

## Reflections on Intersectionality: Gender, Class, Race and Nation

Heidi Gottfried

This article argues for several shifts in perspective in order to advance a comparative, transnational account of how gender, race, ethnicity, class and nation align in practice to overcome insularity and particularism inherent to many extant intersectional theories. An extensive review of feminist theories finds that much US scholarship decontextualizes intersectionality, taking-for-granted the national and the transnational. Complexity of relationships between social inequalities cannot be studied as if contained within national borders. A theoretical shift takes the analysis of complexity beyond the nation-state, and argues for social practice theory to examine how complex social relations are reproduced as well as resisted in a globalizing economy. Then introducing the concept of geographies of power shifts the analysis to the transnational to historicize and contextualize categories of analysis. Historicizing Japan's past and present international entanglements can lift the veil shrouding the national narrative of class and racial homogeneity and deconstruct the boundaries of the racial category of Asian. A substantive shift to study transnational migration, particularly women migrants involved in reproductive labor, complicates categories and frameworks for analyzing the intersection of class, gender, race and nation.

**Key Words:** social reproduction, inequality, power, practice, reflexivity

---

### Introduction

This comparative, transnational examination of migrant labor changing the reproductive bargain<sup>1</sup> in Japan highlights the historical and cultural variability of gender relations as they intersect with class, race and nation. The intersections of these relationships are presented as shaped by uneven processes based upon older social formations as well as new subjects and practices. Scholarship on intersectionality, while unsettling monolithic categories used to organize meaning, has theorized the nexus of gender, class and race as if contained within the narrow confines of national borders and as derived from experiences in the West, particularly in the US. To go beyond this spatial insularity, I explore class, gender and race in Japan, allowing for critical reflection on the missing subjects in national political projects.

This article argues for several shifts in perspective in order to advance a comparative,

transnational account of how gender, race, ethnicity, class and nation align in practice to overcome insularity and particularism inherent to many extant intersectional theories. An extensive review of feminist scholarship in the first section suggests the need for a geographic shift in the focus away from the US. All too often US feminist theories decontextualize intersectionality, taking-for-granted the national and the transnational. Complexity of relationships between social inequalities cannot be studied as if contained within national borders.

Next, a theoretical shift takes the analysis of complexity beyond the nation-state. Social practice theory provides an approach for examining how complex social relations are reproduced as well as resisted in a globalizing economy. The second section pushes forward this theoretical shift from micro-level studies of particular groups to analysis of social practices at multiple levels. Updating social practice theory extends the perspective to consider shifting hegemonies and restructuring of complex power relationships across time and space. The third section introduces the concept of geographies of power to shift the analysis to the transnational. A comparative, transnational approach historicizes and contextualizes categories of analysis. Meanings and structures, particularly of race and ethnicity in relationship to gender and class, differ when the perspective shifts to other countries and regions of the world beyond the US and Europe.

The category of Asian is itself relational, constructed and configured differently depending on social location, for example, whether viewed from perspectives in Japan or in the US. To uncover sources of relationality, the fourth section shifts to an historical register. It presents a condensed political-economic history of Japan over the past thirty years to deconstruct the imaginary Asia(n). Reading this historical narrative reveals how the structure of gender and class relations within racialized relationships is tied to geographies of power, not only to the Japanese state's modernization project fostered in the cradle of United States' occupation forces, but also to Japan's colonial domination and economic dominance of other countries in the region. Historicizing Japan's past and present international entanglements can lift the veil shrouding the national narrative of class and racial homogeneity, bring "foreign" others out of the shadows and deconstruct the boundaries of the racial category of Asian. Hegemonic rule in "modern" Japan has relied on absences no longer tenable with the increasing presence of workers from other countries, particularly from other parts of Asia. Finally, a substantive shift to study transnational migration, particularly women migrants involved in reproductive labor, complicates categories and frameworks for analyzing the intersection of class, gender, race and nation.

### Unsettling Categories in Theories of Intersectionality

This literature review reveals current feminist theorists coming to terms with challenges from the recent past. Postmodern and multi-racial feminisms unsettled the certainties of old categories, destabilizing and diffusing conceptualizations of power and—more significantly—the very concept of gender at the heart of feminism as a critical theory of society. Identity politics and movements

of the late-1960s and early-1970s inspired race and gender consciousness infusing theoretical debates in the US. This new theoretical wave advanced intersectional analysis of differences to forge a way forward. Inhabiting categories of difference enriched the experiences represented in research, sensitizing feminists to explore their own social locations more critically. In so doing, this scholarship etched finely grained experiences from the standpoint of particular groups of women in specific times and places. Such analyses so closely limning experiences often lost sight of social structures buried in the details of group embellishment and isolated from the whole system of differences (Bourdieu 1990, 8).

The subject of feminism came under critical scrutiny when postmodernists cast suspicion on social theory writ large, undermining master categories and meta-narratives. Postmodern feminists turned away from theories privileging gender and broadened the terrain of analysis to account for more fluid and complex social relationships. As Crenshaw suggests, “indeed, one of the projects for which postmodern theories have been very helpful—is thinking about the way power has clustered around certain categories and is exercised against others” (1991, 1296-7). This project raised a fundamental question lurking below the surface: What remains of feminism in the wake of postmodernism? Analyzing the French political campaign for electoral parity, “The Contentious Subject of Feminism” by Elenore Lepinard (2007) incisively identifies real political as well as theoretical stakes in trying to construct a robust conceptualization of gender difference after the fall from grace. She succinctly poses the dilemma at the heart of the postmodern critique, as follows: “Crucial to feminism’s understanding of difference is the theoretical and political status given to the category of women, which has been altogether the term that made possible the voicing of feminism’s political claims, the inescapable figure of feminist identity, and the elusive subject of the feminist struggle” (Lepinard 2007, 377). More specifically, to heed Braidotti’s strategic call for abandoning “feminism founded on shared oppression or on the female subject” (Ibid., 394) would deprive feminism of its political subject. Pluralizing difference without recourse to theoretical prioritizing of structures can lapse into relativism and particularism, and thus cannot easily differentiate which differences matter and why. This question remains a central challenge to feminist theory and politics taken up by women of color.

Rooted in the experiences of women of color, multiracial feminists also noted the gaps in both feminist and anti-racial theories to “advance the telling of that location” (Crenshaw 1991, 1242). Black feminists criticized second wave feminist discussions of the interrelationship between gender and class for failing to integrate an analysis of race, and rendering black women invisible, just as traditional social science had, by and large, rendered all women invisible (Collins 1990, 1999; Spelman 1988). Theories of race were not immune from similar charges of giving primacy to one overarching category. Anti-racial and feminist discourses had articulated parallel streams of thought (Crenshaw 1991); neither theories of gender nor theories of race adequately addressed the experience of race and gender as “simultaneous and linked” social identities (Browne and Misra 2003, 488) and “structures of domination” (Zinn and Dill 2007, 71). “Because women of

color experience racism in ways not always the same as those experience by men of color and sexism in ways not always parallel to experiences of white women, anti-racism and feminism are limited, even on their own terms” (Crenshaw 1991, 1252). Intersectional analysis not only was a retrospective corrective to race and gender theories, but also was a prospective revision of substantive knowledge on the ground.

These intersectional theories share a social constructionist perspective that categories and meanings are historically contingent and situational. Influential ethnomethodological approaches conceptualized gender, along with race and heterosexuality, as on-going, methodological, and situated accomplishments (West and Fenstermaker 1995). What became known as the “doing gender” approach emphasized on-going negotiations and interactions in the social-order. One of the most far-reaching theories by Yuval-Davis (2006) concerned the intersection of different social divisions “concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they related to political and subjective constructions of identity” (Lenz 2007, 103). But as Lenz concisely summarizes in her critique of Yuval-Davis’s work, the cultural construction of identities based on discourses “classifying persons and collectivities” is disconnected from the social structure; it locates class in economy, distancing gender from the division of paid and unpaid labor. These theories complicated analyses and troubled the categories, yet moved the agenda too far in one direction for analyzing complexity.

Despite recent proliferation of scholarship on intersectionality, few key texts, as discussed above, focused on theorizing complexity, that is, the patterning of inter-relationships between social divisions. In “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” McCall (2005) details alternative methodologies used in this pursuit and identifies the inherent problems in many of these approaches. She argues in favor of adopting a methodology capable of analyzing “inter-categorical complexity,” taking into account “the potential for both multiple and conflicting experiences of subordination and power” (McCall 2005, 1780). McCall suggests that theorists “...provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions” (Ibid., 1773). Such strategic essentialism offers one methodological solution to overcome the theoretical impasse. Essentialism conveys a strong sense of “identity politics” (Laclau cited in Lepinard, 394) that restores women to the position as collective subject of feminism without totalizing the category of woman. Strategic analysis grounds women’s oppression contextually and allows for historical contingency, which can avoid the tendency to fix the category of women in an essential difference, and thus can restore the political subjects of feminism.

To study complexity, analytical categories should be theoretically driven, but derived from the study of specific social formations in historical context. “Complexity derives from the fact that different contexts reveal different configurations of inequality in this particular social formation” (McCall 2005, 1773). The nature and extent of differences should not be assumed a priori (Ibid., 1791). Put another way, Browne and Misra (2003, 491) suggest asking questions such as: Do

race and gender always intersect? Does intersection necessarily create multiple disadvantages for women of color and multiple privileges for White men? Using socio-historically informed middle-range theories can consider the complexity of intersections more systematically.

During the 1980s feminists engaged in critical inquiry over and self-reflection on the representation and exclusion of subjects from Anglo-American feminist theories. Postmodern and multi-racial feminists unsettled categories by problematizing the category of women and theorizing the intersection of race and gender. Several problems marred otherwise rich intersectionality accounts. Particularism often followed from analysis that took the standpoint perspective of one's own group, which limited their ability to "envisage complexity of social structures" (Lenz 2007, 101). Further, many reserved social structure for class analysis then switched to social constructivism for analysis of race and gender relations. Mapping complexity requires a multi-dimensional theory integrating micro-level interactions with meso-level institutions.

### A Theory of Social Practice

This section reprises my theory of social practice to bridge agency and structure for discerning subjects in historical context (Gottfried 1998). Written in the waning years of the last millennium, the original piece saw the spectre of abstract-structuralism as the main antagonist haunting feminist debates. At the time, discussions of globalization and gender were still in their infancy. Now, almost a decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the pendulum has swung back to theoretical propositions with considerations of large-scale institutions and structural explanations. Flirting with postmodern dissolution of stable categories and the abandonment of class has led both to dissatisfaction with theories of difference and to revisiting early second wave feminist debates on the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism in order to salvage social structures and agency. Yet, social practice theory requires updating in order to take into account newer scholarship on intersectionality. This section lays out the logic of practice to develop a dynamic account of the complex relations of gender, class and race as embedded and embodied, elaborating on Gramsci's notion of hegemony.

Impoverished notions of patriarchy motivated the initial intervention whereby feminists moved theory beyond abstract categories and functionalism. The alternative theory of social practice gave feminists tools for the excavation of lived experiences without sacrificing reference to social structures. An excavation of the logic of practice made visible the gendering process and grounded specific forms of male power in relationship to class and other hierarchies. Class and gender were conceptualized as mutually constituting but representing two analytically different types of irreducible social relationships. Mutually constituting conveyed that there were "no ungendered class relations and no gender without class dimensions" (Acker 2004; *Ibid.*, 2006). A feminist historical materialism informed both method and theory to capture tensions, contradictions and oppositions within social processes (Pollert 1996). Theoretical and methodological injunctions directed

attention to ‘the institutional embeddedness of different forms of male power’ and the ways these ‘two dynamics (class and gender) enmesh in practice’ (Ibid., 653–4). The phrasing of “enmesh in practice” denoted a kind of “doing” intersectionality, insisting on the distinction between the empirical experiences of simultaneity and the mutual constitution of relationships analytically.

My formulation of social practice theory borrows centrally from Gramsci’s problematic. While the economic moment is a fundamental aspect of Gramsci’s problematic, his non-reductionist theory, giving centrality to politics and ideology with its area of hegemony, dissolves the static opposition of agency and structure. In the struggle for hegemony, ruling groups make concessions of a material kind in order to secure consent of subordinate groups. Goran Therborn (1999) amplifies Gramsci’s understanding of “consent to the system of rule [as] generated by the dual operation of the marginalization of alternatives and the partial accommodation of one’s own material interests and normative concerns.” Hegemonic rule predisposes agents’ tacit acceptance of a preferred picture of the world, but the continual reconfiguration of cultural and ideological elements unsettles such assurances. As a consequence, the dominant culture is never pure but becomes ‘a mobile combination of cultural and ideological elements devised from different locations’ (Bennett 1994, 225). Gramsci presciently observed that, “hegemony...requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries” (1978, 285). Hegemony is not an external force primarily enforced by coercion, but rather operates on the basis of active consent. Although Gramsci penned his Prison Notebooks before social practice theory had a specific name, his approach is well suited for analyzing the logic of practice.

The logic of practice inscribes gender, race and class relations in the principles guiding social action. These principles are not reducible to “a set of conscious, constant rules” (Bourdieu 1990, 12). Rather hegemonic forms of rule are embedded and embodied in the norms governing everyday interactions and formal institutional structures; institutions structure the conditions of social practices. Embedded refers to how relationships of inequalities become normalized in the way institutions are organized. Embodied refers to “modes of being in bodies” (Morgan 1998, 655); ‘gender [sexuality, race and class] rests not only on the surface of the body, in performance and doing, but becomes *embodied*—becomes deeply part of whom we are physically and psychologically [and socially]’ (emphasis in the original)(Martin 1998, 495). To say that hegemonic forms of rule are embedded and embodied suggests that historical legacies of past practices “calls into existence specific patterns (or configurations) of practice” (Connell 2007, 86), but also can be called into question. As social practices, subjects engage in both habitual enactment and reflexivity, suggesting the possibility of discerning subjects who can take action against prescribed and proscribed conduct. Hegemony occurs not only by virtue of the subjects addressed but also by the subjects excluded and unmarked. Subjects are ‘generated and adjusted in a complex interplay of current contingencies and historical legacies’ (Dyson 1992, 3–4). “Historical knowledge” tells us where to look and what is the “relative weight, the embeddedness and the historical relationality of the elements which constitute it” (Knapp 2007).

My formulation of social practice theory utilizes Gramsci's notion of hegemony. An excavation of the logic of practice reveals particular structures of domination, illuminates the taken-for-granted assumptions orienting practical activity, and thus makes them available for feminist criticism and political action. The theory of social practice initially focused on the mutual constitution of gender and class relations, yet this iteration neglected race and nation.

### Geographies of Power and Mapping Intersectionality

With the exception of post-colonial theories and recent scholarship on gender and globalization, feminism has not consistently integrated the nation and the transnational into accounts of intersectionality. Tracing the lineage of current feminist literature on globalization to women and development research shows both the continuities and distance traveled from the previous terrain of debate and the uncharted territories still in need of mapping (Acker 2004; Fernandez-Kelly and Wolf 2001; Chow 2003). The construction of national subjects and subjects within nations involves political cartography not readily captured by extant theories of intersectionality. For this reason, I adopt the spatial language of geography, differentiating the concept of geographies of power from cartographies of struggle (Mohanty 2006) and the international division of labor to provide a conceptual mapping of social inequalities shaped at multiple scales.

One of the major advances in feminist theory comes under the microscope of Joan Acker's (2004) keen analysis when she examines gender as embodied and as embedded in the logic and (re)structuring of globalizing capitalism. She extends her earlier pioneering research on gender relations being embedded in the organizing principles of major institutions (Acker 1990). For the study of globalization, Acker posits that the gendered construction (and cultural coding) of capitalist production separated from human reproduction has resulted in subordination of women in both domains. Despite corporate claims to non-responsibility for reproduction of human life and of the natural environment, "the ability of money to mobilize labor power for 'productive work' depends on the operation of some non-monetary set of social relations to mobilize labor power for 'reproductive work' (Elson cited in Acker 2004). This archeology enables Acker to uncover the historical legacy of a masculine-form of dominance associated with production in the money economy that was exported to and embedded in colonialist installation of large-scale institutions. By the late 20th Century large-scale institutions promoted images and emotions that expressed economic and political power in terms of hegemonic masculinities, characterized by Acker either as "hyper-masculinity," (i.e., aggressive, ruthless, competitive, and adversarial) or as "transnational business masculinity" (i.e., ego-centrism and conditional loyalties to country of origin and even to the company that employs them). The construction of hegemonic masculinities is shaped in large-scale institutions and everyday practices.

Several studies showcase a social practice approach to examine intersectionality as embedded and embodied in organizations. An exemplary case study by Linda McDowell (1997a) examines

The City, the financial district in London, through the lens of the daily social practices, careers, and interactions between individual men and women working in merchant banks. Focusing on the workplace level, although neither denying nor neglecting structural and institutional factors that sort men and women into different occupations, McDowell (1997b, 182) suggested that ‘uncovering the social construction of different masculinities and the relations between them is...a crucial element in revealing how the structural order of gender is maintained, reproduced or challenged’. Merchant bankers constructed a dominant version of hegemonic masculinity revolving around a variant of an embodied, manly, heterosexualized, class-based masculinity that disempowers a range of “Others,” not only women but men from different class, ethnic and educational backgrounds. Organizational practices are tied to embodied characteristics of gender, class, age and race, and to notions of appropriate behavior and style and embedded in institutional rules and regulations (Halford and Savage 1997, 116; Gottfried 2003).

Despite the insistence on multi-scalar accounts, these rich studies lack a vocabulary for mapping the contours of power relations at multiple and shifting scales. The field of geography offers a spatial language to map systematic power relationships in localities and between countries within regions and across the world. “[While] world atlases mainly tracked the shifting of borders and changes in the names of cities and countries determined by politics, diplomacy or war” (Revkin 2007, 2), the flat surface of maps renders the structure of power relations unintelligible. Not surprisingly, post-colonial feminist thought appropriates the language of geography to explain border-crossings and unequal power relations and exchanges affecting social divisions of gender, race, class, and sexuality within and across nations. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who entitles one of her influential essays, “Cartographies of Struggle,” lays out the remit of “feminism without borders”; and with rhetorical flourish, she argues that global feminism should study ‘a world definable only in relational terms, a world traversed by intersecting lines of power and resistance...’ (Mohanty 2006, 42-43). Cartographies of struggle mark the hidden histories of resistance, whereas the alternative conceptualization of geographies of power seeks to map shifting hegemonies.

The concept of geographies of power surveys different analytical ground than the concept of international division of labor. The latter specifies power relationships between classes across ‘classes’ of countries, that is, the structural architecture girding the links in commodity/supplier chains that stretch beyond geographical borders. This compelling metaphor illuminates the interconnections tying the economic fate of both men and women in different regions of the world. The concept of international division of labor, however, seems best suited for analyzing economic structure, eclipsing political and cultural dimensions that encompass how states’ (including de-regulation and re-regulation), international organizations’ (including unions and NGOs), and agents’ practices affect patterns of inequality. Yet, the international division of labor remains useful for diagramming economic structure of hierarchical social relations. The alternative concept of geographies of power charts the rise of new subjects within and beyond the nation.

Using the concept of geographies of power can map the operation of power at multiple

scales. Mapping intersectionality in terms of geographies of power foregrounds international entanglements and transnational relations, but also is capable of examining intimate practices in every day life. The fruitfulness of intersectional analysis integrating the transnational becomes more apparent when studying women migrants. Women migrants problematize and destabilize categories of gender, race, class and nation<sup>2</sup>. Tracking the migration trail of “pioneering” women can highlight the contradictory effects on and complexity of gender and class relations in and between both home and host countries. Theorizing the intersection of gender, class, race and nation is unavoidable when studying nannies, maids, and home-health care workers who toil invisibly in the intimate sphere of someone else’s household and who create transnational “care chains” linking families from Third to First Worlds (Hochschild 2003, 18). Like women of color whose experience of race and class domination was documented for an earlier period in the US, women migrating from the Third World perform domestic work cast-off by affluent women in the First World. First World women’s increased labor market participation and ability to combine work and family, to some extent, relies on Third World women’s cheap reproductive labor<sup>3</sup>. The increasing presence of migrant women involved in reproductive labor results in “new geographies of centrality and marginality” (Sassen 1996, 17). Studying women migrants involved in caretaking shows the intersection of class and race in the transnational “work transfer system of reproductive labor among women” (Parreñas 2001, 78).

Feminist theories of the global and of postcolonial subjects highlight spatial and temporal dimensions of intersectionality. These studies call attention to the ways gender, class and race are embodied and embedded in everyday practices at multiple scales and note how globalization has altered the sites, the subjects, and the ways of doing politics. Geographies of power can be used to conceptualize the spatial dynamics in which micro-and meso-practices produce and reproduce gender, class and race within and across nations.

#### Out of the Shadows: Historicizing Japan from the Imaginary “Asia(n)”

In Japan a national(ist) narrative has filtered modern subjects through the binary of Japanese/non-Japanese. To sustain this juxtaposition, the state invented a tradition of an authentic monolithic culture<sup>4</sup>. Thus, any attempt to analyze the intersection of class, gender, race/ethnicity and nation requires unpacking monolithic categories to uncover the historical erasures of ethno-cultural groups in Japan. Intersectional analysis can bring these excluded others out of the shadows in some cases quite literally for those who live in makeshift domiciles or who work outside of legal confines. The influx of women migrants, particularly from other parts of Asia, renders geographies of power structuring and restructuring complex relationships between race, class, gender and nation more visible to reveal the historical construction of the imaginary Asia(n). Historicizing Japan’s relationship to other countries in the region can deconstruct this imaginary.

A political cartography mapping geographies of power elucidates the missing subjects in Japan

from analysis of contradictory tensions that originated prior to but became increasingly apparent during the 1990s. Just as many have celebrated the 1980s as the culmination of the economic miracle, the 1990s has become known retrospectively as the “lost decade.” Both instances, however, treat respective periods in isolation from their historical antecedents. The essays in *Japan After Japan* remind theorists of the imperative to historicize contemporary social life. More specifically, the editors, Tomika Yoda and Harry Harootunian (2006, 6–7) suggest, “approaching the decade in relation to broader historical trends of globalization and postmodernization that followed completion of Japan’s postwar high-speed economic growth.” This section briefly chronicles the state’s modernization project and its impact on representation and structuration of class and gender within racialized categories.

After the end of the Second World War the Japanese state embarked on an ambitious modernization project to rebuild the war-torn nation. The state promoted rapid industrialization, accelerating the shift from agriculture to manufacturing and fueling the exodus from rural areas to factories and offices in sprawling urban areas. The farming class contracted at a fast pace around the same time that the blue-collar working class and white-collar jobs expanded (Ishida 2005). Economic expansion that followed during the 1960s stabilized employment relationships for many men who moved into more secure employment in core industrial sectors, while many working class women toiled in low-wage jobs crucial to the textile and consumer electronics industries. A feature of Japanese capitalism in this period was that job security of regular employees working in large Japanese companies was underwritten by inferior working conditions further down the job hierarchy and the production chain. Men and women in the manual working class occupied positions in different industrial sectors and in different size firms. The modernization project entrenched gender divisions of labor cross-cutting the class structure.

By the beginning of the 1970s, the sources of labor from the countryside had largely dried up during the fast-paced economic transformation over the preceding two decades. “The early 1970s hit Japan hard, coming at a time when it had depleted the resources of cheap labor extracted from rural areas and agricultural sectors through process of industrialization” (Yoda 2006a, 30). In response to spiking oil prices from the mid-1970s onward, employers incorporated “flexible” nonstandard employment, chiefly among women, as a cheap labor buffer to manage high personnel costs associated with the lifetime employment system and the embedded male breadwinner reproductive bargain. Strict immigration policies foreclosed the possibility of employers filling the large and growing volume of nonstandard employment with low-wage migrant labor.

State-led modernization was a cultural as well as an economic and political project. “The national operated through a broad configuration of disciplinary institutions, hegemonic rule through creation of social consensus and normativity, and forcing of individual and collective identities in complex relation to one another” (Ibid., 35). In particular, the construction of Japaneseness erased the recognition of other subject positions, including hyphenated identities such as Korean-Japanese, left little room for imagining multiethnic identities and fostered a kind of historical

amnesia for forgetting Japan's colonial past. Through restrictions on migration the state further enforced the conception of Japan as a homogeneous nation. The rupture evident during the 1990s and the anxiety fueling pro-natalist political rhetoric of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in the early years of the next decade made visible contradictions buried beneath the smooth surface glossing the narrative of cultural homogeneity. This condensed political-economic history of Japan encourages further reflection on the imaginary Asia(n).

### Reflections on Intersectionality

Feminist theories of intersectionality need to pay more attention to intra-categorical differences as well inter-categorical relationships. Categories such as Asian assume internal coherence and imply homogeneity. Contiguous nations bound together in Asia share more than a common physical space; they occupy different positions of power relative to one another and against other regions in the world. These international entanglements shaped configurations of inequality. In this case, Asia signified the naming practice given to racially differentiate the East from the West. The concept of geographies of power is a tool to map the establishment of political and ideological borderlines racializing national groupings and to call attention to shifting hegemonies. Meanings of Asia(n) differ when viewed by others *within* the constellation of countries composing this so-called region. Shifting our gaze to focus on missing subjects in Japan makes visible the relationality of constituent parts to unsettle how we think about categorical differences.

Uncertainties in economic and political arenas led to a loss of confidence in and to a questioning of the unified national subject hegemonic in Japan. Most notably from the mid-to-late 1990s, a surge of interest in class analysis, gender and race matters reflected on these missing subjects in scholarship as well as in public discourse and policy. A new scholarly literature on Japanese minorities contested the untenable view of Japan as a culturally homogeneous nation (Weiner 1997; Roberts 1999; Ching 2006; Lie 2001). It became increasingly impossible to ignore ethnic and racial differences with the growing numbers of "foreign" laborers working in Japan. Tracking transnational migrant flows between countries in Asia, especially cross-border migration of women who perform care work illuminates already existing differences relatively hidden from view and restructuring of relationships between class, gender, race and nation.

In Japan, the question of care arose in the context of demographic shifts imperiling the former reproductive bargain. At the time, conditions of the old reproductive bargain began to show signs of wear. The state could no longer rely on unpaid labor of women in the private sphere to fully care for children and elderly parents. Moreover, projected labor shortages due to the declining fertility rate and the aging population prompted the conservative government to discuss recruitment of workers from abroad. This was the background against which the LDP liberalized immigration policy to recruit migrant labor on short-term visas to fill specific job categories. New short-term programs for industrial training in 1990 and technical internships in 1993 created a pool of

temporary labor (Ito 2005, 66). These policy revisions served to induce migration of a relatively cheap labor force without provoking too much political opposition (Ibid.). For example, recruitment of Filipinas on short-term visas to perform reproductive labor as trainees guaranteed that this type of work was gendered as women's work and was established as temporary work. Further, the status of "trainee" deprived workers of both explicit and implicit contractual commitments for continuous employment and denied recognition of workers' actual skills and their previous work experience and educational achievements. Short-term visas functioned as revolving doors due to legal requirements that directed workers to return home after a fixed time period.

Other recent provisions of the Japanese immigration law based migrants' entry and access to work and citizenship on class, gender and heritage. The revised Immigration Control Law of 1990 accorded a special status to those with Japanese heritage, *Nikkeijin*, principally Latin Americans mostly from Brazil and Peru (Roberts 1999, 399). As overseas descendants of Japanese, *Nikkeijin* are allowed to stay in Japan as "spouses or children of Japanese nationals or as 'long-term residents' without limitations on work" (Ito 2005, 56). Similarly, political practices favored Japanese nationals over others as evident in the example of public employment and enfranchisement, which has been restricted to Japanese nationals, although some municipalities have abolished the nationality requirement (Kibe 2006, 422). The Immigration Control Law regulated the mode of entry, restricting the terms and conditions of living and working in Japan, shaping the contours of power relations in Japan.

A transnational comparative perspective on migration of care workers puts in sharp relief the fault lines of race, gender, class and nation intersecting in practice. Reproductive work by migrants alters class and gender relations not only in the host country but also at home through the "huge transfer of caring and emotional resources globally..." (Pyle 2006, 289). As the state increasingly relinquishes responsibility for provision of care services, "much of the burden of social reproduction in the receiving countries [shift] onto women from the sending countries..." (Ibid.). A new reproductive bargain changes the relative weight distributed to public and private responsibility for social reproduction (health care, childcare and elderly care), that is, how social reproduction is organized, who bears the cost, who performs the labor and under what conditions (market, state, family): either commodified (paid or unpaid); marketized (formal or informal employment relations); or socialized (public support for care). From this perspective, we can better see the spatial dynamics in which micro-level and meso-level practices produce and reproduce gender, class and race within and across nations.

New structural configurations anticipate the emergence of new practices. Social practice theory argues that structure and agency are inextricably linked. Indeed innovative oppositional politics and practices counter older forms of organization and point to social movements articulating new voices and identities around intersectionality in Japan<sup>5</sup>. Crafting movements based on intersectionality acknowledges differences and mobilizes around mobile and multiple communities and identities. Contestation has involved reflexive framing of new subjects and practices critical of

traditional class politics.

Class politics have inflected and reflected asymmetrical gender relations and gender differences, but this has been an unacknowledged legacy of Japanese trade unions. Japanese enterprise-based unions protected and projected interests of a male-breadwinner reproductive bargain and a work pattern based on a hegemonic masculinity norm of non-responsibility for reproductive labor and care work<sup>6</sup>. In response to established labor's perceived inefficacy and in the face of "new modalities and loci of oppression" (Kohso 2006 cited in Yoda and Harootunian 2006, 14), new oppositional politics and worker-based reform organizations have emerged.

Japanese reform efforts largely have been premised on the idea of creating a new, more democratic structure that serves the needs of marginalized workers<sup>7</sup>. These new organizations have coalesced around the intersection of gender and class issues as well as other identities at multiple levels and scales. In so doing, oppositional reform movements are crafting new political subjects. For example, organizations "forming solidarities around the identity of 'woman' have the potential to destabilize the male full-time worker norm at the foundation of trade unionism" (Curtin 1999, 7). Yet, these new movements and organizations do not assume "that there exists an overarching and fixed common interest among women workers" (Ibid., 161). Adopting strategic essentialism but based on intersectionality, these organizations have challenged the assumption of a singular working class interest, and the false unity of the national narrative that glosses over differences, while at the same time they find common ground for organizing.

### Gender, Class, Race and Nation: Lessons from Japan

This article reviewed literature on intersectionality to extract lessons from archaeology of US scholarship. It spotlighted the initial impulses critical of feminism for privileging the category of woman that masked important differences among women. If women did not share uncomplicated experiences, then feminist theories needed new ways of thinking about multiple sources of differences beyond the singular female subject. Yet, these theories too narrowly based conceptions of intersectionality on the standpoint of particular group's experiences primarily in the US. Intersectionality theories of difference were diagnosed as suffering from twin maladies of particularism and of relativism, unable to adequately conceptualize social structuring of relationships between social inequalities at multiple scales, over time and across space.

The second section proposed social practice theory to overcome these problems, and acknowledged the weakness of the approach in its early formulations. Social practice theory enabled the excavation of power and hegemony as embedded and embodied, but tended to operationalize concepts without attention to space or scale. To address these limitations, section three turned to recent feminist literature on globalization and postcolonial thought. The concept of geographies of power mapped the spatial patterning of social divisions ranging over intimate relations localized in everyday life to economic transactions regionalized in supra-national governance. It theorized

transnational mobility of reproductive labor and the class within racialized relationships among women who performed low-wage domestic labor that released affluent women from these tasks as part of the reproductive bargain. The changing reproductive bargain, with the increasing presence of female migrants who supplemented and substituted for women's unpaid labor, made visible the once absent subjects that had obscured the social divisions of labor in the myth of the homogeneous nation in Japan.

The fourth section historicized social relationships as they have intersected in Japan from a deconstruction of the imaginary Asia(n). Its historical perspective uncovered the social construction of Japaneseness as based on the exclusion of other identities. Mapping missing subjects in Japan contributes to conceptualization of shifting borders and boundaries relating race, class, gender and nation. An intersectional analysis pointed out the cleavages that otherwise would have remained under the surface.

The analysis has several implications for consideration by the next generation of comparative, transnational theories of intersectionality. The concept of geographies of power in particular moves analysis beyond simple categories and can be used to develop a more systematic treatment of "trans" as one way forward. Ilse Lenz discusses the theoretical implications of this move, as follows: "Persons with plural identities beyond groups become invisible because they are transcending these delimitations or crisscrossing between differences. Transmigrants, transcultural or trans-desiring/queer persons—the 'trans' perspective becomes more important, but it cannot be integrated into concept of essentialized homogenous groups" (Lenz 2006, 101-2).

Feminists' engagements with intersectional analysis grow out of political as well as theoretical concerns. Political priorities should be assessed against the needs associated with different social locations that are shaped by intersections of class, race, gender and nation. Without critical reflection on the setting of priorities, we can, and often do, privilege the needs of one group over that of others. Strategic essentialism provides a means for identifying common bases of inequalities, while at the same time acknowledges possible differences. Strategic implies the provisional acceptance of political subjects attuned to historical circumstances and variability. Because political subjects are not given, politics should be formulated on the basis of strategic interests and social locations. New organizing strategies and organizational forms apparent in Japan embody new sensibilities eschewing singular political subjects. These organizations presage a politics that transverse old boundaries and reflexively forge solidarities across social locations.

A critical feminist theory for our time foregrounds comparative differences and commonalities and recognizes linkages and tensions within and across social locations. Through the comparative, transnational lens we can more clearly see cross-border relationships.

(Heidi Gottfried, Professor, Department of Sociology,  
Wayne State University)

## Notes

- 1 I first encountered the term “reproductive bargain” in a paper delivered by Ruth Pearson at Ochanomizu University in 2007. It immediately resonated as an institutional term closely allied with the concept of gender contract that Jacqueline O’Reilly and I had developed in our collaborative writing projects (see Gottfried and O’Reilly 2002; Gottfried 2000). I define reproductive bargain as an ensemble of institutions (the relationship between state, families and economy), ideologies and identities around social provisioning and caring for human beings (including health care, childcare and elderly care).
- 2 Migration from rural to urban areas in rapidly developing countries offers another example of new geographies of power. Eileen Otis’s dissertation provides a fascinating case study of the fashioning of bodies for gender appropriate work in China. In her case study, young women migrants from rural areas represent the preferred workers for the highly gendered jobs of beauticians in the burgeoning service sector. Training involves disciplinary practices, imparting moral lessons on the proper conduct of the new socialist/capitalist worker and instructing young women on the use of embodied skills. Spatial dynamics inform the restructuring of class and gender relations in a new geography of the Chinese economy.
- 3 Globalization means more than the transnational mobility of reproductive labor and the substitution of women performing domestic tasks. It involves a distinctive type of commodity in which emotional, sexual as well as physical labor capacities are extracted (Hochschild and Ehrenreich 2003). Transnational migration continues to be predicated on gendered assumptions about who is available for what type of work.
- 4 Glenda Roberts summarizes the new research on “the formation of modern Japanese identity” in Michael Weiner’s introductory chapter from *Japan’s Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*. “The meaning of ‘Japaneseness’ was created from the new nation-state, linking nation, family, and the Japanese way of life. The next step, linking blood and culture, was made explicit in 1940 by Kada Tetsuji, who argued for a biological or genetic basis for the ‘distinctiveness and superiority of the Japanese people’” (1999, 399).
- 5 It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the influence of ethnocultural minority groups, particularly the Ainu and Koreans, on the increasing recognition of intersectionality in local and national state action. See Kibe (2006) for a fascinating and politically relevant discussion of “differentiated citizenship” in Japan.
- 6 More recently, the major labor federation, Rengo and some affiliated unions, especially in the service sector (public sector unions and retail), have articulated successive action plans to promote gender equality, to recruit more women members and to target part-time worker. These campaigns have not yielded significant boosts in women’s union membership. Their failure to make union strategies and structures more woman-friendly is in part to blame for the lack of organizing success.
- 7 The discussion of new unions was developed in collaboration with Anne Zacharias-Walsh.

## References

- Acker, Joan. 2006. *Class Questions: Feminist Answers*. AltaMira Press.
- Acker, Joan. 2004. “Feminism, Gender and Globalization,” *Critical Sociology* 30, 1: 17–42.
- Acker, Joan. 1990. “Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations,” *Gender and Society* 2: 139–58.
- Baca Zinn, Maxine and Bonnie Thornton Dill. 2007. “Theorizing Difference From Multiracial Feminism,” in Verta Taylor, Nancy Whittier and Leila Rupp (eds.), *Feminist Frontiers*, Seventh Edition. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Bennett, Tony. 1994. “Popular Culture and the ‘Turn to Gramsci,’” in J. Storey (ed.), *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture: A Reader*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

- Bourdieu, Pierre, 1990. *The Theory of Practice*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.
- Browne, Irene and Joya Misra. 2003. "The Intersection of Gender and Race in the Labor Market," *Annual Review of Sociology* 29: 487-513.
- Ching, Leo. 2006. "Give Me Japan and Nothing Else: Postcoloniality, Identity, and the Traces of Colonialism," in Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.), *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Chow, Esther Ngan-Ling. 2003. "Gender Matters: Studying Globalization and Social Change in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *International Sociology* 18,3: 443-460.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 2000. *Black Feminist Thought*. London: Routledge.
- Connell, R.W. 2007. "Masculinities and Globalization," in Verta Taylor, Nancy Whittier and Leila Rupp (eds.), *Feminist Frontiers*, Seventh Edition. Boston: McGraw Hill.
- Crenshaw, Kimberle, 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, 6: 1241-1299.
- Curtin, Jennifer. 1999. *Women and Trade Unions: A Comparative Perspective*. London: Ashgate.
- Davies, Roy. 2007. "The Rise and Fall of Alberto Fujimori: Biography of the President of Peru, 1990-2000." <http://www.ex.ac.uk/~RDavies/inca/fujimori.html>
- Dyson, Kenneth. 1992. "Theories of Regulation and the Case of Germany: A Model of Regulatory Change," in Kenneth Dyson (ed.), *The Politics of German Regulation*. Hampshire: Aldershot.
- Fernandez-Kelly, Patricia and Diane Wolf. 2001. "A Dialogue on Globalization," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, 4: 1243-1249.
- Gottfried, Heidi. 2007. "Changing the Subject: Labor Regulations and Gender (In)Equality," in Ilse Lenz, Charlotte Ullrich, Barbara Fersch (eds.), *Gender Orders Unbound: Globalization, Restructuring, Reciprocity*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Gottfried, Heidi. 2004. "Gendering Globalization Discourses," *Critical Sociology* 30, 1, 2004: 1-7.
- Gottfried, Heidi. 2003. "Temp(t)ing Bodies: Shaping Gender at Work in Japan," *Sociology: Journal of the British Sociological Association* 37, 2: 257-276.
- Gottfried, Heidi. 2000. "Compromising Positions: Emergent Neo-Fordisms and Embedded Gender Contracts," *The British Journal of Sociology* 52, 2: 235-259.
- Gottfried, Heidi. 1998. "Beyond Patriarchy? Theorizing Gender and Class," *Sociology: Journal of the British Sociological Association* 32, 3: 451-468.
- Gottfried, Heidi and Jacqueline O'Reilly. 2002. "Re-regulating Breadwinner Models in Socially Conservative Welfare Regimes: Comparing Germany and Japan," *Social Politics* 9, 1: 29-59.
- Gramsci, Antonio. 1978. "Americanism and Fordism," in Q. Hoare and N. Smith (eds.), *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. New York: International Publishers.
- Halford, Susan and Mike Savage. 1997. "Rethinking Restructuring: Embodiment, Agency and Identity in Organizational Change," in Roger Lee and Jane Willis (eds.), *Geographies of Economies*. London: Arnold.
- Hartoonian, Harry, 2006. "Japan's Long Postwar: The Trick of Memory and the Ruse of History," in Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.), *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. 2003. "Love and Gold," in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (eds.) *Global Women: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell and Barbara Ehrenreich. 2003. "Introduction," in Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (eds.), *Global Women: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

- Ishida, Hiroshi. 2005. "Does Social Class Matter in Japan? Class Structure, Mobility and Subjective Perception," Unpublished paper presented at the Conference on Researching Social Class in Japan, University of Michigan, October.
- Ito, Ruri. 2005. "Crafting Migrant Women's Citizenship in Japan: Taking "Family" as a Vantage Point," *International Journal of Japanese Sociology* 14: 52-69.
- Kibe, Takashi. 2006. "Differentiated Citizenship and Ethnocultural Groups: A Japanese Case," *Citizenship Studies* 10, 4: 413-30.
- Kohso, Sabu. 2006. "Angelus Novus in Millennial Japan," in Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.), *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Knapp, Gudrun Axeli. 2007. "Social Theoretical Perspectives on Intersectionality," Unpublished Paper.
- Lenz, Ilse. 2007. "Power People, Working People, Shadow People: Gender, Migration, Class and Practices of (In)Equality," in Ilse Lenz, Charlotte Ullrich, Barbara Fersch (eds.), *Gender Orders Unbound: Globalization, Restructuring, Reciprocity*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers.
- Lepinard, Elenore. 2007. "The Contentious Subject of Feminism: Defining Women in France from the Second Wave to Parity," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 32, 2: 375-403.
- Lie, John. 2001. *Multiethnic Japan*. Cambridge; Harvard University Press.
- Martin, Karin. 1998. "Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools," *American Sociological Review* 63 (August): 494-511.
- McCall, Leslie. 2005. "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, 3: 1771-1800.
- McDowell, Linda. 1997a. *Capital Culture: Gender and Work in the City*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- McDowell, Linda. 1997b. "A Tale of Two Cities? Embedded Organizations and Embodied Workers in the City of London," in Roger Lee and Jane Willis (eds.), *Geographies of Economies*. London: Arnold.
- Mohanty, Chandra-Talpade. 2006. *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Nash, June. 2005. "Women in Between: Globalization and the New Enlightenment," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 31, 1: 145-167.
- Parreñas, Rhacel Salazar. 2001. "Transgressing the Nation-State: The Partial Citizenship and 'Imagined (Global) Community' of Migrant Filipina Domestic Workers," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 26, 4: 1129-1154.
- Pollert, Anne. 1996. "Gender and Class Revisited; Or, The Poverty of 'Patriarchy,'" *Sociology* 30: 639-59.
- Pyle, Jean. 2006. "Globalizations, Transnational Migration, and Gendered Care Work," *Globalizations* (September) 3, 3: 283-295.
- Revkin, Andrew. 2007. "The Art of Mapping on the Run," *The New York Times*, Week in Review (September 9): 2.
- Roberts, Glenda. 1999. "Review of Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 25, 2: 399-403.
- Sakai, Naoki. 2006. "'You Asians': On the Historical Role of the West and Asia Binary," in Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.), *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Sassen, Saskia. 1996. "Toward a Feminist Analytics of the Global Economy," *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 4, 1: 7-41.
- Spelman, Elizabeth. 1988. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. Boston: Beacon Press.

- Therborn, Goran. 1999. *Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Weiner, Michael (ed.). 1997. *Japan's Minorities: The Illusion of Homogeneity*. London: Routledge.
- West, Candice, and Susan Fenstermaker. 1995. "Doing Difference," *Gender and Society* 9: 8–37.
- Yoda, Tomiko. 2006a, "A Roadmap to Millennial Japan," in Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.), *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Yoda, Tomiko. 2006b. "The Rise and Fall of Maternal Society: Gender, Labor, and Capital in Contemporary Japan," in Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.), *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Yoda, Tomiko and Harry Harootunian. 2006. "Introduction," in Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootunian (eds.), *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2006. "Human/Women's Rights and Feminist Transversal Politics," in Marx Ferree, Myra and Aili Mari Tripp (eds.), *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organizing, and Human Rights*. New York: New York University Press.