

preface

THIS ISSUE OF *Feminist Studies* focuses on sexuality, both in its heightened visibility and its effacement, in local and global contexts. In our first article, Debra B. Bergoffen uses the February 22, 2001, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia judgment in *Prosecutor v. Kunarac et al.* to illustrate the transformative potential of the court's naming rape as a crime against humanity. Her essay, "From Genocide to Justice: Women's Bodies as a Legal Writing Pad," uses the explicit context of globalization to examine the relationship between the particular and the universal. Relying on Maurice Merleau Ponty's phenomenology of speech, violence, and dialogue, Bergoffen posits that "the court's speech [gives] us a new representation of humanity and shows us how this new representation challenges us to reconsider the meaning of the sexed body." As the court seems to understand it, women's rape in intrastate conflicts is a crime against humanity not because it represents men's patriarchal failures. Rather, it is a crime against humanity because it violates "the body's materiality" and it "attempt[s] to destroy [the body's] capacity to engage the world on its own terms." Although the body involved is more often than not sexed female, naming rape a crime against humanity and not a crime against women renders the particular sex of the raped body largely irrelevant. In this type of analysis, the operative identity is neither female nor male, but rather human, which can be either female or male. Bergoffen's commentary raises provocative issues, particularly for those women's rights advocates without whose efforts the court's linguistic practice would have been all but impossible.

Sexual violence is made visible in the art of Mexican painter Frida Kahlo. Her well-known, multiple images of bloody wounds have been read most often as references to the disabling accident Kahlo suffered at the age of eighteen and her subsequent chronic physical suffering, her miscarriages and abortions, and the traumatic passages of her relationship with Diego Rivera. Evelyn Torton Beck's art essay, "Kahlo's World Split Open," offers

an alternative reading, suggesting that the wounds are Kahlo's way of articulating something she was unable to say in any language other than pictures: the story of her sexual abuse at the hands of her father. Kahlo's chosen language, Beck speculates, may have been a way to express herself without ever becoming fully conscious of what she was expressing. Through careful analysis of some of Kahlo's best-known paintings, Beck teases out the power dynamics of the family and the extreme vulnerability of the young Frida, who is often depicted nude, bleeding, or surrounded by images of sperm and eggs, to explain how the artist's young body is shown as a production of a whole series of cultural, social, and familial relations, all of which construct her as the mutilated property of her father.

Sexuality is also a theme that emerges from Nadine Naber's ethnographic research among middle-class Arab American family and community networks in San Francisco. "Arab American Femininities: Beyond Arab Virgin/American(ized) Whore" analyzes Naber's interviews with three of her original interviewees to demonstrate the falseness of the notion of a fixed dichotomy between "Arab cultural re-authenticity" and "hegemonic (white) U.S. nationalism." The three young Arab American women at the center of Naber's article challenge the idea that "the phenomena of intersectionality [can] be generated as taking one singular form for all Arab Americans." To avoid the essentialism caused by ignoring multiple Arab American female identities, Naber urges "feminist theory and practice vis-à-vis Arab American communities [to] take the specific ways that the coordinates of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion, and nation intersect in different contexts seriously." The three narratives represent "three different locations along a continuum of gendered experience at the intersections of race and class; religion and sexuality; and Orientalism and religion." They "point to the process by which different sociohistorical circumstances produce shifting constructions of Arab American femininity. . ." and support Naber's argument for Arab and Arab American feminist studies, central to which are "the locational conditions that mediate and break down an 'imagined Arab American identity.'"

Sandya Hewamanne analyzes the impact of global capitalism on local sexual norms and practices. "Pornographic Voice: Critical Feminist Practices among Sri Lanka's Female Garment Workers" identifies the

Katunayake Free Trade Zone (FTZ) as “a critical space . . . created through globalization and women’s work [that] marks a point where resistance to one form of patriarchal control meets accommodation to other forms of patriarchal hegemonies.” The FTZ affords women workers the freedom to purchase, read, and contribute to pornographic tabloids as part of “an alternative sexual subculture” that challenges the “intertwined discourses on nation, modernity, and female morality that prescribe ideal behavior for working-class women.” Both the creation and the consumption of these pornographic voices, however, all but ensure the women’s continued exploitation. Hewamanne critically assesses these tensions, ultimately concluding that the women workers’ pornographic voices are more “emancipatory” than oppressive. Consequently, they should be encouraged rather than repressed.

Mariana Valverde explores the emergence of the “respectable same-sex couple” as a new identity. Her commentary, “A New Entity in the History of Sexuality: The Respectable Same-Sex Couple,” both reminds readers of Michel Foucault’s claim that the end of the nineteenth century saw the establishment of the “homosexual” as a person and asserts that the beginning of the twenty-first century is marked by a number of new cultural sexual categories with which to contend. Suggesting that “the particular form of the inner self that is ‘sexuality’ . . . may indeed be now fading,” Valverde argues that the “homosexual” has largely been replaced by, most tellingly, the “respectable same-sex couple.” Analyzing photographs of gay and lesbian weddings in San Francisco and Canada, Valverde finds Canadian couples to be much more pragmatic than their San Francisco counterparts. This, she contends, echoes Canadian Supreme Court cases on lesbian and gay issues that not only recognize sexuality-based legal rights, but also make gay life sound like a series of transactions over pension rights. Perhaps minimizing sex and romance was necessary to achieve this legal protection, but Valverde wonders if increased respectability and assimilability of lesbian and gay couples was worth the twenty-first century construction of Foucault’s homosexual as the most profoundly sexless of beings.

This issue includes a provocative review essay that foregrounds gender to challenge the “sanitized” and “romanticized, triumphalist narrative” that has come to tell the story of black people’s twentieth-century struggle for

human rights and dignity as one of civil rights. In “What’s Sex Got to Do with It: Gender and the New Black Freedom Movement Scholarship,” Christina Greene examines alternative readings of cultural icons. The authors Greene discusses go beyond the gender critique of the civil rights and black power movements as essentially masculinist to offer new examples of the conscious use of gender to better understand the complexities of racial identity. The contribution of this scholarship, according to Greene, is its place in “an emerging effort to demonstrate how attention to gender advances our understanding of the post-World War II struggle for Black freedom.”

Finally, the creative writing shares this issue’s focus on sexuality, sexual violence, and sexual politics and highlights the theme of transition. The two short stories by Beth Partin and Cathleen Calbert deal with young women during the final years of high school. In “Afraid to Say,” Partin’s protagonist Natalie finds the language of others inadequate to accurately name her experience of rape. Their words rob her of her agency in multiple ways at a time when she most needs it. Calbert’s “The Seafarer” explores the experiences of an unnamed teenager whose high school years are drawing to a close, whose youth must yield to the work of her womanhood, and whose future is one of limited options. Liz Robbins’s three poems, “Two Coins,” “A Song My Mother Sang to Me,” and “Envy,” deal with loss, longing, and the inevitability of change. Maria Mazziotti Gillan’s two poems, “Spike Heels” and “At Eleven, My Granddaughter Loves to Read,” contemplate the transitions that come with the passage of time: looking back to the narrator’s youth in the 1950s and forward to “where I have yet to go” (“Spike Heels”). Mary Ann Wehler’s poems, “Woman Saved from Salad Spinner” and “Scars,” address transition on the level of the poem’s structure, as in “Woman Saved from Salad Spinner,” where stanzas alternate describing the comfort the poet feels from her husband’s touch with the harrowing details of her daughter’s suicide attempt. We end this issue with Barbara Wiedemann’s “The Privet Hedge,” which embraces transition and change as both necessary and manageable if tackled, like the pruning of a hedge, one side at a time.

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