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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgpc20>

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Version of record first published: 05 Dec 2008.

To cite this article: Louise C. Johnson (2008): Re-placing gender? Reflections on 15 years of Gender, Place and Culture , Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography, 15:6, 561-574

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09663690802518412>

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Re-placing gender? Reflections on 15 years of *Gender, Place and Culture*

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This article reflects on *Gender, Place and Culture (GPC)* from 1994 to mid-2008, to highlight some of the key subjects and debates which have been delimited and progressed within its pages. Launched simultaneously with the cultural turn in human geography, *GPC* proceeded to raise important questions about identity and difference, effectively reflecting but also driving a number of transformative intellectual and political agendas. This reflection will focus on three interrelated sites of such activity: empirical, theoretical and political. Empirically, numerous articles have examined the ways gender is lived, in and across spaces and these have been enlivened by approaches highlighting masculinities, sexualities and embodiment. Theoretically these subjects have been informed by post-colonial and post-structural frameworks, directing discussion towards multiple identities, reflexivity, research practice, performativity, material cultures, positionality and the nature of academic knowledge. In addition, *GPC* has registered progressive political concerns for justice and equality, though the nature and extent of its political import has been legitimately questioned from without and within the pages of the journal. The resolution of the many dilemmas associated with the ways gender is lived, thought about and practiced has not always been successful in the pages of *GPC*, and the ongoing reality of Anglo-American dominance, the persistence of women's inequality and the tension between discursive and political activism, remains. However, in re-placing gender over the last 15 years, *GPC* has been a journal of serious and path-breaking scholarship which has further legitimized the value of feminist geography.

Keywords: feminism; Feminist Geography; cultural turn; embodiment; sexuality; masculinity; feminist politics

Introduction

As a feminist geographer, I approached the launch of *Gender, Place and Culture (GPC)* in 1994 with great excitement but also apprehension, predicting three trajectories in terms of the journal's impact on the spatial disciplines: incorporation, engagement and transformation (Johnson 1994). At the time of its foundation, Anglophone feminist geography had charted a particular history: moving from its 1970s critique and inclusion of women's concerns to engage over the 1980s with structural dimensions of gender inequality. By the early 1990s, there was a new emphasis – on post-structural analysis and fractured, multiple, performed and discursive identities. It was primarily in these terms that *GPC* engaged and transformed geography. This article reflects on *GPC* from 1994 to mid-2008, to highlight some of the key subjects and debates which have been delimited and progressed within its pages. Launched simultaneously with the cultural turn in human geography, *GPC* proceeded to raise important questions about identity and difference, race, gender, masculinity and sexuality, performativity and the negotiations of

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gender in space, queer and post-colonial discourses and transnational citizenship, effectively reflecting but also driving a number of transformative intellectual and political agendas.

An overview in 2003 by Peake and Valentine isolated five core themes operating within the journal: social reproduction, paid work, public space and mobility, 'race' and colonization, and activism (Peake and Valentine 2003). My own take on such a history revisits these dimensions to isolate three interrelated sites of engaging but also transformative activity: empirical, theoretical and political. Empirically, there have been many articles on the ways gender is lived, in and across spaces; and indeed there has been a great deal of vital research on paid work, social reproduction and mobility in and around homes and communities, in first as well as third world countries, in cities and rural environments. At these sites, there have been ground-breaking studies of masculinities, sexualities and embodiment. It is these innovative elements rather than the more thoroughly discussed subjects of work, home and community that will be the focus of this reflection. Theoretically these subjects – as well as those of work, social reproduction, etc. – have been strongly informed by post-colonial and post-structural frameworks, directing discussions towards new takes on multiple identities, reflexivity, research practice, performativity, material cultures, positionality and the nature of academic knowledge. Across these concerns, there has been a recent focus on those writing from – or at least about – the geographical and cultural margins – by those from Asia, Africa, South America and Eastern Europe and minorities within first world countries – which has served to extend the empirical as well as political agenda of the journal. In addition to these empirical and theoretical emphases, *GPC* has echoed ongoing political concerns emanating from feminism but also from other progressive movements for justice and equality, articulated by ethnic minorities and those from the 'third world', though the nature and extent of its political import has been legitimately questioned from without and within the pages of the journal.

In the process of leading these interventions, the journal has registered a generational change, to re-place original preoccupations with gender and women with new concerns for masculinities, race and sexualities, embodiment, oppression and the mutually constitutive nature of space and gender, while also breaching the usual borders between categories, nations and sub-disciplines. The resolution of the many dilemmas associated with the ways gender is lived, thought about and practiced has not always been successful in the pages of *GPC*, and the ongoing reality of Anglo-American dominance, the persistence of women's inequality and the tension between discursive and political activism, remains. However, in re-placing gender, *GPC* has become a place of serious and path-breaking scholarship which has further legitimized the value of feminist geography within geography and other disciplines. In this positive sense, there has been widespread incorporation of the perspective. In what follows I will explore some of these sites of innovative empirical, theoretical and political practice, to highlight continuities as well as shifts of emphasis over the 15 years, to affirm the immense value while also noting some of the limitations of these agendas.

Living/studying embodied gender

The empirical, theoretical and political scene for *GPC* was set early, with its opening articles on the construction of class, racial and gender difference in the homes, communities and workplaces of Worcester, Massachusetts (Pratt and Hanson 1994), on women inhabiting the community sphere in Kitchener-Waterloo in Canada (Milroy and Wismer 1994), troubled speculations on performative homo-sexualities in London (Bell et al. 1994) and an examination of racialized masculinity in British advertising (Jackson 1994). Across such diverse papers was an overriding interest in how gender was lived in and through space and its intersection with other dimensions of identity – especially class, race and sexuality. The focus was not on women

but on *gender relations* and the multi-faceted and discursive nature of identity. Here, then, was the cultural turn in operation; as individuals, social groups, activities, representations and the places they occupied were deconstructed as material but also cultural artefacts, with people and place mutually structured and constituted. The first issue also had articles on how women had been represented – by themselves as well as others – through nineteenth century French travel writings (Monicat 1994) and as utopian, but also politically subversive, *others*, floating somewhat like water between categories and conventions (Reichert 1994).

Embodiment

From this first collection of papers, there followed many others exploring the various sites and ways in which gender – as a now thoroughly differentiated category – was lived. There were articles ranging across scales from gendered bodies to homes, work places, communities, border regions, migratory flows, cities and regionalized nations. Throughout, discursive regimes were connected to material effects as, for example, the hysterical woman (Bankey 2001), the fear and reality of violence (Mehta and Bondi 1999; Cribb and Barnett 1999), eating patterns (Matthee 2004), injecting drug users (Malins, Fitzgerald and Threadgold 2006), and abjection (England 2006) were all approached as embodied sites of textual inscription which had very real consequences for women and men, shaping their identities and social relations as well as the conceptual and actual spaces in which they moved. *Embodiment* thereby became a subject which appeared regularly across the years in *GPC*. The ways in which gendered bodies were subsequently discussed signals some of the broader developments in thinking on identity, discourse and power over these 15 years and serves to illustrate the ongoing transformative nature of discussions within *GPC*.

Thus in an early *Viewpoint* article Robyn Longhurst sketched the ‘fertile ground for further interdisciplinary geographical inquiry’ (Longhurst 1995, 97) of work on the gendered nature of binary thinking and how it related to embodiment. Noting how feminist philosophers and geographers such as Gillian Rose (1993) had highlighted the association of masculinity with the mind, rationality and legitimate knowledge, she also argued that the related consignment of women to the emotional and irrational realm of the body led to a privileging of the conceptual over the corporeal in Western thinking. The result was integral to the production of ‘hegemonic, masculinised and disembodied geographical knowledges’ (Longhurst 1995: 97) which could be duly unsettled and disrupted by taking embodiment seriously. The gendered structuring of knowledge was thereby seen as oppressive to women and deeply embedded in Western thought. Masculine ways of thinking rather than men were the problem, with alternatives possible through a reversal of such thought and in taking the sexed body in space as a legitimate starting point for geographical knowledge. The examples Longhurst used in 1995 were few in number and, as she noted, relatively obscure. Fifteen years on and embodied geographies have appeared a number of times in *GPC*, shaping and enlivening the representations of landscape (Nash 1996), discussion of pregnancy (Davidson 2001), using bathrooms (Brown 2004), sports and fitness (Johnston 1996; McCormack 1999; Evans 2006) and shopping for clothes (Colls 2006).

Such later work illustrates how the call for embodiment has been extended by wider disciplinary interests in emotions and non-representational forms of expression while also benefiting from an engagement with more recent post-structural theory and taboo subjects. Thus in an article on injecting drug users in Melbourne’s central business district, Peta Malins, John Fitzgerald and Terry Threadgold utilize Gilles Deleuze’s (1993) notion of the ‘fold’ along with Judith Butler’s (1993) formulation of ‘performativity’ to describe the entwining of bodies, risks and city spaces for women who are injecting drug users. They describe how body-space foldings

or mutual interrelations affect the ways in which these women are able to interact with city spaces and the others who use them. With bodies seen as shaped by the assemblages and connections they form, the focus is on how women's bodies, the discourses, forces and spaces around them come together to actively shape subjectivity and actions. While surrounded by many negative foldings, the authors note how these are also resisted and alternatives constructed, albeit within a narrow range of discursive options, to create both safe spaces and safer bodies. From such an understanding of how bodily practices enfold into city spaces and the way these in turn fold back into bodies, the authors offer some practical advice on creating safe and welcoming spaces for these women. They therefore conclude and recommend to service providers and city authorities: '... that a service which opens up multiple potential foldings ... will be more likely to leave room for women to go about unfolding and refolding their identities' (Malins, Fitzgerald and Threadgold 2006, 525). Embodiment has thereby moved from the critical and speculative to being a site of progressive and very different policy interventions as well as a key innovative site of scholarship in the pages of *GPC*.

Masculinities

If embodiment was one path-breaking subject that *GPC* foregrounded, the definition, differentiation and changing nature of masculinity across space was another. Thus in the first issue Peter Jackson (1994) focused on how men had been represented in British advertising – predominantly as young, white, able bodied and staunchly heterosexual – before considering the example of how the soft drink Lucozade was repositioned in the British marketplace by its association with black sportsmen. In such an exercise, Jackson (1994, 49) argues, the advertising campaign not only drew on wider attitudes towards gender, sexuality and 'race', but used the associations with particular black sportsmen to suppress 'the more threatening aspects of a stereotypically and rapacious black male sexuality, provoking desire without evoking dread'. The use of black sportsmen established a range of positive associations between masculinity, athleticism and style to thereby remove the more threatening associations of a stereotypically anonymous and rapacious black masculinity (Jackson 1994, 51). Jackson's analysis affirms the need to see racism in terms of its national but also local specificity as opposed to some kind of permanent, universal and widely accepted social phenomenon. Here, then, was an emphasis not only on how men were represented but how race intersected with sexuality to differentiate masculinity within wider national but also local representations.

The notion of a differentiated masculinity and how it is created, represented, lived and connected to place, persists as a subject across the 15 years of *GPC*. While the focus on representation itself can often dominate the discussion, there are also fine examples where the complexity of living as a man is presented and questioned. Thus in a discussion of 'Leading men to violence and creating space for their emotions' (2006) Stuart Aitken looks at how three mainstream films – *Braveheart*, *Pulp Fiction* and *Mystic River* – constructed their leading men. Drawing on embodiment literatures, Aitken suggests that these films present men not only as perpetrators but also as physically brutalized victims of violence and how they act in such a way that is both complicit but also undermining of hegemonic forms of patriarchal masculinity. He argues that the viewing experience of the film-goer offers shifting and multiple positions on the nature of masculinity which thereby resist larger norms. This occurs especially through the non-discursive emotional impact of the film viewing experience. Drawing on Deleuze, emotional geographies and chaos theory, Aitken emphasizes how these films have affective components which are not solely tied to patriarchal logics, as they present bodies and spaces in ways that are simultaneously active and passive, masochistic and sadistic, in and out of place; affirming but also challenging dominant notions of being male.

While this focus on representation leads to a more nuanced reading of film and the ways in which men are depicted, it is unclear what wider political agendas are advanced by such an analysis. In contrast, the work of Linda McDowell (2000, 2002) on young men as they complete their education and enter the paid workforce at various locations in Britain, has both a concentration on dominant masculinities but also on how this is differentially negotiated within and across a restructuring economy. In two articles in *GPC* (2000, 2002), McDowell looks at how a group of school-aged young men in Cambridge and Sheffield see themselves and their work prospects. In a context of declining manufacturing employment and service sector growth as well as a feminization and polarization of the paid work force and media hype surrounding a supposed 'crisis of masculinity' and 'lad cultures', she asks young working class men how they see themselves. And the outcomes of such conversations – with an admittedly small sample – are remarkably traditional: the young men affirm older style commitments to full time, masculine forms of work, different from the past primarily in the levels of skills and training needed to access them. In an academic context of discussions around a diversity of masculine – and feminine – subject positions, which involve the 'insertion by individuals into cross-cutting discursive gender positions and multiple regimes of power', McDowell (2000, 404) presents interview material with strong parallels across individuals and places, at least in relation to expectations. McDowell's later studies of the actual experiences of these young men highlight the importance of locality and education levels in their work force success rates – with far more young men gaining meaningful employment or ongoing training in Cambridge compared to those in Sheffield. From such material, she confirms the ongoing importance of structural constraints over diverse identity options for these young men. McDowell (2002, 54) observes: 'Although old social divisions might be reproduced in different ways, it is important not to neglect the continuing significance of class, 'race' and gender in the structuring of youth opportunities.' She thereby notes, despite her focus on young working class men and their relatively disadvantaged position, that as they were all white, they did not experience the added problems faced by, for example, Asian working class men in a racialized as well as gendered labour market. Rather as white men, compared to young women, they still had more systematic advantages because of their race and gender (2002, 56–57). While calling for governments to engage more directly and constructively with disaffected young men via effective transition to work programs connected to schools, McDowell (2002, 57) concludes: 'It is . . . essential that the new focus on masculinity in both academic analyses and in the rhetoric and policy of gender equality programs does not obscure the persistent nature of interconnected class and gender inequalities in the workplace.' As McDowell notes, despite the concern for young men, women still earn less than men and enter retirement with fewer resources. For McDowell then, an emphasis on discursive regimes around masculinity sets the parameters but does not limit her engagement with the lived realities of being young working class men in particular localities, nor does this emphasis preclude a structural analysis, the affirmation of women's ongoing inequality or sensible recommendations for government action.

In their overview of masculinities and geography, Berg and Longhurst (2003) observe that it was not until 1989 that studies of masculinity occurring in other disciplines – such as the work of Bob Connell in Sociology – had an impact on Geography via the writings of Peter Jackson. Berg and Longhurst subsequently charted a shift from a focus on men to masculinities thence on to the mutually constitutive relationship between masculinities and other axes of identity such as class, disability, race, place and sexuality. Moving beyond the focus on men to that of male power, Gillian Rose (1993) raised the issue of masculinism in the discipline, which had the effect of gendering geographical knowledge and privileging the male point of view. Such a perspective on maleness and masculine knowledge was broadened to a differentiated masculinity in the late 1990s, as the place of men in cities, workplaces and in academia was revisited. In the new

century, it was men in rural geography, in social and cultural geographies that come to the fore in the pages of *GPC*. While an accurate overview, one also needs to be reminded that such a position was present in the very first article in *GPC* by Peter Jackson in 1994! In this, *GPC* has been a vital participant rather than a leader in the focus on masculinity in the spatial disciplines.

Sexualities

In a later discussion of men and masculinity, Berg and Henry (2006) emphasized how geographers perform nationalism as well as hetero-masculinity in the work published in the *New Zealand Geographer*, as does a mapping of heterosexuality across the United States (Puar 2006) highlight the connection between particular notions of the nation and dominant images of masculine sexuality. This connection of gender with sexuality, nationality and place was also present in the first issue of *GPC*, with the provocative article on hyper-feminine 'lipstick lesbians' and skinhead gay men in England (Bell et al. 1994). Here was an article exploring some of the outer edges of normative sexual identity, not only making visible such practices but raising questions about the stability and politics of performative sexualities. As an article questioning the construction and place of heterosexuality, with a focus on sexual outlaw styles and an acknowledgement that the analysis as well as these transgressive styles did not bring patriarchy to its knees, it is not surprising that it generated spirited responses. Stimulating ongoing discussion and a set of *Viewpoint* articles (Kirby 1995; Knopp 1995; Probyn 1995; Walker 1995), this piece clearly touched those who had long worked in gay geographies – such as Lawrence Knopp – but also those who had been grappling with the issue of sexual identities in other disciplines (such as Cultural Studies and English Literature). While many articles in *GPC* subsequently explored gay geographies at various locations – such as the historiography of gay sexualities in ancient Greece (Bravmann 1994), in work on gay and lesbian pride parades in New Zealand (Brickell 2000) on lesbians in Montreal (Podmore 2001) and gays in Toronto (Nash 2005) – in its first issue *GPC* had moved into uncharted waters and in the process extended the post-structural perspective on identity to the diversified spaces in which those with transgressive sexualities moved. The broaching of such subjects previously rather muted within mainstream geographical literature continued in the journal, including articles on the complicated passions associated with lesbian motherhood (Gabb 2004), queer Christians in Washington DC (Paris and Anderson 2001) and the story of a group of German feminist geographers exploring queer theory and identities with the eminent Professor of Geography, Doreen Massey, through a series of weekend workshops (BASSDA 2006).

However, *GPC* has not only engaged with marginal sexualities and queer theory, but the article by Bell et al. in 1994 also aimed to expose the fabricated and fragile nature of heterosexuality. Subsequent articles have documented the processes of creating and policing normative sexualities at various scales – be it in rooms like bathrooms and toilets (Brown 2004), on the streets through the regulation and performance of prostitution (Hubbard 1998) and across whole nations – including mapping heterosexuality in England (Robinson, Hockey and Meah 2004), the United States (Puar 2006), urban Botswana (McIlwaine and Datta 2004) and in rural Vietnam (Rydstrom 2006). Thus in the themed issue on gender in post-Doi Moi Vietnam, Helle Rydstrom traces the origins of attitudes towards sexuality for young women in rural Vietnam. In doing so she highlights how ancient Confucian teachings, a matrilineal preference for sons along with female virtue and fecundity, and more recent state-sanctioned campaigns against 'social evils' associated with globalization, modernization, westernization and pre-marital sex, come together to prescribe young women's view of themselves and their activity as sexual actors. The result is a set of centralized but also ambiguous and ambivalent directives along with ongoing challenges by young women of the efforts to impose moral boundaries.

Such observations – derived from studies of policy documents as well as from interviews with groups of young women across Vietnam – lead Rydstrom (2006, 297) to conclude: ‘In all this, female sexuality is constructed as something which invites control – imposed by oneself and/or by the government.’ Here then *GPC* moves from being a journal which focuses on ignored but also transgressive sexual practices to articles which examine the ways in which normative forms of sexuality are created, challenged and policed. This shift from the margin to the centre in matters to do with sexuality echoes the move charted earlier to engage with *gender relations* and *men/masculinity* in the process of progressing the debate and understanding of gender, place and culture. In the process of publishing material not only on marginal activities but on how various identity norms are constituted, key social categories are re-placed at the centre of analysis, with insightful, theoretically adventurous and politically charged implications.

Thinking/theorizing gender

GPC began when postmodern debates were well underway in the social sciences, showing in its pages an emphasis on post-structural issues of identity and representation as well as on post-colonial relations of power. The politics of knowledge creation within the academy – through the process of doing field work, conducting interviews, using qualitative or quantitative methods, even of the very decision to enter into a research–researcher relationship – all came under scrutiny. Along with a questioning of the positionality of researchers and academics in various articles went a troubling of what exactly academic theory was, how it was derived and how it related to political praxis. Such questions emerged particularly from those working across first and third world countries. Thus in a special *Viewpoint* collection on ‘feminists talking across worlds’ (2002) the politics as well as the practice of researching outside one’s own class, racial and privileged position was examined. And in the process, the very nature of academic curiosity and theory-making was troubled. As Richa Nagar (2002, 184) wrote:

Transnational feminist conversations . . . cannot be productive unless feminist academics based in Western/Northern institutions produce research agendas and knowledges that do not merely address what is theoretically exciting or trendy *here*, but also what is considered politically imperative by the communities we work with or are committed to *there* . . . widening the notion of what constitutes theory should form the core of transnational feminist praxis.

In isolating what is of importance across the globe to those without a voice, power or resources, poses a particular challenge to first world academics overseeing the production of journals. However, it is of course possible and in the practices of selecting members of the editorial board and reviewers as well as in the pages of *GPC* there are deliberate efforts to include those from non-central locations. Within the pages of the journal there are also some fine examples where, for example, the plight of south Asian immigrants in Tanzania (Nagar 1998), the struggles for gender justice in Zimbabwe (Kesby 1999; Goebel 2005), gendered spaces of terror and assault in Guatemala (Hanlon and Shankar 2000), the relation of gender and mobility in South Sulawesi (Silvey 2000), wife seclusion in Nigerian Hausaland (Robson 2000), women workers in the Istanbul clothing industry (Eraydin and Erendil 1999) and the place of Ethiopian women in Israel (Fenster 1998) are studied, made visible and theorized. And the type of theorization that occurs, despite the variability in detail, reflects a commitment to work from the micro-specifics of particular situations through a set of scalar steps to national and global intersections of material and cultural dimensions. It is from this local–global interface that new theories of gendered spaces, transnational perspectives and suggestions for political interventions are emerging.

So for example, Katherine Rankin (2003, 112) looked at the mutual embeddedness of culture and economy through an ethnographic analysis of the relations between spatial practices,

economic strategies and gendered symbols of status amongst the Newar merchant community in Nepal. Faced with a neo-liberal open market agenda, Rankin argues that an honour and place-based system for meeting social obligations structures caste, spatial relations and gender identities, which in turn mediate responses to neo-liberal agendas in decisive ways. Her fine-grained ethnographic analysis highlights the complexity but also agency of the encounter between 'traditional' and 'modern' as market values do not neatly replace older ones but create new regimes of value in association with pre-existing ones. These new orders in turn open up new opportunities and constraints for differently positioned social groups. Such observations have important implications for development practices, suggesting that the usual strategy of giving access to markets and credit might not guarantee social opportunity with often undervalued cultural ideologies playing a vital role in structuring opportunity. Indeed the importance of cultural dimensions suggests that a different approach to change using these rather than social or economic triggers might well be more effective along with an understanding of the importance of space in the social order. Such an analysis affirms the theoretical and political value of beginning with the local or, in Rankin's (2003, 125) words,

... points to a model for gender planning that focuses foremost on cultivating locally situated social criticism as the surest foundation for development – in contrast to dominant approaches that emphasise market deepening and capital access with little regard for the cultural politics of social change.

As to how these studies might progressively transform the process of creating new knowledges – not just its content or theoretical underpinnings – has also been explored in the pages of *GPC*. At a somewhat prosaic level, many articles within *GPC* traverse different boundaries, especially those between sub-disciplines. There is a regular flow of work that moves across genres, subjects and frameworks and in the process breaches what would be usual boundaries within Human Geography. So, for example, a study of the discursive construction of migratory Filipina entertainers (Tyner 1996) engages with literatures and debates within Migration, Political, Feminist and Cultural Geography, and a study of women's household strategies in rural Appalachia embraces economic, cultural and rural concerns while work on rural women's voluntary work engages with economic, rural as well as feminist perspectives (Oberhauser 1995). But such breaching of disciplinary boundaries only begins the process of rethinking how subjects are approached. Far more profound is the issues of just how researchers are themselves positioned and how they create knowledge not from their disciplinary perspective but from their personal and political ones.

Regularly positioned as privileged academics working in developed countries, many feminist geographers are deeply committed to social justice not only for women in the first world but also the third. And working across boundaries of class, race and geography have presented particular challenges which, in turn, have generated a range of creative alternatives and theoretical insights. So, for example, transnational work – in the form of collaborative research and writing projects – is now a regular occurrence judging from article appearing in *GPC*. However, as Miraftab (2004) notes, it is no longer a simple dynamic between first and third world countries, but now includes women from the third world being educated in the north and researching countries other than their own. As she observes, 'Feminist thought should consider the implications of this increased transnationalism of researchers, hence revisit and extend its methodological debate about insider/outsider positioning to include an explicit focus on transnational/transborder feminist praxis' to consider new, in between spaces (Miraftab 2004, 601–602).

Such alternatives are well illustrated by the alternative research practices developed by J.K. Gibson-Graham (1994) who involves the subjects of research in the construction and destabilization of the research process itself. Thus in researching alternative subjectivities of

women in Australian mining towns they/she draws from feminist politics an awareness of a personal location in research projects, a desire to work with others in ways to deconstruct inequitable relationships and a strategic awareness of what resources an academic brings to a project. Others too, concerned with how researchers cross class, gender, ethnicity and other social divides in the course of conducting research, have explored creative alternatives – including first person narrations, personal positioning and by transnational and cross-class work (for example, Nagar 2002; Pratt 2002). There is also some vital work on how ‘whiteness’ is constructed, lived and marketed (Twine 1996; Pratt 1997; Winders et al. 2005) as this racial category – like men and heterosexuality before it – is subjected to scrutiny.

Some of the limitations of such an agenda are highlighted in a series of *Commentaries* on Eno Okoko’s article on ‘Women and environmental change in the Niger Delta, Nigeria: evidence from Ibeno’ (1999). For here, in highly theorized responses by Robson (1999), Jarosz (1999) and Laurie (1999), the empirical account from ‘the margin’ is slotted into ‘relevant’ theoretical debates – on sustainability, on women and development and on eco-feminism. Despite the cautions articulated by Robson – who notes the structural limitations of female academics working in Africa: such as being few in number, with limited resources and without the informational and technological connections to the world’s academic literatures that first world academics have – there is something of a patronizing disjunction between an ‘empirical’ article from someone working in the south that is given various theoretical treatments by those who know better in the north. As Robson (1999, 385) further notes:

The complex and unequal nature of North-South professional interaction by academics does not become less problematic merely by recognizing and naming it. As individual scholars we find ourselves in awkward ethical, moral and personal positions because of this complex web.

Such reservations do not negate the dilemma and tension between a transnational feminist geography that is purporting to be reflexive and open to voices from the margin and an apparent imperative to maintain ‘academic standards’ and Eurocentric theoretical traditions. As Sawaswati Raju acerbically notes in 2002 (175–176), while discussing how to ‘talk across worlds’:

There is absolutely no denial for a need, even in a politicized struggle, to question universalizing theories and meta-narratives and to engage in intense debates about differences among women and about listening to multiple voices . . . theories will have to move constantly between the ‘micro’ and the ‘macro’, and attend to how ideas originate and travel across space to assume specificities, and yet retain some similarities.

How and who is to do such transnational theorizing and what results from it for me remain unresolved issues for *GPC*. Here, then, is a transformation that is yet to be eventuated, a challenge for the future of those seeking to re-place gender, place and culture in a way that is politically and also theoretically progressive. The parameters have been sketched and involve seeing activism as theory, in connecting across scales as well as groups, and not being immobilized by the impossibility of crossing identity boundaries to conduct worthwhile research.

Re-placing gendered politics

GPC is a journal that unashamedly pursues a feminist political agenda. Exactly what that means is not only contested but highly variable across time and space. However, despite the variability and debate around the term ‘feminism’, there is general agreement that it remains a political movement concerned with ameliorating the unequal place of women. Now a relational and dynamic gender category anchored in place and differentiated by other social dimensions – including those of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, geography – the emphasis on women and their inequitable place in the world continues to inform what is published in the pages of *GPC*. What feminism continues to give *GPC* is a commitment to gender justice, a focus on the usually

unequal place of women and an imperative to alleviate this in some way. *GPC* thereby remains inherently committed to an activist project, and even when focusing on the place of men, heterosexuality, representation, or research methods, a progressive gender agenda is pretty well always present. In this, though, there has not always been a straightforward set of political priorities or trajectories, in the sense that destabilizing power in favour of women has been an ongoing objective.

There are a number of ways of assessing the ways in which *GPC* has re-placed politics in Geography. Most obviously, *GPC* has raised the profile of feminist geography and feminist geographers in the discipline and provided a refereed and highly respected space for women's writing on subjects of importance to them. Such work has tended to concentrate in areas of somewhat traditional concern: in social, cultural and rural geography as opposed to the more masculine domains of political, economic and physical geography. But, as has been noted previously, the neat divides between such sub-areas of the discipline frequently collapse before the wide-ranging interrogation of the feminist geographer; so that it is in the interstices between the social and the economic, the cultural and the material, the rational and the emotional, the symbolic and the real, that much transformative feminist geography has occurred as, for example, embodiment, masculinity, knowledge creation, research and sexuality are interrogated in all of these terms.

In the process, core concepts have undergone a transformation as the very notion of, for example, 'gender' becomes a relational, contested, differentiated, place-based and performative category. 'Place' too becomes imbricated and mutually constituted by a range of social and spatial relations, while the idea of a 'progressive sense of place' emerges too from articles which consciously articulate a political agenda. By its longevity and expansion from two to four and then six issues per annum *GPC* has acquired a respected status and its articles a heightened impact as a consequence. In its very scale and longevity, *GPC* has become an academic political force to be reckoned with. More concrete manifestations of its disciplinary impact can be seen in the impact on national associations, with papers and regular reports emerging from conferences, study groups, workshops, cross-sectoral collaborations and so on. This is also seen in the increased visibility of graduate support groups, the celebration and memorialization of key figures in the development of feminist geography – such as Janice Monk, Suzanne Mackenzie and Robin Law – and the willingness of those from other disciplines to publish within its pages. This then is an effective politics of visibility and institutional presence – all vital to the maintenance and further development of feminist geography and its political project.

Alongside such political interventions have gone those into serious academic debates. Thus, as has been documented, in its engagement with race/racism, sexuality, masculinity, embodiment and transnationalism, *GPC* has actively shaped the contemporary conceptual and hence political agenda. Conceptually, feminist geographers have been critical in further developing the notion of embodiment at a number of sites – especially around sport, shopping centres, gymnasiums – but also in vital activities, such as pregnancy, intravenous drug use, even in loving children, in ways that lead to concrete suggestions for improved drug treatment or shopping centre design. Here, then, are conceptual insights linked to everyday political actions. So too in relation to work on masculinities, which has enhanced understandings and heightened the sophistication of skills training and anti-violence measures. Again, conceptual development holds the possibility of informing better policy interventions.

But within its pages not all of the progressive intentions held by the editors of *GPC* have been realized and there remain contradictions which, to the credit of the journal's editors and contributors, are the subject of regular reflection and ameliorative actions. So, while wishing to represent a diverse set of theoretical and political positions and drawing articles from over 25 countries, the majority of contributions to the journal remain written by white women based in the United Kingdom and North America. Most are also written by women, with the significant few

written by men concerned with issues around masculinity and homosexuality. In a reflective piece written after ten years the Spaniard Maria Dolores Garcia-Ramon joined the Dane Kirsten Simonsen and Greek Dina Vaiou (2006) to note how from 1994 to 2005, of the 242 authors of articles and viewpoints, only 19% were not based in Anglo-American universities or research centres – which included Australia and New Zealand. Authors based in the United States and the United Kingdom constituted 64% of writers while of the 320 book reviews only seven were not written in English (2%) and only five reviewers were not Anglo-American. GPC subsequently moved to publish all abstracts in Spanish as well as in English, made a real effort to include non Anglo-Americans on its Editorial Board, accept papers in languages other than English and as subjects of articles and book reviews. Despite such moves, Audrey Kobayashi (2006) could note that as more studies of racism and other forms of discrimination appear, the number of women of colour doing those studies remains static and abysmally low at 2%. Therefore there remains a tension within GPC between a stated commitment to engage positively with the politics of ethnic and racial difference and the reality of delivering this to the pages of the journal.

Such a discussion, however, did much to highlight the newer political agendas in feminist geography, adding a spatial dimension to practice theories and stressing through various studies the importance of understanding the relationship between individual consciousness, action and social change. As Minelle Mahtani (2006, 24) observes, it is vital to ensure that our reflexive practices contribute to larger social justice issues. Just because we now research on race and sexism does not mean that we are dealing with the power dynamics of these relations within the academy. Rather, as Sanders notes in the same themed issue on 'Anti-racist feminist geographies and the academy', 'what is missing from the miasma of postmodernist debates is a consideration of right and wrong, more importantly who benefits and who loses' (Sanders 2006, 49).

Revisiting a socially progressive political agenda is a regular feature of articles in *GPC*, as are actions to address political gaps. And so while Bondi and Rose (2003) can observe that analyses of Anglo-American feminist urban geography have broadened women's experiences, they further note that what is absent is the discussion in *GPC* of differential socio-economic impacts on women's daily lives of urban restructuring, neo-liberalism and policies on social exclusion. I would suggest that subsequent articles on, for example, women and homelessness in Canada (see themed papers in *Gender, Place and Culture*, Volume 13, Issue 4, 2006) and the United Kingdom (May, Cloke and Johnsen 2007) address this absence. So too with regular articles on first/third world intersections – be it in relation to domestic labour, sex tourism, representations and writing from the margins – such as Africa, Asia, India or New Zealand – as well as writing from the margins within first world countries – many articles in *GPC* recognize that race, ethnicity and sexuality operate to fracture and enliven societies of the West/North/centre – and the need to write/research from these margins. As Pratt and Yeoh (2003) conclude in their review article of 'transnational counter topographies', as Singapore stretches its economic reach and unequal social relations into China, there is a necessity to pay close attention to the specificity of place and context while building connections across struggles in different places. Such actions are at the heart of transnational feminist politics as well as research and writing collaborations for a future feminist geography around the relations of gender, place and culture.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

Re-ubicando el género? Reflexiones sobre 15 años de *Gender, Place and Culture*

Este artículo reflexiona sobre *Gender, Place and Culture* (GPC) desde 1994 hasta mediados de 2008, para resaltar algunos temas y debates claves que han sido delimitados y avanzados en estas páginas. Lanzada simultáneamente con el giro cultural en geografía humana, GPC procedió a plantear importantes cuestiones sobre la identidad y la diferencia, reflejando en forma efectiva, pero además impulsando, un número de transformadoras agendas políticas e intelectuales. Esta reflexión se enfocará en tres áreas mutuamente relacionadas de tal actividad: la empírica, la teórica y la política. En el área empírica, numerosos artículos han examinado las formas en que el género es vivido, dentro y a través de espacios, y han sido animados por enfoques que resaltan masculinidades, sexualidades y corporalidad. En lo teórico, estos temas han estado informados por marcos poscoloniales y posestructurales, llevando la discusión hacia identidades múltiples, reflexividad, práctica de investigación, performatividad, culturas materiales, posicionalidad y la naturaleza del conocimiento académico. Además GPC ha registrado una preocupación política progresista por la justicia y la igualdad, aunque el grado y la naturaleza de su significancia política han sido legítimamente cuestionados desde dentro y fuera de sus páginas. La resolución de los muchos dilemas asociados a las formas en que el género es vivido, pensado, y ejercido no siempre ha sido exitosa en las páginas de GPC, y la realidad actual de la dominancia angloamericana, la persistencia de la desigualdad de las mujeres y la tensión entre el activismo político y el discursivo, aún permanece. Sin embargo, re-ubicando al género durante los últimos quince años, GPC ha sido una revista de investigación seria y de vanguardia que ha legitimado aún más el valor de la geografía feminista.

Palabras claves: feminismo; geografía feminista; giro cultural; corporalidad; sexualidad; masculinidad; política feminista