
June 2023

Executive Editors' Introduction

Catherine Ndinda

Priyanka Tripathi

Kimberly Davis

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ndinda, Catherine; Tripathi, Priyanka; and Davis, Kimberly (2023) "Executive Editors' Introduction," *Journal of International Women's Studies*: Vol. 25: Iss. 4, Article 1.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol25/iss4/1>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

Executive Editors' Introduction

By Catherine Ndinda, Priyanka Tripathi, and Kimberly Davis

As we battle with continuing disparities and injustices based on gender and sexuality, the need for critical and nuanced analysis in this arena is more pressing than ever. This introduction highlights some of the important challenges and debates surrounding Women's and Gender Studies today and investigates how scholars and activists are trying to create a more equal and just society for all. In this regular issue of the *Journal of International Women's Studies*, the articles address diverse topics such as contraceptive use, barriers to sexual health, menstrual poverty, women's right to resources such as land, women police officers, women in political parties, women's career goals, gender-based violence in conflict situations, Gender Studies as an academic discipline, lesbians in film, and women's literature, among others. Below, we have organized the articles, essays, film reviews, and book reviews according to regions of the world, to aid readers in finding scholarship of interest to them.

Africa

In the essay "Born into Expectations," Lyndah N. Wasike uses her own experiences as a rural girl to explore the challenges of accessing education in Kakamega county, Kenya. The author underscores that despite the interest in advancing girls' education, rural girls encounter challenges within the home, the school environment, and the community. In the school environment, the division of labor between girls and boys is set. Her school, which is supposed to encourage the culture of learning for both boys and girls, is a site of gender discrimination in which girls were discouraged from reading books and assigned menial tasks. Through her personal narrative, the author illustrates that the personal is political and that gender discrimination and inequality are entrenched in the everyday activities of children in rural Kenya. It took Lyndah's own efforts and the aspirations of her parents to fast-track Lyndah on the road to success. Achieving women's empowerment and gender equality requires the boldness of parents who dare to go against the tide of entrenched patriarchal and cultural ideologies, to imagine an empowered future for their children—both boys and girls.

Adaobiagu Nnemdi Obiagu's article interrogates whether education and economic empowerment protect women against gender-based violence (GBV) in Nigeria. The findings suggest that in Nigeria, education and empowerment do not protect women from GBV but instead exacerbate it, echoing findings elsewhere (Bangladesh, Malawi, Kenya, and Uganda). Obiagu identifies three cultural factors that explain GBV in Nigeria: patriarchy and sociocultural factors, religious fundamentalism (Muslim and Christian), and the hidden curriculum that entrenches gender stereotypes. In a context where the ascribed gender roles for women place them in a subordinate position, their education becomes a disrupter and threat to the prevailing gender ideology. Obiagu argues that fundamentalist religious organizations that promote hegemonic masculinity are culprits in the promotion of intimate partner violence (IPV). The author concludes that dealing with GBV in religious societies such as Nigeria requires not only consciousness-raising among girls and women but also raising awareness among boys and men.

Floribert Patrick C. Endong grapples with the issue of rights for LGBTQ individuals in Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, and cinematic representations of queerness. The author acknowledges that Nigerians are deeply entrenched in different ethnic identities as well as

the Christian, Muslim and African traditional religions that have multitudes of followers. The LGBTQ agenda sits uneasily in this cultural and religious context. Despite entrenched social cleavages, the country is united in its opposition to the LGBTQ agenda. LGBTQ people have found Nollywood, the popular Nigerian cinema industry, a valuable avenue to disseminate their messages and ideas. The author employs the example of the film *Ife* to illustrate that even in the most conservative societies, LGBTQ advocates are disseminating their views in ways that seem entertaining and less threatening to the established status quo.

Etumboh Nguh Cyril, Numfor Che William, and Isabel Khan, in “The Impact of the Anglophone Crisis on Gender Equality in Cameroon” examine the impact of the Anglophone conflict on the achievement of gender equity and equality in Cameroon. The analysts trace the root of the current conflict to colonialism and the decisions taken at independence which made Cameroon a bilingual country with Anglophone and Francophone regions. The conflict which has affected mainly the Anglophone region of Cameroon has not only displaced communities but increased the vulnerability of women and girls to gender-based violence. The authors argue that the conflict in Anglophone Cameroon needs to be resolved and in that process gender equality and related concerns such as GBV need to be addressed.

South Asia: India and Pakistan

The land question is as contested in Pakistan as it is in most African countries. Iram Rubab, Beenish Malik, and Zujajah Bakht Aziz shed light on the status of women in Pakistan with regard to land ownership. The authors examine both Sharia and common law to establish which system works better for women in Pakistan. The authors argue that regardless of the legal system in place, women in Pakistan, as elsewhere in developing countries, encounter hurdles in their quest for land ownership. Rubab et al identify institutionalized patriarchy, female mobility, patriarchal control of citizenship and land documents, and bureaucratic processes as some of the key hurdles in the way of women owning land in Pakistan.

Rabbia Aslam and Saad Ali Khan’s “Student Perceptions of Gender Studies as an Academic Discipline in Pakistan” examines the perspectives and experiences of students pursuing a degree in Gender Studies at Pakistan’s Quaid-i-Azam University. The study reveals how many students were originally unaware of the field and had prejudices about it pushing a Western agenda and being irrelevant to their daily lives and career aspirations. On the other hand, Gender Studies assisted students in reflecting on and questioning their preconceived beliefs about gender, resulting in better knowledge and comprehension of gender issues. The authors recommend revamping curricula to include Pakistani feminist voices and to provide career counseling for students.

The article titled, “Perspectives of Women Police Officers in the Union Territory of Puducherry, India,” Chemmalar S. discusses how women are increasingly embracing physically demanding and male-dominated professions such as policing and details the hardships they experience on the job and their psychology in dealing with them. The researcher interviewed female officers in the Union Territory of Puducherry to better understand their experiences and perspectives, revealing that women are underrepresented and devalued in policing in this region.

In the article, “Muslim Women’s Rights Discourses in Kerala: Case Study of a Marginalized Group,” P. Shabna’s interview-based study discusses the limitations of the Islamic framework embraced by several sectarian Muslim women’s associations in the South Indian state of Kerala, and compares them to NISA, a progressive, autonomous Muslim women’s organization. The Islamic framework employed by the sectarian groups involves a reading of the Quran as a text affirming gender equality. Yet these sectarian groups are wary of feminism as a Western ideology and employ gender-essentialist notions of an ideal Muslim woman. In contrast, NISA offers a more

progressive notion of Islamic feminism that vigorously challenges the concept of Muslim ideal womanhood and Islamic family laws that oppress women.

Aman Ullah, Zafar Khan, Mahrukh Shakir, Zahid Ali Shah, and Rahman Ullah's "Analyzing Global and Local Media Representations of Malala Yousafzai" employs ethnographic research to investigate the discrepancies in how Malala is portrayed in global versus local media and sheds light on the complicated controversies surrounding her struggle. Even though she received international acclaim for her bravery and determination as a champion of women's right to education, her efforts were met with varied reactions in Pakistan, with some hailing her as an opportunist or the victim of a Western scheme.

This issue also offers film reviews of three recent Indian films. Employing the concept of "Fourth Cinema," Argha Basu and Priyanka Tripathi review *Kantara* (2022), a film that sympathetically depicts indigenous communities and the complex role of women in these societies. V.K. Karthika offers a critical review of *Maja Ma* (2022), a film that explores negative views of lesbianism within a traditional Indian society. Reviewed by Avishek Deb, *Sonata* (2017) depicts postmodern urban women who seem empowered but ultimately capitulate to patriarchal views of femininity.

Southeast Asia

Using data from Demographic and Health Surveys, Chiew Way and Siow Li Lai's "Women's Empowerment and Modern Contraceptive Use: Evidence from Four Southeast Asian Countries" explores the association between women's empowerment and modern contraceptive usage in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. The study's findings revealed that more empowered women were more likely to utilize modern contraceptive techniques, underlining the need to empower women in Southeast Asian nations to enhance their access to primary health care and promote improved reproductive health.

Focused on the ethnic Toba Batak community of Indonesia, Ratih Baiduri and Elly Prihasti Wuriyani's "Women's Resistance to Toba Batak *Umpasa* from a Feminist Perspective" analyzes gender ideologies in *umpasa*, a set of values passed down through oral poetry that addresses family expectations for sons and daughters. Although the authors conclude that *umpasa* is a predominantly patriarchal value system, Toba Batak culture also values daughters for their ability to confer status to the family in cultural rituals. Recent changes to *umpasa* include more gender-neutral language and the encouragement of daughters to earn an education and an independent income. The article also provides some evidence of women's resistance to their marginal position dictated by local customs.

In their article, "Gender-Based Conflicts in Political Parties: Male Domination in Central Java's Politics," authors Misbah Zulfa Elizabeth, Ririh Megah Safitri, Sholihan Sholihan, and Arikhah argue that despite Indonesian national legislation to increase women's participation in party politics, political justice for women has not yet been achieved. Using conflict theory, the authors draw from interviews and focus-group discussions to highlight overt, covert, and avoided conflicts between women activists in Central Java and the male-dominated political party management. Their findings locate gender asymmetry and marginalization of women as the cause of the conflicts that impede women's full participation in politics.

Middle East

Beverly McNally and Carmen Winkel's "Embracing the Changes" surveyed women undergraduates in Saudi Arabia, a society experiencing legislative change regarding women's

roles in society, to investigate the impact that this sea change has had on their future career intentions. Many of these ambitious young women have non-traditional career aspirations, such as software, engineering, corporate careers, and owning their own businesses. They plan to continue working even when married, and it is significant that their families are supportive of their aspirations. The study has practical implications for the government and higher education to ensure support for these women's career ambitions.

Bilal Hamamra's article offers an intertextual analysis of two works—Palestinian writer Fadwa Tuqan's autobiography *A Mountainous Journey* (1990) and Mary Sidney's early modern English translation *The Tragedy of Antony*. Hamamra finds trans-historical and transcultural continuities in these works; the authors share similar goals to memorialize their brothers through their own authorial identities and contributions to nationalist discourses. In Hamamra's analysis, both texts examine the perils of women's political speech, the silencing of women in their respective societies, and the role of female suicide and martyrdom (including Palestinian suicide bombers) as forms of political action. She argues that examining women-authored texts across periods contributes to a critical understanding of women's agency as speakers and writers.

Australia and New Zealand

Through a thematic analysis of interviews with ten key informants from a larger study, Sandra Basham and Jaya Dantas' "Australian Health Professional Identify Barriers to Asian Women's Sexual Health" investigates impediments to Asian migrant women's participation in sexual health services in Australia. The researchers identify four major hurdles to this lack of participation, including a lack of information and cultural shame around sexual topics in Asian women's cultural context. According to the key informants, a cultural humility approach is required for health professionals and sexologists to engage Asian migrant women in sexual health services in Australia due to the need to build trust.

"Tackling Menstrual Poverty: A Substantive Equality Approach to the Right to Education," a study by Aniketh Rao, examines the distribution of free menstrual products to New Zealand's primary and secondary school girls in order to combat menstrual poverty and increase their access to education. The study is founded on the substantive equality concept, a cornerstone of human rights. The researchers present data from scholarly and organizational sources to support the free distribution of menstrual products to reduce menstrual poverty and support menstruating girls' equal access to the right to education.

South America

Ximena Burgin's article, "Use of Technology by Ecuadorian Teachers: An Exploratory Study about Gender Roles" examines teachers' decision-making in their workplace conversations about implementing technology in the classroom. Based on data collected through Nominal Group Technique, the findings were that men tended to dominate the discussions, evidencing the *machismo* and gendered imbalance of power of Ecuadorian society. Burgin also found that men and women teachers expressed gendered differences in teaching philosophy that affected their use of technology in the classroom. Women teachers were more student-centered, taking a holistic approach to consider the beneficial effects of technology upon their students' skills, whereas men teachers were less nurturing and more focused on technology as a pragmatic aid for the teacher. Women teachers were also more open than men to the ideas of other teachers. Burgin's study demonstrates that teachers' decision-making processes, colleague interaction, and pedagogical philosophies are all influenced by sociocultural norms about gender roles.

Paloma Czapla also contributed a book review of Cassia Roth's book *A Miscarriage of Justice*. Roth's book offers a historical analysis of early 20th-century post-emancipation Brazil, focusing on the state's efforts to control women's reproductive lives.

United States and Europe

In a globe-spanning article, two Iranian scholars, Vida Rahiminezhad and Mahdiah Sadat Faal Nazari, employ the French feminist theories of Luce Irigaray to analyze a memoir by US writer Joyce Johnson, a female member of the male-dominated 1950s Beat movement. The article outlines Irigaray's concept of "feminine language" as a resistance to the masculine rules of language and applies those concepts to Johnson's *Minor Characters: A Beat Memoir*. Through close reading, they uncover Johnson's use of word play, unusual syntax and grammar, and vocabulary that draws upon the female body as a source of meaning-making. They also analyze Johnson's depiction of women's silence as a subversive feminist response to the constrictions of language upon women's subjectivity.

This issue also includes Mohosin Mandal's film review of *Silent Beauty* (2023), a film documentary about the childhood sexual abuse experienced by the Mexican-American filmmaker Jasmín Mara López. Ashley Lee also contributed a book review of *Fierce and Fearless*, a biography of Patsy Takemoto Mink, a Japanese-American politician who was the first woman of color elected to the US Congress.

Global

Aslı Ermiş-Mert's "Happiness, Life Satisfaction, and Gender Equality at the Micro and Macro Levels" uses global data from the Gender Inequality Index (GII) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to examine the impacts of gender equality or inequality upon people's levels of happiness and life satisfaction. It uses statistical analysis to explore how these two aspects of well-being are affected by the gender, educational level, and income of an individual as well as their attitudes toward gender egalitarian ideals. The main findings are contrary to expectation; they show that increasing gender inequality at the macro-level of a nation improves the likelihood for any person to be either very unhappy or very happy, and the pattern is the same for life satisfaction. However, in both gender-equal and gender-unequal countries, an increasing level of gender egalitarian ideology improves life satisfaction. The findings reveal the importance of improving gender equality at the macro level to enhance emotional well-being.

We have also included a book review by Linor Kadoch, who reviewed *Jewish Women's History from Antiquity to the Present*, an essay collection that addresses Jewish women's experience in various regions over a wide swath of time and place.