

Introduction: Transnational Feminism and/in American Studies

***WiN* Editorial Board**

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We are delighted to welcome you to the inaugural issue of *WiN: The EAAS Women's Network Journal*, our double-blind peer-reviewed online journal published by the European Association for American Studies' Women's Network. Like the EAAS Women's Network, *WiN* seeks to enhance cooperation among European Americanists who are engaged in the scholarly exploration of the transnational connections of women, men, and transgendered individuals in our constantly changing world. To this end, we are providing an open-access platform for collaboration and the interrogation of new directions in women's and gender studies such as gender and capitalism, affect theory, life course studies, and environmental/social justice discourses. *WiN's* mission is to facilitate the dissemination of essays, articles, book reviews, and other scholarly contributions on women's and gender issues within the framework of American Studies, promoting the increasing visibility of women's and gender issues globally.

Inspired by recent women's marches around the world, we have chosen the theme "Transnational Feminism and/in American Studies" for our first issue. The articles presented

here derive from our Second Biennial EAAS Women's Network Symposium, which was held at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, from 31 March to 1 April 2017. This international conference (whose program can be found on our website) profoundly and productively interrogated women's and gender issues within a transnational framework and engaged in the multifaceted conceptual and theoretical debates in the field.

As Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan convey in their seminal text *An Introduction to Women's Studies: Gender in a Transnational World* (2001/2005), "transnational feminist studies is not a luxury that is added to the end of a syllabus or that can be relegated to one week out of the semester or quarter" (xvii). A mode of thinking in American Studies scholarship for over a decade, transnationalism should be integrated into all contemporary feminist discourse—whether through academic writing, in the classroom setting, or within the realm of activism—so that important questions are asked, and answered, about "ethnocentrism, racism, and nationalist viewpoints as foundation[s] to gender identity and issues of sexuality" (xvii). Unlike certain threads of global feminism, which espouse a "world-wide alliance of women," invariably lapsing into the same tropes of condescension, paternalism, and cultural imperialism found in preceding feminist movements, transnational feminism represents a paradigm shift *away from* orientalist and colonial discourses that prioritize "the West" and that marginalize the social, cultural and historical contexts with which women struggle elsewhere in the world. Thus, transnational feminism signals a movement *towards* examining how "western" countries, such as the United States, are, for better or worse, implicated in global issues that impact women's lives and how these issues can be broached (Tunç 8-9).

“It may now be time,” as Susan Koshy cautions us, “to think carefully about whether feminism travels well across borders, not because distances are as great as they were in the past, but precisely because they are alleged to have shrunk.” According to Koshy, “Transnational feminism, at the best of times a precarious project that negotiates neoliberal universalism, cultural relativism, asymmetrical knowledge flows, the demand for authenticity, and its own commodification, may be short-circuited by its mediatization. These shifts invite us to reflect on the possibility or impossibility of transnational feminism in our time” (302–303). Such a reconceptualization or rethinking has become all the more urgent as women’s rights, access to health care, and social and political spaces are being placed in jeopardy with rising global conservatism. Examining women’s movements (past, present, and future) in a transnational way underscores the necessity and continued importance of feminism and feminist concerns.

When we began editing this special issue in October 2017, the #MeToo hashtag was beginning to spread virally, and survivors of sexual assault—ninety percent of whom are women—were starting the slow process of asserting control over their own bodies after an eternity of silence. *Time* magazine named “The Silence Breakers” as their Person of the Year for 2017. As stories of sexual abuse, harassment, misconduct, violence and rape continue to make news headlines, we would like to recognize the #MeToo movement as a watershed moment in sexual politics, while also connecting it to the larger transnational feminist movement. As Americanists and feminists, we are deeply committed to fighting the oppressive gender, sex, race, class and power relations that also prompted the #MeToo campaign. With the inaugural

issue of *WiN*, we continue the scholarly interrogation of the complex intersections of transnational feminism and American Studies.

In their contribution “The Affective Aesthetics of Transnational Feminism,” Silvia Schiltermandl, Katharina Gerund, and Anja Mrak propose a comprehensive alternative examination of affect, aesthetics and the political dimensions in transnational feminism writing. Taking their cue from Rita Felski’s call for a post-critical sensibility and Samantha Pinto, who has shown the congruency of aesthetic and political interests in the study of literary texts, the three authors present the concept of affective aesthetics. This approach productively complicates recent theories of literary aesthetics and makes them applicable to a diverse range of texts. Using works by Christina Sharpe, Sara Ahmed, bell hooks, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie as case studies, Schiltermandl, Gerund, and Mrak show how the idea of feminism as an everyday practice permeates through these aesthetically rendered texts and fosters a personal and intimate link between the writer, text, and the reader. In this sense, an affective aesthetics approach lends itself to a reading of genre-defying non-experimental texts in order to exhaust their full political potential for a transnational feminist agenda.

Agnieszka Soltysik Monnet’s “The American Woman Warrior: A Transnational Feminist Look at War, Imperialism, and Gender” critically interrogates the recent trend of strategically deploying women in the portrayal of torture scenarios in American popular culture. Analyzing *Zero Dark Thirty* (2013) as a case study, Monnet shows in detail how the proliferation of the figure of the female CIA intelligence analyst contributes to rendering torture as a legitimate and effective means of retrieving vital information from terrorists. During this process, it is the simultaneous foregrounding of the femininity of the CIA analyst—especially in juxtaposition to

the supposed male terrorists—and the portrayal of the “woman warrior” as a fierce feminist who makes it her mission to bring down the enemies of her nation that banalize torture and tacitly endorse what Monnet calls “the legally murky world of black sites and enhanced interrogation techniques.” Like the TV dramas *Homeland* and *State of Affairs*, *Zero Dark Thirty* is also part of a larger trend within American popular culture that appropriates feminism for politically conservative ends.

Hope Lee Sneddon examines the social and spatial politics of hair in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s novel *Americanah* (2013). She argues that such politics involve complex matters that require a discussion about more than just the consequences of slavery and colonialism on the performance and spatial constraints of black culture in America. Any consideration of the way black hair is perceived in the United States must also take into account the social restrictions placed on salons producing and performing black hair culture. In her article, Sneddon deploys a threefold approach, drawing on gender and cultural studies with an emphasis on Michel Foucault’s work on heterotopias, as a productive way to address these issues. What she reveals is that entangled in the performance of black hair in the United States is African/American identity, the transnational politics of race and migration, and the policing of women’s bodies.

Saskia Hertlein’s “Between Love Songs and Open Wounds” draws on transnational feminism, intersectionality, critical diversity literacy, borderlands, inter-American and literary studies to illustrate how Luis Alberto Urrea’s *Into the Beautiful North* and Loida Maritza Pérez’s *Geographies of Home*, as counternarratives, challenge dominant discourses. Borders as in-between spaces and sources of “open wounds” provide us with new venues for metaphysical and spiritual transformation, beyond the literal conceptions of reality. She aptly argues that

these novels challenge the narrative status quo and encourage readers to rethink their personal beliefs structures and perceptions.

In her epilogue to this inaugural issue, Annessa Ann Babic provides us with her observations on and analysis of the 2017 and 2018 Transnational Women's Marches. She reflects on their themes and lessons, and reminds us that each generation has its own fights and issues for which to stand. She comments, "Riot Grrrls and Gen Xers, like myself, who have essentially grown up and framed our lives once again found ourselves marching, like our second wave feminist sisters did. Though, this time the rise of millennials and Gen Z reminded us—and perhaps the world—that the battle is not won." Women must continue to fight for themselves and the world around them, as complacency will allow progress to erode and fail. Only education, understanding and transnational collaboration will prevent impasses from further dividing, stagnating, and erasing our collective promise and prosperity.

Finally, we would like to thank the authors for their contributions, the anonymous peer reviewers for their valuable input and suggestions, and EAAS for their continued support of our efforts. We hope that *WiN* will inspire numerous productive scholarly discussions in the field of women's and gender studies. We also hope that you will enjoy our first issue, contribute to future issues, and return to this site many times.

Works Cited

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