“Touch paper - a small piece of paper on one end of a firework, which you light in order to start the firework burning: The instructions on the fireworks said, ‘Light the blue touch paper, and stand well clear.’”
- Peake & De Souza, 2010

Books Under Discussion:


Barbara Ehrenreich, Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers (2004).

Definition of Transnational Feminism:
- The study of intersections among nationhood, race, gender, sexuality, and economic exploitation on a world scale

What are the major issues concerning the women around this topic or situation?
- Racism
  - Peake & De Souza 2010
    - What is Red Thread?
      - Anti-racist organization in Guyana that defends the rights of women, sticks out its neck to speak out against violence against women, and attends to the very basic needs of its community - everything from helping mothers budget for food to advocacy and protest.
    - Black activist in the Guyanese Red Thread & White British academic in a Canadian university
    - Goal of Red Thread:
      - to oppose all forms of discrimination including discrimination on the grounds of sex, race, class, dis/ability, age, sexual identity, and HIV status
      - Bring together low-income Guyanese women of African, Indian, and Indigenous descent, across race divides.
      - One goal in Red Thread: to discuss issues that may be difficult to approach, which is necessary to improvement
        - One member said she felt Linda, one of the authors, was racist since she seemed to spend more time with the Indo-Guyanese rather than the Afro-Guyanese. Being in Red Thread helped her gain confidence to speak up about her own life experiences to give voice to her beliefs.
  - Louie 2001
    - Book as a whole discusses discrimination towards sweatshop women of all ethnicities
    - San Francisco sweatshop: Comparison of wages (annually): Chinese = $5,464; Other Asians = $7,500; Mexican = $6,500
      - US factories a much more unfair place than those of Hong Kong
  - Ehrenreich 2004
    - Statements made to maids and other workers such as “you only are a maid.” Shows a complete power shift and a very unprofessional employment situation which is abusive towards the worker.
    - Employers hold all of the power when it comes to someone holding a working visa. If they are fired, in many cases they are deported or have to live in fear of finding a job as
an illegal immigrant.

- Fear and discrimination are throughout the entirety of the book.
- Employers don’t want their maids/nannies to be seen talking to other maids/nannies of their own/different racial backgrounds.
- Employers want the workers to remain pretty much invisible.

- Classism
  - Peake & De Souza 2010
    - Research process itself is producing hierarchies
      - academic feminists versus activists and elite grassroots women versus other grassroots women
    - Fear for Red Thread
      - it will end up promoting elite group of grassroots instead of promoting an engagement working with women like themselves to promote change for everyone’s benefit; hierarchies actually within organizations
    - Feminist academics have access to all worlds but they are not putting those worlds in touch with each other
      - While academic feminists conducting research in the global South may have little to give beyond academic knowledge and skill training, they are more likely to benefit professionally from the research conducted.
      - Benefits: furthering their academic careers, increasing their number of publications, training graduate students, and benefiting more financially - by utilizing the knowledge base of grassroots women in order to do so.
  - Issues with Quantitative Research
    - “Many decisions about our lives are taken from figures and we don’t know where these figures come from and we should be able to control this.”
    - Large divide between those who do not and those who cannot, because they lack the training in even the most basic of statistical analyses.
    - Qualitative vs. Quantitative
      - Most women’s studies based on qualitative research, when we need to start moving towards quantitative
      - Resistance to using quantitative methods creates another divide between North and South; a desire by northern feminist academics working in the global South to refrain from using quantitative methods is taken largely in ignorance of the situation of grassroots women’s organizations in the South for whom research funding is often tied to the production of quantified data.
      - Much of research training has been ways for women to become “data literate” in that they can understand what data sources are available, how data can be collected, and how they are translated into statistics.
      - Necessary to collect exceptionally high-quality research data.

- Louie 2001
  - Book dedicated to those working-class persons and families who are victims; without their hard work we wouldn’t function as a planet
    - “Yet the powerful and the privileged often stifle these women’s voices” (pg3)
    - “CAPITALISM BENEFITS FROM THE EXCEPTIONAL”
  - CHINESE women have transformed Chinatowns into family-oriented communities
    - Sweatshop workers treated poorly; when speaking out, caught in a DOUBLE BIND speak out and be heard, making change vs. speaking out, being heard, getting fired
      - Chinese seamstresses in San Francisco betrayed by 60 Minutes media when stories were highlighted employer = “hero to every small
businessman”; divide blame equally among manufacturers, workers, shoppers

- Injured workers couldn’t be helped by police because machines were “private property”

-HISPANIC
- Highest concentrations of workers in “blue collar” jobs and lowest in management among all races of women
- 70% of workers in auto-transport equip assembly continue to be women (1983)

Ehrenreich 2004

- 1965-1995: Women begin to work outside the house in US but still expected to clean at same rate. Have to give a “do-it-all” appearance.
- Am. women now hired other foreign women to be a cleaning lady-> “perpetuating gender opposition” further
- Most were from Northern Hemispheres, in poverty, left to help family
  - By coming to help in the US, can get much more money working as a nanny or maid, or caretaker than staying at a middle-class job in their native countries. Goal = to make money in the US to help family at home.
- Work for the rich women in the first world- > women subjected to oppression by American women: women reinforcing the sex gender system
- New World (women gain new privileges and work outside home) vs. Third World (traditional women-cook and clean)
- Feared deportation and and legal status: silent about assault, below min. wage, & long hours
- Have to deal with parents’ jealousy from bonds with the children and how attached the children become. “attachment factor”
- Do work not part of job description and expected to be “round-the-clock” in live-in situations.
  - “Sometimes nannies get farmed out to clean or baby-sit for their employers’ friends, too. They act as if my services are their property -- property they can lend out whenever they want -- that makes me really feel bought.”

- Have to deal with the media “vilifying migrant mothers” in places like the Philippines & casting blame on them for children at home growing up without them.
  - **Play important role in the economies of their native countries
- In places like China, there is an example of a worker who is treated with less respect than the family’s dog and given worse living conditions. “My room is very hot and I have no electric fan. But our dogs have a fan! They bought it for the dog…”
- Another major problem in this book is the children of the workers themselves. They are left behind in the native country with mother-in-laws or maids themselves.
  - Even if the worker has a husband, he normally does not take care of the children when she leaves - most countries do not support men doing the “work of women”.
  - “Migration creates not a white man’s burden but, through a series of invisible links, a dark child’s burden.” Pg. 27
  - “I love Ana more than my own two children. Yes, more! It’s strange, I know. But I have time to be with her. I’m paid. I am lonely here. I work ten hours a day, with one day off. I don’t know any neighbors on the block. And so this child gives me what I need.”

- Workers cannot show that they have their own life.
  - “When the domestic worker shows that she has her own life, her own problems, her own health, and her own kids to attend to, it’s threatening. Suddenly it’s clear that the
worker has concerns that are more important than taking care of some employer’s house or kids.

- Care is a major export of foreign countries now. Working women want to import this care to help better their children’s lives.
  - “We’ve decided to let other women take care of our children so that we can give those children a better life… we are more like our nannies than we realize - strung out between the old ways and the new, between the demands of money and the demands of love.”
- Workers treated as servants or sometimes treated as best friends. “Reliable and completely discrete.” “They must see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” ** Ex: Jamaican worker seeing husband kissing wife’s best friend.
- Another point of this book is the generational difference of the power of women. Think of in the 1950’s what the woman’s role was and now think of what she is attempting to import.

- **Sexism**
  - Peake and De Souza 2010
    - Guyana is commonly regarded as a homophobic country in which the only acceptable sexuality is heterosexuality
    - Considered a biological betrayal but also a social betrayal in their failure to contribute to the reproduction of the nation and their “race.”
    - Lesbians and Gays seen as “unnatural”:
      - Wicked, depraved, corrupt, impure, immoral, polluted, and filthy.
    - Red Thread - until 2006 - had not taken any public position on issues of sexuality
  - Louie 2001
    - Most people in the factories were women and children – faced with low wages, excessive hours, unsanitary conditions
    - “Feminization of Labor” – the disproportionately high numbers of women working in the global sweatshop since the 1960s
    - “Feminization of Migration” – rise in women’s labor migration from the global South (aka “targets of the US capital export and labor import, whose economies are more tightly woven together through global sweatshop production”)
    - “Segmented Labor Market” – the stratified job market within which women work
    - “Ethnic Enclaves” – how women confronted entrenched relations of class, gender, race, and national privilege within their industries, families, and communities
      - Women serve as “bridge people” within/between grassroots movements for justice by challenging “multiple oppressions”
    - **Construction of Women’s Centers** – enabled them to resist oppressions and to fashion new ways to work, live, think, create
    - CHINESE
      - “Love for boys” and “hate for girls”
      - Women trickled into US pre 1875 as “slaves, forced prostitutes, or merchant wives”
    - HISPANIC
      - Texas/NM: women paid $5,300 annually; men $6,000
    - KOREAN
      - “Hierarchical gender relations were maintained at work via male management, discipline, and sexual harassment, and employers portrayed factory work as only a temporary arrangement for women whose true
vocation was marriage and motherhood.”

- “pretty, young faces to attract male customers”

- **Ehrenreich 2004**
  - **Prostitution:** Girls from native island (Thailand) don’t view it as bad -> helping fam “One girl equals one television”
  - If runaway- beaten & excessively raped
  - Ex: Male dominance over women
  - Women reserved solely for dirty jobs- ex: being maids
  - In brothels, women can have sex 15 times/day and when they do not comply they are beaten and raped. Massive fear of AIDS.
  - Sex workers seen as exotic because of their “dark-skinned ‘native’ bodies” - women continue to do this work because of the exceptions that make it out of this sex worker business.
    - This is similar to the American Dream in which the workers have hope for something better that may very well be unattainable.
  - Many women in the brothels (which many of them did not choose to enter at all) have to deal with a life where they have to be with 15 men every day. “The reaction to this abuse takes many forms: lethargy, aggression, self-loathing, suicide attempts, confusion, self-abuse, depression, full-blown psychoses, and hallucinations.” In places like Thailand, psychology barely exists so there really isn’t therapy available for these women.
    - **This is just like in the rape documentary we watched & learning about rape itself where the woman seeks to blame herself.**

How does each of the authors address these issues differently? Describe the framework within which they define themselves through a comparative examination of their work.

- **Peake & De Souza 2010**
  - Does not focus on individual stories, although many individuals are involved in Red Thread
  - Focuses on how to make women’s movement successful
    - Links between activism, social change, and research
      - Feminist knowledge production in the North have come to focus less on the link between praxis, academic knowledge, and activism and more on questions of feminist epistemology
    - The NGOization of Development
      - Red Thread is NOT an NGO (Non-governmental organization)
        - Do not get proper funding
        - Causes problem with equal distributions of money
        - Problems with “in-between” projects - running the building and being able to fund worker in between projects
      - Feminist academics in the North may not be relevant to Southern groups
        - Karen: “You know I am coming to this meeting but I should really be in Guyana dealing with crises.”
        - Transnational conversations are of much more use for the North; there is no direct benefit to the South as there could be for people in the North, like academic publications and so forth
    - Reclaiming value of quantitative research
      - Teach women how to collect and analyze data statistically

- **Louie 2001**
  - Creation of AIWA (Chinese)
  - **Youth Build Immigrant Power Project** focused on learning tools of community organizing, leadership training, workplace outreach to immigrant workers, and
fundraising to give “...the garment workers a place to come to when they have problems in their workplace that their bosses are ignoring...[and] makes the community aware of the unfair treatment...”

- Creation of La Mujer Obrera (LMO) (Hispanic women)
  - “...fought hard against the passage of NAFTA, having first had experience with maquiladorization enacted under the “twin city” arrangement between El Paso and Juarez during the Border Industrialization Program”
  - Learned how to analyze working conditions/social problems, who was responsible, and what workers could do to achieve justice
  - Confidence gained while standing up for rights spilled over to their jobs

- Korean Immigrant Workers Advocates (KIWA)
  - Workers could come to when they ran into conflicts with bosses
  - Shares common heritage and perspectives with Korean Democratic labor movement
  - Development of organizations created support network; incorporated gender-specific education campaigns and services into organizing work

- Ehrenreich 2004
  - Author worked for US Maid Company: says cleaning floors is “a different world down there below knee level”- shows how women are physically, mentally, and emotionally belittled through s/g system
    - $25/hour/person -- maid makes less than $6/hour. Company docks pay for being late. Breaks = driving to the locations, cannot even drink water on shift.
  - CASA de Maryland's Mujeres Unidas de Maryland - advocate for improved conditions for all workers - former & current domestic workers. Self-esteem classes - can talk about abuse.
  - Shared Communities - Fillipina organization. Ethiopian Community Development Council.
  - ** “More than 25 Washington-based organizations have joined forces to create the Campaign for Migrant Domestic Workers Rights (Break the Chain Campaign), a coalition whose aim is to change public policy and to strengthen the safety net available to G-5, A-3, and B-1 domestic workers.”

In what ways did the authors respond to (e.g. resist, criticize, re-formulate) the Issue?

- Peake & De Souza 2010
  - Feminist academics also need transforming, along with the feminist movement in general
  - Make sure transformative work rather than on Red Thread's (or that organization's) needs
  - Need to put groups like Red Thread in touch with other Southern groups
  - Racism:
    - Given the racial context in Guyana we could learn so much from women activists in India and Africa, and indigenous groups in Latin America
  - Classism:
    - Prevent hierarchies from happening in grassroots organizations
    - Focus on research that accepts measuring transformative practices, moral accountability, and self-empowerment as the fundamental building blocks of development - NOT on research that will benefit the upper class
  - Sexism:
    - Research needed on youth and sexualities in Guyana, to investigate the extent to which the narrow range of acceptable sexualities hinders participation in development process.

- Louie 2001
Ehrenreich 2004

- Criticize the way all women are treated but especially the way minority women are treated
- Perhaps the authors of the book shine a different light on why these women are travelling to do all of these jobs. It goes against what the media is making as a negative stigma. The women are doing it to help their families and are kind of doing it selflessly. In the case of sex workers, it is the same situation. Their end goal is normally to get their families out of the poor conditions they are living in even if it means being with someone “por residencia” (for visas) instead of “por amor”. The women realize this difference.

What difficulties have these initiatives or issues posed for those women and for those that followed them?

- Racism
  - For those women that stand up to their employers -- can lead to getting fired or losing their visa. Probably hard for women in these initiatives to actually stand up for their rights.

- Classism
  - Classicism present even within women as a whole- -> rich, white women in America more privileged and treat minority women with disdain- belittle minority women the way men in Am. belittle Am. women
  - Women of wealthy country oppressing immigrants of other countries who work for them
    - Nannies and maids

- Sexism
  - Patriarchal society
    - Men dominate home, community, and workplace → makes it difficult for women to be leaders
    - Even though women did begin to go to work in 1900's still not able to do high power jobs

- One can never “stand well clear” of the racialized, classed, and transnational power relations that saturate issues regarding the women’s movement
- Sometimes difficult to come together to discuss these issues of race, class, and sex, but it is necessary in order to move forward. All these authors had the commonality that they discussed difficult topics and had to overcome these.

How has learning about these issues or initiatives informed your understanding of women (and men) and how they have influenced your actions as advocates for their causes and your life in general?

- Be more aware of not only American women’s rights but minority women’s rights- don’t further oppress fellow women- -> show more sympathy; don’t force them into dirty jobs and criticize for language barriers
- Standards of living compared to America significantly lower
  - US Nannies make equivalent salaries to doctors in Philippines
  - US Lifeguards make more money than Coal Miners in Russia
- Transnational feminism and working → International feminism and increasing economies of other countries
  - Nannies/maids not well represented by unions
- Although knowledge is power, necessary to take ACTION. While women getting degrees in women’s studies and discussing key issues in that subject is crucial, putting these thoughts into actions will be what ultimately gains equal rights across race, class, and sex.

What does this initiative or approach share with approaches pertaining to the other roundtable


**topics?**

- **Bodies/embodiment (Roundtable #1)**
  - Women being employed solely for the reason that they will attract male customers
  - People immigrated to America to work solely in sweatshops OR marry men
  - Young girls in prostitution didn’t think it was body b/c only saw themselves worthy b/c of their bodies

- **Masculinity (Roundtable #2)**
  - Men enslave young women as sex workers further portrays masculinity and adrocentrism

- **Feminism, Science, and Technology (Roundtable #4)**
  - In order to progressively move forward, we need to reclaim value of quantitative research by feminist activists.
    - Women should know how to collect, organize, and analyze data in a statistical manner.
    - Finally know figures about our lives because we collect data ourselves.

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Have you personally experienced a point in your life where you have felt like an outsider? (because of race, class, gender, etc.)
2. How can feminist academics challenge the academic structures, norms, and practices in which they work to make them more inclusive of women in the global South? (From Peake & De Souza, 2010)
4. How do you think the transnational feminist movement will affect future generations of women?