

## **IRW/IWL Seminar 1997-1998**

### ***Women in the Public Sphere: Power, Practice, Agency***

#### **Anne Camilla Bellows**

Geography

“Women Defining and Defending Urban Food Security Power, Practice, and Agency in Southwest Poland”

In southwest Poland, especially in the Upper Silesia region, much of the landscape is classified by Poles as an environmental catastrophe. Food activists, mostly women, are also environmentalists. Their re-definition of food security faces challenges of food safety as well as general access. Given health risks stemming from polluted agricultural lands resulting in contamination of edible food crops, various organizing strategies have been developed, including: 1) developing an alternative market distribution system for retail sale of chemically tested foods; 2) distributing these foods to schools and hospitals and creating public subsidies for their purchase; and 3) community education. Under both central and market systems, and from food riots to environmental activism, women have fought on behalf of the broader public need for household and community food security. This fight often glorifies uncritically the gendered, aged, and classed divisions in food labor. For these reasons, women’s political (as well as private) labor for food security and community survival is often rendered invisible.

#### **Susan Carroll**

Women’s Studies

“Getting Real: Power, Practice, and Agency”

This project is very much an empirical as well as a theoretical endeavor. It involves both a critique of previous work on the representational relationship between women public officials and women citizens and new research and analysis. The empirical portion of this project draws upon in-depth interviews with 49 of the 55 women who served in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress (1993-94). These in-person interviews were conducted by myself and other members of the research staff of the Center for the American Woman and Politics as part of a large, grant-funded project examining the impact of women on major legislation considered by that Congress. The research also draws upon 20 in-depth interviews which I conducted with veteran women state legislators from various states in November 1995; these in-person interviews were conducted at the 1995 Forum for Women State Legislators sponsored by the Center for the American Woman and Politics.

#### **Kathleen Crown**

English and Women’s Studies

“The Rhetoric of Ecstasy in American Poetry Since World War II”

My dissertation, “Possessed by History: The Rhetoric of Ecstasy in American Poetry Since World War II,” explores the conflict in postwar poetry between ideals of rational public discourse and the individual and collective experience of women, often relegated to the so-called private sphere and articulated as forms of impassioned or “heightened speech.” I consider this rhetoric of ecstasy as a gendered response to traumatic historical events. Chapters on H.D., 1950s

postwar culture and the poetic avant-garde, Susan Howe, and Lucille Clifton look at how American women poets project postwar trauma back onto encounters (peaceful and brutal) between colonial settlers and native peoples, focusing also on the violent suppression of an “enthusiastic” or “ecstatic” discourse that historically has been gendered female and exiled from the realm of politics and history. I explore a conception of an ecstatic poetics as a kind of traumatic utterance in response to wartime atrocities—the atomic-age anxiety of H.D.’s *Sagesse* and the historical archaeology of Susan Howe’s experimental writing—looking at contemporary women poets’ use of the male-dominated traditions of the “long poem,” an expansive form inclusive of history and public concerns.

### **Harriet Davidson**

English and Women’s Studies

“With Whom Do You Believe Your Lot is Cast?”

I have been exploring the social use of poetry, examining the place of poetry in contemporary American society and theorizing the function of poetry in public terms rather than the more traditional private terms, which refuse history and society in an uncritical vocabulary of subjectivity, privacy, and universality. I am interested in the way poetry is used by certain groups as not primarily an aesthetic or private activity (though not without aesthetic impulse), but as an activity best described by Nancy Fraser’s seminal analysis of the “subaltern counter-public sphere.” Fraser’s critique of the Habermasian concept of the public sphere leads to an understanding of the formation of multiple public spheres based not only on issues, but also on groupings of identities, styles, and types of discourse. She is particularly interested in disturbing the neatness of public/private binary in feminist thinking.

### **Elin Diamond**

English

“Women’s Performance in the Public Sphere”

This project takes the rather odd perspective that the public sphere belongs not only to social actors but to those who take up speaking positions in actual art contexts, women who assume and query agency in and through cultural production. Since the 1970s the work of women performance artists has created a public space for exploring feminist thinking about power and patriarchy, about history and memory, and about politics and cultural practice. This project will both trace the genealogy of that practice and focus on a particular artist, Theodora Skpitares.

### **Leela Fernandes**

Political Science and Women’s Studies

“Between the National and the Global: Gender, Commodification, and the Making of a New Public Sphere in Globalizing India”

The 1990s has marked a new phase of economic liberalization in India. The process of economic liberalization which began in the 1980s has undergone a striking shift, marked by an increase in the pace and in the appearance of public acceptance of India’s transition to an “open” free market economy. The print and television media images increasingly seem to contribute to the reproduction of a new public culture, one that has discarded the last remnants of state socialism.

What then are the implications of such cultural shifts or “disjunctures” (Appadurai, 1990) and how do they unfold in relation to economic policies of liberation? My proposed project analyzes the production of a new hegemonic public culture in India, one that prefigures and in a sense is necessary for the continued implementation of economic liberalization in India. This type of public culture becomes a critical site in which the disjunctures and disruptions of economic liberalization are negotiated. My central argument is that the negotiation of the cultural and economic tensions and disjunctures associated with these new economic policies being implemented in India occurs through a set of gendered political processes. The political disorder associated with economic change is managed through new technologies of power that reassert social order by policing the boundaries of women’s lives, bodies, and sexualities.

**Mary Hartman**

Institute for Women’s Leadership

“Gender, Household, and Power: A Subversive View of Western Civilization”

This project focuses on a unique household pattern of late marriage, especially for women, and of single-family households in northwestern Europe from the medieval period. The still unnoticed consequences of this generally overlooked family pattern (which was only first discovered in the 1960s) included instability of households and an increase in the domestic authority of wives by comparison with wives in the far more common joint-family household system. In that latter system, women typically moved as teen-aged brides into the households of their father-in-law, and usually waited until middle age before they became the mistress of households. By contrast, women in northwestern Europe, for reasons that are still unknown, were mistresses of households from the time they were married, and had most often helped to continue their marriages through their own labor. An estimated sixty percent of northwestern Europeans in early modern Europe, from about 1500 to 1750, participated in “life-cycle domestic service” throughout most of their adolescence up through the mid-twenties or so.

**Debra Liebowitz**

Political Science

“The Gendered Politics of Globalization: International Trade and Women’s Organizations”

My project examines transnational feminist political activism around globalization of the economy in Mexico, Canada, and the U.S. In both academic and popular discourse, “globalization” has become one of the catch words of the ‘90s. Much attention has been drawn to a range of phenomena which are held up as examples of the process of globalization: corporate downsizing; the prevalence of communications technology which alters the space/time continuum; and the increasing importance of international trade regimes like NAFTA, MERCOSUR, the WTO, and APEC in mass political mobilization in many parts of the world in response to the perceived negative effects of globalization. Student strikes in France, the popularity of Gennadi Zyuganov in Russia, Pat Buchanan’s run for the 1996 Republican presidential nomination in the United States, and the Zapatista uprising in Mexico are but a few significant examples of political mobilization which respond to and implicitly or explicitly critique the impact of globalization on citizens and communities.

**Leslie McCall**

Sociology and Women's Studies

"Feminist Reconsiderations of Economic Restructuring and Inequality"

I will carefully select several local labor markets and conduct a detailed comparative case study of the mechanisms underlying selected configurations of inequality. So far my research has relied on summary aggregate measures of inequality. Comparative case study analysis allows a more detailed description of the processes differentiating outcomes in one local economy from another. The results from my macro-analyses suggest several interesting comparisons that will offer theoretical insights into the interconnections among different forms of inequality that are associated with different dimensions of restructuring. These results also have important policy implications. They indicate where policies like affirmative action and comparable worth are ill-suited or poorly targeted to the changing structure of inequality. They also suggest alternative frameworks that are being adopted by progressive unions and community organizations around issues such as the "living wage."

**dt ogilvie**

Organization Management

"African American Women as Outsiders within Research on Leadership"

Forty percent of managerial positions are held by women, but only 3 percent of these are African American women. Whereas 2 percent of Anglo women managers are in top executive positions, only 0.9 percent of African American women managers hold these top positions (Baskerville, Tucker, and Whittingham-Barnes, 1991). For an African American woman to attain a top executive position seems to be a rather unusual event. Clearly, such women are the outsiders within dominant culture organizations. Given the racial and gender barriers that these women continue to face, it is remarkable that even these few women have been able to make it to top positions in dominant culture companies. Larkey advocates the development of theory "*when organizational power patterns turn societal patterns upside down*" (Larkey, 1996: 467, emphasis in original); this is clearly the case when African American women, who have traditionally enjoyed the least amount of power in American society, attain power in organizations in which they are the political minority.

**Cynthia Saltzman**

Sociology, Anthropology & Criminal Justice, Rutgers-Camden

"In the Shadow of Privilege: Women and Unions at Yale"

My book is both an ethnography and history of women's political culture. The research is based on anthropological fieldwork, oral histories, and archival data and represents a thoroughly revised version of my doctoral dissertation. I received support for my ethnographic research from pre-doctoral dissertation fellowships granted by the National Science Foundation and the National Institute for Mental Health. I also gained additional support for my research as a post-doctoral fellow at the Institute for Social and Policy Studies at Yale University.

**Louisa Schein**

Anthropology and Women's Studies

## “Gender, Culture, Mobility: Minority Women Performers in China’s Maoist Era

In 1942, having completed the arduous Long March from the southeast coast of China to its mountainous northwest, members of the Red Army and the communist party had settled into a base camp at Yan’an. Mao Zedong, in the midst of his meteoric rise to cultic “helmsman” of the Chinese socialist revolution, delivered the “Yan’an Talks on Art and Literature”—an aesthetic program that would harness cultural production to the making of revolution for decades. This project proposes to investigate a rarely noted outcome of this policy that had far-reaching consequences for gender and ethnic politics in China.

### **Robert Shaffer**

History

“A Writer In/On the ‘Public Sphere’: Pearl S. Buck on Asian and American Women”

My seminar paper details Buck’s views and activities on the role of women in the public sphere in both Asia, especially but not exclusively China, and the United States. The paper would analyze Buck’s fiction, articles, book-length essays, and organizational activities, and would emphasize as well the responses of other women and activist women’s organizations to Buck’s work on these issues.

### **Caridad Souza**

Puerto Rican & Hispanic Caribbean Studies

“Racing the Public Sphere: Youth, Sexuality, and Female Bodies”

This project will examine the construction of racialized sexuality of young Puerto Rican mothers within policy and legislative arenas against the backdrop of the debates about early pregnancy and parenting. Using an ethnographic case study of young Puerto Rican mothers (ages 14-21) in an urban neighborhood in Queens, I will analyze their claims for autonomous sexual subjectivities within the broader New York City political economy and public policies that constrain their attempts. I will explore their claims to sexual autonomy through the lens of recent media and popular cultural representations and legislation about them (i.e., the Contract With America) as well as through their own narratives about their sexual autonomy that renders visible the political interests of female bodies and brings into sharp focus the transparency of their structural and social location in the U.S. as young, racialized, ethnic women.

### **Linda Steiner**

Journalism and Mass Media, SCILS

“Forms of Women’s Transformative Media: Contemporary Examples of Feminist Communication Channels”

My project involves the study of recent forms of women’s transformative media, that is, ongoing, contemporary examples of feminist communication channels. I will look at different technologies of distribution, although, given issues of cost and ease of production/distribution, print remains the favored medium. More importantly, this research will examine in detail how, freed of the interest or need to attract large audiences, these materials address highly specific audiences defined by (and often divided by) age, sexual preference, ethnicity, religion,

occupation, and political commitment. Take the issue of age, for example: given the apparent obsession with compulsory heterosexuality characteristic of commercial teen magazines such as *YM* and *Sassy*, I will pay particular attention to politically ambitious materials now becoming available for adolescent girls.

**Karen Zivi**

Political Science

“Promises and Paradoxes: Women, AIDS, and the Limits of Liberalism”

Exploring a contemporary public policy issue which affects the lives of women, this project draws upon the insights and experiences of previous feminist reform movements while critically analyzing conceptions of state power, agency, and subjectivity. Bridging the often identified gap between feminist theory and practice, it analyzes not only the actions women take in the public sphere but also the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of these practices. And by offering a critical evaluation of these practices, it takes on the challenge of seeking paradigms of resistance and transformation which do not rely upon or reinscribe patriarchal or phallogocentric assumptions.