

*Jolin Joseph is a Ph.D. candidate and Vanier Scholar in Gender, Feminist and Women's Studies at York University. She is interested in questions of (il)legality, precarity, and gendered migration policy in South and West Asia. Her dissertation takes a feminist political economy perspective on Indian migration to Saudi Arabia.*

## **FEMOCRATIC ADMINISTRATION: GENDER, GOVERNANCE, AND DEMOCRACY IN ONTARIO**

Tammy Findlay  
Toronto: University of Toronto  
Press, 2015

### **REVIEWED BY ROBERT DRUMMOND**

This work could be described simply as a study of the Ontario Women's Directorate from 1985 to 2000. However that description would not do justice to the scope of Professor Findlay's inquiry and argument. Her broader aim is to assess the capacity of feminist theory (and feminist activism) to promote democracy (and an appreciation of the role gender plays in policy) within the ranks of a provincial public bureaucracy. Her assessment pays particular attention to the apparently different gender regimes that characterized the Peterson and Rae governments on the one hand and the Harris government on the other, and while she acknowledges the difference between them, she points as well to their similar failure to fully embrace democracy and feminism. She recognizes the debates within feminist circles about the extent to which the state can ever be expected to alter the gendered power structure of society, but she throws her lot in with the

"femocrats" or "state feminists" who see an opportunity (not to say a duty) to remake the state apparatus to produce more democratic and more gender-sensitive policy. In that sense, while the analysis is highly critical, it is not pessimistic and concludes with a prescription for improvement.

This is a very fine piece of scholarship, both theoretically and empirically. Some readers will no doubt be mildly irritated (as I was) by the terminology commonly employed in critical theory and feminist political economy, but I trust they will acknowledge (as I do) that the problem is our own and not that of the author. Indeed Professor Findlay wields the theory with considerable subtlety and sophistication, and her empirical analysis admirably displays an open mind.

In the prescriptive portion of the work however, Professor Findlay has taken on a formidable task, and it is there that I find an opportunity for more critical comment. She seeks to encourage greater participation by citizens in the making of public policy and, by extension, a more accurately diverse expression of the public will. The practical means by which this encouragement is to take place are however undoubtedly contentious, even within the ranks of those who share her aims.

She argues the necessity of "state feminists"—bureaucrats with feminist ideals—to act as advocates within the public service, accountable not to the government of the day but to the public whom they and the government purportedly serve. The neutrality valued in a Weberian model of bureaucracy she (perhaps realistically) describes as illusory, but also as antithetic to substantive democracy. Some interests appear already to have their internal advocates; those Professor Findlay prefers mainly do not. I suspect she and I prefer many of the

same groups, but I don't know that I could persuade some of my more conservative colleagues that internal advocacy for my preferred interests is democratic while advocacy for theirs is not.

Some of her other prescriptions are, to my mind, more sensible. Reducing hierarchy in the public service in favour of a spokes-in-the-wheel model of collaborative and consultative decision-making would be a long overdue recognition of the interconnectedness of policy fields, as well of the "inter-sectionality" that characterizes citizen clients. Giving better access to marginalized groups can only help to make policy more sensitive to citizen diversity and therefore more effective in the long run. However, there is a degree to which the models of citizen participation Professor Findlay seems to favour are optimistic about the time and energy most people are prepared to devote to political action. Moreover they underestimate the degree to which people may need to be organized in groups with a tendency to oligarchy. We can and should mitigate that tendency, but it would be naïve to ignore it. Finally, Professor Findlay expresses the belief, widespread among democratic reformers, that more respect must be paid to the lived experience of citizens, in contrast to the deference now paid to the views of "experts." Who could disagree with the need to acknowledge that people closest to a problem may best know its shape and weight? But surely Professor Tammy Findlay, Ph.D., is not asserting that expertise is without value?

*University Professor Emeritus of Political Science and Public Policy and Administration, Robert Drummond taught at York University for 42 years; former Dean of Arts at York 2001-2009.*