

PREFACE

The theme of this issue is "Women and the State in the Americas." To put this theme, and this particular set of articles, in context involves looking back to the early days of Second Wave feminism, the days in which intellectual work was perhaps more grounded in grassroots political organizing than in the then very rare academic institutions of women's studies. Twenty years ago, an important group of feminist scholars, many if not most of whom had activist careers, set out on a quest to document and theorize the ways in which state institutions mold and at the same time rely on gender specific practices and ideologies. "Women and the state" was the banner under which such scholarship developed.

Today, sociologists and political scientists are no longer so certain that there is such a thing as "*the state*," and feminists no longer agree on the significance and content of the category "women." These doubts do not mean that the scholarship and the political activism formerly gathered under the "women and the state" umbrella are outmoded: on the contrary, the articles in this issue join a vast and growing literature around the questions of "women and the state." But feminists as well as nonfeminists are more wary of generalizations either about "the state" or about "women," and by and large we have given up the earlier dream of a universally valid theory of the relationship between the two. The scholarship on women and the state is today more empirically grounded and specific. And yet some common themes are emerging from these case studies.

One of the major epistemological breaks marking the emergence of Second Wave feminism in the Americas is the simple declarative statement: the personal is the political. Susan Zeiger's study of state manipulation of mothers and their relationships with their sons offers an example of a historical moment when issues encompassed within this intersection of the personal and the political were deployed to great effect not only by feminists and antiwar activists but also by the state itself. Zeiger's analysis of the effect of U.S. official patriotism on mother-son relationships is presented as a historically specific study of the First World War, but similar analyses could be carried out for other nation states in the Americas and other times.

North American feminists have often analyzed how the

state manipulates women and forms gender through either ideological campaigns or through tax policy, welfare policy, and so on. It is, however, necessary to remember that some states in the Americas are still using much cruder methods, up to and including generalized torture, in order to curtail and suppress resistance. The presence of "human rights violations" is often acknowledged in liberal discourse, but human rights are seldom regarded as gender specific. Nancy Caro Hollander's innovative essay examines the ways in which state violence and terror, while at one level unifying women and men as victims, at another level creates and reinforces gender specific psychic and social patterns. State violence has been and still is directed at lesbians and gay men in many parts of the Americas, but, as Joceline Clemencia's collage of interviews with Curaçao women shows, cultures of sexual resistance are developing in many corners of the hemisphere.

The essays by Cynthia Mahabir and Katherine Teghtsoonian further underline the high stakes involved in the specific ways in which relations between the personal and the political are organized. In Grenada, the outcome of rape prosecutions seems to depend as much or more on the value attached by "creolized cultural scripts" to the family's "honor"—often quantified in monetary payments aimed at stopping prosecutions—as on the victim's own personal experience. In Canada and the United States, as Teghtsoonian shows, the deployment of a language of consumer and parental "choice" in daycare debates in the political realm masks the material and financial processes that are constricting the actual choices of real mothers even as choice in the abstract is elevated into the key principle of child care provision. Tamara Friedman's short story, which could be read as an ironic commentary on the "promises, promises" of one of the most important sites of feminist organizing against the state, the prochoice movement, reminds us of the very high stakes involved in state policies regulating pregnancy and abortion.

Feminists, however, do not speak with one voice, whether about cultural issues or about strictly "political" events. Rebecca E. Biron's account of the different ways in which the feminist press in Mexico City has responded to the Mexican state's key crisis of the past year, the indigenous uprising in Chiapas,

documents in important ways a diversity within feminism that has parallels in other states of the Americas.

Finally, Felicia A. Kornbluh provides an excellent overview of recent feminist scholarship on the gendering of the U.S. state, in a review essay highlighting some of the specific features of U.S. state formation but also drawing connections with the literature on gender formation within other states. And in Lisa Chewning's "Jade and Jasmine" and in Ann Schwab's and Jesse Lee Kercheval's poems, we have three strong reimaginings of women's responses to state authority. Chewning paints a striking image of the disjunction between the orientalized sexist fantasies of Western men and the realities of the Vietnam War's violence, while Schwab subtly draws our attention to the ironic distance between philosophical discourse, symbolized by Martin Buber's abstracted "I and Thou" constructions, and the personal acts enacted by "Ladies." The final poem provides what the often depressing analyses of "the state" cannot provide, namely, a frankly utopian fantasy: a nonarmy of women parading on bicycles under one of the most photographed monuments of the masculinist state, the Arc de Triomphe in Paris.

This issue also features art selected by Margaret Bernal, former executive director of the Bureau of Women's Affairs, Jamaica, and former editor of *Arts Jamaica*. Our cover artist, Edna Manley, was considered the "matriarch" of Jamaica's vital contemporary art movement. Within a few years of her arrival in Jamaica in 1922, she had gathered together like-minded artists who offered that country's first art classes at the Institute of Jamaica (forerunner of today's highly respected Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts). Other Jamaican women artists whose work is reproduced throughout the issue are Susan Alexander, Laura Facey, Dawn Scott, and Samene Tansley.

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for the editors