

## Summaries

### **Nadja Bennewitz:** *Women's Rooms in a Medieval City*

Bennewitz describes the whole gamut of women's spaces in the medieval city of the 12th and 13th centuries. She begins with the description of the informal power of the mistresses of the stone-walled patrician houses, who kept charge of the keys to all the rooms of their houses, supervised household help, and who often worked in the businesses of their husbands as equal partners. She notes the parties that were held in the women's bedrooms after their giving birth, when all their women friends would come to visit, this practice soon curtailed by the town council as the 15th century wore on. The author goes on to discuss the dungeon prisons where women were kept in, and the women's houses, which were officially sanctioned for the purposes of providing sexual services to all men other than married men, priests, and Jews. She devotes a detailed section on the cloisters and the religiously-motivated though non-institutionally organised Beginen Order. She argues that these religious orders provided a safe space for women away from the numerous pregnancies that destroyed the health of women 'outside', their cloisters providing them with a means of livelihood outside of marriage and giving them the opportunity to conduct a civic life within the cloister walls that they were barred from leading outside them.

### **Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen:** *Black Kitchen - White Kitchen*

This essay focuses on how the transition from the black, smoke-riddled kitchens of old Europe, rural societies in the Old as well as New World, as well as how they mostly remain in Africa, Asia and Latin America into the white sterile kitchens of modern times have robbed us of our sense of pleasure in our lives. The author delves into the history of kitchens, with their hearthfires and the customs surrounding the preparation of meals, an analysis bordering on the mystic as it discusses the symbolism used in the mythology of fertility. She goes further into the description of the kitchen as women's space, where women could work and help one another and its gradual development into an ever smaller room, as meals began to stop being prepared at home and nutrition began to be taken over by professionally-trained specialists preparing genetically-modified convenience foods. She traces the parallel of disappearing kitchens to the disappearance of meals taken together as a family.

### **Cornelia Kraiker:** *My Breast-Feeding Circle and Mother and Child Playgroup*

The author writes about her breast-feeding circle and playgroup and how

this group of mostly university graduates in a small town of 3,500 inhabitants supported each other through boredom and feelings of inadequacy brought on by their non-conformity to the traditional rural mother role. In 1986, after the Tschernobyl nuclear reactor catastrophe, the group organised political activity against nuclear power, arranged to receive actual becquerel readings regularly from nearby Wiesbaden, demanded that radioactive contaminated sand from the playgrounds be changed, and was able to push for regular testing of air, water, and ground quality. Kraiker describes how the playgroup changed to become a 'women's space' where the private could be discussed away from the workplace, as well as from family and neighborhood circles. She has come to see the group as something that helped her to reorient herself in this status-passage in her life.

**Bertrun Jeitner-Hartmann:** *My Quilt Group*

The author describes her quilt group in Nuremberg and how it provides not only a satisfying creative outlet but also, quoting Pinkola-Estes from 'The Woman Who Ran with the Wolves', sets the ideal stage for the four basic techniques underlying all human activity: asking questions, story-telling, listening and handiwork. The women in the group give their own personal reasons as to why the group, which meets monthly, has become such an important part of their lives.

**Ute Karlavaris-Bremer:** *Laundry in Pakrac. Space for Women - Space for Peace*

The author describes how the women of Pakrac in Slavonia/ Croatia in Ex-Yugoslavia started the Women's Club in 1994 as a result of the Anti-War Campaign of Zagreb. While their men were on the front, the women were compelled to clean-up their city of debris and this brought them in constant contact with each other. The idea of setting up a laundry came out of a common urgent need as the water supply of Pakrac had been cut off. In July 1995, the laundry 'Maja' opened and has since then been run by the 10 women of the club ranging in age from 22 to 65 years of age. The room has been consequently used as a place for discussions over a wide range of themes concerning all. It has become a safe haven for the Women's Club of Pakrac in the midst of their destroyed city.

**Tiisetso Matete-Lieb:** *Women and Space. The Gender-Related Effects of Tradition in Lesotho*

This article examines the theme of Women and Space from the point of view of the tradition and the law in Lesotho. In an attempt to enhance the readers understanding of the issues involved, the author gives a broad overview of

the practices and betterments that form the basis for the traditions and the laws. In the process she highlights those actors which define space for women within the society, namely gender, age, physical location (i.e. urban or rural area), education level, group and individual motivation.

**Rita Schäfer:** *Women Space as Social 'Free' Space in Zimbabwe*

Households and women's organizations are of great importance in Shona women's culture in Zimbabwe. Women create their own social space and develop new skills. Cooperation, sharing of new ideas and performing cultural activities are important for women's self-esteem. Households and women's organizations are also the centres of women's economic strategies and means for expressing their socio-political interests. Households should not be perceived as areas subordinated under men's dominance in public life, but they are rather one of those fields in which women are able to participate in socio-economic decision-making. Household dynamics and the variety of women's interactions and interrelationships reveal how women create their own culture and their own social space. They adopt these areas to the changing circumstances of rural life and changing living conditions in towns. In building new organizations they try to overcome socio-economic differences and they open up space for extended economic autonomy.

**Ingeborg Nickel:** *Mexican Women-Writers. The Conscious Living Here and Now with Traditions and Perspectives for Future*

In an effort to understand how Mexican women cope with the rapidly changing conditions in their society, the author examines the life-stories of three Mexican authors born within the years 1946 to 1950. She specifically chooses them because they cannot be said to be exceptional cases and are thus indicative of life-situations of women as a whole and not just of authors. Common to all was their middle-class origin, which enabled them to achieve good schooling in mostly private schools, thus assuring them of having a functioning network in later life. Positions within government institutions change in rhythm with the patterns of the six-year electoral period, providing an ever rotating carousel of job opportunities, which are, on the other hand, apportioned out to aspirants according to the 'compadrazgo'-system or 'family'-networks not based on blood ties within organisations. Nickel concludes that the chances for women from the middle and upper-classes within the job market are higher for Mexican women than for German women for the following reasons: the quota system for women particularly in the field of education, women are forced to work because of the economic situation and inflation, cheap household help is readily



available, matriarchal family structures encourage solidarity among women, the accepted role of women as protector of cultural traditions within the society, and strong emotional support from close family ties.

**Marissa Pablo:** *A Paradox? - Marriage Migration as Expansion of Women's Space, Remarks on Bettina Beer's Book: 'German-Philippine Marriages - Interethnic Marriage and Migration of Women'*

In this essay focused on Beer's dissertation in anthropology, the author describes the salient points of methodology used in the study and its most central findings. For both authors the common conclusion seems to be the importance of separating on the one side media hype and politically-correct feminist pronouncements, from the other side, i.e. the viewpoint of the couples themselves. The book review deals most extensively with the discussion on tourism and prostitution and how these muddle up the whole discussion, as well as the cultural definitions of the word 'love' in two different Filipino languages. The manner in which the foreign interviewers' questions with just one word to denote a feeling can lead to wayward conclusions when seen from the viewpoint of answers in the context of languages that have various words for varying kinds of love and the feelings arising from them.

**Annemarie Große-Jütte:** *Space for Encounters between Women from East and West Germany: The East-West Women's Bridge - A Citizens' Initiative*

The author describes the beginnings of the East-West Women's Bridge Initiative, which began shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall largely because of the realisation that deep differences arising from 40 years of separation stood in the way of meaningful and effective communication, that is the starting point for a common agenda for the creation of a united Republic of Germany. The unique characteristic of the East-West Women's Bridge is that it is a women's initiative that strives not only to articulate women's interests but also to set goals for itself that address societal concerns in their entirety. The activities center on: personal encounters from women in both parts of the country, regional groups that serve as contact points for women, and supra-regional activities that take place three times a year - one conference each in the West and in the East and a summer camp. Mottos for the initiative are the statements - 'How we became what we are' and 'Show me how you live'. The author discusses experiences, problems, and perspectives confronting women from both parts of the country today.