

## **Editorial**

### **Gender, Bodies and Identities in Organization: Postcolonial Critiques**

**Andri Georgiadou, Beverly Dawn Metcalfe, Niki Dickerson von Lockette, Dimitria Groutsis, Banu Ozkazanc-Pan**

A critical perspective on embodiment in organizations acknowledges that the body is site, object and subject of the labor force, crossing and spanning the material, social, cultural and natural world (Dale, 2005; Monaghan, 2002; Williams and Bendelow, 1998). Binary distinctions between body and mind are challenged, placing the lived experience as locus of analysis (Williams and Bendelow, 1998; Kringen and Novich, 2018). Importantly, examining the lived experience allows us to explain and understand inequalities and freedoms, as these are lived through and bounded by the body, both within and outside the organization (Fotaki and Pullen 2019). Elaborating on this point, Kringen and Novich (2018: 198-199) note:

“Through this approach, the intersection of the physical body and the projection of gender within the workplace provides the capacity to link the symbolic body of doing gender with the embodied self. Connecting embodiment with workplace structure and policies provides a mechanism for criticism on the use of human bodies in organizations while illuminating how organizations use members bodies to achieve objectives and goals (Styhre, 2004). In turn, this may elucidate how organizational control is enacted and how individual resistance is lived (Dale, 2005). Underlying this approach is the recognition that social embodied action is fundamental in the production of meaning.”

In short, scholars drawing on embodiment seek to counterbalance and transgress what they see as simplistic binary distinctions between male/female, culture/nature, public/private, human/animal and mind/body which, they argue, too often inform scientific explanations and disciplinary boundaries while creating methodological ease and elegance for categorizing ‘distinct’ groupings.

Sociologists, social scientists, political economists and feminist theorists alike have departed from a disembodied rationality by conceptualizing the body as a project individuals work on and transform as a means of identity construction and reconstruction (Butler, 1990;

1993; Dale, 2001; Shilling, 2017). Attention is turned to the interdependence between the perception of one's body and social relationships, power, control, hierarchies, aesthetics, performativity, status, and irrationality.

Crucially, there is visibility given to a 'body' that goes beyond an ideal type, which is cast as – white, male, heteronormative, youthful, healthy, fit, able bodied and largely interrogated through a Western gaze (Acker, 2006; Brewis and Sinclair, 2000; Hall, Hockey and Robinson, 2007; Bryant and Garnham 2014; Monaghan, 2002; Oerton, 2004; Davies, Browne, Gannon, Honan, Somerville, 2005; Nkomo and Rodriguez, 2017; Simpson and Pullen, 2018; Fotaki and Pullen 2019). The consequence of this has been the exclusion of diverse groups, particularly of women, but also of men who do not fit the 'ideal type' mould, where they are pitched as the problematic 'other' in the context of organizations (Fotaki and Pullen 2019). For instance, Gatrell (2011) has noted the negative connotations surrounding the pregnant working body, while also capturing the public vocal hostility toward breastfeeding women at work; Poorhosseinzadeh, Strachan and Broadbent (2019) show how senior men construct an ideal type masculine (disembodied) candidate when recruiting for leadership positions and as such exclude women; Haynes (2012) notes that notions of physical capital remain highly gendered in professional services firms, with implications for equality and diversity in professional work; symbolic artefacts such as military uniforms affectively mark men's and women's bodies in distinct and inequitable ways as noted by Just, Kirkegaard and Muhr (2019). Taken together these theorists make visible and obvious, give voice and power to what are taken for granted and normalized body effects at the workplace level. As a result, drawing on embodied lives offers us an incredible opportunity to interrogate and challenge how we understand and theorize diversity at the workplace level.

Methodologically, examining embodiment in organizations sees scholars going beyond a measurement of given experience. Instead, in seeking to explain and understand the lived experience researchers employ discourse analytic tools, ethnography, interviews and observations examining how the embodied self is articulated, framed, performed, assembled created and disbanded through interactions and reactions within given structures; in relation to others; in resistance to others; in response to policies and processes. As such there are nuanced discoveries, capturing the micro politics of the self – as body and in response to bodies. The

body is both vehicle for organizational outcomes; for organizing and for interactions within the organizational context.

Our concern then is that the substantive literature is ‘colonizing’ bodily accounts, thus leaving the ‘subaltern’ and ‘othered’ identities in the shadows (Spivak and Harasym, 2014; Liu, 2017). Further, ideas of whiteness and the power effects of space and belonging remain under theorized. For this special issue, we therefore invited contributions that explored bodily processes as part of colonization. What brings together the contributions is an emphasis on presenting feminist postcolonial accounts of bodily experiences, desires, actions and the politics of resistance, while further highlighting the lived embodiment of workers and managers, teasing out how gendered embodiment affects bodily feelings and relational and organizational experiences at work, and how the body constitutes an active medium of work, management and organization.

The special issue commences with a critical examination of the hospitable body by Kristina Zampoukos, who examines the hospitable body and how it is put to work, how a specific type of bodies are chosen and become linked with certain occupations and spaces of work, and how the hospitable body is shaped, transformed, and commodified aligned with predominant means of production. Drawing on an array of sources mainly relating to the Nordic countries, the author analyzes current research on hospitality workers, whilst highlighting the way employers portray and, at times, exploit the hospitable body. Zampoukos is proposing in this paper in-depth and context-sensitive studies of the hospitality work environment, centered around the social and organizational aspects, whereas she calls for a systematic examination of the forms of knowledge prevailing among individuals working in hospitality. She concludes by suggesting that the working body can be posited as at once porous, relational and “in the making” (Massey, 2005), and as a (legally bounded) terrain in need of safeguarded from the dangers of flexible work regimes, stress, violence, sexual and racist harassment, and poverty.

In the next paper, Georgia-Zozeta Miliopoulou and Ilias Kapareliotis explore the attitudes and sentiments of senior female executives in Greek advertising agencies. Drawing on intersectionality, they posit that a long-term exposure to male-dominated cultural contexts, has led women to have limited awareness of potential ceilings and challenges they encounter along their career paths and interestingly enough perceive themselves as an embodied exception proving the rule, and not as role models and agents of change. The study demonstrates how of

the absence of gender affiliation and solidarity fulfills the male narrative, hence endorsing the stereotypes. More specifically, Miliopoulou and Kapareliotis elaborate on how a male dominated industry and a patriarchal socio-cultural context exert enormous pressure on women who instead of feeling proud and accomplished, they feel frustrated and overwhelmed. Miliopoulou and Kapareliotis conclude by noting, “bolder steps must overcome the southern context barriers impeding women by creating self-fulfilling prophecies rather than collective gender consciousness”.

In our next contribution, Diane Tober and Charlotte Kroløkke explore the relationships between emotional choreography and the establishment of a bioavailable workforce for the global fertility trade. Building upon contemporary feminist social science and postcolonial research on reproductive labor and travel, this article explores three intersecting elements: the factors that impact reproductive travel and cross-border egg donation, the way emotion and meaning are enclosed in clinical contexts to recruit a healthy, young, able-bodied workforce, and finally, the embodied experiences of women who travel across borders in order to offer eggs in exchange for pay. Tober and Kroløkke offer an exploration how emotional choreography is linked with the creation of a bioavailable workforce for the global fertility trade through extensive ethnographic fieldwork in fertility clinics. In detail, the authors investigate the way local and cross-border egg provision brings into surface the global reproductive hierarchies in transnational reproduction; what the authors introduce as “reproductive colonialism”. The analysis shows that gendered constructions of care and emotion are indeed incorporated into feminized reproductive work and are profoundly embedded with the fertility industry in general. It also confirms that these conceptualizations constitute part of a larger network of global assemblages and relations. As emphasized by the authors, women's reproductive bodies become embedded within the affects, esthetics, hierarchies, ideologies, and power structures of the reproductive colonialism.

Drawing on the theories of Womanism and African feminism, Loliya Akobo Kagher, Lilian Otaye-Ebede and Beverly Metcalfe investigate the lived experiences of Nigerian women in male-dominated organizations in order to stipulate an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of the way the Nigerian society marginalizes qualities and aspects of embodiment and disembodiment of women. Through in-depth interviews, the authors emphasize the multiplicities of difference in theoretically approaching African experiences and highlight how gendered

embodiment is constructed in the Nigerian context, as well as the way the coloniality of power is challenged. Kagher, Otaye-Ebede and Metcalfe highlight that men are part of the social construct of spatialized embodiment in that context, and hence it is vital that they are not left out of the story. As the authors note “Our writing this paper is in itself a decolonial act and is a tactic to underscore the body politics of knowledge of African women. As Black African women, we write to disengage and engage with our lives and subjectivities. African feminism and Womanism negates a postcolonial ethic. Black bodies matter and are nurturing a decolonial strategy to talk back and write about gendered embodiment in organizations via African heritage and legacy”.

In the following contribution, Anna-Liisa Kaasila-Pakanen draws on the research of Sara Ahmed and Gayatri Spivak to introduce a notion of a close encounter to reflect the way we can engage with other individuals in a substantial way as the foundation for ethical interaction with difference in the organizational context. Kaasila-Pakanen concentrates on “reflecting the responsibilities, politics, and ethics of representation that embodied postcolonial feminist viewpoints bring out for management and organization scholars interested in the long-contested dilemmas of approaching and “writing the Other” (Rhodes & Westwood, 2007)”. Through this, the author provides an important perspective for reconsidering the foundation of feminist alliances, participative epistemologies, but also difference within the postcolonial lens. Kaasila-Pakanen’s work reminds us how research can often become a way and means of relating to difference but also others (Phillips et al., 2014, p. 326). As Kaasila-Pakanen notes, the paper “aimed to show how close encounters touch and create writing that touches, creates words that resonate with other people's words, and is thus able to create both affective solidarity (Vacchani & Pullen, 2019) and affective sociality between readers and writers (Pullen, 2018) and individuals in organizations”.

In the final paper of this special issue, Andri Georgiadou and Eleni Damianidou investigate the process of shaping the body within the postcolonial masculine organizational culture (Georgiadou & Antonacopoulou, 2020), thus providing a deeper understanding of how workplace and social life tend to be organized based on the ideal(able) body. Using data from interviews with employees with disability, the authors discuss the way those with “ugly bodies” construct their identities in relation to nondisabled colleagues. With the body constituting a political site, the study indicates that it could be experienced and comprehended in relation to the

social construction of what is perceived as normal within the specific context. The article unpacks how representations of beauty impact both the social beliefs about the other's body and the individual perceptions about their own bodies. Drawing on social embodiment model, the authors confirm the gendered and ableist aspects of social beliefs and working practices. Just as homosociality is a gender practice, linked to hegemonic masculinity (Collinson & Hearn, 1994), Georgiadou and Damianidou confirm that it is also an ableist practice (Sang et al., 2016). Further to the Western perspective that discourses white colonial interpretations (e.g., Simpson & Pullen, 2018), this study provides insights that explicate the embodiment of social identity in a culture that resembles ancient Greek values about the significance of *kallos* in addressing the bifurcation of good/bad and able/disabled.

As we bring this special issue to a close, the contributions herein provide much food for thought for reflecting on the ways in which embodiment require us to rethink the very foundations of our experiences, theories and practices; a way which is quite resonant with the aims and goals of *Gender, Work & Organization*. The journal has pushed the scholarly field to expand upon gender not only as an analytic tool, or simply a variable, but an organizing principle in the relations among/between people, and in the economic activities in which we participate and the organizations that we assemble. Embodiment as a framework for the analysis of gender relations moves us into the domain of understanding how the body functions as the site for gender, an observation that requires feminist scholarship to move into the body and out of the text for any analysis of the social, economic and political. The pandemic has demonstrated that bodies and labor matter, and in many instances, demonstrated that the gendered, racialized ways in which individuals work, live and provide care should no longer be invisible--rather, they should be rendered visible.

As Federici (2020) remarks across much of her writing and analytics, the spaces that women occupy need to be considered through a lens that can acknowledge the social, cultural and material elements. In this sense, embodiment opens opportunities for us to consider how theorizing and writing require efforts that go beyond the text. Rather, the very acts of writing, caring, and valuing are embodied ways of engaging with the social world, fraught with power relations, hierarchical social structures and cultural norms that seem to reward patriarchy. In this regard, we hope that this special issue opens opportunities, conversations and provocations for

engaging with embodiment as a core analytic lens for the scholarly community that has supported the journal and continues to grow.

The contributions in this special issue offer a glimpse of new frontiers in the examination of gender and embodiment in the workplace. Interrogating these relationships in the international context has pushed open some intriguing questions. The bounds of what constitutes embodiment, or the physical self are culturally bounded and are performed in very different ways. As well with gender, gender divisions, and social constructions and meaning of gender vary radically from context to context (Georgiadou and Syed, 2021). More specifically, how embodiment unfolds and is employed in organizations looks very different across the various cultural contexts explored in the papers in this issue. The politics of gender, work (issues of modernization, contestations between the West, etc.) seem to find their way in many of these dynamics.

These blurred boundaries offer some interesting options for the field going forward, particularly expanding theoretical frameworks for forms of gender that are different or more complicated than western feminist paradigms. Definitions of organizations, workplaces, and particularly their role in economies that are very different than the advanced capitalist societies from which many of these paradigms emerged. Examining these relationships in different economic and political contexts offers an opportunity to expand the meanings, possible relationships and interrelations of core conceptual tools in the field. As scholars of gender and women's studies, we must continue to call up for more work to be done to fully explore the various configurations once we consider a broader scope of lived experiences. Beyond simple critique of western feminism to crafting whole new narrative, it is important to move beyond the binary to a more expansive, broader theoretical framework and cases.

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