

## PREFACE

This issue of *Feminist Studies* begins with a cluster of articles about the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women held at Beijing in September 1995. These articles together reveal the complexities that accompany global conferences, highlighting both the possibilities of collective action which inhere in such a gathering and the enormity of the tasks that lie ahead.

The first article is excerpted from a speech by Chinese scholar and feminist Wang Jiaxiang about the importance of this conference being held in Beijing. She speaks movingly of her coming to understand that the revolution had not so much equalized gender relations as pronounced their irrelevance, the increased burdens brought upon women by the opening up of the economy, her discovery that promoting women meant making them "vice-mayor, vice-governor, vice-something," and her hope that such international conferences would force the Chinese government to be more accountable to its women. Wang Jiaxiang's speech is followed by three short recollections by Chinese women activists, who participated in the six regional meetings which prepared the Beijing conference, about their entrance into the international women's forums, and of their realization that "women's issues are global and China is no exception." These are taken from "Reflections and Resonance: Stories of Chinese Women Involved in International Preparatory Activities for the 1994 NGO Forum for Women," a collection published by the Ford Foundation, Beijing.

The UN Platform for Action, negotiated at Beijing by approximately 181 governments, acknowledged for the first time women's rights to "have control over and decide freely and responsibly on matters related to their sexuality." Jennifer J. Yanko writes about the workshops organized by the Boston Women's Health Collective for those who were engaged in translating and making relevant *Our Bodies, Ourselves* for countries around the world, a testament to one of the most important achievements of the global women's movement. The next article, by Mallika Dutt, discusses both the excitement and the frustration that characterized the experiences of U.S. women of color who went to Beijing. She argues that women of color were taken aback by the "vibrancy and power of the glob-

al women's movement" in contrast to the disorganization amongst U.S. feminists and learned about the impact of the global economy on women in ways they had not before. Beijing was also bittersweet for women of color as they strove to identify with and understand their differences from women from their countries of origin.

The article by Barbara Hopkins discusses the tensions and disagreements between the official UN Platform for Action and the Economic Justice Caucus of the Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) Forum on key economic issues. While there was near-universal agreement among women in the NGO Forum that *laissez faire* policies were harming women, the Platform for Action insisted that although women were indeed adversely affected by these policies, they would benefit in the long run.

The last article in the cluster is excerpted from a talk given by Hilary Charlesworth, at the Sixth International Interdisciplinary Congress on Women held in Adelaide, Australia, this past April, about whether global conferences ultimately benefit women. Charlesworth argues that masculine agendas predominate at these meetings, even though the bulk of the work is done by women. Analyzing the "soft law" declarations of the seven global forums organized by the UN since 1990, Charlesworth suggests that the recommendations are either so qualified or couched in such unspecific language that they are impossible to monitor and are ultimately toothless.

If the articles make one thing clear it is that we are in a truly global age. And in this global age, there are some increasingly powerful forces. The first is the force of economic liberalization. The International Monetary Fund has written out its totalizing narrative: privatization and austerity measures are good; public expenditures are bad. The second force is that of oppositional social movements. Women from around the world came together at Beijing to rewrite that narrative and took home with them both ideas and strength to help them in that fight.

Both this narrative and the struggle against it are also illustrated in Seung-kyung Kim's "Big Companies Don't Hire Us, Married Women": Exploitation and Empowerment among Women Workers in South Korea." In this article, Kim examines the case of a strike in a factory in a free-export zone in Soyo,

notorious for its abusive managers, in which married women workers publicly voiced sentiments against the strike but voted for it through a secret ballot. Examining the tensions experienced by being a mother/wife and a working woman in Korean society, Kim argues that working mothers carry guilt about diminishing their husband's masculinity and their children's opportunity to have a good home yet continue to work because of financial need. The contradiction between their publicly voiced opposition to the strike and their voting in favor of it epitomizes, therefore, the conflicted position these women inhabit. In this case, their silent actions reveal their true interests, not their voice.

In "The Problem of Silence in Feminist Psychology," Maureen A. Mahoney questions the valorization of voice prominent in the cultural feminist strain of contemporary thinking in the United States and suggests that "silence can also be understood as an avenue to power" for women. She discusses "two competing stories about the psychological source of women's power" that derive from the fields of relational psychology and of postmodernist literary theory and finds a telling contradiction between the intellectual rejection of having an "authentic self" and the shameful psychological experience of self-betrayal. Mahoney draws on a childhood experience of shame when she wore inappropriate pants to a new, middle-class school in order to illuminate the pain, not the playfulness, of feeling false to a perceived "true self." In a critique of Carol Gilligan's "politics of voice," she argues that girls' and women's silence may signify active resistance to authority, not defeat. She suggests that the psychological experience of "feeling real" so important to women's development may depend on the contradictory state of "feeling false," and she develops a theory of psychological power that "paradoxically locates the capacity for creativity and resistance in the delicate balance between being heard and not being heard, between speaking and refusing to speak."

Like Mahoney, Elana Michelson validates the anti-authoritarian implications of some experiences typical for U.S. women, while she also finds earlier cultural feminist celebrations of experience undertheorized and simplistic. In "'Auctorité' and 'Experience': Feminist Epistemology and the Assessment of Experiential Learning," she foregrounds the nonelite college as a site of feminist theory and practice by bringing together fem-

inist epistemology and a nontraditional academic practice, the assessment for college credit of students' prior experiential learning, a practice that insists knowledge is produced by particular people as they work and care for others. Yet the assessment of students' experience has been constrained by traditional middle-class models of knowledge and of academic authority and by a practice of autobiographical portfolio writing that molds students' conceptions of themselves according to a bourgeois individualist model of "the integrated, developmental self of Romanticism and liberal humanism for whom the norm is psychic, if not economic, upward mobility." In contrast, a retheorized practice for assessing students' experience might better serve the students' situated knowledges.

The knowledge in Shirley Geok-lin Lim's poetry is situated in transnational migration and in the crossed ambitions of mother and daughter for mobility and autonomy. From the angry daughter's viewpoint, the mother so wanted "fine things" that she "confused/ life with wanting." Refusing forgiveness, the daughter rejects her abandoning mother as a greedy baby, a "piglet" who has suckled from the world, not nourished it.

Elaine H. Kim's art essay turns to the visual arts to highlight this transgressive tradition of "bad women" among Asian Americans. Asian American bad women are doubly bad, because they challenge both the patriarchal racism of the West and the patriarchy of their own families. Yet their badness is politically important precisely because Asian Americans are positioned as the model minority at the expense of other people of color. The three artists represented in this essay are installation artists, Vietnamese American Hanh Thi Pham and Korean American Yong Soon Min, and Chinese American painter Hung Liu. Together they examine the ways that the brutal and complicated legacies of imperialism are inscribed on women's bodies, disrupt the "orientalist fetishization of Asian women," assert the right of women to choose and represent their own sexuality while recognizing the extent to which Asian American women have historically been denied those choices, and celebrate their sister transgressors.

In contrast to the "history and politics of the possible" adumbrated in the Asian American women's visual art described by Elaine H. Kim, Myrna Goldenberg reports on a history and

politics that should have been impossible. In a review essay surveying memoirs, biography, short stories, social history, and philosophy of the Holocaust, Goldenberg delineates the Holocaust as a gendered experience. Jewish women, classified by the Nazis as "nonpersons and nonwomen," were nevertheless brutally targeted for specifically gendered cruelties as potential reproducers of a despised "race." As one scholar put it, "genocide is the act of putting women and children first." Those women permitted any choice over their fate at all suffered "the pains of unbearable choices and unspeakable loss," and their memoirs reverberate with repeated themes: "misogyny and sexual abuse, amenorrhea and fear of sterilization, the 'crime' of pregnancy and childbirth, the impossible burdens of childcare." They also describe a few lucky, fragile, and heroic alliances that preserved life or dignity. This literature highlights the paradoxes of "belief in the face of consummate evil; reason in the face of Nazi madness; survival as acts of resistance and sabotage," recounting fascinating stories of Jewish and non-Jewish heroines, martyrs, and traitors, including daring resistance fighters and a tragic lesbian love affair between a Jewish woman and the wife of a Nazi officer.

Jane Jacobson's powerful poems in this issue follow generations of women from a Warsaw wedding before the Holocaust to the American diaspora of its descendants. Tender and painful words trace an embroidery of remembrance and imply the necessity of art for survival, even in the abyss. A doomed woman buries a wedding photograph, "as proof should words fail us," and sends to the New World an embroidery picturing two lovers. Considering this gift from her family's past, today's bride-to-be wonders, "If we embroider the truth/ we mean we are telling lies. But what if the thread/ itself is the truth?"

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for the editors