

PREFACE

The structural transformation of the capitalist economic system in the period after World War II and the concomitant changes in women's lives provide the context for much of the work presented in this issue of *Feminist Studies*. Foremost among these changes have been the increased size of the service sectors in the advanced capitalist nations, alterations in the competitive positions of nations, the growth of state sector activities, the dramatically increased labor force participation of women, and a significant potential for greater autonomy and self-determination for women. In "Shifts in Public and Private Boundaries: Women as Mothers and Service Workers in Italian Daycare," Chiara Saraceno discusses the Italian political context of the 1960s and 1970s, the response of the state to women's demands for childcare services, the shifting boundaries between public and private in the realms of both material and mental life, and the tension that arises among and within women as they seek to grapple with major changes in their mode of livelihood. Saraceno points out that women have different needs as mothers who also work for wages, as teachers in childcare centers, as full-time homemakers, and as wage workers doing the same kinds of service work for pay. In using childcare as her case study of state involvement in shifting boundaries, she reminds us of the curiously neglected place of children and their needs in feminist theory, thus extending the recurring discussion of motherhood in our pages. Her nuanced discussion of political movements, party and state responses, and the new and complex meanings of public and private that develop as the service sector grows, contributes new insight in the development of a feminist theoretical perspective of the state as well.

Using a more instrumentalist view of the state, Marilyn Power, in "Falling through the Safety Net: Women, Economic Crisis, and Reaganomics," describes recent changes in state policy in the United States and their particular impacts on women. Arguing against the view that Reagan's economic policies are *specifically* designed to bolster patriarchy and weaken women's position, Power nevertheless shows that they have that effect because of the way our economy and society are already structured; with women in the lowest paying jobs and more responsible for children they are the most vulnerable to cuts in social service budgets. Reagan's policies strengthen the free market, discipline labor, build the military, and redistribute income to capital. In Power's view, although they affect women disproportionately,

the Reagan administration's policies are primarily motivated by the need to resolve the economic crisis. Power's analysis gives us a more complex view of women's economic status than that suggested by the commonly used term "the feminization of poverty." Arguing that Reagan's policies are likely to contribute to increased disparities among women (because they exacerbate class and race differences generally), Power challenges the notion that in economic crisis we find greater sisterhood. In contrast, she suggests that as some women have entered the professional groups of lawyers, doctors, managers, and so forth, their interests have diverged dramatically from poor and working-class women. Yet her analysis directs us toward seeking a restructuring of the American economy that benefits all of us.

The publication of these two articles extends the discussion of issues raised at the Conference on Women and Structural Transformation held recently at Rutgers University. The questions of growing and declining class and racial differences among women and of greater autonomy or increased exploitation of women were discussed in the context of the current global economic transformation. A future issue of *Signs* focusing on poor women will no doubt extend the debate, as will future articles in *Feminist Studies*.

Eleanor Wilner's poems and Yi-tsi Mei Feuerwerker's article on writing biography convey something of the confrontation with self that is necessary to write clearly, deeply, and honestly. Wilner's images of "hard lines," shafts of light, and cords of neatly split wood evoke the women writers she looks to as models: a dead friend and the poet Maxine Kumin. Her own self—contours—messy, explosive, scattered in fragments like a cosmic collision—take vivid shape and even comfort ("dear, could you just manage to pull yourself together") from these admired and beloved women who are so different yet so near. In telling the tale of writing the biography of Ding Ling, the most prolific of modern Chinese women writers, Feuerwerker seeks to understand both Ding Ling's struggles for new feminist self-definitions and her loyalty to the Communist party—despite its alternating persecution and idolatry of her.

Nancie Gonzalez, in "The Anthropologist as Female Head of Household," also explores the interaction between one's work and one's consciousness of self as she discusses how her experiences of fieldwork in Latin America and the Caribbean influenced her own personal development. She notes that ob-

servicing strong women who raised children without men increased her confidence in her own ability to be a single parent. Gonzalez's acknowledgment of her debt to her Third World women informants reverses our tendency to see feminist ideology as a Western export to other cultures. This affirmation of non-Western women's autonomous strategies and struggles, also present in Feuerwerker's discussion of Ding Ling, develops a cultural dimension to the growing awareness among Western feminists concerning the importance of the global economic transformation.

Other work in this issue includes art by Inuit women, introduced by Josephine Withers, and poetry by Susan Rawlins. In recent decades, the Inuits have created a new art form that preserves and explains the transformation of the world of Eskimo myth. As Withers notes, the artist becomes the new shaman as the Inuits meet modernization. In Rawlin's poem, "Waiting Room," Claudius's regal summons to Rosenkrantz and Guildenstern is juxtaposed to a pregnant woman's soliloquy on her powerlessness to summon male others—absent lover, doctor—to her aid. This material powerlessness is belied by the rhetorical strength of her language. In this issue, we are also pleased to inaugurate a new feature of the journal, "Comment and Debate," with Phyllis Mack's response to Shirley Glubka's article on unconventional motherhood (which appeared in volume 9, number 2). In this section we will occasionally publish pieces that comment upon, critique, extend, or debate ideas and issues that have been presented in our pages. We hope thereby to generate discussion that will advance the women's movement and feminist scholarship, and to provide our readership with added opportunity for interaction. Whereas Shirley Glubka discussed an agonizing decision to relinquish her child, Phyllis Mack discusses her deliberate and equally difficult decision to have and raise a child on her own. This essay, like the two lead articles, informs our understanding of the variety of conditions under which women mother, and describes another woman's struggle for self-determination.

Deirdre David's article on George Gissing's novel *The Odd Women* also raises issues concerning women's struggles for autonomy within cultures defining them as dependent. Odd women, unmarried middle-class women who sought education and employment in order to support themselves, were an important component of the feminist movement in England in the late

nineteenth century. But, as David points out, the ambiguity of Gissing's fictional treatment of these "New Women" reflects not only societal conflict over women's roles, but also deeper conflicts within women themselves. Feminists then, as now, struggled to establish a "subversive culture within the elaborative structures of a dominant one." And, like Ding Ling, like Saraceno's contemporary Italian service workers and mothers, they do not do so free of doubt and uncertainty. We are all of us odd women.

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for the board