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Introduction: Empowering Future Generations of Women and Girls: Empowering Humanity: Select Proceedings from the Second World Conference on Women's Studies

By Diana J. Fox¹

The current collection of articles was first presented as papers at the Second World Conference on Women's Studies, hosted by The International Institute of Knowledge Management (TIKM), May 5-6, 2016 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. Authors subsequently built on their conference presentations, transforming them into scholarly articles with activist recommendations for change—the hallmark of the JIWS. It was my great pleasure to serve as conference co-organizer and special issue editor for the present collection. Here, we have an opportunity to focus our attention on the insights of SE Asian feminist scholar-activists, both women and men, whose research marks a significant contribution to global knowledge of the region's challenges and achievements regarding gender equality.

Paper topics include—among others—young Cambodian women's expressions of self-determination and agency through zines (on-line, self-published magazines); the increasing visibility and contributions of women artists—both formally trained in elite institutions and through local village practices—in various parts of India; analyses of Indian laws pertaining to sexual harassment and domestic violence; the role of university education for Pakistani young women's understanding of their social status; the impact of advertising images of idealized notions of femininity on Indian women's sense of self, as well as the burgeoning of ads with social messaging including LGBT rights; increasing roles for women in small-scale organic farming of cardamom in Nepal and their subsequent empowerment; the incorporation of women into previously male professions, including the police in India; women's challenges as invisible, sub-contracted laborers in India; the possibilities of Buddhist practice for expanding feminist consciousness, globally; and an analysis of women's experiences of micro-credit, with recommendations for improvement, in rural Bangladesh. The issue begins with the keynote address I delivered on the opening day of the conference.

¹ Diana Fox is a cultural and applied anthropologist, scholar-activist, diversity consultant and documentary film producer. Her work focuses on the Anglophone Caribbean, particularly Jamaica and Trinidad & Tobago where she researches issues of gender and sexual diversity, women's social movement activism for ecological sustainability, women's human rights and transnational feminisms and activism. She serves on a number of boards and committees including the Sexualities Working Group of the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA), the international advisory board of the Fondes Amandes Community Reforestation Project (FACRP) in Trinidad and Tobago, as faculty representative for BSU's Presidential Advisory Board to end Campus Sexual Violence and is the Founder and Editor of the open access, online Journal of International Women's Studies. Dr. Fox is the executive producer of the documentary film, *Earth, Water, Woman: Community and Sustainability in Trinidad and Tobago* in conjunction with Sarafinaproductions. She is currently collaborating with J-FLAG, the first Jamaican LGBT human rights organization on a documentary titled *Many Loves, One Heart: Stories of Diversity and Resilience*.

As founder of the JIWS, I am well aware of the troubling dynamics of an international feminist journal, located in the global North, publishing in English, which at first glance appears to reproduce N/S global power relations in the world of publishing. In 1999 when I launched the JIWS, online, scholarly publishing was just emerging. Since, however, the medium is flourishing as witnessed daily at on the journal website, where we not only receive articles from all over the world but see articles downloaded on our real time googlemap from every continent—a map that all readers and authors can access on our landing page. The on-line, open-access format has facilitated publishing by authors in parts of the world where print journals and access to elite Western publishing norms are extremely difficult. It is no small feat for those of our authors who speak and write in English as a second or third language, to publish in English. We are a small operation with limited funds; hence, our editorial staff work closely with authors revising and hammering out details, offering didactic editorial commentary to encourage the exchange and movement of ideas. The JIWS represents a particular expression of transnationalism, in both process and product. Social media tools of communication play an important part in this process: many articles in this (and other issues) are revised in real time discussions I have with authors not only through email but on Facebook Messenger and Whatsapp, halfway around the world, while doing the same with the publishing division at TIKM. Exchanging ideas, clarifying points, asking questions, through these tools ensures that what ultimately appears in these pages is truly the result of a collaborative author-editorial process. As such, the process contributes to disrupting top-down Western/non-Western power relationships in the publishing world.

In addition, the articles in the JIWS reflect scholarly and activist developments all over the world, not only in Women's Studies, but in gender and sexuality studies as well. The current issue is indicative of such developments, demonstrating that feminism—by this and many other names—is a rich, global phenomenon, with local and regional variations, yet undergirded by the universal drive for human dignity. It is instructive for those of us in the West to listen closely to the voices of women and their male allies who seek justice and equality for girls and women, for to assume that progress necessarily flows from the “West to the rest” or from North to South, from so-called “developed” to “developing” nations, not only inserts erroneous dichotomies in far more complex realities, but closes us off to the truths of other cultures that stretch far beyond facile stereotypes and easy conclusions. As we in the United States are on the cusp of breaking our Presidential glass ceiling of gender exclusion, we engage in this issue with societies that have long passed this barrier, whose struggles lie elsewhere in simultaneously unique and intersecting ways. I invite you to learn from our esteemed South Asian colleagues and collaborators, and to explore how their insights can assist each of us in moving forward with our own projects and goals. And please stay tuned for a follow-up issue next year around this time, when we will be publishing select articles from the Third World Conference on Women's Studies, May 4-6, 2017, *Building Resilience: Dialogue, Collaboration and Partnerships across Our Differences*. You can find out more about the conference, how to submit an abstract here: <http://womenstudies.co/> or on the JIWS website, <http://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/publicity.html>.