

PREFACE

The essays and creative work in this issue of *Feminist Studies* explore two central aspects of women's lives—motherhood and economic activity—in a variety of settings: Argentinean women whose children were kidnapped by the recently replaced military regime; a Pakistani mother of daughters; urban and rural African women; English and Canadian women factory workers; English social workers.

Nora Amalia Femenía, in "Argentina's Mothers of Plaza de Mayo: The Mourning Process from Junta to Democracy," suggests that the extraordinary circumstances under which the mothers lost their children prevented a normal mourning process from taking place but also made available emotional energy that led to public, collective protest. Their children and other relatives, often young parents themselves, simply disappeared: kidnapped, held in concentration camps, and murdered. The mothers generally refused to believe that their loved ones were dead and demanded "let them appear alive." Most significantly, they organized a continuing public protest in the center of Buenos Aires—even while the junta remained in power. And although some of them disappeared themselves, the demonstrations continued. How did these women, mainly middle aged and older, often socially isolated because of the terror others had of the consequences of offering to help them, manage to conduct this campaign in the midst of a repressive regime? How did they support themselves psychologically and financially?

Extraordinary events such as these lead us to consider as well the more ordinary lives of many women who are both mothers and activists and to speculate about the sometimes deep connections and conflicts between those roles in our and other women's lives. In "Second Thoughts: On Writing a Feminist Biography," Jacquelyn Dowd Hall discusses how the passage of time in her own life, advances in feminist scholarship, and contact with the niece of her subject have led her to reconceptualize some aspects of the life of Jessie Daniel Ames, the chief organizer of the Women's Campaign against Lynching in the 1930s. Ames was widowed at a young age, with three children to support; also an active feminist, she valued her economic autonomy highly. Central to Hall's rethinking is her increased awareness of Ames's struggle to accommodate in her life both a public "male" career as a paid civil rights staffer and an affective life based in a support network

of female family members, even as she associated the female world with abhorrent female dependence.

The accommodation of both instrumental "masculine" and expressive "feminine" modes, and their transformation, is a theme that emerges in several other works in this issue. In Janet A. Kaplan's essay on the art of Remedios Varo we have another example of a successful woman in a masculine world. In her surrealist paintings, Varo conveys a female vision of such "masculine" topics as science and technology. She portrays both the constricted lives of women and also women as explorers and creators. Her paintings illustrate the range of childbirth metaphors discussed in Susan Stanford Friedman's essay, "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse." Friedman engages the ongoing debate in feminist literary criticism about the relationship of women's bodies and reproductive experience to women's writing. Kaplan suggests that Varo's painting, *Celestial Pablum*, in which a woman is feeding pablum to a moon in a cage as though it were a baby, illustrates one end of the spectrum, portraying mothering as inherently constricting for women. In contrast, Friedman discerns in the work of many women writers the use of childbirth imagery that does not ratify women's confinement to childrearing but rather undercuts patriarchal restrictions by using images of generativity to strengthen their own legitimacy in male-dominated artistic culture. Varo's painting, *To Be Reborn*, also exhibits this transformative use of a birthing metaphor. Together these several works in different genres contribute to the ongoing debate surrounding concepts of female difference and maternal thinking.

"Masculine" versus "feminine" modes are examined in the short story, "Simple Questions," by Talat Abbasi, a Pakistani woman who now lives and works in New York City. She sympathetically describes an encounter with a headmistress from the perspective of an uneducated Pakistani woman with five daughters, from ten years to five months, the eldest of which has had to leave school to help out at home. It is a powerful reminder of both the conditions of mothering in many parts of the world today and the universal valuing of woman's nurturing of children. The overburdened mother, who seems to want the same life for her daughters, "pities" the headmistress because she is "masculine," unmarried, and childless.

Diane Glancy's poetry moves away from the mothering motif as the poet draws on her Cherokee heritage as well as her Anglo-German farming background to explore layers of language. The nontransparent language of the poems, its halting "dumbness" and its peculiar spelling, call attention to language in relation to power and powerlessness. "Fodder forgive our trezpasses. . ." questions the hegemony of Jesus and the replacement of oral culture with literacy, while "If Words Were Shapen in the Animal Head" gives "mute" animals language.

A cluster of articles focuses on the economic activity of women and discusses its relationship to women's reproductive capacities. In her review of a decade of research on African women, Claire Robertson notes that overall, despite country, regional, and ethnic differences among African women, their productive economic activity has generally been marginalized—especially during colonization but also after national independence—with negative implications for women's ability to control the conditions of childbearing and family life, their broader political power, and the dominant sexual ideology and practices.

In Martha C. Howell's wide-ranging review of recent research on marriage, property, and patriarchal relations, she explores several works that focus on Europe, one on the United States, one on China, and a collected volume that discusses relations between the household and the wider economy in diverse settings, including nineteenth-century London and contemporary South Africa. Howell points out that these diverse books all contribute to the project envisioned by Gayle Rubin a decade ago, when she called for a new political economy of sex that would show how sexual systems, kinship, and marriage are integrally connected to economic and political structures. Although Howell finds many commonalities in these studies of disparate times and places, she concludes that Rubin's project is still very much in the making.

Joy Parr examines women's work lives in a Canadian hosiery town between 1910 and 1940. Because the town's economy was dominated by a large hosiery manufacturer that offered many jobs to women and few to men, women often became steady lifelong wage earners, while men worked more sporadically or commuted to more stable jobs elsewhere. Many formal and informal practices, as well as ideology, developed to support this way of life as "normal." Women managed to combine reproduction and produc-

tion by taking occasional leaves of absence and relying on female kinship networks to share childcare; the sexual division of domestic labor was relatively intransigent, although in other ways (control over money, for example) marriages appear to have been more egalitarian here than elsewhere. Paris, Ontario, provides an interesting counterexample to the dominant male breadwinner ideology.

On the other hand, Sonya O. Rose's study of the English hosiery industry between 1850 and 1910 examines the division of labor *within* the factory, as it emerged from the putting-out system, and focuses on the conflict that developed between women and men as the factory system exaggerated the previously established division of labor in family-based industry. The conflict was partially resolved by "gendering" machines and further sex segregating jobs. Women's subordination was reinforced in new forms with new ideology.

Dina M. Copelman reviews books by Martha Vicinus and Deborah Epstein Nord that focus on a different class of women during the same period, discussing the struggle waged by middle-class women to attain meaningful professional work. As Copelman points out, the desires of these women were class bound; the jobs they created often involved "dictating proper standards of behavior to working-class women." Nevertheless "these books reveal how women both fought against and reshaped middle-class gender and class values, creating new institutions and alternatives for women." They also examine the often intense emotional and psychological struggle that individuals seeking, and achieving, such transformations undergo.

Taken together the works in this issue, most powerfully Femenía's essay on the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, remind us that changing our world to eliminate oppression is exceedingly difficult both personally and politically. The experiences of the mothers of Plaza de Mayo are unfortunately shared by women and children elsewhere. In December 1986, the government of the Republic of South Africa admitted to having in its custody (in prisons), 246 children under the age of fifteen. The African National Congress and other groups claim the number of "missing" children is more like several thousand. Just before we went to press, the South African government announced new bans on political activities in black schools and additional censorship rules which make the

reporting of protest in South Africa virtually impossible. Some of you may have been able to see performances of the Wozah Africa theater company during its U.S. tour. An interracial theater company from South Africa, its play, *Born in the RSA*, vividly portrays events that occurred in a 1985 crackdown, including the arrest of children at a school demonstration in a black township and the imprisonment and torture of activists. Somehow, a seemingly indomitable spirit of resistance survives.

It is impossible to consider events like these and not to want to participate in some way to relieve these conditions. Robertson's review of research on African women in this issue concludes with a plea that American women "place themselves in a world economic perspective and take responsibility for eliminating the neocolonialism that benefits them." Divestment activities are occurring on many campuses, and in recent weeks, several major U.S. companies have announced the cessation of their operations in South Africa. In Notes and Letters, we call attention to a similar effort regarding the assets of a pension plan that many of us participate in, the TIAA-CREF program. Those wishing to participate in other ways may want to contact Free South Africa Movement, c/o TransAfrica, 545 Eighth St. S.E., Washington, D.C. 20003; and North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), 151 West Nineteenth St., Ninth Floor, New York, NY 10011.

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