

Transnational Knowledges, Transnational Politics

While I was in the final stages of writing this book, I gave a presentation about *OBOS* and its travels to an audience of feminist scholars. Afterward one of these scholars, well known for her work in postcolonial feminist theory, approached me. “You know,” she said, “I can’t tell you how nice it is to hear a story like this. It’s so . . .” —she seemed to be struggling to find the right word—“it’s just so *hopeful*.”

Her remark, I must admit, took me somewhat by surprise. I began this inquiry—as I set out in the introduction—with certain ambivalences, which were a reflection of my position as a feminist scholar. Within feminist scholarship, it is *bon ton* to situate oneself as a critic. Taking a critical and reflexive perspective is almost a kind of second nature, involving anything from debunking assumptions that are taken for granted in scientific discourse to exposing hidden inequalities and exclusions of power lurking within even seemingly benign practices and policies to being relentlessly vigilant concerning one’s own blind spots and prejudices. While my experiences as a feminist health activist in the seventies made me embrace *OBOS*, my experiences as a feminist scholar in the nineties warned me to take a more cautious stance. Well versed in poststructuralist feminist theory, I was inclined to be suspicious of any text that glorified women’s embodied experience as an unproblematic source of knowledge. Moreover, in the light of long-standing debates about “global feminism,” I was disposed to be wary that any U.S. feminist export could exhibit imperialistic tendencies, which would obscure differences and hierarchies of power between U.S. feminists and feminists in non-Western contexts.

Throughout this inquiry, I have used these ambivalences as a re-

source for exploring the history and travels of *OBOS*, taking its trajectory within and outside the United States as an occasion to think critically about its politics of knowledge and its status as a transnational feminist project. As a result of my efforts to read *OBOS* through the critical lens of contemporary feminist scholarship, I find myself at the end of my own journey—much like the feminist scholar in my audience—left with an unfamiliar and yet unmistakably pleasant feeling that I can only describe as hopeful.

It is not my intention to romanticize *OBOS* as a feminist project, and, as I have shown throughout this book, it has produced its own problems and exclusions. Nevertheless, I will take the opportunity in this final chapter to explore some of the reasons for this strange and appealing sensation of hopefulness that the project has engendered, despite all its limitations. While I began this inquiry with the assumption that *OBOS* would have much to learn from contemporary feminist theory, in this chapter I will argue that it is contemporary feminist theory that may have just as much, if not more, to learn from *OBOS*. I will take the travels of *OBOS*—the scope and variety of its border crossings, the diversity of its multifaceted transformations, and the ways in which it has shaped encounters between feminists globally—as having implications for feminist scholarship and theory and, more specifically, for how we might begin to think about feminist history, feminist politics of knowledge, and transnational feminism.

Before I discuss these implications, however, I will return briefly to the questions that were raised at the outset of this inquiry: how a U.S. feminist book could resonate with women in such diverse social, cultural, and geographical locations; what happened to it as it traveled; and what these travels can tell us more generally about feminist knowledge and feminist politics in a transnational context.

Making *OBOS*

The present inquiry began with two somewhat unorthodox assumptions. The first was that *OBOS* should be regarded, first and foremost, as an *epistemological project* rather than a popular self-help book on women's health. Within feminist scholarship, the prevailing sentiment is that *OBOS* is historically important, practically useful,

and undoubtedly well intentioned but has little of theoretical relevance to offer feminist scholarship. From the vantage point of postmodern feminist theory à la Donna Haraway, Joan Scott, Judith Butler, and many others, *OBOS* is regarded as theoretically naive and unsophisticated because it commits several cardinal theoretical sins: it naturalizes the biological female body, it valorizes women's experiences as authentic sources of the truth, and it glorifies the autonomous agency of individual women. Seen in this light, *OBOS* is at best old-fashioned and unsophisticated and at worst an object requiring critical deconstruction.

In the present inquiry, I have taken issue with this stance. I have argued that some of the assumptions made by postmodern feminist body theory, while helpful in deconstructing the problematic legacy of Western Enlightenment philosophy, have also become blinders, obscuring the analysis of *OBOS* as an epistemological project and, more generally, failing to engage seriously with feminist health activism. This theory gets in the way of exploring what has been the most distinctive feature of *OBOS*, namely, a politics of knowledge that invited individual women to use their own embodied experiences to engage critically with dominant practices of knowledge. This politics of knowledge was reflected in the book's distinctive format (accessible and accountable information, women's personal stories about their bodily experiences, and a critical framework situating women's health in a broader social, cultural, and political context). It was this politics of knowledge that enabled the readers of *OBOS* to become embodied, critical, epistemic agents.

The second assumption of the present inquiry was that in order to fully appreciate the impact and significance of *OBOS* as a feminist icon it would be necessary to connect the book's history *within* the United States with its travels *outside* the United States. This meant that I refrained from writing a straightforward history of *OBOS* as a U.S. feminist project. Instead I have taken the book's travels as a starting point for thinking critically about its impact during the past three decades, the myriad transformations it has undergone, and its worldwide significance as a transnational feminist knowledge project for transnational feminist health politics. This entailed situating the inquiry within contemporary theoretical debates about the politics of location. These debates explore how individuals use their material locations in the world as a resource for knowing what it means to be

embodied as a particular kind of person in a particular social and cultural context. The politics of location is also a place from which to construct a critical subjectivity and political perspective for social change. In the present inquiry, I have used the politics of location (social, cultural, and geographical) to understand how *OBOS* as a feminist knowledge project has been able to circulate internationally, thereby generating a transnational feminist politics of the body.

The combination of an approach that treats *OBOS* as an epistemological project and a perspective that decenters it as an exclusively U.S. feminist project has brought me to the following insights.

First, the politics of knowledge represented by *OBOS* was particularly suited to crossing borders of class, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and generation, allowing the book to speak to a wide diversity of women. The reason for its success in addressing different women was that it did not assume that women would automatically have identical experiences, needs, or interests simply by virtue of having a female body. Indeed, the book recognized differences in women's embodiment (experiences, social location, and circumstances), and this recognition had consequences for the process in which each new edition of *OBOS* was made. It assumed that this would not be a one-time affair but would require the ongoing critical interrogation of each new version of the book. Through the collaborative method of knowledge production, whereby different women were invited to "read against the grain" and to think critically about the text from their specific embodied location, *OBOS* was not only able to include a variety of perspectives on women's health, but it used these different perspectives to enable readers to think critically about their own embodied experiences, as well as become sensitized to the circumstances of women in social, cultural, and political locations different than their own.

Second, the politics of knowledge represented by *OBOS* not only allowed it to cross the borders of class, race and ethnicity, sexual orientation, and generation within the United States, but it also enabled what was otherwise a local product—a typically U.S. book—to travel. One of the unique features of *OBOS* was that its content, form, and politics did not remain intact in the course of its border crossings. It invited women across the globe to rewrite the book and, ultimately, transform it in ways that would make it accessible and relevant in their own social, cultural, and geopolitical contexts. This required some-

thing other than a straightforward translation; it required a feminist translation strategy of “friendly learning by taking a distance” (Spivak 2000). The translators of *OBOS* invariably participated in a collective process of contextualizing and critically reworking the U.S. text, whereby they creatively used differences between their own context and the U.S. context to open up controversial topics, celebrate local accomplishments, or suggest points for political coalitions. The same process of reading against the grain that had been instrumental to the widespread popularity of *OBOS* within the United States proved to be its most translatable feature *outside* the United States. In the course of translating *OBOS*, women from widely divergent locations were able to appropriate this collective, critical process of knowledge production, using *OBOS* as an occasion for developing their own brand of oppositional feminist politics of knowledge.

Third, the travels of *OBOS* have implications for how we think about the circulation of feminist knowledge and politics in a global context. One of the most notable features of the translations is that they were not simply transported from the “West to the rest” (Hall 1992) or imposed as a kind of feminist cultural imperialism. The international trajectory of *OBOS* suggests that the circulation of feminist knowledge is much more complicated and contradictory. When feminist knowledge moves from place to place, it is reworked and rearticulated, allowing new configurations of the original to emerge. Thus, while *OBOS* emerged initially in the United States, its flows were not unidirectional. The text not only moved from place to place, but its translations traveled as well, providing the basis for new translations or returning—literally—to the United States, where they were taken up and used by diasporic communities there. Thus, *OBOS* should be viewed less as a U.S. book with multiple translations than as an ongoing transnational feminist knowledge project.

Fourth, as a catalyst for transnational feminist politics, *OBOS* has created a global feminist imagined community. This community is not based on shared gender identity or common interests or even identical political goals. It has emerged through the engagement of women from different locations with *OBOS*, predicated on their willingness to engage in a shared politics of knowledge. Through the act of making, reading, or translating *OBOS*, women in different locations and at different points in time were able to participate vicariously in that first mythical discussion group “where it all began.” The

story of the first meeting in 1969 in Boston when a group of young women met to talk about their bodies not only became a foundational myth for U.S. feminism. This myth also traveled, capturing the minds and hearts of women across the globe, who imaginatively situated themselves within the mythical history of *OBOS*, making it their history, too. Thus, the very myth that created *OBOS* as a U.S. feminist success story has, through its travels, enabled *OBOS* not only to continue but to become much more than the original project. As transnational feminist project, *OBOS* has taken on a life of its own, becoming a feminist icon for women across the globe.

Having looked at the making of *OBOS* and how it traveled, I will now turn to the implications of this transnational knowledge project for feminist scholarship—in particular, for feminist history, knowledge politics, and transnational practice.

Feminist History

The making of *OBOS* and the ways it has traveled have implications for how feminist history should be written. In recent years, U.S. feminist historians have devoted considerable attention to what has been called “second-wave feminism.”¹

Written against the backdrop of a widespread feminist backlash in the United States (Faludi 1992), these histories exude a sense of urgency—a desire to set the record straight before it is too late. There is a palpable sense that feminism has come and gone, leaving us with no other choice than to patiently await the next “wave”—a new generation that will pick up the torch and carry on where “we” left off. While many historians lament its passing, expressing an unmistakable nostalgia for the “good old days,” others have been more critical, pointing to its mistakes and failings. However, in either case, feminism is treated very much as a U.S. phenomenon. Both its emergence and its demise seemed to occur without reference to what happened outside the United States. The implicit assumption is that what happens in the rest of the world is dependent on what happens to feminism in the United States. It is as if without U.S. feminism there would be no feminism at all.

The history of *OBOS* refutes the assumptions made by this particular brand of feminist historiography. It disrupts the notion that

feminism is a thing of the past. While many of the projects of the so-called second wave of U.S. feminism may be over, *OBOS* is not only still around but feminism itself is very much alive and kicking in many different locations around the world. The longevity and the success of *OBOS* are inextricably linked to its capacity to transform itself so that it can speak across shifting lines of difference. Its resilience raises questions concerning the claim that feminism is dead or at least on its last legs. U.S. feminist history has been criticized for its “time-charged terminologies” (first wave, second wave, third wave), which marginalize the activism and worldviews of women of color.² Ironically, the very period that white feminist historians typically treat as the moment of decline is the time when women of color began to develop as a new political subject. From the point of view of multiracial feminism in the United States, feminism gained momentum in the eighties and its best days are yet to come (Thompson 2002, 344).

But, even more powerfully, the transnational trajectory of *OBOS* demonstrates that feminism is not limited to the United States and, indeed, may presently play a more significant role outside the United States. U.S. feminism has often situated itself (and been situated by others) as the standard against which all women’s struggles across the globe are to be measured. Ironically, even so-called international or comparative studies of feminism tend to treat the United States as the undisputed center of feminist history. Precedence is given to events and struggles occurring within the borders of the United States. A discourse of the Western Enlightenment is reproduced, whereby notions of progress and development are privileged so that what comes after is automatically better than what came before. This version of feminist history tends to leave non-Western women’s movements “stuck” in an earlier and “less advanced” stage (Shih 2002, 98). The translations of *OBOS* demonstrate that, while notions about what might constitute a feminist politics of the body may differ, there is a broad interest among women’s groups in widely divergent locations about issues of women’s health. The international women’s health movement is not only one of the most vibrant of the contemporary social movements, but it has become a force to be reckoned with in the terrain of international politics. The global interest in women’s health, reproductive rights, and sexual integrity demonstrates that worries about the demise of feminism may be, in

fact, little more than ethnocentric myopia, that is, the failure of U.S. feminism to look beyond its own backyard. A more accurate and politically viable vision of history would encompass the wide diversity of feminist histories and women's struggles across the globe.

The global dissemination of *OBOS* shows why—when it comes to the state of feminism in the world—there may be considerably more reason for optimism than despair. It provides a case in point for the importance of what Susan Stanford Friedman has called “thinking “geographically” (2001), that is, for replacing the “overdeveloped historical contextualization” of U.S. feminist scholarship with a better-developed “spatial and geographical imagination” (16). This not only means acknowledging and learning about feminist histories of struggles in other parts of the world. At a time when the accelerating pace of globalization and transnational cultural traffic has made national borders increasingly porous, it also makes sense for contemporary feminist historiography to explore the ways in which the global is already implicated in local histories, as well as the diversity of feminist struggles across the globe.³ By tracking the migratory and transcultural formations, feminism can become viewable as both more ubiquitous (global) and more historically specific (local), that is, as emerging in specific geographical locations and at specific historical moments.

Politics of Knowledge

The making of *OBOS* and its travels also have implications for how we should think about feminist knowledge and knowledge politics. Postmodern feminist scholarship, particularly under the influence of critical race and postcolonial theory, has devoted considerable attention to the production and dissemination of feminist knowledge in the context of global hierarchies of power. Many scholars have criticized the problematic legacy of Western Enlightenment philosophy, along with its humanistic conception of identity, its arrogant claims to universalist knowledge, and its notion of modernity, which locates progress and development squarely in the West, while the non-Western world remains mired in ignorance and tradition (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Mohanty 2003). Attention has increasingly been paid to the unequal circulation of feminist knowledge, whereby feminist

theory (with a capital *T*) is situated in the United States (or France) while non-Western women become the objects of that theory, the “subalterns” in whose name white, already emancipated, First World feminists may speak (Spivak 1988a).

While this critique has been extremely important in uncovering the relationship between power and knowledge in a transnational context, it has tended to focus—somewhat paradoxically—on feminist theory in the West.⁴ Postcolonial feminist theorists have directed their critical energy inward, preferring to deconstruct the humanistic, modernist, or ethnocentric assumptions of Western feminist theory (John 1996). The unintended consequence of these critiques has been a centering (rather than a decentering) of feminist theory in the metropolises of the First World rather than an exploration of what actually happens when feminist knowledge and knowledge practices flow from the West to other parts of the globe and how “Western” feminism gets taken up outside the United States. It seems to be assumed that Western feminist conceptions and knowledge practices are automatically irrelevant for or even harmful to feminists in non-Western contexts. But, as Roy (2001) has noted, the assumption that universals are simply the outcome of First World hegemonies makes it difficult to imagine “careful and responsible modes of universalization” in feminist knowledge practices. In short, while sophisticated theoretical reflections on the feminist politics of knowledge in a global context abound, little attention has been paid to the vicissitudes of feminist knowledge practices on the ground and to how feminist knowledge travels and is transformed in ways that might make it oppositional in different locations.

One look at the international impact of *OBOS* as a feminist knowledge project belies the assumption that feminist knowledge that is relevant in the West will automatically be irrelevant for non-Western women. Aside from the fact that it is unclear why the modernization projects of other nations should not be subjected to the same critical scrutiny as the modernization projects of the West (Narayan 1998), the notions of modernity, humanism, and ethnocentrism are hardly limited to the West. The translations of *OBOS* suggest that a more complicated approach is needed. For example, the fact that discourses of equality originated in the West and many exclusions have since been enacted in their name does not mean that these discourses cannot be rearticulated outside the United States in ways

that will make them oppositional. The notion of women's reproductive rights—which provides the undisputed ideological lynchpin of *OBOS*—obviously draws on Western notions of equality (with all their drawbacks). Nevertheless, the notion of reproductive rights has proved to be an effective rallying cry for feminist health activism internationally and has been strategic in empowering women in many contexts outside the United States (Petchesky 2003, 1995). It would be shortsighted to dismiss it with the “poison skull” label of ethnocentrism merely because it employs a modernist discourse and politics of rights, equality, and collective struggle (Pfeil 1994, 224).

In the present inquiry, I have shown how non-Western feminist scholars and activists from very different social, cultural, and geopolitical locations have freely borrowed from the U.S. *OBOS*, including its concepts of individualism, choice, and informed consent. While these concepts were clearly modernist in origin, they could easily be used (albeit flexibly and strategically) to empower women in the context of their own (often very different) modernization projects. A case in point is the Bulgarian *OBOS*, which I discussed in chapter 6, in which the individualism of the U.S. book is embraced and rearticulated into a strategy for gendered citizenship and social change as an oppositional response to the postcommunist legacy of collectivist ideologies and state-imposed equality between the sexes. The Bulgarian case illustrates that rather than summarily dismissing Western feminism it makes more sense to explore how feminist concepts and practices associated with the West (e.g., the language and politics of rights, equality, and collective solidarity) are taken up and rearticulated as potentially useful discourses within the contested terrain of oppositional feminist politics.

In other words, rather than viewing *OBOS* as just another typically U.S. feminist book about women's health, it should be regarded as a traveling theory par excellence. It is a prime example of how feminist knowledge and knowledge practices can travel in ways that both take up and reinscribe, but also transform and decenter, Western theory. By looking at how women in other contexts appropriated *OBOS*, a valuable site for theoretical exploration is opened up, offering an opportunity for analyzing how and why feminist knowledge can become oppositional at specific moments in time and in particular locations. Ironically, paying closer attention to the diverse sources and character of non-Western feminist knowledge practices might

do more to revitalize Western feminist theory than the most “rigorously reflexive meta-theoretical ruminations” on its own intellectual practices (Stacey 2001, 102).⁵

As Edward Said (1983) argued in his seminal essay on traveling theory, what happens to a theory when it travels is at least as interesting as the “original” for what it can tell us about the limitations and problems, but also the possibilities, of the original. As traveling theory, *OBOS* has shown that it has a unique capacity to generate endless alternatives—a capacity that is, when all is said and done, what critical consciousness is all about (Said 1983, 247). For those theorists interested in decentering First World feminist theory, it may well be time to stop focusing on those theories that are most firmly embedded in the context that is being criticized (the U.S. academy and Western philosophy) and begin considering theories that have demonstrated that they are capable of movement and transformation. For anyone interested in the possibilities of a critical, nonimperialistic, feminist theory on a global scale, any theory with such a capacity clearly deserves our most serious attention.

Transnational Feminist Practice

Finally, the making of *OBOS* and its travels have implications for how transnational feminist practice should be theorized. This inquiry has critically engaged with the ideological commitment to internationalism that assumes that feminism can encompass all women regardless of nationality, uniting them against the masculine aberrations of fascism, imperialism, and war.⁶ In its most recent incarnation, this dream of international feminist solidarity has come to be known as transnational feminism. This version of international feminist politics rejects binaries such as the West and the rest, global and local, and center and periphery, assuming instead that women are linked by globally structured relations of power that influence their lives at every level in ways that are both varied and historically specific (Grewal and Kaplan 1994, 13). Women are viewed as having different experiences, different needs, and different struggles depending on the particularities of their local circumstances, as well as their location within a global nexus of power. This conception of transnational feminism assumes that, while feminist alliances are necessary

and desirable, they are also invariably infused with inequalities and hierarchies. It is essential, therefore, that feminists do not assume a natural affinity based on a shared gender identity but rather acknowledge their complicities in national histories of imperialism, colonialism, and slavery. Differences rather than similarities among women should be drawn on as an occasion for global dialogues about common issues and common struggles. That these alliances are complicated and often fraught with contradictions is illustrated by the recent emergence of feminist NGOs that adopt agendas inspired by the United Nations and engage in international coalitions aimed at helping Third World women. These coalitions can involve mainly urban, middle-class, white feminists (“globetrotting feminists”) from different parts of the world who meet at international megaconferences to set feminist agendas, often to the detriment of the local activism of community-based women’s groups (Alvarez 1998; Thayer 2000). While these transnational feminist alliances are undoubtedly undertaken out of a desire for international feminist solidarity, in practice they sometimes exacerbate inequalities among women at a local level and even deradicalize local feminist politics (Mendoza 2002). Thus, transnational feminism requires constant vigilance in order to ensure that global linkages between women remain mutually empowering (Mohanty 2003). However, by looking at how feminists actually work across lines of difference in the context of transnational alliances, some of the pessimism of this important critique can be tempered by a more realistic and simultaneously more hopeful perspective on transnational feminist politics.⁷

In the present inquiry, I have shown how the alliances generated in the course of translating *OBOS* bear many of the features of what might be called *good* transnational feminist practice—that is, practice based on the acknowledgment of differences among women, on an awareness of privilege and complicity in national histories of domination, and an attempt to discover common concerns and struggles.

As we have seen, *OBOS* went from an almost exclusively U.S. project to a transnational feminist project with offshoots across the globe. The “center” of *OBOS* gradually moved to the “periphery,” whereby the translations increasingly became the *raison d’être* for the project as a whole. In the wake of waning sales and uncertainties concerning future editions of *OBOS* within the United States, the translation projects clearly were instrumental in the longevity and

success of *OBOS* as feminist project. In this context, the U.S. collective increasingly took on a supportive role, facilitating the adaptation of the book in other contexts. The help provided was of the “no strings attached” variety, sometimes interventionist, sometimes “hands off,” depending on the needs of the local groups doing the translations. Members of the U.S. collective was consistently mindful of their status, using their financial and organizational resources, international status, expertise, and substantial international network to help local women’s groups do what they wanted to do. Moreover, the groups involved in translating and disseminating *OBOS* did not passively adopt the agenda set out by their U.S. “sisters” but rather used the project in ways that fit their own needs and political agendas, sometimes explicitly in opposition to the U.S. project. Thus, *OBOS* provides a promising example of how U.S. feminism can be decentered while maintaining an awareness of and responsibility toward the unequal division in resources (financial, institutional, and informational) between First and Third World feminists. It shows how feminist political practice can recognize and (re)dress global power hierarchies while remaining mutually beneficial for all parties concerned.

However, *OBOS* is not simply an illustration of how transnational feminism works in practice. It also suggests some directions in which contemporary scholarship on transnational feminist politics should be elaborated. While postcolonial feminist scholarship tends to highlight difference as the sine qua non of any feminist alliance across national borders, the transnational alliances around *OBOS* indicate that the similarities or commonalities among women may be equally important.⁸ Despite its commitment to the struggles of non-Western women, postcolonial feminist scholarship has not paid sufficient attention to the actual practices of activists from the First and Third Worlds who are already working across lines of difference. As a result, the lessons that these practices might teach us have been foreclosed in advance by a perspective that commits itself to “unbridgeable distance between differently constituted individuals or groups” (Pfeil 1994, 226).

Ultimately, a political perspective of “unity in difference,” a determination to remain “full of hope,” may be just as—or even more—important for a transnational feminist politics than the recognition of the many differences and conflicts that divide us (Pfeil 1994, 227).

The efforts of feminist activists already working across borders to create workable coalitions attest to an awareness of conflict but also to a belief in the possibility of solidarity. As we have seen, this unity in difference does not have to be of the “common world of women” variety that has been so perceptively criticized by Mohanty (2003) and others. Nor does it require a shared identity, a common experience of oppression, or even a collective political ideology. As the translation projects have shown, community can be constructed imaginatively as a common history that begins with a small group of Boston women meeting in 1970 to talk about their bodies and continues through space and time to include Serbian activists, Japanese feminist scholars, Armenian physicians, and even Tibetan nuns. Incommensurable differences in personal history, social and cultural contexts, and geopolitical circumstances are not forgotten but momentarily transcended in order to create a liminal unity. The global feminist imagined community that is generated through working together on *OBOS* is a shared political project—a project aimed at developing empowering knowledge practices concerning women’s bodies, sexuality, and health.

On a Hopeful Note

Up until now, I have dealt with the reasons for a hopeful assessment of *OBOS* and its travels. It’s unlikely that *OBOS* could have emerged at a different time or in a different place than during the exuberant activism of the sixties in the United States. Nor could it have happened without a group of women (the “founders”) with the vision and motivation to launch such a project and the stamina to persevere through several more decades. It required a mass audience eager to read and be inspired by what the book had to say. But the success and longevity of *OBOS* cannot be attributed to these historically specific conditions alone. Processes of globalization have enabled knowledge and information to circulate around the globe. People are on the move (willingly or unwillingly), making the borders between nations and cultures more permeable and creating opportunities for cross-cultural exchange. Information and communication technologies make global connections possible across time and space. The global expansion of capital has done much to increase disparities between

the postindustrial nations of the First and the Third Worlds. However, while the threatening cloud of globalization has given us ample reason for pessimism, it has also provided cause for optimism, particularly because it has enabled what Appadurai (2000) has called “grassroots globalization” or “globalization from below.”

It is my contention that the global dissemination of *OBOS*—its seemingly unstoppable ability to cross borders—is just such an example of grassroots globalization. Despite its limitations, it has—through its myriad transformations—invariably provided opportunities for dialogue among differently embodied and differently located women. While these dialogues are hardly a sinecure for the global empowerment of women, they offer the possibility of understanding points of divergence and intersection among women across multiple borders, whether personal, cultural, national, or political.

Throughout this inquiry, I have been puzzled over the willingness of many feminist groups to undergo enormous hardship in order to get a mere book translated. I have wondered at the equanimity with which they struggled to finish the book only to have their publishers balk at giving it proper distribution. And I have observed with growing despair how foundations are more than willing to finance translation projects under the banner of international feminism and yet have no interest in the less sexy and more mundane task of keeping these projects afloat once the book has come out. And yet, despite all odds, those women involved in *OBOS*, both within and outside the United States, seem prepared to carry on, taking difficulties in stride in order to produce new editions of the book. It is, ultimately, the process of collaboration rather than the outcome that justifies the enormous expenditure of time and effort and makes the project worth doing.

The process of transforming *OBOS*, whether updating it for a new generation of readers or translating it for another audience, involves getting women together and discussing the book against the backdrop of their specific experiences. It involves finding ways to make the book interrogate and speak across lines of difference shaped by class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and more. This process invariably entails introducing feminist discourses and initiating collective forms of political activity that can make sense in specific locations. This project of cultural translation—in the broadest sense of the word—is an occasion for what can become a transnational,

cross-cultural dialogue among women loosely united under the banner of a shared, but differently conceived, feminist political project. Such encounters inevitably provide an opportunity for what Lugones (1990) has called “world traveling”—the delight and pain of entering another’s world, in learning “what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes” (401).

It is, of course, an open question whether such encounters will provide the kind of dialogue necessary for mutually empowering and reflexive transnational feminism. It may not always be possible for future editions of *OBOS* to maintain a commitment to the critical politics of knowledge that made it oppositional and translatable to other contexts: its commitment to women’s embodied experience as critical resource; its critical engagement with dominant forms of knowledge; and its conviction that all knowledge is situated and partial, requiring ongoing reflection and critique. However, based on the present inquiry into the making of *OBOS* and its travels as an epistemological project, my inclination is to end this book on a note of optimism and an appreciation for the hopeful glimpse that this particular feminist project provides of what might someday become a better world.