Christine A. Payne and Jeremiah Morelock (Eds.): *Feminism and the Early Frankfurt School*, Boston: BRILL, 2024, 380 pages.

Following the tradition of the typically less optimistic diagnoses of time characteristic of early Frankfurt School Critical Theory, Christine A. Payne and Jeremiah Morelock commence their anthology with an "exhausting and overwhelming" (x) compendium of contemporary social crises – ranging from attacks on abortion rights and other anti-feminist mobilizations against women and queer people to the COVID-19 pandemic. The "authoritarian modern society" (x) serves as the contextual framework for the volume and informs its central aim: to formulate a critical analysis of the conditions and manifestations of current social realities that can enrich the struggle for a better society in solidarity with political activism.

The implementation of this project, which initially seems rather abstract and comprehensive, is to be concretized through the theoretical integration of feminist thought and Frankfurt School Critical Theory, a synthesis that the authors recognize as fruitful for feminist movements and their understanding of "sex and gender relations" (xi). The primary objective is to transcend the long-standing dichotomy between feminist theory and the early Frankfurt School, a division that, according to the editors, characterized feminist approaches to Critical Theory for decades.[1] Against the widespread narrative of incompatibility, "Feminism and the Early Frankfurt School" aims to advance a productive convergence of these two theoretical traditions.

To this end, the anthology brings together seventeen essays that primarily deal with the works of Theodor W. Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse and link them with feminist theories, evaluating their potential contributions to feminist thought and social analyses. The texts are arranged into four thematic domains, focusing on authoritarianism (part 1), (non)identity (part 2), intersectionality (part 3), and the relationship between human and nature (part 4), thus providing a comprehensive panorama of the multifaceted discourses that are pivotal in the convergence of feminism and the Frankfurt School and bringing the heterogeneous and diverse texts into a reasonable order.

The articles in the first section, "Culture and Class: the Libidinal Politics of Authoritarianism", endeavor to elucidate the persistence of authoritarian structures,

[1] While this characterization might be accurate for the English-speaking context, the feminist reception of the early Frankfurt School is more nuanced in the German-speaking area. Feminist scholars like Regina Becker-Schmidt and Gudrun-Axeli Knapp have discussed the importance of older Critical Theory for Feminism since the 1970s. We will return to this briefly later.

CONSTELACIONES. Revista de Teoría Crítica. Número 16 (2024) – ISSN 2172-9506

which serves as the anthology's starting point. Particular attention is paid to the role of the patriarchal nuclear family in the formation of authoritarian character structures. The first three articles focus intensively on the early studies of authoritarianism by Wilhelm Reich and the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research's "Studies on Authority and the Family", emphasizing the significance of traditional sexual morality and family structures in these early explorations of authoritarianism.

Kristin Lawler's essay synthesizes Reich's and Marcuse's sketches of an authoritarian society with radical feminist ideas of sexual liberation, as exemplified in Ellen Willis's and Shulamith Firestone's works, to analyze how sexual repression maintains capitalist structures and authoritarianism. Drawing on Marcuse's and Willis's work, Lawler argues for dissolving the "split between pleasure and society" (16) seen as fundamental to capitalist production and control. Incorporating Reich and radical feminist tradition, the author emphasizes that partial social liberation can lead to authoritarian backlash. Emancipatory movements should reassess the role of sexual repression in maintaining capitalist social structure and incorporate this understanding into their struggles (3). While Lawler's analysis barely addresses any critiques of the potentially essentialist conceptions of sexuality in Reich's work and in radical feminism, her reference to Reich's often neglected analysis of fascism and the radical feminist tradition offers valuable insights for contemporary struggles. Her plea for a more comprehensive consideration of the sexual dimension in authoritarian structures is thoroughly convincing.

Ryan Moore's article on the significance of the patriarchal nuclear family in the "Studies on Authority and the Family" is also insightful. Moore systematically examines the texts of Horkheimer, Marcuse, and Erich Fromm, which constitute the core of these studies, for their thematizations of patriarchy and family. The Institute's study, often overshadowed in reception by "The Authoritarian Personality", is subjected to a meticulous close reading that draws the reader's attention to the importance that the study's authors attributed to the patriarchal nuclear family as a mediator of societal authority relations. "The theoretical and empirical studies from the early years of Nazism have much to offer for contemporary critics of fascism" (42), summarizes Moore, and argues for a critical reexamination and updating of these considerations.

The essays in section two, entitled "Power, Truth, and (Non)Identity", advance a compelling argument for synthesizing Frankfurt School Critical Theory and femi-

CONSTELACIONES. Revista de Teoría Crítica. Número 16 (2024) – ISSN 2172-9506

nist theory. Tivadar Vervoort's article, "Towards a Critical Identity Politics", for example, demonstrates the complementarity between Adorno's and Judith Butler's reflections on (non)identity. This synergy fosters a critical-reflexive approach to identity categories, recognizing their strategic necessity while critiquing their limitations. Vervoort proposes a "critical identity politics" (114) that combines Adorno's concerns about identity categories with Butler's focus on challenging "hegemonic identity categories" (129), offering a nuanced framework for addressing identity in political discourse. Furthermore, Mary Caputi attempts to make Marcuse's concept of the "feminine principle" useful for queer reinterpretations. The hope for resistance against capitalist functional logic, which Marcuse originally located within the "feminine principle" (94), may now be identified in what she terms "non-binary subversions" that break with a dichotomous identity logic (106).

References to Marcuse generally occupy a prominent position in the anthology. Multiple authors advocate for taking up Marcuse's analyses on the subversive power of the "feminine principle" or on the relationship between emancipatory theory and practice for feminist concerns. Marcuse's theoretical framework appears especially inspiring for intersectional feminism, arguably due to its characteristic optimism (95) and more explicit engagement with political activism (212) compared to the works of Adorno and Horkheimer. This relevance is exemplified in the contributions of Nicole Yokum and Sergio Bedoya Cortés in the volume's third section, "Intersectional Investigations". Yokum posits Marcuse as a "prime candidate" (212) for an alliance between Black Feminism and the Frankfurt School. The assertion primarily stems from Marcuse's recognition of the revolutionary potential inherent in marginalized individuals, who "have managed to resist the integration of thought and feeling into conformity with the modern industrial apparatus" (213). From an intersectional Marxist perspective, Bedoya Cortés also argues that with Marcuse, "gender and racial struggles could act as triggers for the socialist rebellion" (247). From the struggles of marginalized groups, a universalist emancipatory movement would then have to emerge, "since without it, feminist or racial refusals would focus on mere integration of women and minorities within the productive system" (247–248).

In the fourth and final section, "Socialized Nature: Essential Categorial Questions in Science", on feminist and critical-theoretical perspectives on the human-nature relationship, Imaculada Kangussu and Nathalia N. Barroso once again refer to Marcuse's "feminine principle". Drawing upon the work of his disciple Angela

CONSTELACIONES. *Revista de Teoría Crítica*. Número 16 (2024) – ISSN 2172-9506

Davis, they attempt to locate this principle within the contemporary experiences of Black women as the "mules of the world" (359). Orientating social struggles around the lived realities of these "mules of the world" could then determine their universal direction: "when the smallest is the measure of humanity, everyone is considered, everybody is inside, nobody is out of the game" (360).

While the anthology may contain an abundance of reflections on feminist connections to Marcuse's work, the articles are generally diverse and encourage the feminist reader to connect to the early Frankfurt School at various points. The unifying thread among these contributions is that they confront the works of the Frankfurt School theorists with the question of their significance for feminist theories. Overall, this results in close readings that elucidate both the synergies and tensions between feminist theory and the theories of the Frankfurt School, thereby creating research desiderata that similar projects can build upon further.

A notable gap in this otherwise substantive compilation is the limited systematic engagement with feminist theorists who have previously conducted analyses on the relationship between those two theoretical traditions – particularly along thematic strands such as authoritarianism, identity, intersectionality, and the human-nature relationship. This is worthy of criticism, as a more comprehensive inclusion of such perspectives could potentially enrich the approaches presented in the anthology. Throughout the various contributions, one can repeatedly discern argumentative threads that have a long-standing tradition in the study of Frankfurt School Critical Theory and feminism, which could therefore be situated within a broader academic debate.[2]

This becomes particularly apparent in Jana McAuliffe's text in the anthology's section on "Intersectional Investigations" on the treatment of historical traumas in the works of Adorno and Joy James and their respective potential for understanding contemporary lived realities. McAuliffe highlights James' intersectional analysis of the historical trauma of enslavement and the specific exploitation of women within this context as a productive approach towards the "pluralization of traumas called for by feminist intersectional analyses" (210). James' emphasis on the "agency

[2] We are aware of the language barriers in the academic feminist discussion of early Critical Theory. In Germany, for example, there is already a broader feminist discussion of the early Frankfurt School, which could provide valuable insights for the discussion threads of this book (see, among others: Regina Becker-Schmidt, Gudrun Axeli-Knapp, Barbara Umrath, and Karin Stögner). Nevertheless, there are feminist receptions of Critical Theory in the Anglo-American sphere that would be of great interest to explore and discuss systematically (see, among others: Nancy Fraser and Jessica Benjamin).

CONSTELACIONES. *Revista de Teoría Crítica*. Número 16 (2024) – ISSN 2172-9506

and action (not just subordination) of oppressed peoples" (207) and the "raced and gendered attention to historical traumas and their contemporary impact" (ibidem) seems central to the process of pluralizing historical traumas. In contrast, McAuliffe presents Adorno's reflections on Auschwitz as less fruitful for her project. In particular, McAuliffe takes issue with Adornos lack of emphasis on the agency of the oppressed in his references to Auschwitz and his purported insistence on the singularity of the Holocaust. While her criticism of Adorno's neglect of agency draws from her reading of his lectures on metaphysics, her claims about his view on the singularity of the Holocaust rely solely on secondary sources. This omission of a comprehensive engagement with Adorno's diverse writings on the Holocaust is problematic, as it prevents a more nuanced understanding of his perspective, which would be necessary in order to realize McAuliffe's intention and gain a truly differentiated perspective on the significance of Adorno's reflections on the Holocaust for the present. Moreover, the author's argument that Adorno's focus on the question of guilt in addressing the trauma of the Holocaust could have a paralyzing effect and takes too little account of the revolutionary potential of the oppressed (208) echoes widespread criticism of Adorno's (purported) pessimism. However, this critique lacks proper contextualization within Adorno's personal experiences during the Third Reich and his broader body of work on Auschwitz.

A parallel line of argument is evident in Jennifer L. Eagan's article on Adorno's astrology study "The Stars Down to Earth", which is also situated within the intersectionality framework. Here too, Adorno is criticized for failing to recognize the phenomenon's inherent potential for resistance in his classification of astrology as an authoritarian and system-stabilizing practice (269). "Astrology is anti-Enlightenment in the sense that it is against the domination of nature" (270), explains Eagan, suggesting that Adorno overlooked astrology's subversive potential, which Eagan locates primarily in its deviation from Enlightenment rationality. In doing so, Eagan repeatedly criticizes what she views as methodological deficiencies in Adorno's study and characterizes the psychoanalytic method Adorno uses as "pseudoscience[...]" (261). However, this emphasis on methodological flaws itself appears paradoxically positivistic, particularly considering Eagan's criticism of male and Enlightenment rationality and her advocacy for breaking with it. While Eagan acknowledges Adorno's and Horkheimer's conceptualizations of enlightenment and disenchantment, and touches upon elements of their dialectical understand-

CONSTELACIONES. Revista de Teoría Crítica. Número 16 (2024) – ISSN 2172-9506

ing, her argument for astrology as a means of re-enchanting the world does not fully engage with the complexities of a dialectically conceived critique of enlightenment. Although she recognizes some of the pitfalls of simple re-enchantment (262-263), the extent to which her proposed astrological approach can genuinely address the dialectical tensions inherent in the enlightenment process, as articulated by Adorno and Horkheimer, remains insufficiently explored.

Both articles reiterate prevalent critiques of Adorno, particularly his pessimism and perceived neglect of the oppressed's agency. While they raise important questions about the contemporary relevance of Adorno's social critiques, it may be more illuminating – particularly where such criticisms are often evident to feminist readers – to transcend well-established critiques and adopt a more nuanced examination of Adorno's stance on resistance and subjective agency. How, for example, can the thematization of resistance potentials among marginalized and oppressed individuals be observed in the evolution of Adorno's work? What hopes for subversion remain in Adorno's dialectical social theory? A consideration of previous feminist debates and scholarly works on these topics could have significantly enriched such inquiries.

Finally, Lea Gekle's contribution to the penultimate article of the anthology presents a successful attempt in this direction. She examines how partly essentialist ecofeminist critiques of the domination of nature and women could be further developed through Adorno's and Horkheimer's historically materialist perspective on the domination of nature. While elucidating the feminist implications of their reflections, Gekle also highlights the absence of a systematic investigation of women's oppression in their work.

Gekle's approach effectively realizes the anthology's stated aim of challenging the perceived incompatibility of feminism and the early Frankfurt School, demonstrating both the potentials and obstacles of such an integration through the lens of feminist and critical-theoretical debates on human-nature relationships. This objective is largely achieved across the anthology's other thematic areas as well. However, in the "Intersectional Investigations" section especially, a more intensive examination of the various intersectional interpretative possibilities within the Frankfurt School would have been of great interest. The focus here predominantly centers on Marcuse's work and its connections to Black Feminism, whereas discussions of Adorno seem to implicitly perpetuate the assumption of incompatibility that the anthology initially sought to question. After reading the book, the ques-

CONSTELACIONES. Revista de Teoría Crítica. Número 16 (2024) – ISSN 2172-9506

tion of the potential of Adorno's and Horkheimer's reflections for an intersectional feminism therefore remains open. To what extent might their reflections on the constitution of society and its identity logic inform understandings of racism? Additionally, how can drawing on Adorno and Horkheimer, particularly their critical analysis of domination in bourgeois society, help move beyond limitations typical of contemporary intersectional theorizing? Such inquiries should maintain a critical perspective on their shortcomings in this area and the lack of systematic consideration of female, queer, or racialized lived experiences, as Gekle has already noted.

Newal Yalcin

n.yalcin@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Mahza Amini

amini@em.uni-frankfurt.de