Introduction

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This General Issue has been jointly edited by Sally R Munt and Rose Richards, and is enhanced by two focussed articles on Post Secular Feminism that have been commissioned and edited separately by Professor Sarala Krishnamurthy, who recently retired from her position as Professor of English and Applied Linguistics, and former Executive Dean at the Namibia University of Science of Technology. Sarala starts this Introduction with a descriptive context to, and analysis of, the articles on post secular feminism. Then, Sally and Rose will introduce the general articles which have been submitted to this, the fifteenth issue of *Feminist Encounters*, for Autumn 2024.

Feminist Encounters has been growing in international reputation, so much so that in 2023 we had over 125,000 readers in over 100 countries. We continue to encourage this flourishing of feminist debates globally, and thank our readers for their participation and support over the past eight years, and the future success and growth of the journal.

POST SECULAR FEMINISM

On June 4, 2024, the Indian nation voted the Right-wing Hindu party BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) back into power, giving a positive endorsement of the good work that had been done for ten years, but rather reluctantly. Consequently, even though BJP won, it did not do so with an overwhelming majority, but with its allies, the NDA (National Democratic Alliance), seeking additional support from two or more external parties. The BJP fought on a Hindutva ideology and successfully rode this wave for a decade, but anti-incumbency, youth unemployment, and the tiresome repetition of outdated slogans ensured that the Hindu party returned to power with its wings clipped. BJP had first got the mandate to rule in 2014 because it pushed a Hindu majority agenda which propagated divisive and polarising politics, (that is, Hindu versus Muslims), claiming that previous governments had followed a minority Muslim appeasement model at the cost of the major Hindu polity. This ideological shift received some traction from the public at large. In this context, what might the present-day scenario and Right-wing ideology mean for women in India in general and Muslim women in particular? This is explored through a framework of what might be described as post secular feminism.

Stoeckl and Rosati (2012: 4) state that 'a post secular society is a society in which one can find high levels of reflectivity both on the side of modern society and on the side of religious traditions, both being capable of finding from within their own imaginaries good reasons to enter into a dialectical relationship of mutual tolerance and/or recognition.' With the advent of modernisation, most societies in the democratic world have moved towards the secular to accommodate disparate religious and pluralistic groups. Nevertheless, in the postmodern scenario, gradually religion has restaked its claim to public influence and relevance, while secularism is losing ground to such forces leading to a worldwide 'resurgence of religion' seen in such phenomena as the missionary expansion, a fundamentalist radicalisation, and the political weaponisation of violence inherent in some of the world's religions. For example, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali born, Dutch-American writer, activist and politician points out that Islamisation entrenches itself in modern societies when refugees move into ghettos and, over a period of time, start asserting their right to practise their religion even if it obstructs other groups. In order to ensure a well

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functioning society based on democratic principles of multiculturalism and plurality, the post-secular embraces all religious practices.

The first two articles in this issue grapple with the concept of the post secular within the ambit of modern feminism, with particular reference to the Muslim response to majoritarian and identitarian politics in India. The first takes up the symbolic issue of *hijab*, a head scarf worn by religious Muslim women which caused a political turmoil when a group of Indian students claimed their right to don the *hijab* in school over and above the standard uniform requirement stipulated by the school authorities, stating that they did not think the *hijab* was an imposition on them by their traditional leaders and that the school had no business interfering with their religious and cultural practice. In this article, Ipshita Chanda proceeds to argue from a feminist perspective, that linking women's 'dress' with progress in order to essentialise and politicise identity is challenged at every turn by Muslim women. According to them, post-secular feminism should actively enforce the assurances given to the citizen by the constitution, which promises equal rights for all citizens in a diverse, multicultural and pluralistic society. The author contends that Muslim women's struggle includes the right to practice one's faith without fear over and above the norms administered by the majoritarian government which believes that its obligation to enforce commonality amongst different religious groups is ideal and it is one desired by all Muslim women since they would want to blend in. Chanda specifically locates the use of *hijab*, a practice signifying a particular religion, Islam, in the democratic state and pluralistic society of India, wherein the Constitution gives every citizen the right to practice, preach and profess a religion.

The second article takes up the control and expectation of the traditional *Ulema* (a body of Muslim scholars who have specialised knowledge of Islamic sacred law and theology) in Kerala (a state in South India), and examines how it influences Mappila (a Muslim sect) women. Making use of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, digital ethnography with a sample of thirty respondents and secondary sources, Shabira Kolakkadan attempts to articulate the concept of piety and lofty ethics expressed among young Mappila women. Set against the geopolitical backdrop of the Indian Hindu majoritarian government and its institutions which professes that it wishes to 'save' Muslim women from the debilitating, humiliating stranglehold Islam has on the female sex, Kolakkadan states that the post-secular turn has problematised European feminism in terms of it emphasis on political subjectivity and personal agency, proclaiming that religion becomes the tool to enforce subjugation to the diktats spelt out in the religious texts. Pointing out that historically, the Gulf migration of male members of the Mappila community has led to the socio-economic transformation of Muslim women, which has resulted in education, mobility, agency and greater autonomy in decision making for the Muslim family, Kolakkadan argues that the younger generation of Mappila women choose to follow modern norms, making some compromises with their religious teachings. While they adhere to their traditional attire, Mappila women are articulate and actively participate in discussions which had to do with their religious and cultural practices as well as public discussions about appearance, and continuing to emphasise their religious identity through *hijab, purdah,* and *shariah* law. She interviewed young Mappila women who are active in social media, who wear *hijab* as part of their piety and invoke Islamic traditions in everyday life. These largely middle-class women are mothers and postgraduates from state-run institutions who contribute enthusiastically in contemporary discourses about gender, nation, and citizenship. She states that the *Ulema* imposes cultural behaviour on women, following the patriarchal norms of modern society, that are quite contrary to what is originally written in the *Quran* and *Hadiths* (Islamic religious texts). Islamic sermons distinguishing between a 'good Muslimah woman' and an educated one, claim that the first duty of the Muslim woman is to marry and look after her family. Educated and professional women cannot carry out the same responsibility as 'stay at home' wives. Women's self reliance and autonomy is therefore perceived as a threat to men's authority, their education is discouraged.

The author examines young Mappila women's notions of marriage and domesticity in social media, in detail. Clubhouse and WhatsApp group discussions reveal the complicated relationship between the *Ulema's* conception of household chores, and the young Mappila women's opinions and insights. Pious young Mappila women think that the male expository injunctions of the *Quran* and Prophet Muhammad, are underlying the *Ulema's* framework of appropriate femininity, and are in need of critical exploration. Kolakkadan asks further questions around men's and shared responsibility towards child rearing, marital relationships, domestic responsibilities, sexual relations within a marriage, polygamy, and motherhood.

These two articles open up further discussions about how feminism is perceived within Islam, and readers are encouraged to review our earlier special issue Gender Activism in India[1] where you will find more articles that explore Islamic and Muslim feminisms.

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[1] https://www.lectitopublishing.nl/feminist-encounters/volume-7/issue-1

GENERAL ARTICLES

"'I am on Guard": The Making of Race, Gender and Affect in Human-Dog Relations in South Africa' by Catherine Rudolph is the first of our articles in the general section of this issue. This article analyses human-dog relations in the post-apartheid White South African suburbs to show how they operate in the production of racial and gendered difference. Her analysis draws primarily on the author's own experience as a White woman growing up in the South African suburbs, and her work as a dog walker, as well as being based in some primary empirical, qualitative research, which is drawn from interviews with the owners of two dog day-cares in Cape Town. The article tracks the affective and biopolitical effects of human-dog relationality to consider how they work in the socio-spatial structuring of the White suburbs. Using Donna Haraway's understanding of relations across difference in interspecies 'becoming', the article augments this with Harlan Weaver and Sarah Ahmed's respective theorisations of the work of affect between bodies. It outlines White discourses of fear around crime and security, and describes the spatial organisation of the suburb, which informs dogs' socialisation/enculturation with White people, and their concomitant hostility towards Black people. Suburban dogs become part of a racialised species kinship, in which they are cast as White people's companions, while protecting private property and White bodies. The article considers how dogs reproduce the historico-racial schema so that Black subjects are made to feel vulnerable in White space. Finally, it looks at gendered racialised narratives of threat and the construction of White women as objects of protection in relation to the imagined threat of Black men. By analysing these modes of relation, this article shows how interconnectedness yields an ethical responsibility towards others, across differences of race and species.

Mathias Klitgård has written the second article in the current issue, on 'Queer Renaturalisations: Guy Hocquenghem's Contradictory Nature Politics, Between Identity and Desire'. Mathias' article explains how queerphobic discourses frame nature as defined by reproductive heterosexuality, or as defined by unruly desires that civilised heterosexuality promises a progress away from. This article argues that both these politicised determinations of nature follow a logic of *renaturalisation* – a strategy that invokes nature and the natural to reinforce a normative process. He argues that the ambiguity of nature discourses stems from a conflictual construction of queerness as both social and antisocial. Because queerness oscillates between being a recognisable identity and a general critique of everything social, nature discourses used to justify heteronormative ontologies are contradictory, and therefore must change according to the context of the argument. Excavating a theory of *renaturalisation* from Guy Hocquenghem, this article will suggest that queer politics should take nature more seriously - not because nature is inherently progressive or conservative but because this very duality materialises through cultural anxieties around queerness.

In 'Managing Sex, Safeguarding the Soldier: Gender, Race and Regulationism in Nineteenth Century Colonial Punjab', Sameera Chauhan explains how managing sex was an important part of Britain's imperial project in the colonies, specifically India. Using a wide range of archival materials and examining the political debates and medical discourse from the nineteenth century, this article delves into the colonial military enterprise of regulating sexual recreation for British troops, and the processes through which the sexualised native woman was configured in colonial Punjab. Chauhan argues that paradoxical attempts to make sex available, while simultaneously emphasising imperial social mores of sexual respectability, led to the casting of the 'prostitute' as a colonial bogeyman; a vulgar but necessary evil, and a vector of disease.

In the next article we present for this issue, Longlong Ge writes about 'Repression, Permeation, and Circulation: Retracing and Reframing *Danmei* Culture Online in Mainland China'. Longlong Ge discusses the popular culture genre of *Danmei* (耽美), which is also called 'boy's love', and refers to these fantasy textual stories depicting gay male romantic relationships (McLelland and Aoyama, 2015). The rapid online proliferation of this popular culture has triggered scholars to reflect on the 'queer culture' in which it is represented. The article explores the intrinsic connection between Chinese *danmei* culture and Chinese queer culture in digital media. By adopting the research method of media archaeology and culture materialism, Ge maps the development of *danmei* culture in mainland China into three periods: the repression period (1994-2003) when the state authority compelled *danmei* and queer culture to find shelter in virtual cyberspace; the permeation period (2003-2016) when queer culture reshaped *danmei* culture, and when the former two generated multiple forms of expression on the internet; and finally the circulation period (2016-2021) when digital media industrialised *danmei* culture. Then, a cultural framework, 'queer-*danmei*-media' is proposed, in reference to the interaction of the 'affect-body-world' described by Melissa Gregg, Gregory J. Seigworth, and Lisa Blackman, in order to reinforce the social and political functions of *danmei* and transfer it from a generalised pop culture towards the more *outré* politics of cultural representation and campaigning position of queerness and feminism.

In 'Sarah Leavitt's *Tangles*: Teaching Queer Caregiving Memoir on Disability, and Pedagogy as Resistance', author Jane Tolmie examines Canadian artist Sarah Leavitt's graphic novel *Tangles: A story about Alzheimer's, my mother and me* (2010, 2011 UK), in relation to queer identity, feminist wilfulness (Ahmed, 2014), and critical disability

studies. *Tangles* takes up themes of lesbianism, disability, and activism, and it does so through storytelling. Studies around life writing and disability, including the dementia disease Alzheimer's, point the reader strongly toward recognition of the key importance of storytelling in the preservation of selfhood. Tolmie asks the reader to consider whose stories are told, and whose are not, and by whom; how can or does patient selfhood emerge or survive in caregiving narratives written and/or drawn by others? This article examines this graphic memoir in the contexts of Comics Studies, Canadian Gender Studies and Critical Disability Studies.

In 'Outbursts, Discipline, and Wake-Up Calls: Gendered Emotionalities in Men's Gambling' by Klara Goedecke describes how within gambling debates and research, emotions are associated with irrationality, loss of control, and problem gambling. Simultaneously, they have a complex relationship to masculine positions, which are said to be connected to both stoicism and aggressivity. Using interviews with Swedish men gamblers and feminist and critical theorisations of emotions, this article discusses experiences, negotiations, and performances of emotions within men's gambling. The article demonstrates that emotions and control were entangled themes in the research, but discussed as separate by the individuals who were interviewed, who used emotion work in order to navigate their own experiences in relation to larger discourses about gender, health, and 'sovereignty' in relation to gambling. The article expands feminist masculinities research by providing in-depth, detailed discussions about men's emotionalities. It also contributes to gambling research by integrating problematising perspectives on emotions and to research about the production of gendered emotionalities under capitalism.

In '"Get Fierce in 5!": Depictions of the 'Healthy' Girl Body in *Seventeen* Magazine, 2016 to 2017' Shara Crookston updates another domain of popular culture, that of teen magazines. *Seventeen* Magazine, the longest running magazine for adolescent girls in the United States, reinforces problematic images of the 'healthy' adolescent girl by routinely featuring slim celebrities and models, all of whom adhere to a desirable body ideal of hegemonic beauty. Misleading and contradictory narratives of postfeminist, neoliberal empowerment include telling girl readers to love their bodies while simultaneously portraying the slim body as preferable. Additionally, most issues of *Seventeen* feature a diet-themed section, thereby encouraging food restriction and the surveillance of eating. Findings from this feminist content analysis of the magazine from 2016 to 2017 challenge *Seventeen's* stated mission of 'celebrating real girls with our social-first approach, inviting them into the conversation and engaging them in real experience as they navigate major milestones'. Thus, Shara helps us understand how postfeminism can create ambiguous messaging on femininity to young women, and explains why more classic, conformist stereotypes can undermine and reinforce female normativity.

The feminist bookstore became an institution in the global north in the wake of the second wave feminist movements of the 1970s. In 'Between Refusal and Refuge. Queer Feminist Bookstore Savannah Bay', Suzanne van der Beek and Catherine Koekoek write about how feminist bookstores have played an important role in the creation of feminist spaces since the end of the 20th century. In the Netherlands, Savannah Bay is one of the last remaining in a previous network of feminist bookstores. This article explores how the bookstore manages to uphold its function as a feminist space while operating in relative isolation. The data used for this analysis consists of a series of interviews with volunteers working at Savannah Bay. This data is analysed via Bonnie Honig's *Feminist Theory of Refusal* (2021), which connects three forms of feminist resistance within one arc of feminist refusal. Crucial to this arc is the circular movement where the women first leave the city, then organise a new way of living, and then return to the city to implement their ideas. By reading the experiences of Savannah Bay volunteers via Honig's theory of refusal, this article analyses how the bookstore manages to uphold a feminist space while being embedded in a predominantly patriarchal public sphere. It demonstrates the complex ways Savannah Bay continuously negotiates its relationship to the customers and volunteers it caters for on the one hand, and a patriarchal public sphere which it seeks to reform on the other hand. Additionally, this reading extends and nuances Honig's theoretical approach by relating it to empirical data, which raises questions about the conditions for fulfilling Honig's feminist arc of refusal, and about the relations between the various moments of the arc.

In "Precarity Factors of Street-Based Sex Work Within Criminalised Contexts: A Study in Athens, Greece", the large team of researchers and collective authors: Stavroula Triantafyllidou, Paraskevi Siamitrou, Evangelina Ntinopoulou, Anna Apostolidou, Anna Kouroupou, Sofia Kotsia, Anna Papadaki, Giorgos Papadopetrakis, Konstantina Papastefanaki, Aggeliki Sougle, Vaggelis Tsiaras, Lissy Canellopoulos, and Antonis Poulios, help us to better understand sex work in Athens. This community research study investigates the intersecting self-identified precarity factors and identities associated with street-based sex work in a criminalised context in Greece. The community research project was executed in order to understand how to improve the effectiveness of individualised care interventions to this minority and stigmatised community. Interviews of 264 cis and trans female sex workers were conducted from June 2021 to December 2022, at a community day centre for sex workers in Athens. The community-based precarity index for sex workers was used, which was developed at the community centre itself, using factors identified by sex workers themselves. Street-based sex workers more commonly reported interrelated precarious factors, such as perceived problematic substance abuse, homelessness, client violence, medical issues, and trouble with the police. Trans and refugee identities were both associated with street-based sex

work as well. The collective authors emphasise how harm reduction, gender-affirmative and multilingual and multicultural interventions are essential in street-based sex work intervention programs. Decriminalisation of sex work is recommended to reduce the harms and risks associated with sex work.

Following this excellent and diverse range of articles, this issue presents several book reviews from contemporary publications in Feminist Studies, for you to peruse.

BOOK REVIEWS

Narnia Bohler-Muller reviews *Feminist Institutionalism in South Africa: Designing for Gender Equality* (edited by Amanda Gouws, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and the National Research Foundation (NRF) funded SARChI Chair in Gender Politics in the Department of Political Science at Stellenbosch University). The book demonstrates the shutting down of gender activism within the South African state was at least partly due to the clash of ideologies of feminism, race and class, as well as a lack of political will to support feminist and women's initiatives.

Nombulelo Tholithemba Shange reviews Stephanie S. Starling's *Womanhood in Contemporary Botswana*. The book investigates the post-Covid realities for contemporary Batswana women within a global context of attacks on women's rights. The women's stories illustrate their survival tactics as well as their struggles, and the tensions between African traditions and modernity. The idea of double patriarchy permeates the book in various ways, showing how contemporary Batswana women must navigate a complex social system to survive and find an identity.

Samia Rahman reviews *Muslim Women in Britain, 1850-1950: 100 Years of Hidden History* (edited by Sariyah Cheruvallil-Contractor and Jamie Gilham). This book combines historical archival work and sociological frameworks to show how and why events played out as they did. The book traces the development of British Muslim communities and the role of women in them. It also makes a connection from the Victorian age to the current period and shows that many of the debates of the 19th century are still in play now. The narratives of women converts to Islam are also discussed, including hopes for emancipation in their new religion and their continued struggles with patriarchy.

Alice Ashcroft reviews *She's in CTRL: How Women Can Take Back Tech* by Anne-Marie Imafidon. Ashcroft describes the book as accessible to both feminist scholars and people working in Computing. The book discusses the importance of developing a growth mindset, dealing with ingrained and systemic sexism, the gendered language of tech, the effect of caregiving and the need to take back control through technology. Actionable steps toward gender equality in tech are included.

We commend this issue to you, and we hope you enjoy reading it.

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