

## preface

This issue of *Feminist Studies* focuses on embodiment, one of the central but also one of the most controversial areas of feminist research and activism. Most feminists would agree that female bodies—in their social, sexual, medical, legal, and economic contexts—have always been in some way at the heart of feminist endeavors. But how those bodies are imagined, and even more crucially, how ideas about the differences between bodies play out in feminist theory and practice, is much harder to pin down. Hagar Kotef points out in this issue that an abstract notion of “woman” has always underpinned liberal feminism, but how does this abstract woman relate to the sacred essence of womanhood discussed in Jennie Klein’s essay on Goddess art and spirituality or to the experiences of the differently sexed and gendered people whose voices we hear in Evelyn Blackwood’s article or in Amanda Lock Swarr’s research?

The construction of the female body always involves the policing of it, as all our authors make clear. For example, Swarr’s research, based on interviews conducted in Soweto, Johannesburg, and Cape Town, investigates the assumption that for black South Africans, lesbian and gay identities and sexuality accompany a dually sexed biology known as *stabane* in Zulu and “intersex” in English. In “*Stabane*, Intersexuality, and Same-Sex Relationships in South Africa,” Swarr argues that the surveillance and violent regulation of those suspected of being *stabane* are deeply imbedded in colonial histories of racialization. “Corporeal expectations of both sex and race have been violently policed and used to justify imperialism. Such concepts have concrete effects because they establish norms about possible ways to be—in a body or in a sexual relationship.” Swarr traces incidents of overreporting of intersex births in black communities during apartheid, which “extends earlier connections between racist science and intersexu-

ality by using claims of the common occurrence of intersexed bodies among black South Africans to reinforce assertions of racial difference and white superiority.” Swarr’s research comes in the aftermath of homophobic and gender-based hate crimes in South Africa during which accusations of stabane status were invoked. This phenomenon leads Swarr to conclude: “Sex is in crisis and violence is articulating its borders. Concerns related to stabane illustrate constantly shifting ideas of gender and sexuality in South Africa.”

Swarr’s work in South Africa is joined by Evelyn Blackwood’s ethnography of individuals who position themselves as men with female bodies in Padang, West Sumatra, and who identify as *tombois*. According to Blackwood’s research, tombois dress and act like men, physically and socially embodying masculinity and, to some extent, a version of femininity based on the social spaces they are navigating. Blackwood’s essay, “Trans Identities and Contingent Masculinities: Being Tombois in Everyday Practice,” examines when and where tombois take up particular subject positions. Focusing on households and local communities, Blackwood examines how tombois respond to and manage expectations of gendered practices in different cultural spaces. The extended kinship groupings within which tombois move include “three generations linked by emotional, economic, and lineal ties,” wherein tombois dress in clothes designated as “male” and are given “the same privileges as their brothers in terms of mobility and autonomy,” signifying “their masculinity and their families’ acknowledgment of that masculinity.” However, “despite the legitimacy tombois have within family space, they face certain obstacles in enacting their masculinity,” creating a somewhat precarious masculine identity. When it comes to the dominant culture’s expectations of marriage and giving birth, tombois’ masculinity does not erase a female embodiment. Tombois navigate a complex cultural and community terrain that requires an acknowledgment of their female bodies and, under certain circumstances, performances of femininity. Ultimately, Blackwood argues that tombois’ masculinity is contingent based on “the culturally dictated positioning attached to female bodies and the material effects of that embodiment.” Blackwood insists that tombois’ masculinity is one of many versions of masculinity in Southeast Asia that transgress normative categories of gender through

their expression of both masculine and feminine behaviors. She concludes that “tomboys also strategically manipulated cultural gender codes of femininity to create space for themselves and their partners.”

The complexity of embodiment in theoretical as well as practical contexts is the focus of Hagar Kotef’s “On Abstractness: First Wave Liberal Feminism and the Construction of the Abstract Woman.” Taking as her starting point a passage from Sarah Grimké’s 1838 *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*, Kotef argues against simply dismissing the “abstract woman” in liberal feminist thought as a euphemism for the middle-class white woman. Instead, she shows how abstractness is constitutive of liberalism, “a regulative idea that is never actualized but still cannot be thought of simply as a facade.” The passage from Grimké’s letter, “Legal Disabilities of Women,” describes the oppression of various groups in society. Slaves, she notes, are often killed by legally sanctioned violence; working-class husbands frequently exercise their legal right to “[degrade] women by personal chastisement”; and middle- and upper-class white women, if they are not literally imprisoned in the home, face restrictions on their physical movement and especially on their attendance at church.

Kotef reads this brief but complex passage as key to nineteenth-century and liberal ideologies of womanhood. In Grimké’s vision, the closer women get to full equality with men, the more disembodied they become. Equality, for her, would produce “a new female subject who lacks any concrete attributes, who is nothing but an empty juridical function tying together rights and liberties.” Thus, in the letter, the middle-class white woman—significantly closer to equality with men than lower-class women or women of color—has a body only insofar as her movement can be restricted. The battered bodies of working-class women are somewhat more vividly described, but Grimké’s discussion veers almost immediately into an indictment of the drunkenness of working-class men: in other words, the working-class wife is beaten not because she is a woman but because she is poor. Excessive corporeality, to the point of inhumanity, is seen as an attribute of slave and “Hottentot” women. In other words, liberal feminist arguments for a “universal,” abstract human subject—at least in the nineteenth century—entail the imaginative marginalization of women’s bodies.

The political meanings of female bodies are at issue also in Sunaina Maira's "'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and U.S. Orientalisms." Maira explores the representation of South Asian Muslim terrorists and feminist activists in the mainstream U.S. media. She argues that the figures of the radical male terrorist and the oppressed Muslim woman are both crucial to neoliberal justifications of the U.S. "War on Terror." The terrorist and the oppressed woman have been enshrined in media discourse as the two faces of Islam, and U.S. policy is to eliminate the first and liberate the second.

Maira discusses the figure of the terrorist through an examination of the case of Hamid Hayat, arrested with his father in Lodi, California, by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in 2005 under suspicion of funding and organizing a terrorist "sleeper cell." In 2006, Hayat was found guilty of making false statements and providing "material support" for terrorism by attending a jihadi training camp in Pakistan, then returning to the United States to plan terrorist attacks. Hayat resolutely denied attending a training camp. He was sentenced to twenty-four years in prison. Hayat was incited to express radical Islamist views by a paid FBI informer, Nasim Kham, who had himself been investigated by the FBI and convicted of burglary. Maira notes the irony of the fact that "the state seems to seek out and even foster the radical ideas that it then uses as examples of terrorist conspiracies." In other words, the United States needs "bad Muslims" to support its policies in the Middle East and elsewhere.

But the United States also needs humanitarian justification for its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and this is provided by media figures such as Irshad Manji and Asra Nomani, authors of *The Trouble with Islam Today: A Muslim's Call for Reform in Her Faith* and *Standing Alone in Mecca: An American Woman's Struggle for the Soul of Islam*. Although their biographies and strategies are significantly different, Manji and Nomani both use pro-Western ideologies to critique Islam from within. Maira contends that mainstream commentators and liberal feminists alike have allowed the women's stories of coercion and abuse at the hands of Muslim men to obscure their awareness of the racist dimensions of their texts, and she calls for a "deeper analysis of the linkages between Orientalism, feminism, and U.S. imperial-

ism” as a way of treading the “fine line between apologizing for fundamentalism and patriarchy and justifying imperial policies.”

Part of Manji’s and Nomani’s success in the U.S. media derives from the ways in which their bodies are framed in visual technologies such as television and the Internet. In her review essay, “Networked Bodies and Extended Corporealities: Theorizing the Relationship between the Body, Embodiment, and Contemporary New Media,” Michele White asks a related question: how does the development of new media such as the Internet impact on bodily experience and feminist theories of the body? The books she discusses offer several different ways of answering this question. Susan Kozel, for example, uses her experience as a dancer and choreographer, the metaphor of “connective tissue,” and the language of phenomenology to explore the ways in which the Internet reimagines the body as a discursive as much as a biological phenomenon. Anna Munster argues that embodiment in the new media should be seen as a practice of assemblage or bricolage, and Bernadette Wegenstein sees the Internet as the most recent in a long history of medical and visual practices that include body art. Kim Toffoletti uses the concept of the “posthuman” to argue that Internet technology transforms the way we think about the body and shows how it enables the assimilation and transformation of the body into a whole series of systems and networks. White concludes that the Internet offers transformative new ways of both experiencing and theorizing bodily experience, opportunities that feminism neglects at its peril.

The last two articles in this issue look at the ways in which visual art has been a powerful and controversial tool for feminist activism. In “What We Want,” Barbara Sjöholm weaves a description of her experiences researching the lives of nineteenth-century Danish painters Marie Luptau and Emilie Mundt, with an evocative account of their struggles to achieve recognition for all aspiring women artists in Denmark. Luptau (1848-1925) and Mundt (1842-1922) met when they were both studying at Vilhelm Kyhn’s Drawing School for Women in Copenhagen. Luptau was the daughter of respected women’s rights activist Line Luptau; and Marie’s painting of her mother and her associates, *From the Early Days of the Women’s Suffrage Movement*, hangs in the Danish Parliament. The two women set up a

home together and in 1891 adopted a baby daughter, Carla Mundt-Luplau. Their domestic happiness as lovers, mothers, and painters only reinforced their determination to strengthen art education for women, and in the 1890s they opened their own art school in Copenhagen. Sjöholm situates the paintings by Mundt and Luplau that are reproduced here in the context of the women's experiences as artists, lesbians, and early feminists, contrasting Luplau's interest in open-air scenes and landscapes with Mundt's more intimate portraiture.

Art was a catalyst in Second Wave feminism as well. In "Goddess: Feminist Art and Spirituality in the 1970s," Jennie Klein explores the history and reception of Goddess art. Noting that feminist spirituality, with its focus on the Goddess, has been marginalized in recent accounts of feminist art, she reminds us that in the 1970s and 1980s, the Goddess was central to feminist art production, especially in Southern California. There were three reasons why Los Angeles was so conducive to the development of Goddess art. First, Marija Gimbutas, the influential feminist archaeologist who claimed to have uncovered a prehistoric matrifocal culture that predated ancient Greece, lived and worked there; second, the Woman's Building, founded in 1973, provided space for feminist art exhibitions and housed the Feminist Studio Workshop, the first art school dedicated to feminist art production; and third, *Chrysalis: A Magazine of Women's Culture* was produced in Los Angeles between 1977 and 1980. Klein argues that although Goddess art has been dismissed as apolitical and essentialist, in the 1970s and 1980s it was part of a radical feminist vision that was enabled by the work of artists and activists such as Arlene Raven, the contributors to *Chrysalis*, and the women who worked and made art in the Woman's Building.

The creative work in this issue also explores the joys and the limits of gendered bodily experience. Jackie Cornog's humorous re-creation of childhood games of Monopoly, "Game Roles Sestina," culminates in an ironic comment on adult gender roles; Don Mee Choi's savagely satirical "Instructions from the Inner Room" is a contemporary twist on premodern Korean "poem-songs" traditionally passed down from mother to daughter; and Natasha Marin's "Adolescence, or Through the Fire," poignantly imagines the tender eroticism of a teenage girl's desire to "risk

it all” for love. The central image of Camille Norton’s “August Afternoons at the Love/Art Laboratory” is a peacock whose feathers become a reminder of the imminence of both desire and mortality, and Choi’s “From Noon–To All Surviving Butterflies” is a grim evocation of a war-torn landscape. Loss haunts all these works, including Libby Ware’s story, “The Circuit,” that delicately traces the many layers of human experience, exploring the links between secrecy and privacy in the context of a body that—for the reader anyway—is full of surprises.

Amanda Lock Swarr with Sally Gross and Liesl Theron conclude this issue with a News and Views piece about two South African organizations, Intersex South Africa and Gender DynamiX. With all the attention in the global media to champion runner Caster Semenya’s gender identity, there has been no mention of the efforts of South African feminist and intersex activists to challenge the stigma and misconceptions around intersex people. The work of Intersex South Africa and Gender DynamiX in Semenya’s home country reminds us that the way that bodies are construed and imagined—the subject of many of the articles in this issue of *Feminist Studies*—can often have dramatic real-life consequences.

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