

## PREFACE

African American historian Elsa Barkley Brown, in her contribution in this issue, uses jazz as a metaphor for a scholarly approach that might more effectively help feminists to explore the complexity of difference. In jazz, "the various voices in a piece of music may go their own ways but still be held together by their relationship to each other." That relational approach, which is now emerging in discipline after discipline among feminist scholars, is characteristic of many of the essays in this issue of *Feminist Studies*.

The first essay, Sagri Dhairyam's "'Artifacts for Survival': Remapping the Contours of Poetry with Audre Lorde," addresses the issue of literary critics' "vested interest in homogeneity" by examining critical responses to Lorde's poetry. Dhairyam argues that poetry is still defined as visionary timelessness by different communities of critics even as they remap Lorde's poetry—work which always insists on all her identities—according to their particular political agendas. While Dhairyam emphasizes the work of critics, Constance Coiner in "No One's Private Ground': A Bakhtinian Reading of Tillie Olsen's *Tell Me a Riddle*" discusses how Olsen's experimental narrative strategies release "potentially democratizing modes of discourse." Coiner delves into Olsen's ways of inviting a reader into her text so that she might see herself as one of its subjects and fill in its silences. In both Dhairyam's and Coiner's analyses, the relationship between the author, the text, and different communities of readers becomes another element in a potentially politicized terrain that joins race, class, and gender differences to narrative strategies.

While our first two essays are focused on textual and critical issues, P. Gabrielle Foreman's "Past-On Stories: History and the Magically Real, Morrison and Allende on Call" emphasizes the significance of women's recuperation of their specific ethnic histories. By comparing Morrison's and Allende's fusion of apparently contradictory narrative strategies—that of the historical with that of the magically real—Foreman interrogates the meaning of experience for the storyteller who writes to reclaim the past. In comparing Allende's *The House of the Spirits* to Morrison's *Song of Solomon* as narratives grounded in histories which have been erased or distorted and trivialized, Foreman points to the different ways in which these authors employ magical realism. The "magic" in Chilean Allende's realism finally gives way to the political realism of her country's recent wrenching history, yet Morrison's magical realism serves to

dramatize the continuity of African American survival strategies that would strengthen generational ties.

Dolores Mitchell's essay, "Images of Exotic Women in Turn-of-the-Century Tobacco Art," moves beyond the text as writing to the text as image to investigate racial stereotypes of women in one particularly well developed form of American commercial art. By examining images of "exotic" women—North African, Turkish, Spanish, Native American—that were used to advertise the cigar, that sensual refuge of white American males, Mitchell demonstrates that fears and desires around female sexuality were deflected in the cigar advertisements to different categories of women well outside of mainstream America.

Prodded by feminist philosophers and literary critics, and by historians from outside of the white mainstream and active on their own campus multicultural curricula, women's historians have begun seriously to rethink the ways they use the categories of gender, race, and class whose operation in social life their subdiscipline consciously set out to expose and explore. The three historians—Iris Berger, Elsa Barkley Brown, and Nancy A. Hewitt—whose ideas were first presented at the American Historical Association in December of 1990 and are reproduced here in edited and expanded form, grapple with guiding metaphors for understanding the way these divisions structure and restructure each other: elements in "compounds" so tightly bonded together that they constitute new substances; intertwining themes in a jazz concert; patches in a quilt; the simultaneous voices of many people speaking at once, as implied by the creole term "gumbo ya ya." The historians also try out their new, more fluid and interactive categories, demonstrating that they bring us closer to the truth of the life of, for instance, a Cuban-born dark-skinned Tampa, Florida, cigar maker in about 1900; or to the political identities of Black women factory workers in South Africa in the 1940s and 1950s; or even to the life of Anita Hill, whose duel with Clarence Thomas was structured for public consumption primarily as gender (Hill) versus race (Thomas) and thus badly distorted and far more likely to result in Thomas's victory.

Sarah S. Hughes, in "Beyond Eurocentrism: Developing World Women's Studies," discusses two ambitious new anthologies, prepared by teams of feminist scholars, one in history and one in anthropology, designed both to consolidate twenty or more years of contributions by feminists to their fields and also to present

research and thinking on non-Western cultures for teachers and scholars ready to expand beyond Western frontiers. Our other review essay, Anne M. Boylan's examination of six recent textbooks in U.S. women's history, looks, among other things, at their treatment of differences among women, their ability to abandon the white middle-class "standard," and asks whether U.S. women indeed have a "common past" or, as Ellen DuBois and Vicki Ruiz prefer to call it, simple "overlapping narratives, . . . a series of dialectical relations among and across races and classes of women."

We also have a cluster of three pieces in three entirely different genres, which take stock of motherhood as it looks to feminists in the 1990s. Gail Kligman's report on adoption and its place in reproductive policies in Romania describes sexual politics on the national and intimate levels which often force motherhood, or at least maternity, on women. Under Ceausescu's corrupt "orthodox" communist reign, in which abortion was virtually illegal and the crudest kind of government pronatalism operated, women placed babies for international adoptions rather than rear unwanted children. With abortion newly legalized, but the power of husbands in a chaotic and poverty-stricken country unchecked, adoption has a new place in Romania's sexual economy. Some husbands actually force pregnant wives to relinquish infants for adoption so they can profit from the strong international demand for white newborns. In "Prometheus Bound," Helen Duberstein's poem, a woman is haunted throughout her life by images of the infant boy she could not mother (abortion? sterilization? miscarriage? at some point in the quite distant past). We conclude our issue with Jan Clausen's hilarious version of "Invasion of the Body Snatchers," her tale of the revenge of the millions of uteri, surgically removed from women for various reasons, and living in retirement on an estate in South America. The image of a "sticky organic glacier" slowly making its way across the United States as they head for the White House, a trail of slime in their wake, also contains delicious levels of social satire, both of "us" feminists with our propensity to factionalize, and "them," antifeminist defenders of fetal "rights," who have helped us grow accustomed to seeing little blobs of tissue on our electronic media.

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for the editors