

preface

THIS VOLUME OF *Feminist Studies* interrogates the process of and contest over globalization in local, national, and transnational contexts. We begin this issue with a cluster of articles that speak to one of the most contentious and overdetermined signs of national/transnational belonging in the contemporary world, namely the hijab or veil of a Muslim woman. Commenting on legislation passed in 2004 in France that bans the wearing of “conspicuous” religious insignia in public schools—a law that primarily targets girls who wear the hijab—three articles in this volume provide important contextual information for understanding the historical and cultural contingency of the veil. In her essay, “Gender and Secularism of Modernity: How Can a Muslim Woman Be French?” Afsaneh Najmabadi helps us destabilize singular understandings of the veil as a sign of oppression and deceit. She does so by unearthing and highlighting “some of the historical meanings of the veil that have been forgotten to make it the sign that it has now become.” Drawing on historical examples from the Islamic Middle East and specifically Iran, as well as significations of the veil in Western Europe from the seventeenth century onward, Najmabadi reveals the ways in which veiling was indelibly caught up in the broader shifts in understanding, for example, from a focus on male bodies to female bodies through a shift in preoccupation and public debate about the beard to a debate focusing on the veil. Najmabadi also explores the relationship between veiling and the production of heteronormalization and gender segregation over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Not only do we need to pay attention to these shifts in meaning and the contexts through which veiling or not veiling has acquired significance, but, as Najmabadi notes, even within “modern” frames of reference, there have been multiple positions and alignments of an Islamic appeal to modernity, so that present-day meanings of the veil as synonymous with oppression have not always been the sole frame of interpretation, even in

the so-called West. By delineating these “forgotten” meanings and contexts of signification, Najmabadi effectively highlights the historical contingency of the veil, allowing us to circumvent the “circular repetition of choice and oppression, religious and secular, national and extraterritorial” in which the current debate is inextricably mired.

The next two articles stake their claim as position pieces, one arguing for and the other against the headscarf ban in French public schools; but as importantly, they serve to historically contextualize the debates and to highlight the multiple voices (and issues) that manifest themselves through the lens of the veil. Judith Ezekiel’s essay, “French Dressing: Race, Gender, and the Hijab Story,” makes a compelling argument for how the present controversy, unlike its previous iterations in 1989 and 1993, reveals and “distills the transformation of French political culture over the last fifteen years” from a vision of international socialism to a fundamentally nationalist model, that of *la France laïque et république*—the secular French Republic. This model, the author maintains, has been significantly shaped by the Right in France, and although presented as an antidote to a dystopian (and multicultural) “America,” is premised on an anti-immigrant, xenophobic, and racist discourse and practice that reflects an imperfect separation of church and state, despite the vaunted rhetoric of secularism and universalism. By blinding themselves to this nationalist ideology and practice, Ezekiel argues, feminists are caught in the untenable position of either aligning themselves with the racist and anti-immigrant state or sharing a platform with Islamic fundamentalists. In recent years, however, new or revitalized “women of color” feminist movements have emerged that oppose both the law *and* the hijab and take a critical stance toward the xenophobic policies of the state while distancing themselves from right-wing Islamic positions. Ezekiel aligns herself with this emergent position, providing both a personal and historical argument against the pretense of secularism or *laïcité* in the French Republic and the subsequent support of the ban by many feminists.

A somewhat contrary position is articulated by Bronwyn Winter in her essay, “Secularism aboard the Titanic: Feminists and the Debate over the Hijab in France.” Winter supports the ban, that is, the outlawing of religious insignia in public schools, viewing it as tied to France’s hard-won

battle for religious pluralism and the separation of church and state. Ardent in support of French understandings of secularism, Winter does not, however unequivocally support the 2004 law. She tempers her argument by noting the hypocrisy of the French government in choosing to ignore all of the recommendations—other than the ban—put forward by the Stasi Commission in 2003 and also noting the extra vigor the French government displays in separating Islam and the state while displaying far less vigilance when it comes to Catholicism. Construing the French government’s policy as one that addresses only the “tip of the hijab iceberg,” Winter notes that it invariably results in “peculiar alliances and worrying fracture lines” among feminists, with prominent feminists appearing to align themselves with Islamists and anti-Semites on the one hand, while others find themselves “defending a law passed by a right-wing government that they have otherwise roundly criticized for dismantling social protection and assailing—or ignoring—women’s rights.” Detailing these complex ruptures and the various players in this political debate, Winter allows us to better understand the local contexts within and through which retrenchments of nationalism, racism, and xenophobia on the one hand, and gender oppression and religious fundamentalism on the other, play themselves out. While seemingly taking contrary positions in this most recent iteration of the “veil wars” in France, authors Ezekiel (against the ban) and Winter (for the ban) both underline the point that the debate, although “triggered by the hijab, [is] about something other than the hijab or Muslim minorities” (in Winter’s words). Like Najmabadi, they highlight a similar imperative to move beyond simple binaries—of *laïcité* versus religion and nationalism versus “othered” difference—that leaves no space for a feminist position that is both secular and antiracist, a position that opposes both the veil and the law. All three of these articles therefore underline the need to situate the current debate within a global context, looking at the ways in which veiling and unveiling have been caught up in broader political movements, while simultaneously paying critical attention to the local contexts and the particular invocations and reiterations of nationalism within which the debate manifests itself.

Françoise Basch follows this conversation with an essay on World War II France that also speaks to the power of nationalism, racism, xenophobia,

and religion. Basch has already written of these years in her 1990 biography of her grandfather Victor Basch, president of the French League of the Rights of Man, who was assassinated by the Nazis in 1944. In "Gender and Survival: A Jewish Family in Occupied France, 1940-1944," she returns to those war years and crafts a powerful memoir and tribute to the women in her family. Focusing on their lives in occupied France and encompassing the years between her father's suicide in 1940 and the assassinations of her grandparents, Victor and Ilona Basch, in 1944, she highlights the experiences of three generations of women represented by her mother Marianne, her grandmother Ilona, and herself. Using correspondence and diary entries written during the Occupation, she allows readers to see not just the strength and courage of these women as they fought for their own and their families' survival, but also the distinct view of the child she was who witnessed the adults' actions and did not always understand them as for her benefit. Describing her family as "educated, secular, Jewish, and left-wing," Basch shows the multiple lines of conflict that framed (and constrained) her mother's and grandmother's choices: the need to split up the family once the Vichy regime and Germany gained power in France, Marianne's search for a job that would enable her to provide food and money for her family and friends, and the escalating attacks within France against Jewish people throughout the period. The story Basch relates is one of sacrifice and hope and the ways in which "their daily struggles forced women of different generations to reshape conventional models of womanhood" to survive.

Minoo Moallem's review essay, "Feminist Scholarship and the Internationalization of Women's Studies," challenges women's studies programs and departments and feminist scholars and teachers to internationalize. She focuses on the conceptual issues involved in such an endeavor in her review of four books that enter this conversation and seek to respond to this challenge. Moallem notes the importance of the serious consideration of global and gender issues made by each author and especially praises their attempt to analyze gender issues in multiple sites and cultural locations; their engagement of issues of race, culture, religion, class, and sexuality; and their attempt to move beyond mainstream (read "Western") notions of feminism. In commenting on the varied strengths and weak-

nesses of each text, Moallem also highlights the significant problems of formulating an “international” or “global” approach when the “West” remains foundational in definitions of feminism. She argues that “[t]here is certainly a need for an interrogation of an arrogant view of feminism that fails to question the ways in which racist and colonial notions of the ‘other’ are themselves constitutive of a particular kind of feminism before one takes on the project of women’s studies internationalization.” Moallem concludes with a call for scholars to more carefully and consistently interrogate the “significance of ‘nation’ as an analytic category in constructions of globalism.”

The creative work in this issue also offers interpretations of the challenges to women of both globalization and resurgent nationalisms. Na Young Lee’s art essay addresses the work of Korean artist Yun Suknam. Lee highlights Yun’s effort in both drawings and sculpture and her provocative use of materials like rotten scraps of wood in her series *Mother’s Eyes* to offer a “reinterpretation of ‘motherhood’ from a feminist perspective.” Similar to Basch’s memoir, Yun’s art draws on the experiences of the women in her family to comment on the “ambivalent features and conflicting sentiments about womanhood” located in the “traditional sense of home: love, care, conflict, and sacrifice.” Yun’s work to create a more visible and viable space for Korean women through her founding of the October Group (a Korean feminist art group) parallels the efforts to challenge the “gendered order of Korean society” exemplified in her art.

In her story “Homecoming,” Grace M. Cho similarly explores the lives of Korean women in the period during and after the Korean War. Following the life of a young Korean woman from her childhood, when she loses her brother and two older sisters at the hands of the “allies,” to her move to the United States as a “warbride” and her life with an abusive husband and intolerant neighbors, Cho’s compelling story comments on both the dangers of the Occupation and the limited choices offered to women by their “allies” and the Korean state, as well as the ways in which these issues frame and distill the complex emotions surrounding motherhood, belonging, and a lifetime of thwarted desires.

In their contributions to this issue, Inderpal Grewal and Christine So call for feminists to more substantively attend to transnationalism and

globalization in their scholarship. In her review essay, “Gender, Culture, and Empire: Postcolonial U.S. Feminist Scholarship,” Grewal points to nationalism and the default category of the “nation” or “nation-state” as the key presumptions that require disrupting in the feminist scholarship that addresses the history of imperialism and empire. She remarks, “even with the understanding of nationalisms as changing and unstable or even diasporic—the nation seems to hold,” and she calls on feminist scholars to “trouble and interrupt” this “nationalism, which is so powerful.” Describing the books she covers as representing a “new school of post-colonial American studies,” she outlines her appreciation for the authors’ focus on gender, sexuality, and race as “analytic frames to understand U.S. imperialism.” The works she examines offer revisions to the historiography of U.S. imperialism and especially analyze how “imperial subjectivity” emerges through a focus on the relation between domesticity and empire. In their treatment of U.S. efforts toward empire through the twentieth century, all three authors of the books she reviews demonstrate the complicity of white women, who often saw themselves as “superior in race and nationality” in the process of creating U.S. nationalism. Grewal marks the major contribution of the three books as the challenge they present to “scholars of empire” to engage more consistently with issues of race, gender, and sexuality and be more attentive to the ways in which “‘domesticity,’ politics, and ‘U.S. culture’” are inextricably linked to the “culture of empire.”

In her turn, Christine So’s “Asian Mail-Order Brides, the Threat of Global Capitalism, and the Rescue of the U.S. Nation-State” considers the Asian mail-order bride as a site through which U.S. anxieties concerning globalization and the consequences of international exchange become articulated and cast in sharp relief. She focuses on how responses in the United States to the incorporation of Asian mail-order brides into U.S. families illuminate the “mounting anxiety surrounding the globalization of the U.S. family.” She analyzes three venues through which discourses concerning the mail-order bride are produced—the U.S. media, companies arranging such exchanges, and narratives of some “native informants.” So highlights the tensions over attempts to maintain the discourses and material realities of “family” and “capital” as separate—a

separation, she argues, that is necessary for the United States as a nation-state “ever more dependent upon ideologies of ‘family’ to maintain unity and symbolic wholeness.” In other words, a South Asian mail-order bride “threatens to unveil not only the economics that structure every marriage but also the specter of exploitation within the U.S. home itself.” In her exploration of the connections between race, gender, and capital in an “era of globalization,” So provocatively suggests that the “value of Asian women and their ‘culture’ in a global era thus also lies in their production of ‘home’—one in which the moral and the material merge to contain fears of global capitalism within the seamless integrity of family values, national unity, and global harmony.” In the end, So characterizes South Asian mail-order brides as “symbols” of the “cultural exchanges necessary to the reconsolidation of patriarchy and the nation-state in an era of transnationalism.”

Finally, in “One Ring Circus/Altar Call” and “Our Lady of Sorrows” Dawn McDuffie and Susanne Davis take up this notion of desire, ruminating on its intricate relationship with the Christian churches. In the poem “One Ring Circus/Altar Call,” McDuffie beautifully captures the complex balancing of her desire to make love with her uncle and the concurrent longing for divine grace that would make her forget such desire. Walking through the empty circus lot, McDuffie juxtaposes her forbidden sexual desire, expressed through vivid imaginings of the freedom and glamor of aerial circus acts, with ironic memories of her Baptist Bible school with its afternoons of altar calls and illusions of salvation during which she could pretend to “forget desire.” Her poem effectively captures the conflicting desires and pleasures between sexual love (with a forbidden other) and the longing for absolution—to be able to effectively walk “that tightrope between the grace I asked for and my uncle who still napped in a corner of my mind.”

Susanne Davis’s short story, “Our Lady of Sorrows,” also addresses forbidden desires and their mediation through the (Catholic) church. Documenting a day in the life of a young teenage—and pregnant—girl who skips school to take refuge in Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic Church, this story eloquently captures the fears and desires of Jordana Colon as she negotiates her emotional responses to impending motherhood and her

fear of confronting her parents and breaking the news of her pregnancy to them. In the peaceful and quiet church, she encounters an older woman, Rita Clover. It is through her interactions with Rita over the course of the day and her complex and shifting negotiations of Rita's "empathy" that Jordana arrives at a different understanding of her own desires and fears regarding motherhood and her eventual "homecoming." Like the previous stories, these creative pieces complement earlier articles in reflecting on desire, agency, and their complex negotiation through re-entrenchments of religious orthodoxy, militarism, and nationalism in today's globalized world.

To conclude this issue, we are pleased to publish a report from Poland, "We Are (Not All) Homophobes," written by feminist activist Agnieszka Graff, on the growth of lesbian and gay movements and the contexts of resistance to the movements in her country. Graff argues that until a few years ago Polish gay people occupied a "sphere of averted eyes and lowered voices," but recently, gay activists have claimed a public space. Through her own personal experiences and interviews with four other activists, Graff recounts the Polish equality marches and publicity campaigns and the resulting, sometimes violent, political backlash. Resistance to these movements, we learn, comes from some of the many sources addressed in other articles of this issue: re-entrenchments of religious orthodoxy and hypernationalism.

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