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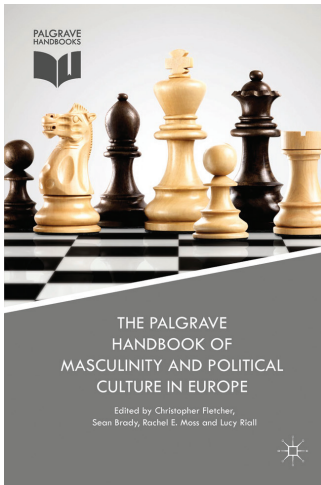
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Christopher Fletcher, Sean Brady, Rachel E. Moss & Lucy Riall (Eds.) (2018)

The Palgrave handbook of masculinity and political culture in Europe

London: Palgrave Macmillan. 465 pages, € 180,19

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The Palgrave handbook of masculinity and political culture in Europe

Political power has been inextricably linked to masculinity for more than two millennia in Europe. *The Palgrave Handbook of Masculinity and Political Culture in Europe* seeks to understand how the maleness of power has historically affected European culture. Male authority has often been conceived of as the natural state of affairs. This handbook problematises the naturalness of male authority by showing the contextual and changeable nature of dominant masculinity. The aim of this book is to address 'gender blindness' in the historical study of politics by gendering questions of leadership, power, and authority. It sets out to explore the mechanisms by which maleness of political power has historically been established and maintained and to examine how these mechanisms have left their traces in European political culture today.

The past decade has seen a proliferation of scholarly work on the history of masculinity (see for example Dudink, 1998; Ellis & Meyer, 2009; Tosh, 2004). Work in this field presents masculinity as a specific and distinct historical category, by making visible where it has previously gone unmarked and unnamed. This volume builds upon one of the most influential contributions to masculinity studies: the concept of hegemonic masculinity, developed by Raewyn Connell (1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity refers to the form of masculinity in a given historical context that structures and legitimates a hierarchical gender order between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and

among men. This means that the hierarchical gender order is not stable but is instead continually facing challenges and undergoing change in order to maintain a successful strategy of legitimising some men's dominance over women and marginalised men. The contributions to this volume aim to analyse the interaction between competing masculinities and changing forms of political culture (p. 7).

The handbook offers an impressive collection of case studies of masculinities, ranging from Ancient Rome to politics in the contemporary West. Although the title suggests differently, the contributions focus on only a few European countries, mostly within Western Europe. This narrow definition of 'Europe' thus offers a limited perspective on the impact maleness of power had on European culture. Still, several contributions in this handbook stand out in their analysis of the interaction between dominant and marginalised masculinities.

Georges Sidéris shows us, through the example of the eunuch Eutropius, who was able to lead a successful military campaign in fourth-century Byzantium, that dominant ideals of masculinity might be overcome, and permit individuals forms of authority from which they might normally be excluded. Laurence Leleu considers another exceptional case by describing women who assumed positions of power in the Ottonian Empire. These women were said to rule with a 'man's heart' (p. 95), and began to resemble men through their virtuous qualities. Although female authority was acknowledged in these exceptional cases, dominant masculinity was still maintained: effeminate men could not effectively exercise power because they would be perceived as weak or indecisive.

Régis Schlagdenhauffen's contribution offers a detailed account of a particular form of masculine authority by zooming in on the life of the homosexual jurist Eugene Wilhelm, who kept diaries throughout his life from 1885 to 1951. Schlagdenhauffen shows how because of his possession of economic means, Wilhelm was able to protect himself against stigmatisation, while at the same time enabling him to exercise authority over his often impoverished sexual partners.

Some of the strongest contributions to this volume not only show the interplay between hegemonic and marginalised masculinities, but also address possibilities for change of the dominant gender order. Susan Doran's chapter illustrates how multiple and competing meanings of masculinity existed in early-modern England in her analysis of the monarchy. Conventional ideas of masculinity came under pressure in this period through the rule of a minor, a queen regnant, an unmarried woman, and a man who did not conform to gender norms of masculinity. However, Doran

argues that these seemingly progressive challenges did not lead to a real crisis of masculinity but seemed to reaffirm dominant masculinity instead: 'an unmanly king was imagined far more dangerous to the state than were underage or female monarchs' (p. 217).

Ann Hughes paints a similar picture of the possibility of change. Her contribution shows how, despite religious upheaval and exacerbated tensions in understandings of political manhood during the English Civil War, traditional gender values were reasserted rather than profoundly criticised. The Civil War was not only a conflict over which elite men should exercise political authority, but also roused anxieties about identity and emotion to which gender was fundamental. Hughes concludes that: 'Conflicts over true political manliness underline the way in which masculinities are always multiple, and always subject to negotiation and contest' (p. 241).

The chapter by Griffin presents an insightful analysis of the ways in which masculinities might shift and change. Griffin shows how in nineteenth century Britain dominant 'gentlemen' masculinity long stood in the way of the integration of women and working-class men into the parliamentary political class. Those who fell short of this norm were considered a threat to the legitimacy of the entire political structure. Griffin illustrates how difficult it is to change the dominant masculine order: 'when it came to the fundamental economic, social and political inequalities between the sexes, the state was not neutral' (p. 423). Male domination was upheld through law, legislation, and the emerging welfare state. Thus, members of parliament were not neutral observers but had a vested interest in maintaining the status quo by virtue of their sex. However, the abolition of property qualifications and the expansion of franchise soon led to the election of members of parliament 'who could not plausibly be considered gentlemen' (p. 409) and slowly paved the way for a more inclusive government.

The handbook offers a welcome contribution to the study of historical masculinities. The richly detailed descriptions show the historical contingency of dominant and marginalised masculinities, making the handbook a valuable source for scholars of gender and historical politics. Scholars of contemporary politics may expect a stronger analysis of possibilities for change in the dominant gender order. Although many of the contributions are valuable in their descriptions of specific historic contexts of masculinities, they could have benefitted from a more systematic focus on mechanisms of power. A more explicit intersectional approach could provide this. Intersectionality refers to the idea that the positions of groups and individuals in society are determined by a combination of identities such as gender, race, class, sexuality, age, ethnicity, and ability (Collins, 1998;

Crenshaw, 1990). The intersection of these identities generates positions of marginalisation as well as privilege, depending on the specific time, context, and space in which they operate. Gender, or masculinity, rarely stands alone. Intersectionality could provide a systematic approach to the study of hegemonic masculinities and sharpen our understanding of change to the dominant gender order (Christensen & Jensen, 2014). This understanding is especially relevant since this volume aims to examine the traces of historical maleness of power in politics today.

To conclude, this handbook aimed to bring gender history and political history together by taking both equally seriously, in which it succeeds. Its contributions provide rich illustrations of ideal and deviant masculinities in specific historical contexts and demonstrate the importance of further studying of those instances where maleness of power is (re)produced or challenged to understand possibilities for change.

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About the author

Anne Louise Schotel is a PhD candidate in political science at the University of Amsterdam and the Germany Institute Amsterdam. She studies the political representation of sex and gender identity in Germany and the Netherlands.