of gender equality.

But even as states have adopted so many woman-centered policies, and amidst a growing awareness of and support for ‘gender equality,’ some troubling global consistencies remain. In practice, nearly all of these policies have yet to be fully, and, in many places, adequately implemented. Globally, women still only account for 22% of parliament members, only slightly
higher than ten years ago. Only 14% of current prime ministers or presidents are women. One in three women worldwide have experienced, or will experience, assault and domestic violence in their lifetimes,\(^2\) and there is evidence indicating violence against women may actually be increasing.\(^3\) And women still account for the majority of the poor and consistently lack access to land, credit and higher-paying jobs in both developed and developing states. So why, despite states and global international organizations promoting so many policy shifts to better include and protect women, does women’s exclusion, lack of prosperity, and lack of security remain so pervasive? Why has a growing global awareness of ‘gender equality’ not yet translated into significantly more women in government, greater economic well-being for more women, or less violence against women at global levels? Equally important, why are all these policies situated as policies for ‘gender equality’? These remain the central questions addressed in this book.\(^4\)

The central problem of this book is the problem with ‘gender equality’ as it is used in international policy and political practice. I am engaging the word ‘problem’ in two ways. Crucially, this is not a book arguing gender equality is bad or should end. Rather, it means to problematize the idea of, and policies and practices framed as, gender equality. When something is a ‘problem’ it does not necessarily mean it is an issue to be resolved; it can also mean to ‘unsettle’ or to more deeply consider, understand and thus explain. In this case, the goal here is to problematize— or better understand and explain—gender equality and how it has become taken for granted as any sort of policy aimed at including more women. To problematize gender equality means to ask: how did gender equality come to be the ‘catch-all’ for any policy meant to address discrimination and exclusion against women?

Using a more conventional understanding of ‘problem,’ this book illustrates that the ‘problem’ with gender equality is that woman-centered policies do little to disrupt and challenge
gender (as ranked patterns of masculinities and femininities) or facilitate substantive equality (as equally valuing femininities and masculinities or significantly promoting women’s emancipation). The promotion or adoption of sex quotas, women’s policy agencies, greater employment and property rights, and violence against women legislation are normalized as part of ‘gender equality’ to end discrimination and better include women. But, a more accurate description for what is happening is a global ‘add-gender-and-stir’ campaign based on liberal feminist logics of individuality, anti-discrimination, and sex-based, essentialist ideas of ‘gender.’ This campaign has pursued and promoted policies in states and international organizations that add women to exclusionary institutions such as governments, legal codes and state practices. But through analyses of these policies and practices and their implementation it becomes clear that an accurate understanding of what ‘gender’ really is remains an issue.

To call this a global add-gender-and-stir campaign is to highlight four central issues: 1) these policies all work within a liberal feminist framework of emancipation of women; 2) these policies treat women and gender as substitutable terms; 3) all these policies and practices have been co-opted by and work within a neoliberal order; 4) these policy efforts should be studied in conjunction- it is important to assess sex quotas alongside changing credit laws and sexual assault policies because, when one begins untangling the research on the status of these policies, similar patterns emerge among them all. The next several chapters build the case for why it is time to stop using gender equality in reference to any woman-centered policy adopted by states and promoted by global institutions.

It is an important moment for women’s rights. It has been over twenty years since the monumental Beijing Platform for Action on Women (1995), the ‘end’ of the Millennium Development Goals (2015) and the start of the Sustainable Development Goals, and over fifteen
years since UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security was adopted. Thus it seems like an opportune moment to critically engage this global effort to promote women in particular ways. To be sure, many women have benefited from these policies and the world is a better place because more states are doing more to address women’s issues and needs. But this book challenges the assumption such policies engage gender or promote equality by elucidating how gender—understood as socially constructed and differently valorized scripts of masculinities and femininities—is not sufficiently challenged or destabilized by policies focused primarily on women. And equality is not sufficiently achieved by ‘adding’ some or a few women to male-dominated institutions.

Part of the reason for this is what we call such policy prescriptions and how we talk about them. For example, if a ‘gender’ quota in parliament is a signal of gender equality, then having the quota becomes a satisfactory benchmark for a ‘gender equal’ state. And in this process two important patterns have emerged: gender has become a ‘shortcut’ expression, a way to acknowledge the socially produced, differently valorized realities of men and women, without the deeper critical analyses explaining why such realities persist. Additionally, gender and women have become synonymous terms, often used interchangeably as though they have the same meaning. In order to critically engage these policies what is needed is a new way of thinking and talking about what is going on in efforts to promote women.

In this capacity, this book offers a critical renaming and reframing of gender equality policies and practices by engaging these efforts as part of a liberal feminist norm of women’s inclusion. The goal in renaming and reframing gender equality as women’s inclusion is to offer a cohesive yet critical examination of, and discourse about, woman-centered policies. By challenging the assumption (implicit and explicit) that any effort to include more women is
gender equality, one begins to see how gender is actually women and equality is actually inclusion and women’s inclusion has inherent limits.

Critical feminist conceptualizations of gender and equality inform the analyses undertaken in this book, which focuses on the global adoption and diffusion of multiple policies and practices in the pursuit of women’s rights and interests—women’s inclusion—and how such rights are pursued within a rubric of ‘gender equality.’ This movement for ‘gender equality’ relies on a narrative where gender and women are inter-changeable terms. It also relies upon a liberal feminist logic of emancipation through addition. But liberal feminist policies are insufficient to fully engage women’s subjugation (and the subjugation of many men and other marginalized groups). Indeed, liberal feminist policies are actually (re)enforcing gendered binaries that other feminisms see as the root of oppression and subjugation.

The reality is despite significant changes in states’ approaches to women’s exclusion and subordination, pervasive gendered logics continue to inform and shape policy adoption and implementation. Furthermore, equality has come to mean a variety of thresholds that do not necessarily call for equal numbers of women and men or equal access to material and symbolic power. By introducing women’s inclusion as an alternative naming for these global policy shifts, later chapters present an alternative discourse and assessment for what is happening so as to facilitate scholars and practitioners to illustrate for larger (and especially non-feminist) audiences why it is a problem to call any policy promoting women gender equality.

The follow sections layout the main arguments, key terms, limits and organization of the book. The next section explains the meanings of ‘gender’ in this book so I can then turn to the framing of analyses, centered on five interrelated reasons women’s inclusion, evidenced in these policy practices, has limits in emancipating anyone.
Add Gender and Stir

Cynthia Enloe advocates for the need for a “feminist curiosity” in understanding how gender operates in global politics, which means to look for the lived experiences of women (and men) and begin to understand how something becomes taken-for-granted. While this study engages largely with global ideas and how they are promoted as state-level policies, it still uses a feminist curiosity to understand an array of policies and practices aimed at improving women’s lives. It is through careful examination of how gender shapes policies, how different women experience such efforts, and how scholars make sense of the conditions under which these policies work, that one begins to understand how including more women in gendered institutions has been normalized to mean gender equality.

While often policies like violence against women, sex (gender) quotas and property rights are treated distinctly in academic work (and as part of different subfields), a central argument here is these policies all embody liberal feminist sensibilities regarding causes of women’s subordination and solutions to fixing it. As further examined in Chapter Two, liberal feminism identifies women’s oppression to be rooted in legal barriers and discrimination that deny women access to the same rights and opportunities as men; once these barriers are removed women can then be fully equal. Such policies are pursued via the state, as the state plays a central role in becoming “the neutral arbiter to ensure women’s equality.” This approach is often referred to as the “add-women-and-stir” approach because it treats women’s oppression like a recipe: one does not need to change the whole recipe, just add women to it. In other words liberal feminism assumes one can change the composition of the institution without needing to also change the way said institution operates. Because women and gender are now often used interchangeably (and problematically), I argue what is happening is actually an ‘add-gender-and-stir campaign,’
in which gender is used as a shortcut, a technocratic term for including women without really
discussing how gender shapes women and men’s experiences within such institutions.

As other forms of feminism have identified, there are limits to just adding women,
particularly in how liberal feminist approaches do not focus on the power of gender or gendered
social structures as a central cause of women’s oppression. While patriarchy is often the term
used to illustrate gender as a male-dominated and identified social structure, this term does not
adequately engage how systems of subordination are not just about male domination, but also
racist, imperialist and heterosexist forms of domination as well. To engage how social structures
promote domination via multiple yet intersecting systems of oppression, I use the term
“kyriarchy,” defined as “interlocking structures of domination” to name the sexist, racist,
heterosexist and imperialist system(s) of subordination central to understanding how gender
equality has come to represent add-women/gender policies. Given the neoliberal world order in
which such policies are being pursued, adding women and calling it gender equality actually
works with an already powerful liberal narrative of individuality, universality, rights and anti-
discrimination. Discussions of kyriarchy and structural oppression are marginalized and critiques
of liberal feminist pursuits and policies are treated as counter to the feminist movement.

This norm, which can be thought of as women’s inclusion, as an alterative naming and
framing, situates these efforts to better include women within a neoliberal world order of the last
forty years, under which woman-centered policies have been promoted. Three key aspects of
women’s inclusion, focused on in this book include: an emphasis on women’s representation in
government, recognizing women’s economic rights, and protecting women from violence. This
context matters deeply for understanding how gender equality was normalized to embody
‘adding women-as-gender’ because it elucidates the trade-offs in promoting liberal feminist
policies centered on women without adequately disrupting masculine-feminine and other binary logics and practices. Neoliberal world order relies upon the subordination of women and other feminized groups to function, and policies normalized as gender equality construct a narrow narrative in which including *some* women becomes ‘enough.’ Liberal feminism seeks to reform existing institutions by adequately addressing the sex composition and recognition. More radical discussions by critical feminists (among other critical thinkers and activists) of dismantling neoliberal capitalism have been artfully silenced and/or marginalized through state and IO recognition of liberal feminist efforts to reform sexist institutions.

What this means is that while formal barriers *are* being systematically addressed, informal practices and sexist (as well as racist, heterosexist and imperialist) beliefs limit the effectiveness of removing such barriers and women’s exclusion and marginalization persist. And these informal practices and ideas are *endemic* to these formal institutions and practices excluding and marginalizing women. It also means many policies, feminist in origin, have actually been co-opted and promoted in troubling ways by powerful global institutions and states because women’s inclusion is considered paramount to better state development and progress. To say differently: when global organizations and states argue for sex quotas, property rights for women and ending violence against women, they do so, not necessarily for social justice, but because women’s inclusion is considered important to neoliberal economic growth, development and prosperity. Inclusion has become a strategy for reinforcing gender binaries and is complicit in neoliberal world order through the reproduction of difference.

According to this rhetoric surrounding efforts to increase women’s inclusion, women are an important means to a more just, prosperous and secure end. But the trade-off is that these policies and the discourse surrounding them do not adequately engage persistent exclusion and
marginalization of many women or subordinated groups other than women. In thinking of this norm as one of women’s inclusion, along with critical engagement with such policies, one may begin to broaden the possibilities and discourse around what gender equality actually means or could mean. In order to understand how women’s inclusion has become such a powerful norm, one must first engage with the slight-of-hand in which gender and women have become synonyms, obscuring the radical intentions of gender in global practices.

Gender = Women

One of the most powerful ways in which the limits of add-women policies are obscured is via the ‘gender = women’ narrative. As many feminists have argued, gender is not synonymous with women. But despite a consistent reminder gender is not just about women, in practice these terms are used interchangeably and this conflation has had important effects. Gender has become a ubiquitous global term: it is listed on official forms, in government and organizational documents and is a staple term for how we talk about ourselves—a lexicon for discussing difference. Gender equality, gender mainstreaming, gender based violence, gender gaps, gender equity, gender parity, gender inclusiveness, and the list goes on. All of these concepts, in practice, usually mean women (and some indicate biological sex) and all are in some way tied to a campaign in which adopting certain woman-centered policies has been normalized as evidence of a more ‘gender equal’ world. But in centrally focusing on policies aimed at including more women and calling it gender, gender—as a feminist and thus political concept and tool of analysis—is obscured. This matters because gender binaries remain central to making sense of why woman-centered policies are not having a greater global impact and understanding how these policies may actually essentialize women in ways that do not adequately promote