“AFRICA RECONFIGURED,” the cluster in this issue on recent scholarly and creative work on Africa, displays a variety of cultural, artistic, and linguistic approaches to decolonizing gender. Originating in disparate fields, each article in this cluster presents examples of how new meanings of gender are produced that defy dominant definitions. Xavier Live-ermon examines the cultural and political context of postapartheid South Africa, arguing that redefinitions of “tradition”—not just legal rights—have led Black South Africans to “queer” marriage practices. Busi Makoni pushes the boundaries of feminist linguistics to consider how young women creatively relate to the prevailing lexicon of body parts in southern African languages and, in doing so, how they challenge normative gender identities. Cheryl Toman offers an account of writer, playwright, and performer Werewere Liking’s distinctive lifelong fusing of performance art and social activism in Côte d’Ivoire and Mali and how Liking’s plays, prose, and poetry enact decolonization in unique ways. Nigerian artist Peju Alatise, whose work is featured in our art spread, presents an array of ideas, materials, and genealogies that deeply question European and US aesthetics, as the art essay by Moyo Okediji explains. Concluding “Africa Reconfigured” are critical perspectives on Euro-American gender orders found in Olumide Popoola’s except from a novel and the poems by Gabeba Baderoon. Two articles in the second half of this issue reconsider a specific moment of US women’s history: women’s liberation in the 1960s and early 1970s. Sara M. Evans challenges the stereotyping of the women’s liberation movement as white, middle class, and antifeminist, arguing that this is a myth fostered by academic theory, the movement’s opponents, and the mistaken notion that women’s liberation rejected its New Left roots. Complementing Evans’s argument, Agatha Beins addresses the issue of racism in that same historical moment of women’s liberation in the United States by revisiting images
of revolutionary women of color in US feminist periodicals of the time, arguing that we have to understand the use of these images in the context of mainstream and New Left portrayals that demeaned feminism as being not serious about politics. Also in this issue is Mark Schuller’s analysis of gender-based violence in Haiti in the aftermath of the earthquake of 2010, in which he examines how international humanitarian organizations are not always fully aware of how structural violence operates in the country. In our forum “Teaching about Ferguson,” *Feminist Studies* offers our readers reflections on the pedagogical challenges and opportunities in taking up the issue of state-sanctioned violence against people of color in the United States. All the articles and essays in this issue emphasize that the specificities of transnational, historical, and political contexts — rather than abstract invocations of globalization — are essential for understanding the changing meanings of gender identities and hierarchies as well as the political goals of women’s organizations.

The first article in our cluster on “Africa Reconfigured” takes on a popular Western assumption about South Africa, which is that the constitutional changes that acknowledged and legalized same-sex partnerships replaced intolerant “traditional” practices among Black South Africans. Xavier Livermon challenges this assumption by demonstrating how Black South Africans engage tradition in creative nonheteronormative ways. He closely follows how Black South Africans redefine autochthonous cultural practices in order to create new meanings and practices for marriage. Just as the very definitions of gender have been continuously in flux, so have the definitions of marriage, and Livermon demonstrates how marriage and long-standing coupling practices have become queered and reconstituted in contemporary Black South Africa.

In line with Livermon’s interest in redefinitions of sexuality and gender in a postapartheid context, Busi Makoni explores the relationship between the naming of genitalia and gender positionings. Studying both men’s and women’s uses of the lexicon for body parts in multiple Southern African languages, Makoni concludes that women engage in a process of dis-identification with, and reappropriation of, socially inscribed language for their bodies. Women use the same name labels, but assign them completely different meanings, thereby creating counternarratives of feminine identity.
The ability to create new meanings permeates the art of Peju Alatise. Moyo Okediji’s art essay introduces how Alatise’s work synchronizes painting, sculpture, installation art, and architecture. According to Okediji, Alatise’s work is part of a movement of contemporary African artists who dismiss popular and academic misunderstandings of African art as derivative of and subordinate to European and US aesthetics. Alatise’s use of abstract art and realist references, what Okediji describes as “abrealism,” probe the subconscious fabrics of social contradictions and conflicts. Her skill with material culture, specifically cloth, transcends the everyday, making dresses, gauze, wire, and wood into bold statements against racist gender hierarchies of colonial rule.

Werewere Liking has been a feminist voice for decolonization in West Africa for decades. Cheryl Toman recounts the impact of this prolific feminist foremother in Côte-d’Ivoire and Mali. Liking, as Toman reminds us, has made signal contributions to art, theater, literature, and philanthropy with the founding of the Ki-yi Mbock Theater Company in 1980 and the opening of an art gallery and theater known as Villa Ki-yi in 1985. Liking’s plays and the Ki-yi Mbock Theater Company push the limits of experimentation and creativity in the arena of feminist decolonial art and literature. Toman notes how Liking’s wide repertoire of fiction (including her 2005 autobiographical novel La mémoire amputée), dramatic works, sculpture, film, and poetry resist colonial European hegemony by Africanizing the French language and incorporating local vocabulary and phrasing; she infuses a variety of African languages into her plays, prose, and poetry. Liking has additionally become a prominent political figure by making her theater space a safe haven for children seeking refuge from Côte-d’Ivoire’s civil war.

“Fishing for Naija,” Olumide Popoola’s excerpt from a novel, uses language as a tool for challenging Anglophone dominance by moving smoothly between standard English, London slang, pidgin English, and Yoruba. Using Yoruba as the basis for a “gender neutral” pronoun, Popoola’s linguistic intervention is part of the overall African disruption of popular expectations of the African migrant subject. As a hybrid text—part prose, part poetry—“Fishing for Naija” breaks a variety of linguistic and gender boundaries in the representation of “queer” Nigeria.

Gabeba Baderoon’s collection of poems speaks to varied aspects of identity, materiality, and memory. Using the metaphor of the camera and the distance it offers, Baderoon expertly balances emotion and the
waves of memory that push through everyday realities in the postcolonial state.

The two articles in this issue on the US women’s liberation movement point to conventional inaccuracies in its treatment. Sara M. Evans argues that there has been inadequate research on this revolutionary movement in US women’s history and that a series of misconceptions fill this void, turning the movement into a minor footnote of so-called Second Wave feminism. Evans traces the women’s liberation movement’s engagement with radical politics and race to its roots in the New Left, which itself, she points out, was fragmented by race. While the mainstream face of women’s liberation was often white, Evans insists its actual actors were not: race was often at the center of women’s liberation discourse, and women’s liberation activism was multiracial. She argues, “to acknowledge that conversations about race were difficult is altogether different from claiming that there were no such conversations.” Dispelling the notion that the women’s liberation movement was all white will enable an understanding of the generative aspects of its debates as well as why they were so difficult.

Agatha Beins offers another call to revisit this historical moment in her intertextual interpretation of words and images found in 1970s women’s movement periodicals. She pays close attention to the repetition of certain visual and linguistic tropes. As Beins argues, “portrayals of women of color in US feminist periodicals were part of a practice of controlling and naming feminism as an identity.” Images specifically of Vietnamese women (in the context of the then ongoing war) and African American women (in the context of the Black Power movement) became iconic symbols that were part of feminist ideals and legitimated feminism as a revolutionary collective. This was in reaction to the dominant characterizations of women’s liberation by popular media and the New Left. Because feminism was not taken seriously as a revolutionary movement, the “radical otherness of women of color and third world struggles for social justice” could provide cultural capital. Beins concludes that, on the one hand, positioning women of color as radical others recognized institutionalized racism and imperialism. On the other hand, this iteration tended to homogenize women of color as the radical other.

Mark Schuller continues this attention to feminist organizing by focusing on the efforts of Haitian women’s organizations to address violence against women in Haiti. After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti,
international aid organizations and celebrities from the global North rushed in to focus on the vulnerability of women as a result of the earthquake. Schuller argues that their approach, self-labeled as a “feminist” one, ignored the pre-existing gender inequalities that rendered women vulnerable in specific ways. Contrary to these international actors, Haitian women’s organizations emphasize an intersectional analysis that focuses on how gender inequality is grafted onto economic inequality, poverty, lack of access to education, unemployment, single parenthood, and work in low-paying jobs. Haitian women’s organizations had been struggling against violence, including structural violence, long before the earthquake. Listening to women’s *istywa* (or personal histories) underscores both the continuities before and since the earthquake as well as how the situation deteriorated for most women after the earthquake. The humanitarian camps for internally displaced persons contributed to the increase in violence against women, as this international humanitarian intervention was based on essentialist ideas about gender. Thus, factors such as their physical design, lack of basic services, daily interaction, the gendered ways in which aid was delivered, and housing were not addressed. While political processes work against an intersectional approach, Haitian women’s organizations have been pressing for just such an approach. Schuller concludes that only by including Haitian women’s own analyses, only by having them handle their own bodies and movement, and only by making decisions based on Haitian women’s multiple subjectivities, will there be any hope of eradicating violence against women.

Jennifer C. Nash leads off our forum “Teaching About Ferguson” with the following questions: “What happens if we refuse the composure that faculty bodies are supposed to perform and enact grief, rage, or sadness? What happens if we refuse performing anything but exhaustion, numbness, or a protective desire to shield our bodies from our students’ scrutiny or curiosity?” Nash points out that “Ferguson” has become shorthand for legal murder and for the devaluation of racially marked bodies. She also raises the possibilities for coalitional activism in the wake of these murders. Jennifer James’s response begins by tracing her family’s history in St. Louis to address the relationship of race and class, arguing that for the Black bourgeoisie in St. Louis County, “the economic similarities between blacks and whites proved immaterial.” She then discusses her experiences teaching African American
history, which “often appears as a series of narrow, harrowing escapes from death.” Her students see the similarities between Ida B. Wells’s fearless antilynching campaign and the roles modern black women have assumed — on behalf of their sons and other slain black men. James argues that we must “accept the unleashing of historical mourning as part of what we do, as a natural consequence of black historical looking.” She notes that for African Americans, melancholia, “far from being the pathological condition Freud describes, defends against... [the] call to prematurely forget.” In her teaching, Sylvanna M. Falcón feels that her role is to connect racialized police violence within the United States with conversations outside the United States. Citizens in Latin America know very well about state-sanctioned violence, including most recently the September 2014 murder of forty-three students in Guerrero, Mexico. Falcón helps her students learn a regional analysis of structural and gender-based violence in order to counter the US propensity to individualize problems; she also pushes students to reflect on the ways US militarism is based on transnational logics of social control and surveillance. Falcón further offers her students models for challenging the state, including notably INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence. Sarah Jane Cervenak challenges us to think about what “teaching about” racial violence means. In her own teaching, she tries to upset the need for a full explanation, making room for sitting with silence and the “refused-to-be explained” features of black, trans, and poor grief. Teaching Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), especially its silences and withholdings, requires a different pedagogical approach to violence. Building on Trinh T. Minh-ha’s filmic concept of “speaking nearby,” Cervenak urges a “teaching nearby” with respect to racial and sexual violence, while always being committed to teaching about social justice and experiences of both subjection and privilege, including white privilege. Rebecca Wanzo discusses the controversies that ensued when well-known St. Louis illustrator Mary Engelbreit transgressed her usual comforting images of childhood innocence to portray a child with their hands up and a mother crying in the wake of Michael Brown’s death. “By bringing injuries to African American children into the space reserved for a mythic white US American ideality, she violated the segregation between idealized fantasies about the American dream and the injuries the state and institutionalized racism continue to inflict on African American children.” This controversy, as well as the reactions to the
non-indictment of Darren Wilson, demonstrates the naturalization of the idea that black death is a common sense outcome of confrontations with the police. Treva B. Lindsey addresses the tendency to erase the histories of involvement in racial justice movements by Black women, trans* people, and queer people. Lindsey points to a growing body of work that documents this activism as well as the way in which Black women, trans* people, and queers are also victims of anti-Black state violence in order to counter a dominant narrative about racial violence that only centers Black men. Lindsey argues that understanding contemporary anti-Black racial terror requires attending to the gender-specific and gendered dynamics of anti-Black racial violence. It necessitates a concept of what Lindsey calls “Black violability” to expand our lens on anti-Black violence. We need to learn the names of others in addition to Black men and boys who have been victims of state-supported violence “to wrestle with how gender and sexuality affect how we mobilize and organize for racial justice.”

Matt Richardson and Lisa Rofel, for the editorial collective