

PREFACE

Feminists have long appreciated Edward Said's *Orientalism* which helped us to see how the "East" has been constructed to imagine and enable European penetration and governance of peoples and nations existing under its dominion. Said, of course, argued that the Western gaze feminized the East and the men who fell under it, but he did not take as his task the examination of the impact of this historical and textual construction on women's sense of their own agency. In bringing together in this issue articles that treat gender and women's issues in Iran, Lebanon, Japan, and Asian American communities, the editors hope to avoid collapsing distinctively different histories and societies into the monolithic rubric of "the East" while pushing Said's inquiry further: "Who's East? Whose East?"

The first question underlines the problematic location of a perspective from which to view the subject. The leveling influence and homogenizing effects that commodity capitalism and Westernization offer and the particularizing strategies of accommodation, resistance, and transformation that local cultural actors may develop, must both be placed at the center of any analysis. This shift of perspective immediately suggests that we reconsider connections inside and beyond the geographical area. The Near East, the Middle East, and the Far East were, of course, nineteenth-century diplomatic terms introduced by powers that located themselves at the center of definition. "Who's East?" calls into question these colonial categories, even while it reinstates the label for a different purpose. We include the United States as part of the "East" because the term can no longer be restricted to a unified notion of geopolitical orientation. Standing in Tokyo, Beijing, or Singapore, for example, California marks the Eastern horizon of the Pacific, the frontier that beckoned and continues to beckon immigrants from Asia to the Americas.

"Whose East?" poses a second and deeply related question. Once the geopolitics of naming have been highlighted, then both the methods of investigation and the politics of representation through which the lives and struggles of the area's women are brought into Western discourse can be better understood. We intend this special issue of *Feminist Studies* as a contribution to that dual project.

The issue opens with Suad Joseph's investigation of a subject central to feminist theory, the claim that women are more relationally oriented than men. In forging and analyzing kinship ties in a working-class neighborhood in Beirut, Lebanon, she discovered that men are as enmeshed as women in what she terms "patriarchal connectivity." Her essay offers us insight into both the limits of our own Western psychodynamic theory,

when applied to the kinship and gender systems of others, and new knowledge about the constraints and possibilities within which Arab women and men construct their intimate lives.

Afsaneh Najmabadi provides a new perspective on the "Woman Question" in the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century struggle between modernizing and Islamicist discourses in Iran, as viewed through women's social forums, genre literature, and bodily disciplines. The result is a fascinating argument concerning the contradictory location of female sexuality in the discourse of both modernization and piety. The "Veiled Discourses, Unveiled Bodies" which Najmabadi describes have certainly served as vectors of change. But modernizing processes entail losses as well as transformations, and condemnation and control of the women who inhabit these contradictory processes remains profound.

"Ma'ssoun's Tale" traces the evolving feminist consciousness of a young Iranian political activist who becomes a refugee and the American ethnographer who presents her story. What does feminism provide for Ma'ssoun, and how is feminism transformed for Janet Bauer as her friendship with the young woman develops? The possible answers to those questions inform the theoretical space in which Bauer constructs her essay.

The next three essays focus on Asian American women's issues and cultural representations. "*Issei Women: Silences and Fields of Power*" analyzes fifteen life histories of first-generation Japanese American women to look at their self-representations. Malve von Hassell argues that the *issei* women's uses of language and silence simultaneously contributed to their powerlessness and to the construction of stereotypes. This helps to account for a cultural miscommunication between *issei* mothers and *nisei* daughters.

Shirley Geok-lin Lim looks at the intersections of feminist and ethnic literary theories in Asian American women's literature. Taking Asian American literature as the site of masculinist views and feminist resistance, she reads specific texts as refigurations of the often oppositional demands of ethnic-specific and feminist thematics. In the Houstons' memoirs, *Farewell to Manzanar*, and in Korean American Kim Ron-Young's novel, *Clay Walls*, Lim traces the specific concerns of Japanese American and Korean American women's representations within the historical moment when counterpatriarchal and counterracist discourses contradict, subvert, and problematize each other.

In "Daughter-Text/Mother-Text: Matrilineage in Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*," Marina Heung offers an instance of these critical intersections in her reading of the popular Chinese American novel. Placing the matrilineage theme within a broad nonethnic specific tradition of the mother/

daughter plot, Heung argues for a central position for "maternal subjectivity and voicing" and examines *The Joy Luck Club* through a "culturally specific critique." The interlingual sophistication of her reading illuminates the culture-specific construction of maternal subjectivity and offers a subtle deconstruction of the novel's formal and stylistic registers that could not be arrived at without the tools of bilingualism.

The two review essays return us to one of the central and, we hope, playfully useful turns in this volume—the interpenetration of cultures and geographies. When observed accurately, these call into question the academic departmentalization of East and West, "Asian" and "American." Sally Ann Hastings reviews two studies of the life and impact of Ume Tsuda, who was educated in the United States and played a major role in extending women's education in Japan. Hastings underlines both the discontinuities of lives lived between two cultures and nations and the contradictory influences of such lives. At the same time, as these biographers celebrate Tsuda's feminism, Hastings's review is careful to bracket their partial grafting of her stance in the context of Japanese (rather than U.S.) history as a problem.

Betty Kano's informative and fresh review of four northern Californian/Asian American women artists introduces us to a community of women that has been too little known. Kano's description of their art is filled with plangent observations gathered from a number of interviews, intimate acquaintances, and her own practice as an activist painter. The cover of this issue is testimony to her talent.

Taken together, these articles suggest a reorientation. When we revisit the site of the Western mapping of its obligate East, we discover a range of social practices, literary discourses, and political movements through which women in many countries live out, and occasionally transform, their lives. It is only by dis-orienting our understandings of geopolitical hegemony that the space for new connections and conversations among women across regional boundaries may be imagined. Once we pose the critical, dual questions, "Who's East? Whose East?" an interrogation of the constitution of "Western" women becomes more possible, as well.

Finally, the creative writing section has been completely given over to poetry. In perhaps an ironic countermirroring of the usual academic journal, we have kept the creative writing "unmarked." The marks of identity in this section are in the words, not in the theory.

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for the editors