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Book Review: Gender and Globalization in Asia and the Pacific: Method, Practice, Theory

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Gender and Globalization in Asia and the Pacific: Method, Practice, Theory. 2008.
Kathy E. Ferguson and Monique Mironesco (eds.). Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. 420 pages, index. \$35.00 (Paperback).

Reviewed by Susan Dewey¹

“Feminists are always interested in ambivalence”, notes Cynthia Enloe in Chapter Fifteen of this outstanding edited collection, “...because so many women live their lives through ambivalence” (288). This powerful statement neatly encapsulates the purpose of the volume, which makes a sustained effort to use work from a variety of disciplines in order to problematize the staid binaries that typically encompass work on gender and globalization. Comprised of eighteen chapters, including an introduction and a conclusion, the book is divided into six thematic areas that provide a basis for the organization and lines of questioning that shape the authors’ arguments: confronting colonial discourses; cultural translations; media; labor, migration and families; trafficking; and militarization. Editors Ferguson and Mironesco specify in their introduction that the work presented throughout the book allows a number of commonalities to emerge “within a dense fabric of specific accounts” (3). The editors group these common themes into three broad rubrics that run throughout all of the chapters’ descriptions of the feminist particularities of place: representations and reproductions; spaces and borders; voices and bodies.

Part One, “Confronting Colonial Discourses,” is comprised of two chapters. The first, Chapter Two, “Telling Tales out of School: Sia Figiel and Indigenous Knowledge in Pacific Islands Literature” by Judith Raiskin, discusses notions of Samoan “tradition” in the context of Sia Figiel’s novel “where we once belonged”. Raiskin notes that Figiel’s protagonist, Alofa, is faced with a contradictory set of norms at work in the powerfully gendered institutions of church, family hierarchy and school that organize Samoan adolescent female life. “While she [Alofa] is taught with violence to suppress her sexual curiosity” Raiskin writes, “the girls [in the novel] are regularly peeped at by neighbors, impregnated by teachers, courted and sometimes raped by male family members...Whom can she [Alofa] believe and what perspective is dictating the conflicting expectations?”(30). Chapter Three, “Licentiousness has slain its hundreds of thousands”: The Missionary Discourse of Sex, Death and Disease in Nineteenth-century Hawai’i” by Virginia Metaxas pursues this issue of island struggles for medical authority between *kauka* (American-trained physicians) and *kahuna* (indigenous healers) in the face of overwhelming numbers of Hawaiian deaths and rising U.S. imperial power in the islands. Both chapters place a heavy emphasis in their persuasive arguments on the fact that globalization is a manifold process necessarily involving both resistance and accommodation.

Part Two: Cultural Translations, continues this ideological line in two chapters that address Indian and Chinese interpretations of contemporary North American and Western European gender paradigms. Chapter Four, “Gay Sexualities and Complicities:

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Rethinking the Global Gay” by Jyoti Puri underscores the paradoxes inherent in this process. She notes that while the dissemination of sexually inclusive identities allows right wing conservatives to attribute homosexuality to so-called Western influence, its simultaneous provision of language and a sense of international community “also helps privileged middle-and upper-class gay subjects over a wide range of gendered and sexual subjects in the Indian context” (76). Chapter Five, “What about Other Translation Routes (East-West)? The Concept of the Term ‘Gender’ Traveling into and throughout China” by Min Dongchao explores the impact of feminist theory on Chinese policy. The author uses the expression *jie gui* (“to connect with the international track”) to show how scholars and activists use the symbolic capital ascribed to what is perceived to be progressive thought that challenges the hierarchies that shape their lives. In doing so, she argues that it is important for feminist scholars to question the multiple routes by and unequal terms upon which practitioners of Women’s Studies meet in the international ideological arena.

Part Three, Media, features three chapters that analyze how individuals make use of popular culture’s complex terrain in constructing their gendered identity projects. Chapter 6, “Gaze Upon Sakura: Imaging Japanese Americans on Japanese TV” by Christine Yano, discusses a popular series on Japanese public television that functioned to celebrate essentialized Japanese cultural identity at a time of waning interest in cultural practices deemed traditional. Yano provides a particularly interesting discussion of the nuanced ways in which the series’ young female Japanese-American protagonist embraces Japanese-ness. Chapter 7, “Globalizing Gender Culture: Transnational Cultural Flows and the Intensification of Male Dominance in India” by Steve Derné, explores male interpretations of contemporary Hindi films. The author makes the provocative argument that rather than advancing gender equality, “cultural globalization often also gives men *new* ideas about how to act out oppressive gender hierarchies” (137). Chapter 8, “Performing Contradictions, Performing Bad-Girlness in Japan” by Yau Ching, describes her innovative work at a girls’ reform school with adolescent females’ self-representations on video. The author raises the important point that Japanese society largely “refuse[s] to register and address how the behavior of these women relates to the society’s shaming discourse” (156). This is a particularly significant point given that many of the reform school girls had engaged in what is perceived to be a uniquely pervasive form of sex work known as *enjo kōsai*, in which adolescent females provide much older men with sexual favors in exchange for material possessions. In doing so, this practice raises critical questions about adolescent female sexuality and control in Japan.

Part Four, Labor, Migration and Families, includes four chapters that address the feminization of low wage work and women’s strategies for socioeconomic mobility. Chapter Nine, “The Social Imaginary and Kin Recruitment: Mexican Women Reshaping Domestic Work” by Maria de la Luz Ibarra discusses the work and family lives of female Mexican domestic workers in Santa Barbara, California and Honolulu, Hawai’i. The author demonstrates how many female migrants recruit their female kin for work once they have established some tenuous form of settlement, thus showing the complex ways in which migration is a group rather than individual activity. Chapter Ten, “Breaking the Code: Women, Labor Migration and the 1987 Family Code of the Republic of the Philippines” by Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, details the Filipino/a construction of women as essentially domestic beings who paradoxically provide a significant source of remittances

via their migrant labor. Chapter Eleven, “Headloads: The Technologizing of Work and the Gendering of Labor” by Vivian Price, analyzes the impact of neoliberal India’s economic reforms upon the construction industry, which is becoming increasingly mechanized to the detriment of the millions of female and low caste laborers who work in this industry and are thus effectively left without state support of any kind. Chapter Twelve, “Gender and Modernity in a Chinese Economic Zone” by Nancy Riley, describes life in Dalian, an export-processing zone in Northeast China. Dalian functions as a site of social mobility for rural migrant workers, for whom “to be modern *is* to be urban” (227), despite the fact that this modernity offers them only low wages and few privileges beyond urban residence.

Part Five, Trafficking, features two chapters on the global rhetoric surrounding the traffic in women for the purposes of prostitution. Chapter Thirteen, “Female Sex Slavery or Just Women’s Work? Prostitution and Female Subjectivity within Anti-Trafficking Discourses” by Lucinda Joy Peach, and Chapter Fourteen, “Do No Harm”: The Asian Female Migrant and Feminist Debates in the Global Anti-Trafficking Movement” by Nancie Caraway both take on the polemical discourses surrounding sex trafficking. Caraway eloquently describes the contemporary frenzy over sex trafficking as “a metaphorical expression of the psyche of twenty-first-century market globalism, with its urge to order, market, and reconfigure human and capital resources” (266). Feminist researchers who study sex work (such as myself) might find themselves wondering why the editors opted to include two chapters that are quite similar in tone and method rather than featuring more field-oriented research with sex workers who are themselves the ambivalent targets of many of the anti-trafficking debates.

Part Six, Militarization, consists of two chapters (and an interview/discussion) that address the broad consequences of the burgeoning military industrial complex throughout the world. Chapter Fifteen, “Gender, Globalization, and Militarism: An Interview with Cynthia Enloe” features Kathy E. Ferguson, Gwyn Kirk and Monique Mironesco engaging in a vibrant conversation with Enloe about her pioneering work on the nuanced connections between otherwise seemingly disparate issues such as the feminization of low wage labor, the small arms trade and the social construction of gender. This format is interesting and could be considered an example of innovative feminist methodological strategies, but in the midst of so many other carefully argued chapters, it reads a bit like a last minute attempt to include Enloe’s important work. For this reviewer, a jointly authored article would have allowed the participants to more fully explore the numerous provocative points presented throughout the interview/discussion. Chapter Sixteen, “Environmental Effects of U.S. Military Security: Gendered Experiences from the Philippines, South Korea, and Japan” by Gwyn Kirk, links environmental destruction and militarism in Okinawa, South Korea and the Philippines. Kirk holds that security needs to be redefined to include human and environmental health given the devastating impacts militarization has had on the three areas of her case studies. Chapter Seventeen, “Globalizing and Gendered Forces: The Contemporary Militarization of Pacific/Oceania” by Teresia Teaiwa, presents a timely analysis of the devaluation of Pacific Islander soldiers in international military forces by individuals of both right and left political persuasions. Teaiwa persuasively argues that this simultaneous disregard for the lives and decisions of these Islander soldiers and the families they often support is symptomatic of a broader dismissal of Oceania as an area of little importance.

Overall, this ambitious collection of studies from throughout the Asia-Pacific region constitutes a well-presented and accessible volume that should be of interest to a wide range of scholars and students in Anthropology, Sociology and many areas of the Humanities. This volume will be of particular interest to students, scholars and even the educated general public, and makes a significant contribution to existing literature on gender and globalization. Most of the chapter authors are established authorities in their respective fields, yet the writing style is accessible enough for use by a wider audience outside of academia. The volume could be of great use in both undergraduate and graduate classes, particularly courses such as Feminist Epistemologies, Feminist Methods and Gender and Globalization. I found the vast majority of chapters accessible and engaging enough for potential use in Introduction to Women's Studies as well, thus expanding the broad possible reach of the book. *Gender and Globalization* could be of particular use in a methods course because all of the chapter authors specify their methods and work plans very clearly, thus making this an excellent example of how to do provocative, grounded feminist research.