

Editorial

The body and its multiple dimensions

Cleovi C. Mosuela

This *InterDisciplines* special issue on »The Body and its Multiple Dimensions« evolved from a series of public lectures delivered by members of the Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology (BGHS) and organized in collaboration with the Volkshochschule Bielefeld in early 2016. The lectures on the topic of the body encouraged us to conceive of and understand the body from different perspectives: from physical bodies, to metaphysical, to social, to political and economic bodies. Briefly, the topics centered on bodies in relation to space, such as moving or migrating bodies; culture, for instance, familial norms and societal values; the concept of performance, for example, femininity and yoga; humanity and technology; and labor, community, and economic crises. In planning this issue, we not only drew on the public lecture series, but also on a cooperation arrangement with Lund University and included two additional papers by the International PhD Conference Lund/York/Bielefeld.

The contributors to this issue employ a diverse mix of approaches to thinking about the body (as did the lectures)—migration, gender, cultural, and linguistic studies, and folklore. Each field applies its own theories and methods. However, common across the individual articles is an understanding of the body as a sociological and historical category of investigation, placing the individual body at the center of our analysis of power relations, changing societies, and contested meanings.

I make two observations from compiling the five contributions in this issue. First, racialized, gendered, and sexualized bodies become critical sites of a biopolitical project (see Foucault 1990). To quote Foucault's lecture on *The Birth of Biopolitics*, biopolitics can be understood as »the

attempt, starting from the eighteenth century, to rationalize the problems posed to governmental practice by phenomena characteristic of a set of living beings forming a population: health, hygiene, birthrate, life expectancy, race [...]« (2008, 317). Biopolitics uses the attributes of the body—such as gender, race, ethnicity, and age—for political purposes (Varga 2005). The application of biopolitical instruments, such as discourses, usually serves to manage the political anatomy of the body through well-being, reproductive behavior, cultural norms and values, human movement, and so forth. As the papers by Ong, Tarkhanova, and Mosuela in this issue demonstrate, these matters become controlling instruments by the state and yield potent ideological impulses. One prominent example is the case of the Philippine state, which disciplines certain kinds of bodies—that are mobile, docile, and flexible workers for the global economy, that embody the Filipino work ethic when overseas, and that extend care to their families and communities left behind in the Philippines (Ong; Mosuela). As the Philippine state has institutionalized the labor export policy as a development project, Filipino workers have become constituted as significant agents of economic development. Their capabilities are optimized and made useful for global capital.

The body as an object of state discourse, particularly in disciplining the body in accordance with biological determinism, also figures in the analysis of policy-making in Ukraine (Tarkhanova). This observation runs parallel to recent sociological and feminist scholarship as it epistemologically and ontologically turns toward corporeal thinking to theory and research. »Contemporary feminist theory has added new ways to think about the body, and feminists now speak of writing the body, reading the body, sexing the body, racing the body, enabling the body, policing the body, disciplining the body, erasing the body and politicizing the body« (Fonow and Cook 2005, 2216). Regulation of the body is not necessarily achieved by coercion, but by establishing ideals and norms of »normalcy« or health (Varga 2005). These disciplinary practices have made the body a site for power struggles, and, in theory, for resistance, as individual choices about the body become laden with political and cultural meanings (Weitz 2016).

Although the body is subject to social control, it is also the heart of one's individuality and identity formation. This leads to the second observation, which is how commodified bodies, for instance nurses, football players, and hip-hop artists, construct their agencies by the »setting and achieving of personal challenges [...] being in control; identification with body and pride in its/their achievements« (Wright and Dewar 1997, 91). Power, in this sense, is personal and embodied, instead of being subjugated by forces in relation to increasing global commodification of care and pop culture. These bodies, as exemplified by the last three articles, occupy more than one subject position and draw on various discourses, such as independence and their overall identity.

In this issue, **Michelle G. Ong** investigates aging Filipina migrant bodies in New Zealand. The article inquires into how taking care of one's health becomes one of the criteria for embodying responsible citizenship, particularly relevant for those whose bodies are marked as racially different. Through a discursive analysis of migrants' understanding of health and aging, Ong critically engages with pervasive neoliberal articulations of healthy aging and the concomitant processes of obfuscating the production and reproduction of social inequalities. The healthy, aged migrant body is therefore produced through disciplining a person's own body constituted by coupling the prevailing health and migration state discourses.

State discourses on healthy bodies also take center stage in **Oleksandra Tarkhanova's** contribution. Tarkhanova takes a critical stance on contemporary Ukrainian welfare and labor policy discourses, a hybrid between socialism and nationalism, in relation to women and their lack of reproductive options. In such essentialist rhetoric, female bodies are expected to bear children primarily to fulfil their »natural« purpose. In effect, on the one hand, reproductive bodies are given priority in terms of social protection in the name of shaping the nation and future economic development. On the other hand, a childless woman becomes a category presumed by the body's exposure to poverty.

Susan Lindholm takes on the gendered body within the space of hip-hop culture, which has been dominated by hypermasculinity and misogyny. By examining the music of Ana Tijoux, the article contributes to the

discussion of the body being enabled to negotiate multiple, different, and sometimes conflicting frames of belonging: national, transnational, and popular culture. Tijoux identifies with the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups, being a migrant herself (born in France to parents from Chile). Thus, the body becomes an agency through which identity and belonging are achieved.

Along this line of thought, **Katarzyna Herd** argues that the body is a means for constructing narratives. The example of football players (European context) signifies how they enlarge their corporealities upon their own agency to impel history writing and the reputation of their teams. Herd analyzes three different cases of football players actively playing for clubs in Sweden. Herd argues that whether they are able to perform or not, they have made several meaningful connections with their fans to create certain narratives embedded in cultural and historical contexts.

The final contribution similarly explores agency. **Cleovi C. Mosuela** inquires into the corporeal element of nursing care performed between the giver (Philippine-trained nurses) and receiver in hospital settings in Germany. Mosuela underscores the significance of »body work,« such as washing and cleaning the body of the patient and offering support to basic daily needs in defining care work. The proximity of the nurses to the corporeal dimension of the patient's body plays a part not only in their integration at the workplace but also in humanizing the patient.

The editor would like to express her gratitude to the contributors and the anonymous reviewers of the articles. Special thanks go to Melanie Eulitz and Andreas Hermwille, who have contributed their time and effort to make the series come together.

References

- Fonow, Mary Margaret, and Judith A. Cook. 2005. »Feminist Methodology: New Applications in the Academy and Public Policy.« *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30 (4): 2211–36.
- Foucault, Michel. 1990. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.
- . 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Edited by Michel Senellart. Translated by Graham Burchell. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Varga, Ivan. 2005. »The Body—The New Sacred? The Body in Hypermodernity.« *Current Sociology* 53 (2): 209–35.
- Weitz, Rose. 2016. »Women and Their Hair: Seeking Power through Resistance and Accommodation.« In *Sociology of the Body: A Reader*, edited by Jacqueline Low and Claudia Malacrida, 320–27. Ontario: Oxford University.
- Wright, Jan, and Alison Dewar. 1997. »On Pleasure and Pain: Women Speak Out About Physical Activity.« In *Researching Women and Sport*, edited by Gill Clarke and Barbara Humberstone, 80–95. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dr. des. Cleovi C. Mosuela, Bielefeld Graduate School in History and Sociology and Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University: cleovi.mosuela@uni-bielefeld.de.