empirical interrogations

This issue includes a number of articles that analyze relevant categories through an empirical lens. This deployment of feminist theories to interrogate empirical research shows not only the strength of feminist research but also the value of interdisciplinarity in grasping the complexities of the lives of women. In the opening piece, Yakın Ertürk considers the impetus behind the global gender equality agenda in the UN – the plane of her analysis – and how this agenda problematizes the role of men. She refigures the categories of women and men in order to critically examine ‘the structural positions of masculinity and femininity in patriarchal orders.’ The political exchange in international policy is also taken up by Salam Al-Mahadin in her analysis of women and education in Jordan. Freedom, equality and good governance are categories she challenges in their masking of strategic discriminatory practices directed at Palestinian women. The intermeshing of the local and global is also mapped by Kiran Asher who draws on the long-standing quarrel between gender development experts and postcolonial feminist theorists through an intervention that draws our attention to Matamba y Guasa, a network of black women’s organizations from the state of Cauca in the specific lowlands of Colombia. A different inflection is given to the interface between international agencies and the negotiation of the traditional/modern binary. Lisa Ann Richey in her study of Tanzanian population policies concludes that Tanzanian women as both providers and clients present their own ‘alternative modernity’ in traversing the categorical logic of the global governance of population control.

A different but equally substantial research project is that by Tuula Gordon and Elina Lahelma who undertook a longitudinal study of the attitudes of young people in Finland. Their ethnographic analysis of the ambitions of young women around womanhood, particularly the question of whether or not to become mothers, highlights the considerable ambiguity this question poses. In a country renowned for its gender equality this research shows that liberal democracy at its best still confronts women with the dilemma of ‘not taking on too much’ when individual choices remain gender specific. These choices around motherhood are also looked at by Rhonda Shaw. Through an analysis of the media she discusses how certain representations of the breastfeeding mother allow for a disruption of the ‘conventional maternal matrix’. Taking up the question of the performative breastfeeding body Rhonda Shaw reminds us that far from being instinctive this practice is implicated in social and cultural

knowledge.

In a work of literary criticism Artemis Michailidou discusses Edna Millay's influence on Anne Sexton, with particular reference to the issues of gender politics, femininity, performativity, and the female body. Despite Sexton's initial reservations about Millay's work she later recovered Millay as an important literary predecessor for her generation. Using an autobiographical approach, Mary Joannou discusses Nancy Cunard's political involvement and shows how Cunard's attention to questions of 'race' set her apart from the general tendency in the left to neglect 'race', in pre-WW2 Britain.

In the dialogue section, we present two pieces. Hsiao-Hung Pai uses participant observation to highlight the precarious working conditions of those who perform the (hidden) cleaning labour in London. Laura Huey foregrounds the silence in feminist scholarship on capital punishment. These final contributions to this issue highlight the many challenges that continue to confront feminist researchers.

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