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## Afterword: Gender and Globalization in Uncertain Times

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**Abstract** We face a systemic crisis of reproduction – in intimate relations and households, in capitalism overall, in our planet’s very environment. Thinking gender and globalization in tandem has a significant role to play in helping us to understand, to grapple with, perhaps to intervene in, this ongoing disaster.

**Keywords** Gender · Globalization · Social reproduction · Capitalism · Crisis

We face a systemic crisis of reproduction—in intimate relations and households, in capitalism overall, in our planet’s very environment. Thinking gender and globalization in tandem has a significant role to play in helping us to understand, to grapple with, perhaps to intervene in, this slow motion disaster (Orr 2012–2013). Our growing awareness of these issues illuminates discussions of gender and globalization in new ways, suggesting how far both the social world and scholarly analysis have moved since Boserup’s (1970) classic essay asked what was happening to “women” as “first world” capital was increasingly seeking out “third world women” to assemble their products.

What strikes a reader first on reading these wonderful essays is the shift in the meaning of the terms under discussion. Whereas earlier work sought to focus on “women”—a term assumed to encompass a clearly defined set of people whose bodies and identities mapped neatly onto each other—more recent work starts with gender or sexuality, and understands the terms themselves far more broadly. Thus in this issue, Choo and Leonard focus on the way gendered subjects are integrated into shifting transnational structures, whereas Lakimsetti and McKay & Angotti are not focused on subjects at all, but on the discourses that locate them and shape the political context in which they live. What’s more, even Choo, writing the single article here that focuses on “women,” does so to explain the variation in migrant women’s experiences, referencing neither their feminine conditioning nor a patriarchy structured around it, but instead analyzing their varied relationships to the structuring of “men’s work;” that is, it

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is the gendering of work not the sex of workers that accounts for the experiential diversity she encounters. Similarly, Leonard, focusing in this case on men, does so with an eye to the complexity of gendered relations, arguing both that the “oil complex” in Chad undermines men’s capacity to enact culturally appropriate masculinity and that rather than denoting a zero sum game with women, these incapacities ultimately hurt women as well.

Lakimsetti and McKay & Angotti turn their attention not to subjects but to discourses, in both cases looking at the interpenetration of colonial histories and contemporary transnational and national discourses to understand the legal and political treatment of sexuality, the first in India, the second in three countries in Africa. Here the “gender” of gender and globalization refers to sexuality, and the authors are focused on understanding the organization of politics around sexuality, not directly on the experiences of sexual subjects. In these latter two essays, the shift in what is meant by “globalization” is equally striking. Both essays, in distinct ways, demonstrate that the “local” context was always already “global,” so that claims to authentic local discourses already reflect prior colonial structuring. Lakimsetti is especially concerned with the highly varied set of relations between transnational and national political discourse across distinct arenas, whereas McKay & Angotti focus more directly on the way contests over the treatment of same-sex relations reflect complex struggles over power across both national and transnational fields. In both cases, the “globalization” under discussion is not an external force, impinging on a static local, but instead describes a varied set of relations across scales that shift in importance over time as well as space.

These shifts in object of analysis reflect changes beyond the field of gender and globalization itself, in the discussions taking place about the two terms separately. Nonetheless, the implications for this scholarly arena in particular are especially rich. As both terms are broadened, the analysis of their relationship deepens as well, revealing further levels of complexity in each—an outcome evident in all of these essays. Thus, the move from “women” to gender/sexuality makes it possible to ask new questions about globalization: How are nation states structured in and around assumptions about intimate life (McKay & Angotti)? At what cost, and to whose benefit, do postcolonial states defend their sovereignty in the face of pressures from the Global North (Lakimsetti)? How do workplaces use assumptions about what is owed to particular subjects to define what can be expected of, or what is due to, their migrant workers (Choo)? Conversely, rethinking globalization as a multidirectional and variegated process allows us to rethink gender as well: How are “women” distinctively located within “gender” and what sorts of inequalities does this generate between women who are otherwise quite similar (Choo)? What happens to “patriarchy” when men’s capacity to enact locally appropriate forms of masculinity is undercut by new economic forms (Leonard)? Under what conditions is it appropriate to think of women selling sex as a form of patriarchal oppression and under which is it better understood as one job among many, due the dignity of decent pay and conditions of labor, and who gets to decide (Lakimsetti)? In focusing on the interpenetration of global forces and gendered discourses, we come to understand both the postcolonial structuring of transnational space and the workings of gender and sexuality overall in greater depth.

Discussing these links also invites reflection on a set of questions not addressed as directly in these articles. It is striking that although we encounter insightful analyses of both gender and sexuality in this issue, their links are less directly taken up. It would be fruitful to think about what the implications of tackling these terms in tandem might be. In what ways are gender, sexuality, and reproduction simultaneously at stake in these narratives (Butler 2004; Ingraham 1994)? For instance, insofar as nation states use homophobia to define their borders, how are these tactics related not only to sexuality, but also to ongoing inequalities between women and men? Insofar as social reproduction happens through women’s unpaid care work at many

levels, how might one think about heteronormative discourses as fundamental to certain kinds of national structuring? If not just gender or sexuality but their combined instantiation in heteronormativity is at play, how might that shift our understanding not only of family, but of the logic of national identification and policy as well? Or to flip the question, what exactly is it about the undermining of men's capacity to contribute to social reproduction in "appropriate" ways that drives them to Viagra and other manifestations of sexual anxiety? That is, how might we theorize the intricate relationships between gender and heterosexuality, rather than discussing them as separate categories of power and difference? Insofar as part of the power of this work lies in making connections visible, thinking explicitly with the concept of heteronormativity might be one way to do that more deeply.

These reflections bring me back to the issue with which I opened these comments: How does all this speak to the current conjuncture? I would argue that there are both intellectual and political consequences to thinking gender and globalization together, consequences that, of course, are intertwined as well. Intellectually, understanding the relationship between gender and globalization directs our attention to the actual, quotidian complexity of the empirical world. Too often, "theory" in sociology aims to simplify, to find the Occam's razor that slices across a social space and "explains" what happens as elegantly as possible. However, the search for elegant explanation can obscure important aspects of the contingent and multiple processes through which empirical reality unfolds. Thus, the work of thorough empirical description can itself constitute a theoretical project, recognizing and making visible the multiple forms of power out of which new identities, discourses and structures precipitate. By bringing sex, gender, reproduction and (hetero)sexuality into explicit relation with time and space at multiple scales, work in the arena of "gender and globalization" forces us to contend with the complexity of the political and thus to describe it in theoretical terms that reveal rather than cut through the multiplicity of power relations at work.

This capacity to recognize complexity is of course related to an early insight of feminism itself: The close links between personal and political and, I would add, the intellectual as well. Tracing the threads that link habitual intimacies around both desire and care to national and economic formations and patterns is an eminently feminist project, and thus one that connects the intellectual project described above to a pressing set of political as well as intellectual stakes.

In the years since the millennium, we have repeatedly found ourselves at the brink of catastrophic failure(s). These problems can all fruitfully be thought of as crises of reproduction, operating at a variety of scales (Federici 2012). From a global reorganization of care work, "solved" at the expense of the world's poorest children and the women struggling to care for them (Hochschild 2000), to multiple financial crises, boomeranging from north to south and back every few years, to the warming climate and exponentially more frequent extinctions, we find households, transnational capitalism and the natural environment all at the limits of their reproductive capacity. These challenges echo each other. In their own ways, all these systems are less and less able to dependably project themselves into the future – whether in imagination or in actuality. At the same time, these stresses interact, tending to trigger and reinforce (and occasionally to undermine) each other. For instance, the increasing dominance of financial capitalism and the instabilities this engenders stress both household reproduction and the "natural" environment. At the same time, families without resources place ever more stress on local ecosystems. Completing the circle, a failing climate system threatens the risk models on which financial systems rely. I could go on, but these examples provide a sense of the intricate links across scales. From the vantage point of a scholarly field dedicated to thinking gender and globalization at the same time, "reproduction" surfaces as a lynchpin term—linking essential and pressing issues across arenas.

It is easy to dismiss “the personal is political” as a quaint slogan from back in the day. However, the phrase was, and is, not only a political intervention, but also a descriptive claim about how the world works that argues that intimate, state and economic actions impel and trigger each other in substantively important ways. Within this frame, the intellectually and politically generative meaning of “reproduction” emerges as a revealing lens, illuminating similarities across and links between crises of economic, social and natural reproduction at varied scales. As capitalism repeatedly reaches its breaking point, only to be saved again and again at the cost of equity, equality, justice, and nature itself, it behooves us to ask how, and if, this world can continue to sustain and remake itself in the face of contemporary challenges. And it is here, in the context of these troubling and troubled questions about an uncertain future—about “reproduction” itself—that one can see the intellectual possibilities, and political necessity, of a field generated at the intersection of “gender and globalization.” These essays, on their own and as a collection, make up one part of that larger project of analysis and transformation.

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