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Transnational Feminism in Film and Media
edited by Katarzyna Marciniak, Anikó Imre, and Áine O’Healy
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Series Editor’s Foreword

The Comparative Feminist Studies (CFS) series foregrounds writing, organizing, and reflection on feminist trajectories across the historical and cultural borders of nation-states. It takes up fundamental analytic and political issues involved in the cross-cultural production of knowledge about women and feminism, examining the politics of scholarship and knowledge in relation to feminist organizing and social movements. Drawing on feminist thinking in a number of fields, the CFS series targets innovative, comparative feminist scholarship, pedagogical and curricular strategies, and community organizing and political education. It explores and engenders a comparative feminist praxis that addresses some of the most urgent questions facing progressive critical thinkers and activists today. *Transnational Feminism in Film and Media* is an excellent example of such comparative feminist praxis. It is located at the intersection of transnational feminist and transnational media studies, and draws on the interdisciplinary scholarship in postcolonial, cultural, race and ethnic, and diaspora studies. As such this book carefully and provocatively engages some of the central interconnected issues in the newly configured field of transnational feminist media studies.

Over the past many decades, feminists across the globe have been variously successful—however, we inherit a number of the challenges our mothers and grandmothers faced. But there are also new challenges to face as we attempt to make sense of a world indelibly marked by the failure of postcolonial capitalist and communist nation-states to provide for the social, economic, spiritual, and psychic needs of the majority of the world’s population. In the year 2007, globalization has come to represent the interests of corporations and the free market rather than self-determination and freedom from political, cultural, and economic domination for all the world’s peoples. The project of U.S. Empire building, alongside the dominance of corporate capitalism kills, disenfranchises, and impoverishes women everywhere, and leads to various kinds of border crossings. Militarization, environmental degradation, heterosexist State practices, religious fundamentalisms, and the exploitation of women’s labor by capital all pose profound challenges for feminists at this time. Recovering and remembering
Series Editor’s Foreword

insurgent histories has never been so important, at a time marked by social amnesia, global consumer culture, and the worldwide mobilization of fascist notions of “national security.”

These are some of the challenges the CFS series addresses. The series takes as its fundamental premise the need for feminist engagement with global as well as local ideological, historical, economic, and political processes, and the urgency of transnational dialogue in building an ethical culture capable of withstanding and transforming the commodified and exploitative practices of global culture and economics. Individual volumes in the CFS series provide systemic and challenging interventions into the (still) largely Euro-Western feminist studies knowledge base, while simultaneously highlighting the work that can and needs to be done to envision and enact cross-cultural, multiracial feminist solidarity.

Transnational Feminism in Film and Media extends the range of scholarship in the CFS series to new levels by creating a dialogue between transnational feminisms and “transnational, exilic, and diasporic films, which are marked by a concern with borders, migration, and foreignness” (Introduction). The collection as a whole challenges the first-third world focus of much of U.S.-based transnational feminism by bringing analyses of post-socialist (second world) cultural production into the theoretical conversation. Essays by Anikó Imre on work by a lesbian collective from Budapest, by Ginette Verstraete on “new” migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees to an increasingly fortified Europe, and Ursula Biemann’s reflections on her own ethnographic films offer cutting-edge analyses of post-socialist transnational media production.

This collection is organized around the following three interlocking analytic paradigms central to transnational feminist media studies: (1) The New Frontiers of Migration, (2) Circulation of Bodies, and (3) Modalities of Foreignness. Foregrounding the work of numerous filmmakers, video and visual artists around the world, the essays focus on some of the most crucial political issues of our times: illegal border crossing, forced economic migration, racism, xenophobia, the traffic in women and children, questions of home and belonging, sexuality and sexual politics, women’s agency, resistance, and of course questions of economic and social justice. Raising questions about power, surveillance, and legitimacy in the numerous border crossings encapsulated by transnational, exilic, and diasporic films, the editors draw on an essay by Bruce Bennett and Imogen Tyler to ask important ethical questions about spectatorship and consumption: “What does it mean for those of us who live our lives protected by borders to consume such
films? Don’t we inevitably partake in the process of fetishizing different experiences of the border, erasing the specificity and materiality of lived experience? Is there a risk that both filmmakers and audiences become border tourists, making cinematic forays into ‘non-American culture’ that are still presented from the position of a Eurocentric gaze?” (see Introduction).

The project thus opens up a number of important theoretical and political questions regarding production and consumption of (alternative) transnational media, and the politics of knowledge and the limitations of analytic paradigms in transnational feminist studies. This is the kind of scholarship that can create the ground for cross-racial dialogue among and between feminist scholars and activists in regional as well as global contexts. The book will be of interest to a wide range of feminist scholars, media and visual studies scholars, and cultural critics. It embodies the comparative praxis and vision of transnational knowledge production that is a hallmark of the CFS series.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty
Series Editor, Ithaca,
New York
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We are grateful to Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Series Editor of the Comparative Feminist Studies series, who read our book proposal, and whose enthusiastic response has invigorated and sustained our efforts throughout the process of completing the collection. The work of Amanda Moon at Palgrave Macmillan has been indispensable to this project. We greatly benefited from the report of an anonymous reader, who offered us thoughtful advice and strong support.

Our book is the result of a feminist collaboration. For all its intellectual and political merits, credit goes to our contributors, who generously shared with us their commitment, ideas, and time and who patiently endured our outpouring of editorial suggestions through several phases of revisions. It has been an exciting challenge for us to bring together scholars and artists of many cultural origins, languages, and backgrounds, from which we will all continue to benefit. The many ways in which voices from across the world have crossed and interwoven in this collection have not ceased to amaze us throughout this project.

Our special thanks to Marguerite Waller for her inspiration in the early, conceptual stages of our project. We are grateful for her initiative in organizing the panel we presented at the 2005 Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference in London, which prompted our collective endeavor in this new and exciting field in the first place.

For the cover photograph and frontispiece triptych we thank Kamil Turowski and María García Javier, the cocreators of the “Maria under Hollywood Sign” photo series. There are many institutions and individuals whose support and inspiration have sustained this project. We single out among them Mickey Lin and Natalie Machida for their help with the index, the Center for Feminist Research at the University of Southern California, Mara Holt at Ohio University, Katrin Kremmler and the Budapest Lesbian Filmmaking Collective, and Theresia de Vroom, director of the Marymount Institute at Loyola Marymount University.
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Ursula Biemann is an artist, theorist, and curator who has produced a considerable body of work on migration, mobility, technology, and gender. In a series of internationally exhibited video projects, as well as in several books (Been There and Back to Nowhere 2000, Geography and the Politics of Mobility 2003, Stuff It—The Video Essay in the Digital Age 2003, The Maghreb Connection 2006), she has focused on the gendered dimension of migrant labor. Later she made space and mobility her principal category of analysis in the curatorial project “Geography and the Politics of Mobility” (2003) in Vienna, in the recent art research projects “The Black Sea Files” on the Caspian oil politics at Kunstwerke Berlin (2005), and in “Sahara Chronicle” on migration systems in North Africa, Townhouse Gallery Cairo/CAC Geneva (2006–07). Biemann conducts research at the Institute for Theory of Art and Design in Zurich and Geneva, and teaches seminars and workshops internationally. www.geobodies.org.

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Marguerite Waller teaches media and cultural studies, women’s studies, and comparative literature at the University of California, Riverside. She is the author of Petrarch’s Poetics and Literary History (University of Massachusetts Press, 1980) and articles on Dante, Petrarch, Wyatt, Surrey, Shakespeare, Italian directors Rossellini, Fellini, Wertmuller, Cavani, and Nichetti, East/Central European film, border art and theory, new media, and transnational feminist dialogue. She has coedited four anthologies: Frontline Feminisms: Women, War, and Resistance, with Jennifer Rycenga (Routledge, 2001); Federico Fellini: Contemporary Perspectives, with Frank Burke (University of Toronto Press, 2002); Dialogue and Difference: Feminisms Challenge Globalization, with Sylvia Marcos (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), and The Wages of Empire: Neoliberal Policies, Repression, and Women’s Poverty with Amalia Cabezas and Ellen Reese (Paradigm Publishers, 2007).