

Academic Mothers in the Developing World: Stories from India, Brazil and South Africa

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This is a welcome treatise on the socio-cultural and ideological landscapes of academic mothers in the Global South. In fact, the book presents a critical interrogation of the (i) ideologies, structures and relations (both within academe and the home), (ii) the tensions, oppressions, contradictions, and confrontations that they introduce for academic mothers in the Global South, and, (iii) the fluid ways in which they reproduce, modulate, isolate, and/or push back such inherent thinking and practices. In so doing, the book addresses the fundamental ways in which such contexts alter the consciences, maternal and institutional identities, as well as, the praxes of academic mothers in the Global South. These are comparatively addressed through the stories of academic mothers in India, Brazil, and South Africa.

Specifically, the book captures the ways in which gender structures the expectations and practices around both marriage and motherhood, the relations of power that reinforce these, and the implications for mothers who are part of the academic community. To a large extent, this is demonstrated through the nuanced discussion of the many complexities and incongruities that surface from such positionalities, and, the influence of these on how academic mothers experience, as well as, react to work-family dynamics/interface. The treatment of the latter is particularly strengthened by the metaphoric reference to the academic mother as a superwoman, the super mother, and the octopus across all three countries. No doubt, such images centre the weight of such demands, the struggles associated with managing the often conflicting demands for their time and effort, and the diverse responses that these produce.

As such, the use of personal narratives, reflective accounts, and critical ethnographies offer a rich assessment of the inherent contradictions within the socio-economic, political, and cultural landscapes in the Global South. Through interrogation, the authors also bring to the centre, the points and ways in which the thinking and practices of academic mothers converge and diverge with the structures that they confront within these social sites. By so doing, the authors offer needed insight into the contradictions embedded within the multidimensionality, politicality, and emotionality of academic

motherhood. This particularly resonates through the considerations of how feelings of powerlessness, isolation, guilt and strain, are often juxtaposed against those of pride, satisfaction, high self-esteem, and strength. Such contradictions however, do not take away from the equally valuable ways in which academic mothers give power to other forms of support/care for their children, their own sense of well-being and professional achievements, as well as, the importance of these for how they attempt to disrupt the systems of power that constrain their engagement within that space.

Thus, while the work is grounded within the applicability of standpoint theory, it presents a situated analysis of the issues that affect the experiences of academic mothers in the Global South. A central aspect of such analysis is the examination of the socio-economic and cultural facets that preconfigure how academic mothers engage in such contexts, and the investigation of how and/or whether they reproduce or disrupt the structures and relations of power that they encounter. In so doing, the comparative narratives of academic motherhood across India, Brazil and South Africa brings into focus the relative importance of social constructions, stereotypes, and relations, on the lived realities, (re)negotiation, and choices of academic mothers in such contexts.

These narratives therefore raise important questions of how we ensure the removal of institutional, cultural, and ideological barriers for academic mothers, if we are to ensure their participation and contribution to the academic community. At an institutional level, these call for gender-based policies that support academic mothers and that by extension promote notions of gender justice. At a familial level, the study advances the need for cultural shifts; in how both men and women are constructed (gender identities), how roles are understood (gender roles), and how relations are framed within these social sites (gender relations). At the level of research, it also calls for deeper interrogations of the discursive and relational contexts wherein academic mothers engage, the complex ways in which these enable or constrain their thinking and practices within these social spaces. Moving this work forward however would require more intersectional analyses of how race, gender, class, and culture affect academic motherhood, networks, and social relations. This is particularly important for countries in the global south where racial ideologies have produced particular relations of power that are intertwined with colour and class gradations, as well as that of gender.