

## PREFACE

This issue of *Feminist Studies* offers two distinct clusters of work: on Middle Eastern women and on U.S. feminism. But it also discusses themes that cross these regional divides and extend to China and Latin America as well. These shared concerns include the ways that history and national politics shape, constrain, distort, and nurture feminist politics; the intersections of memoir and biography with larger cultural and social developments; and the role of the visual arts in expressing, framing, and furthering radical visions. Several authors trace the complicated trajectory of radical, revolutionary, and feminist visions and politics within and across national and personal histories. The art and poetry included here also speak forcefully to the complex interplay among culture, politics, history, and memory.

As Edward Said has demonstrated, one of the founding idioms of Western representations of the East has been orientalism. Several of the articles in this issue build on Said's insights. Charlotte Weber, for example, examines the tensions between feminism and orientalism in the International Alliance of Women, an organization founded in 1904 and devoted to uniting women throughout the world around issues of suffrage and equal citizenship. The assumptions of the Western feminist leadership of the IAW about the "backwardness" of Arab women produced a complex mixture of openness and condescension in their attitude to Arab women's movements. Although they sometimes recognized that customs they considered oppressive, such as the veil, were not mandated by Islamic doctrine, they were nonetheless unable to imagine the possibility of a feminism founded on Islam. They rarely felt that they could learn anything from Arab women, seeing them rather as in need of liberation from what they saw as their oppressive national and social customs. As a result, when in the 1920s and 1930s Arab women united around the cause of Palestinian nationalism, the fragile relationships that had been formed between Western and Eastern feminists were compromised by the IAW's failure to understand that for Arab women, female emancipation was linked to emancipation from imperialist domination.

Lila Abu-Lughod, in an essay dealing with what we might call the "afterlife" of Said's *Orientalism*, notes that the original book was not centrally concerned with issues of gender and sexuality. Nonetheless, she argues, it has paved the way for feminist scholars like Rana Kabbani, Billie Melman, Lisa Lowe, and, most re-

cently, Meyda Yegenoglu to explore the complex history of women's lives in the Middle East. Abu-Lughod shows us how the theoretical sophistication of *Orientalism* has been followed by an outburst of "sensitive, theoretically informed, post-Orientalist empirical work." However, she notes that in our zeal to combat the stereotype of the silent, veiled Middle Eastern woman, we may have unwittingly perpetuated Western assumptions about, among other things, the importance of a certain form of political and social agency.

Norma Claire Moruzzi discusses a contemporary episode that reveals some of the difficulties in communication among Western and Eastern feminists—even Western feminists like herself, who are very familiar with the Middle Eastern context. She describes the way in which her conversations with women friends in Iran transformed her understanding of Tahmineh Milani's *Two Women*, in which the ambitious, overachieving heroine is reduced to a terrified and passive victim by her husband's jealousy and a psychopathic stalker. Moruzzi, who saw the film in Chicago, was initially irritated by what she perceived as its orientalist, melodramatic style. But during a visit to Iran in March 2000, she found that Iranian women of a particular generation were hailing the movie as a coded account of their own experiences during and after the Iranian Revolution. Those women, who were about to graduate when the universities closed shortly after the revolution, found their own lives intimately shaped by the twists and turns of national events. Many, inspired by the revolution's insistence on a return to traditional Islamic ways of life, at first willingly embraced lives as wives and mothers. But as time passed, they began to feel trapped just like the heroine in the film. Tiny clues that only an insider could decipher alerted them to the fact that the film was more than a sensationalist dramatization of one woman's suffering: it was an allegory of the experience of a whole generation of women who felt betrayed by shifts in their national culture.

Of course, these issues are central not just to the lives of Iranian women but also to the lives of many women in countries across the Middle East. Ayse Parla shows how the "woman question" has been, and continues to be, central to Turkish modernization. A commission sent to Turkey by Human Rights Watch in the early 1990s found that the Turkish state was routinely performing virginity exams on women suspected of illegal prostitution, polit-

ical detainees, girls in state-run orphanages and hospitals, and occasionally, girls in high schools. Persistent campaigns by feminists and human rights activists resulted in a 1999 amendment that required the consent of the woman for the virginity exam to be performed. Parla shows how the body of the woman—unveiled but still required to embody traditional virtues such as chastity and modesty—becomes the site on which the relationship between tradition and modernity in Turkey is played out. Parla argues that rather than seeing state virginity controls as the expression of "backward," traditionalist attitudes, they should be understood as part of the apparatus of surveillance of the modern nation-state.

The relationship between tradition and modernity is at issue also in Hoda Elsadda's examination of six twentieth-century biographies of the prophet Muhammad's wife, 'A'isha Bint Abi Bakr. Because the "woman question" has been central to the making of modern Arab states, biographies of significant Arab women express broader ideological and cultural conflicts over religious, national, and gender identities. A central figure from the ideal Islamic past, 'A'isha is often seen as a role model for modern Arab women. But the nature of that role model differs widely in the texts Elsadda examines, revealing the conflicting ideological and political perspectives that inform current debate over contemporary Arab cultural identity. 'A'isha appears variously as a political intriguer, a religious philosopher, a misguided muddler in political and military affairs, and a jealous wife. Elsadda argues that twentieth-century interpretations of 'A'isha demonstrate many of the challenges facing contemporary Arab women, for whom "identity politics is not about sameness and difference, [but about] unequal power relations and ways for dealing with power structures and hierarchies."

Huda Lutfi, a medieval historian and artist, uses painting as a means of negotiating her dual cultural identities and attachments—Egyptian and Anglo-American. Creating an aesthetic vocabulary from Arab calligraphy, Mediterranean, Western, and Indian icons, and other elements selected from various times and places, Lutfi explores the history of women and gender in Arab-Muslim societies but with a greater freedom than that allowed by scholarly methodologies.

Wang Zheng's autobiographical narrative about her Maoist youth looks at the negotiation of feminine identity in the context

of changing ideological pressures. The identity of communist revolutionary was gender neutral and allowed her to criticize openly the traditional way of life of housewives like her mother, illiterate, with small (bound) feet, married at twenty to a man she had never met. But Wang Zheng also describes herself as seduced by the romance of the Chinese picture books, films, and Western novels she devoured during the years of the Cultural Revolution. In spite of her desire to become a communist spy, whose sex was irrelevant to the glorious task of realizing the communist ideal, she also unconsciously absorbed the feudal and bourgeois ideal of the beautiful, passive woman who waits wistfully for her lover to sweep her off her feet. Both dreams, however incompatible, structured Wang Zheng's sense of herself, and now, living in the U.S., she has embraced feminism as a movement in which she can reconcile her desire to change the world with her sense of herself as a woman.

Like Wang Zheng's narrative, Kathy Rudy's account of the lesbian community in Durham, North Carolina, sheds light on the private stories that make up the public record. Describing her experiences during the late 1970s and 1980s, Rudy recalls both the solidarity created among lesbian feminists in this period and the conflicts generated within their communities by differences of race and class. For her, the problem of race loomed largest in challenging essentialist claims to sisterhood. In Durham, white anti-racist activists like Mab Segrest were especially active in demanding lesbian feminists' attention to this issue. From Rudy's perspective, the theorizing that developed both around and in reaction to the community's early essentialist vision helped fuel the development of queer politics and identities.

Patricia Aufderheide reviews two books—*Home Movies* by Michelle Citron and *Chick Flicks* by B. Ruby Rich—that also employ a mix of memoir and analysis to illuminate the feminist politics of the 1970s and 1980s. Here, however, the purpose is to document the range and complexity of the feminist film movement. Calling them "important records of a uniquely intense historical moment," Aufderheide suggests the powerful forces—avant-garde art, revolutionary film in Cuba, sexual and racial liberation movements, and revelations of incest and other forms of violence against women—that shaped feminists who saw the visual arts as a means of documenting and creating women's selfhood. Citron

and Rich write both for those who share their history and for younger feminists and filmmakers. They hope to revive experimental work and to link feminist with queer and postcolonial artistic communities.

Rosalyn Baxandall and Dana Heller also seek to open spaces for contemporary activism by enriching our sense of earlier feminist movements. Baxandall calls for a rewriting of the origin story of the women's liberation movement that takes into account the critical role of African American women. Most scholars of Second Wave feminism recognize the importance of the southern civil rights movement as a source of feminist ideas and strategies. Baxandall, however, points to Black and interracial movements of working-class women in the North—Mothers Alone Working in San Francisco and the Mount Vernon/New Rochelle women's group in New York—which developed feminist institutions and analyses in the early to mid-1960s. She asks why such groups are not included in narratives of women's liberation and how attention to their connections to the Old Left, their appeal to poor and working-class women, and their racial politics might broaden our understanding and practice of feminist politics today. In "Shooting Solanas," Heller offers a similar critique of present renditions of feminism, but her concern is with the ways that film has served to narrow rather than expand our vision. Focusing on *I Shot Andy Warhol*, a quasi documentary on the life of radical writer Valerie Solanas, Heller highlights the filmic transformation of the heroine into a "lone warrior," isolated from the feminist movement, obsessed with Andy Warhol, and out of touch with social activism, new technologies, and larger political debates. The filmmakers intended to reclaim Solanas, author of the *SCUM Manifesto*, as a brilliant if failed heroine of radical feminism. The film, however, only marginalizes her further, ignoring, as do most histories of women's liberation, the connections she forged and critiqued between revolutionary politics and pop culture, radical feminism and commodity fetishism, antipatriarchal visions and queer identities.

The articles, review essays, commentaries, and creative work collected in this issue suggest the power of this global political economy to shape scholarship as well as activism. Feminists are increasingly concerned with comparative and postcolonial approaches to research, teaching, and artistic production. This issue demonstrates the rich possibilities of such cross-fertilization for

analyzing local and national as well as regional and international issues. But it also explores the fractures in the women's movement as it developed around the world. The different national and cultural contexts in which the international women's movement developed mean that we need to temper our enthusiasm for a global women's movement with an awareness that globalism in all its many forms is one of the forces which divides us. It shapes our daily lives in ways whose short-term results have very different impacts on millions of women around the world, and its long-term consequences are still hard to predict. We need scholarship which recognizes both the richness and the limitations of comparative work, scholarship which is amply represented here.

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for the editors