

Beyond the Maternal Myth: Perspectives on Motherhood and Subjectivity from Asia and the Pacific

Special Edited Issue

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Motherhood provides an important ideological site of continued negotiations of subjectivity, agency, and identity within a globalised world marked by deepened geopolitical crises, new migration routes, and rapidly changing family structures. Although mothering has traditionally been represented through tropes of naturalised, moral, divine, or heteronormative representations, recent research brings to the fore the everyday experiences of maternal subjectivity, its resistances, disruptions, silences, and intimate contradictions (Rich 1976; Ruddick 1990; Hays 1996; O' Reilly 2004; Bhattacharya 2012). It is within the variety of cultural contexts that the mother figure evolves not as a sacrificial nurturer, but rather as a rational thinker, meticulous worker, migrant, activist, and narrator of her own embodied experiences.

However, these maternal narratives are far from homogenous. What qualifies as 'motherhood' significantly varies throughout the world, shaped by the intersectionality of caste, class, religion, race, colonial histories, and the political agendas of states and nations (Collins 2005; Hays et al. 2016). The universalisation of maternal experience often erases such complexity, limiting our understanding of motherhood as a dynamic and deeply subjective terrain. Maternal subjectivity, which encompasses how individuals think, feel, imagine, desire, and articulate their identities through mothering, has thus emerged as a crucial analytic lens for re-examining the structures of inequality, as well as new visions of autonomy, kinship, and belonging.

The politics of care, precarity, and affect are also intertwined with the concept of maternal subjectivity. The vulnerability and transformative potential of motherhood are increased in many areas by systemic burdens such as economic instability, restricted reproductive rights, displacement, and ecological collapse. These demands highlight what Berlant (2011) refers to as "the ordinariness of crisis" (23), in which mothers manage commonplace instances of structural violence while simultaneously creating new behaviours related to love, survival, defiance, and futurity.

Motherhood serves as both a mode of constraint and a source of creative possibility. Powerful counter-narratives of motherhood that tend to destabilise idealised and divine or moralistic myths regarding motherhood are expressed by women, queer, migrant, and racialised mothers through literature, memoirs, testimony, and visual culture. They highlight tensions such as those between sacrifice and selfhood, tradition and autonomy, silence and utterance, rupture and repair. In performing this function, they reimagine maternal hope not as a redemptive horizon but as a fragile, negotiated, and subjective mode of endurance.

This special edited issue is intended to bring together interdisciplinary perspectives on the power of maternal subjectivity across cultural, national, and historical contexts. It seeks

contributions on how mothers narrate themselves, how they resist or conform to social expectations, and how maternal identities are shaped and reshaped by these systems of power.

Submissions may draw on literary studies, sociology, anthropology, gender studies, philosophy, visual culture, and related fields to explore how motherhood, as both a lived reality and a conceptual category, continues to shape lives.

I would invite abstracts of 200 to 250 words, accompanied by a bio note of no more than 100 words. Submissions may include, but are not limited to, the following themes:

- Feminist, decolonial and postcolonial approaches to motherhood
- Maternal Subjectivity in Literature, film, digital media, or visual culture
- Narratives of trauma, memory, history, loss and healing
- Non-normative mothering practices
- Motherhood in Asia and the Pacific, transnational motherhoods
- Reproductive justice, body autonomy, body politics
- State control and regulation, policy making
- Ethics of care, labour, precarity
- Asian and Pacific inequalities
- Maternal desire, sexuality and ambivalence
- Indigenous and culturally situated forms of mothering
- Cross-cultural, comparative motherhood
- Motherhood and migration

Submission Guidelines:

- Deadline for abstract submission: 1st March 2026
- Notification of acceptance: 25th March 2026
- Full paper submission deadline: 31st May 2026
- Notification of Revisions, if any: 31st August 2026
- Final paper submission post revisions: 30th November 2026
- Publication date: First half of 2027
- Kindly send your submissions to Dr Shivalika Agarwal at agarwal.shivalika200@gmail.com

Editor's Bio:

Dr Shivalika Agarwal is a poet and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Liberal Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the Manipal Academy of Higher Education, Bangalore, India. Her research interests include Indian motherhood studies, women's studies, psychoanalysis, feminine psychology, identity development, and gender and sexuality. Her research has been published in reputable journals, including the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, *South Asian Popular Culture*, *Quarterly Review of Film and Video*, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy*, and *Women: A Cultural Review*. Her creative writing appears in *Madras Courier*, *Outlook India*, *miniMAG*, *Poetryaspromised*, *Setu*, *Ghudsavar*, and *The Hooghly Review*, among others.

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