

## **Fatness and the Maternal Body: Women's Experiences of Corporeality and the Shaping of Social Policy**

Maya Unnithan-Kumar and Soraya Tremayne, eds.  
New York: Berghahn Books, 2011.

REVIEWED BY CAYO GAMBER

I had hoped this collection of eleven essays that addresses fat women's experience of their bodies during pregnancy and the public policy that surrounds those bodies would offer a consistent interrogation of the certitude and circulation of scientific and medical "knowledge" about obesity. The introductory essay by Maya Unnithan-Kumar and the final essay, "Reproducing Inequalities: Theories and Ethics in Dietetics," by Lucy Aphramor and Jacqui Gingras, do address the pathologizing of fat women as obese and call for a more nuanced understanding of women's experience of their corporeality. In other essays, however, obesity is unproblematized, as in the opening sentence of "The 'Obesity Cycle': The Impact of Maternal Obesity on the Exogenous and Endogenous Causes of Obesity in Offspring in the United Kingdom": "Obesity is a major public health issue on an international level, and in the United Kingdom there are numerous ways in which governments attempt to prevent obesity from proliferating" (Nicole Heslehurst 111). Thus, it is not fully clear how these essays are in conversation with one another and how, collectively, they are meant to enlarge our understanding of the ways in which female reproduction, the medicalization of women's bodies, and social policy intersect.

That said, two essays address Tuareg women whose embonpoint, whose rolls of fat, are seen as beautiful. The forced fattening of the women is described in haunting detail by both authors:

In 1982, I observed young women spending whole days with bowls of millet mixed with butter which they mixed into balls and then washed down with water, clearly forcing themselves to continue. Their stated aim was to get stretch marks on their thighs and stomachs. (Susan Randall 49)

It is usually a descendant of *iklan* who fattens the young girl. This woman is supposed to be a "slave of origin," in other words a slave with a pedigree, whose ancestors have been integrated into the fam-

ily for several generations. Using a wooden funnel, she forces the girl to absorb large amounts of fresh cow's milk, diluted with some plain water. She also makes the girl swallow handfuls of pounded raw millet (*tedda*). The Tuareg refer to this custom, as well as to the practice of fattening, as "filling" (*adanay*). In the beginning, the young girl is force-fed until she gets used to it and starts to participate routinely by lying down on her back and pulling her lips wide open. If she resists, the woman should not hesitate to pinch her or pull back her fingers, sometimes even until they break. (Saskia Walentowitz 76-77)

Randall and Walentowitz offer distinct, contrary readings of Tuareg women's power. For Randall, the forced immobility of Tuareg women—an immobility that is meant to aid them in maintaining their size—confines them; for Walentowitz, however, this same immobility ensures these women's centrality to Tuareg social life.

This collection of essays offers studies on a wide array of countries: Australia, Central Niger, Ghana, India, Ireland, Northern Mali, the United Kingdom, and Tanzania. From these essays one learns that in Tanzania, "when a woman is pregnant, the people around her must pay no attention to her state and, as for herself, the future mother must protect her pregnancy from bad and envious looks, she must not even talk about it" (Mara Mabilia 103). In ironic contrast, the success of the McDonald's chain of restaurants in India is due, in part, to the belief that food which "is both expensive and American ... is perceived as healthy and good for children" (Devi Sridhar 184).

While fascinating discussions, these essays do not explicitly address women's fatness *and* women's maternal bodies. Rather, they discretely address women's fatness *or* maternal bodies *or* potential obesity in women and children.

## **Bound by Love: Familial Bonding in Film and Television Since 1950**

Laura Mattoon D'Amore, ed.  
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REVIEWED BY CHRISTINE M. ROHDE

In *Bound by Love: Familial Bonding in Film and Television Since 1950*, editor Laura Mattoon D'Amore playfully dissects the representation of famil-