

Book Review

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Madeleine Arnot

Educating the Gendered Citizen: Sociological Engagements with National and Global Agendas.

London: Routledge, 2009. 260 pp.

The focus of analysis of this book is on gender and citizenship education. The book is divided into four sections. The focus of the first part is on feminist theories regarding democratic principles and schooling. The second section focuses on personal and collective discourses around citizenship and gender relations, as developed through interviews and group discussions with female and male student teachers in England, Greece and Portugal. The third part traces changes in schooling and gender relations in English textbooks using discourse analysis. The fourth section discusses the challenges that global citizenship places on the education of citizens, as going beyond national contexts and re-defining the notion of citizenship itself.

The theoretical discussion begins in the first chapter with a focus on the construction of political identities and subjectivities and is informed by feminist political theory. It critiques liberal democracy and schooling, and moves on to a discussion centred on sexual contract theory (Patman's theory of 'fraternal pact') and the exclusion of women from the public sphere. The issue of inclusion/exclusion is placed in the framework of nation and the role of political actors in it. The political categories of woman and citizen become crucial concepts of a gender analysis of the state and processes of politicization.

The second chapter offers a synthesis of the critical positions of liberal feminism and other strands of feminism, such as radical, Marxist and black feminism on the gender neutrality of liberal democracy and the fake equality it represents. Here the three spheres of analysis, where the book is headed, are revealed. The theoretical and empirical analysis offers a study of civic spheres, of national narratives of education and an analysis of political identities, differences and subjectivities.

Chapter three aims to answer the question to what extent the new generation of secondary-school teachers actively re-construct in their personal narratives certain notions of women's and men's citizenship. The analysis of the personal and collective discourses takes into consideration the changes in gender notions and conceptions that each country have experienced through time, regarding the socio-political development and the different notions of democracy each country has.

According to the findings that come from interviews with female and male teacher students in England, Greece and Portugal, the subjects use different male and female discursive frames of citizenship and refer to different gendered imaginaries around the concept of the 'good citizen' that reveal notions of dominating masculinity, authority, hierarchy and exclusion.

In the fourth chapter the ways in which feminism and gender change impacts on understandings of citizenship are presented and discussed. Female teachers primarily concentrate on issues of power and sexuality, thematizing phenomena such as the 'bimbo effect', referring to sexual attractive women supporting male power and the 'Thatcher effect', the loss of femininity with power. At the same time, male teachers seem unwilling to challenge notions of hegemonic masculinity that constitute the generally male character of public realms and categorize women active in the public domain either as 'Mothers' and 'Madonnas' (working for the good of the community, being supportive of the general male gender and political order) or 'whores/sluts/bimbos' (p. 15).

Chapter 3 and 4 demonstrate the value of comparative research and provide important insights on different gendered traditions as well as transformations, although the lack of crucial change is the conclusive remark of the whole analysis.

The third part of the book, which includes chapters 5, 6 and 7 focuses on a comparative analysis of curricula around citizenship, following the historical development of the discussion of gender issues in textbooks. As a central finding, the author claims that most formal textbooks take ‘an exclusionary approach to female citizenship’ (p.16), while textbooks especially designed for girls present a more critical engagement with gender relations.

Chapter 6 presents a different kind of socio-historical analysis that goes to physical, formal and informal levels of schooling, not just curricula. Here the authors offer a combination of feminist pedagogical concerns on schooling with politics of citizenship, a unique combination of two crucial issues: politics and education.

The final fourth part of the book, comprised of chapters 8 and 9, discusses the social significance of the processes of individualization and globalization and its relevance to gender relations in schooling and politics. In a discussion of the outlook of citizenship education, in a framework of globalization, the author opines that as class inequalities in educational institutions will aggravate polarization, (Bauman, 2000 in Arnot, 2009) the notion of freedom in a social unequal and hierarchically organized socio-political framework will change, forming new ethics. The author inquires about the sort of moral basis that would sustain the new social order. Following Durkheim, the author concludes by proposing the establishment of ‘a new global conscience collective’ in order to close the ‘citizenship gap’. They stress the fact that as the gendered citizen is still constructed by the educational actions of the state (Arnot, p. 23), the identities of young citizens, both men and women are shaped by ‘post-war ideologies, new social movements, globalizing pressures in the 21st century’, as well as formal texts, curricula, media etc. Predicting the future of gendered education on citizenship, they underline that educational systems will increasingly promote greater freedom through neo-liberal discourses of performativity, individualization and personalized learning, while counter-movements will encourage a global conscience collective.

Scholars and researchers on gender, International Relations and political science would find the book useful as an example of successful comparative research on a wider European level. The empiricist approach fits very well with the theoretical assertions that the authors make in the first parts of the book and the empirical data vividly illustrate the changes of gender notions and the evolution of educational systems in the light of the global transformations in the last few decades in different parts of Europe.

Concluding, there is maybe only one point of critique that someone cannot avoid to mention. Through the whole book, the authors refer to male or female students, teachers and to male and female notions of citizenship, confusing continuously the borders between sex and gender. From a gender studies perspective, male and female refers clearly to biology, whereas men and women to gender. In this context, it is highly problematic to consider a notion or discourse as male or female. Apart from that, ‘Educating the gendered citizen’ is a highly interesting and recommendable book for all researchers that deal with gender, education and democratization processes.