January 2024

Editor's Introduction

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**Recommended Citation**

Davis, Kimberly; Tripathi, Priyanka; and Ndinda, Catherine (2024) "Editor's Introduction," *Journal of International Women's Studies: Vol. 26: Iss. 1, Article 1.* 
Available at: https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol26/iss1/1

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Executive Editors’ Introduction

By Kimberly Chabot Davis, Catherine Ndinda, and Priyanka Tripathi

In this regular issue of the Journal of International Women’s Studies, we present scholarly articles, film reviews, book reviews, and creative writing addressing diverse topics in Women’s and Gender Studies across a wide terrain of nations in South and Southeast Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and North America. This issue offers a cluster of five articles addressing women’s work and economic empowerment. Another subtopic focuses on women’s experiences in academia, as professors and students. In the fields of Humanities and the arts, we include several articles and reviews showcasing the contributions of women artists, performers, and writers. Several pieces explore the experience and agency of marginalized women—refugee women, Dalit women, and an African American women activist. We also include clusters on women’s communities and the importance of spirituality in women’s lives, on queer and trans issues and reproductive rights, and on masculinity and men’s evolving gender roles. As editors, we hope that our readers will be inspired by the critical analysis of gender issues and the passionate advocacy gathered here, by writers and scholars dedicated to voicing feminist resistance and improving the lives of women across the globe.

Women and Economics: Working Women and Women’s Empowerment

The article by Clotilde Hernández Garnica, Sair Alejandra Martínez Hernández, and Armando Tomé González examines gender inequality in leadership positions and on corporate boards across the world, with a particular focus on Mexico. In many countries, men predominate in directorships and boardrooms, but when women are in decision-making positions, this leads to a snowball effect, increasing the hiring of other women leaders. They argue that more effort needs to be made to shift norms and establish gender quotas as a fair practice in forming corporate boards and filling directorship positions.

In the article, “Inactive Women as a Result of The Gender-Based Division of Labor: The “VirtualCall Project as a Possible Solution,” Feminist Economist Ebru Işık focuses on the problem of the large percentage of women in Europe (particularly Turkey) who do not participate in the paid labor market due to the gendered division of labor. The article analyzes the reasons behind women’s economic inactivity and a possible solution in the EU-funded VirtualCall Project, which aims to train women to work as call center agents in their homes. Işık discusses the advantages and disadvantages of home-based labor and concludes that the VirtualCall Project is a reasonable short-term effort to address economic inactivity.

Paola Selene Vera-Martínez and Erika Guadalupe Ceballos-Falcón discuss the notion of women’s empowerment based on their study in Usumacinta Canyon, Mexico. The article problematizes the issue of environment and development and illustrates the significance of these in the global debates on the conservation of Protected Areas. While the protected areas are important as they serve as carbon sinks for the globe, the benefits of these areas to local communities have been the subject of debate. Drawing on in-depth interviews, they describe the process of women’s empowerment as a result of their participation in beekeeping in the rural community in Usumacinta Canyon. The article provides valuable insights into the process rather than the outcomes of empowerment.

Another contribution to the theme of women’s empowerment is Moh Faidol Juddi’s article on “Communication Strategy Evaluation of the Empowerment Program for Women Ex-migrant
Workers in Indonesia.” The author focuses on Indonesian ex-migrant workers and the intervention by the government to ensure that these women, who were domestic workers, do not return to the same occupation but advance to other occupations such as microenterprises. The author critiques the communication strategy employed by the Indonesian government, which did not give space for the women to articulate their views. While the learned submissiveness of these women is an obstacle to their participation, the author argues that the government should have done prior work such as mapping out the range of resources and economic activities and options available to the women.

Melissa Langworthy, in the article “Women’s Microenterprise and the SDGs: Reframing Success in Women’s Economic Development in Sri Lanka,” laments the overemphasis on the financial success of women and underemphasis on dimensions of empowerment. Focusing on Sri Lanka, the author argues that household and spousal support are critical in achieving success for women’s enterprises. The author argues that for microenterprises to count among the tools used to assess the achievement of SDGs, there is a need to consider both the quality and quantity of women’s work.

Jamin Andreas Hübner reviews the book The Gender Order of Neoliberalism which examines how neoliberal ideology in India, Russia, and the United States creates a “cover story” of liberation that allows the continued exploitation of women as workers.

Women in Academia

The article “Jordanian Women in Academia: Barriers and Motivators in Scientific Research and Promotion” by Abeer Al Bawab and associates offers an extensive survey (with 1,121 respondents) of the impediments to the success of Jordanian women scientists in academic positions. Gender-related barriers to career progression included a higher burden of family and social responsibilities, fewer opportunities for leadership roles, and higher teaching load. The article offers suggestions for intervention, including mentorship programs and study abroad, to improve the professional growth of women scientists in Jordan.

The article by Ngozi Christiana Nwadike and associates, entitled “Work-Family Conflict and Stress: A Triangulated Analysis of the Plight of Working Mothers in Nigerian Universities,” highlights the challenges that working women experience in balancing work and childcare responsibilities. This paper provides insights about the complexity and nuances of the double-shift that women face in an African context. The paper makes valuable recommendations for policymakers and the larger society to consider in order to alleviate this burden on working mothers.

In their short story, “Professor Mali Romantic-Longhair and the Girl,” Fatma Fulya Tepe and Per Bauhn take on the issue of the sexual harassment and exploitation of women university students by male faculty. Setting their story in Turkey, they offer two divergent plots—one in which the woman student acquiesces to the harassment, and a second in which she resists. The two plotlines also suggest the importance of institutional authorities and other women listening to and supporting women who report abuse.

Creative Women: Artists, Performers, and Writers

Shalini Attri’s article “Transformed Feminist Spaces and Identity Construction: Redefining Women Pandwani Performers” explores the transformative potential of theater, specifically exploring how women Pandwani performers redefine their identities within feminist theatrical space in Chhattisgarh, India. The study emphasizes the role of performances in rewriting women’s histories, resisting assimilation into dominant cultures, and expanding feminist discourse within
the theatrical realm. The article highlights the significance of folk theater in providing a public space for subaltern voices and the challenging of gender binaries through the narratives of women Pandwani performers such as Teejan Bai.

Similar to Attri’s subject matter, two film reviews in this issue highlight women performers in formerly male-dominated artistic genres and communities. Minae Savas reviews the documentary Finding Her Beat, about women taiko drummers in Japan and North America, and Aditi Magotra reviews Street Heroines, a documentary film about women graffiti artists.

Rachid Lamghari’s article “The Emancipation of a Harem Girl: Resisting the Gendered Division of Space in Wafa Faith Hallam’s The Road from Morocco” studies the subversion of Orientalist and patriarchal narratives in Wafa Faith Hallam’s memoir, The Road from Morocco, specifically focusing on the emancipation of Saadia, a harem girl. Saadia challenges traditional representations of Eastern women by asserting agency, breaking free from the confinement of the harem, and crossing culturally prescribed boundaries to enter public spaces assumed to belong to men. The memoir dismantles stereotypes of passivity and confinement associated with Moroccan women, emphasizing Saadia’s liberation in demanding a divorce and establishing a business, actions which challenge and deconstruct patriarchal authority.

Marginalized Women and Agency

Several articles explore the experiences and highlight the agency of women on the margins—Dalits in India, refugee women in Turkey, and a 19th century Black American woman activist in the US. In her article titled “The Other Dimensions of Dalit Oppression: Tracing Intersectionality through Ants among Elephants,” Arundhati Sen explores the intersectionality of gender and caste oppression by analyzing Sujatha Gidla’s autobiography, Ants among Elephants. Drawing inspiration from bell hooks’ call for an inclusive feminism, the study challenges a narrow view of gender abuse by emphasizing how it is intertwined with hierarchical caste exploitation. The analysis focuses on three main aspects—eruptions of “Dalit rage” in the narrative voice of the text, the author’s personal experiences, and the intersectional dimensions of domination in Dalit women’s experiences—and highlights the importance of addressing interlocking strands of oppression in the experience of marginalized groups.

In their article “Balancing the Protection and Participation of Refugee Women through the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda: Notes from Turkey,” legal scholars Ebru Demi, Bilge Sahin, and Irem Sengul focus on Turkey, which hosts the largest numbers of refugees in the world. This interview-based legal study explores the extent to which national and international organizations are prioritizing the protection of refugee women from violence but are neglecting to include refugee women in decision-making processes concerning them. In these top-down organizations, refugee women are seen as voiceless and vulnerable beneficiaries of aid but not as agents. The authors recommend legally binding national and international frameworks to mandate greater participation of refugee women and to recognize their rights, ambitions, needs, and above all, their agency.

In this issue, Jennifer Rycenga reviews the book Maria W. Stewart and the Roots of Black Political Thought, a work of feminist recovery that showcases how the writings of this early-19th-century African American woman activist anticipated PanAfricanism and Black intersectional feminism.
Women’s Communities and Women’s Spirituality

The article on “Matrilineality, Water Knowledge and Networks, and the Position of Women in Rural Tanzania” tackles water information sharing networks in an area in Morogoro and uses that as a proxy to explore social interaction in communities that are structured along matrilineal or patrilineal lines or a mixture of the two. The article contributes to the existing body of literature on women’s access to water but also highlights the dominance of patriarchal decision-making at the community level. The authors Ruth Aernout, Sara Dewachter, and Nathalie Holvoet found that in matrilineal communities, divorced women were included in discussions and women made more independent decisions regarding water investment than in patrilineal communities.

Shruti Das and Ranjit Mandal review Ayşe Dursun’s book focused on the coalitions forged by organizations of Muslim women in Turkey and their participation in political action such as the headscarf movement.

Sayan Dey, Tias Maity, and Tanmay Srivastava’s article titled “Gender Empowerment in Transoceanic Feminine Folklore and Shrines: A Kin Study of Siddi Women’s Participation in Mai Misra Worship in Gujarat, India” delves into gender empowerment among Siddi women, a community of the African diaspora in India, specifically focusing on their participation in Mai Misra worship in Gujarat. While historical narratives often center on the contributions of African men, this study highlights the roles of women spiritual figures like Mai Misra, Makhaan Devi, and the goddess Luxmi in shaping Siddi culture. Through a kin study on the patterns of Mai Misra worship, the article demonstrates how these spiritual practices contribute to Siddi women’s empowerment, community and agency.

Ayesha Perveen’s poem “Kaml” explores the resilience of a South Asian woman resisting societal norms that deny her love. Through a blend of Urdu and English, the poem depicts the woman’s thirst for love in the face of unreflective customs. The title “Kaml” signifies a heightened level of madness where one transcends the worldly self to attain spiritual elevation through love, drawing parallels to the South Asian Sufi tradition’s concept of Ishq—an encompassing love for the divine. The poem ultimately portrays love as sacred and healing.

Queer and Trans Communities and Reproductive Rights

Doris Leibetseder and Leon Freude’s article, “Reproductive Homonalionalism and In/ter/dependence in Spain and Catalonia: ‘Feminazis’ and Queer and Trans Reproduction,” explores how the state and nation (of Catalonia and Spain) impact queer and trans people’s access to reproductive rights with the aid of Assisted Reproductive Technologies and surrogacy. Their overview of legal history charts vastly improved access, particularly as a result of the 2021 Spanish “trans law.” Yet their in-depth interviews with queer and trans people also identified the presence of discourses of “homonationalism,” an ideology that privileges LGBTQ+ people but discriminates against racialized others. They highlighted expressions of racism, anti-feminism, or alignment with neoliberal ideology and traditional, Catholic visions of the family. This timely article warns of the dangers of queer and trans people allying themselves with discriminatory ideologies in their own pursuit of reproductive rights.

Two reviews in our issue address similar themes, highlighting both reproductive justice and queer resistance. Madhavi Venkatesan reviews the book Surgery and Salvation: The Roots of Reproductive Injustice in Mexico, 1770-1940, while Peter Jnr Tshetu and Brian Pindayi review the film No Straight Lines—The Rise of Queer Comics.
Masculinity and the Evolution of Men’s Gender Roles

In his article titled “Attitudes of Unmarried Men and Women towards Stay-at-Home Husbands in Indian Society,” Rasabattula Srinivas investigates the attitudes of unmarried men and women in Indian society towards the concept of stay-at-home husbands as gender roles evolve. Findings reveal that 97% of male respondents are reluctant to adopt this role, while 86% of female respondents express hesitancy in marrying someone with such inclinations. Both genders cite reasons like “gender role conditioning,” “embarrassment,” and “power imbalance,” while women express additional concerns about the “financial burden on one partner” and a preference for “ambitious men.” The study concludes with recommendations for actions that Indian schools, media, and government can take to reshape gender roles and societal attitudes towards stay-at-home husbands.

Also exploring changing gender roles for men, Raheleh AkhaviZadegan reviews the documentary Beyond Men and Masculinities. The film explores how traditional masculinity harms men’s mental and emotional health and advocates for a redefinition of masculinity that accepts gender equality and allows for men’s vulnerability and emotional expression.

Finally, this issue of the JIWS also includes Prashant Maurya’s review of The Gendered War: Evaluating Feminist Ethnographic Narratives of the 1971 War of Bangladesh, a book that explores the relationship between gender, war, and political ideology.