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BOOK AND EXHIBITION REVIEW

Book Review of: *Refiguring the Postmaternal: Feminist Responses to the Forgetting of Motherhood*

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Refiguring the Postmaternal: Feminist Responses to the Forgetting of Motherhood by Maria Fannin and Maud Perrier, Hardback, ISBN: 9780815392057.

Kate Boyer reviews Maria Fannin and Maud Perrier' book, *Refiguring the Postmaternal: Feminist Responses to the Forgetting of Motherhood* (Routledge, 2018).

Refiguring the Postmaternal: Feminist Responses to the Forgetting of Motherhood, edited by Maria Fannin and Maud Perrier and published by Routledge in 2018, provides a critical engagement with Julie Stephens' book *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking: Feminism, Memory, Care* (2011). It includes contributions from scholars based in the UK, Australia and Canada, with empirical and conceptual essays which approach postmaternalism from perspectives ranging from public policy (including infant and maternal health and paternity leave); ecofeminism; psychoanalysis; alternative economies and social-feminist history. The final chapter includes a response from Stephens reflecting on the six substantive essays.

Each essay in the collection extends or challenges Stephens' conceptualisation of *postmaternalism*, a concept signaling the anxieties about caregiving; nurturing and dependency currently evident across different cultural contexts, together with the way care is devalued and marketised within neoliberal economic regimes; and the depoliticising of womens' claims as mothers within public policy. Stephens' work seeks to both trace out these inter-related trends and explore reparative strategies by which care and the maternal might be re-valued (and perhaps reimagined). *Refiguring the Postmaternal*, which began life as a special issue of *Australian Feminist Studies* in 2016, constitutes a jumping-off point to consider the place/s of the maternal and postmaternal within and in relation to contemporary feminism, recognising the complexity of how these concepts circulate within both feminist theory and activism. Through thought-provoking, carefully written and well-argued essays, this book extends Stephens' work, sometimes disagreeing with aspects of her argument or arguing for refinements.

Through an engagement with psychoanalysis and drawing on autoethnography, in Chapter 1 Lisa Baraitser explores how, alongside caring, maternal practice can also include the management of less sanguine emotions such as guilt, despair and even hatred. Positioning this work as part of a broader project of opening up space to consider that which has been oppressed within a given suite of discourses and practices (p. 25), Baraitser argues that love and hate are always inextricably bound together within the practice of motherhood. Building on this, she further argues that one way to understand postmaternal thinking could be as recognising the simultaneous

love and hate toward maternal figures (p. 15). Carefully written, this piece offers an innovative expansion on current scholarship in the field, though with Stephens (pp. 125–126), I would like to see further discussion of the possible consequences of this move in the context of a culture which is already rife with figures of vengeful and violent mothers. A provocative essay, this chapter deserves engagement both within and beyond Baraitser's home field of Psychosocial Studies.

In Chapter 2 Patricia Hamilton asks what happens when we analyse public policy regarding infant and maternal health from the perspective of intersectionality and racial difference, exploring how neoliberal policies relating to the promotion of infant and maternal health may reinforce existing race and class (as well as gender) hierarchies. Hamilton offers a welcome addition to existing scholarship by highlighting some of the ways both policy (and scholarship) relating to early motherhood can under-attend to or ignore race, and the detrimental effects that can have. Building on Stephens, Hamilton then traces an argument about how the parenting philosophy of attachment parenting (AP) echoes the individualism characterising neoliberalism, further arguing that the influence of AP can be seen in British infant and maternal health policy and discourses about what constitutes good parenting in the UK. Hamilton also notes, however, that the influence of AP within British policy is uneven. The fact that the UK has some of the lowest breastfeeding duration rates in the world; that breastfeeding beyond early infancy and co-sleeping are both viewed as marginal parenting choices; and that breastfeeding duration rates are higher amongst women of colour than white women in the UK (all of which Hamilton notes), all complicate this story. Finally, Hamilton makes the important point that support for mothers of babies and young infants in the UK has been significantly reduced under austerity, noting correctly that this will affect disadvantaged mothers (a higher proportion of whom are also women of colour) more sharply.

In Chapter 3 Junko Yamashita takes things in a different direction, using the postmaternal as a way to frame policy efforts to increase the gender equity of early childcare. Through a consideration of paternity leave policies in Sweden, Iceland, South Korea and the UK Yamashita highlights research which has shown paternity

leave to be correlated with both enhanced father-child engagement and higher levels of gender equality in parenting and domestic work at the household level. Building not only on Stephens' work but also on the legacies of Nancy Fraser's universal caregiver model (1994); and Gornick and Meyers' dual-earner/dual-caregiver model (2008), Yamashita makes a positive contribution to scholarship by highlighting how paternity leave (especially when it is incentivised) can lead to more gender-equitable configurations of early childhood care, thus framing postmaternalism as an extension of long-standing feminist goals.

Next, Maud Perrier and Maria Fannin maintain the focus on how wage-work and carework relate to one another but turn to consider how some mothers are combining these two kinds of practices in innovative ways. Through a consideration of 'mumpreneurs', or mothers engaged in wage-earning activities which at the same time do work of caring for mothers, they show how, contrary to what one might predict based on Stephens' work, entrepreneurialism can also promote community and create 'caring economies' (66). Based on interviews with mother-entrepreneurs in Bristol, UK, this fresh and creative piece offers a useful consideration of how alternative economic practices can value care. Their chapter adds richness to the volume by bringing in voices of mothers as participants/informants, and extends existing scholarship to highlight how workspaces can also function as sites of feminist, maternal activism.

In *Confronting Postmaternal Thinking* Stephens looks to ecofeminism as a means of challenging how the way we care is devalued within neoliberalism. In Chapter 5 of *Refiguring the Postmaternal*, Mary Phillips challenges Stephens' reading of ecofeminism, via scholarship which has highlighted the limitations (and hazards) of casting this movement as necessarily based in or linked to the maternal. Instead, Phillips argues that a more productive way forward is to be found in conceptualisations of care based in embodied empathy which are less anthropocentric and more post-humanist. Phillips argues that a more productive way forward is via a feminist-materialist conceptualisation of care that more fully takes account of the more than human and our relations with non-human others in our personal and planetary becoming. Through a nuanced and measured argument, this piece traces out some of the potential limits of the (post) maternal for ecofeminism, making a line of flight through both gender and human/non-human binaries.

Finally, building on Stephens' work about the different kinds of cultural 'forgetting' at play in popular understandings of both motherhood and feminism, Alison Bartlett's chapter serves as a corrective to monolithic representations of second-wave feminism as solely concerned with achieving (liberal) feminist goals of gender equality in the workplace. Drawing on archival documents relating to two womens' peace movements from the 1980s: the Greenham women's peace camp (in the UK) and the Australian Women for survival peace camp, Bartlett's piece constitutes a purposive *remembering* of some of the radical forms of maternal activism that occurred during the second wave. By highlighting these hidden/forgotten histories, including of collective or 'social' mothering (parenting by other-than birth-parents), efforts to resist gender socialisation and fighting for state-provided childcare, Bartlett re-positions post-maternalism as a (potential) continuation of longer histories of radical maternal activism aimed at making profound changes in the way structures of the family, the economy and the state interface with the work of raising children.

In sum, *Refiguring the Postmaternal* provides an excellent way in to the current conversation about the role of the (post)maternal within contemporary feminist theory and practice. Both for its disciplinary and conceptual breadth as well as the range of its topical concerns this edition will constitute a valuable resource for both scholars and students for years to come.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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