

# preface

THIS IS THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE of *Feminist Studies*. We celebrate a half century of groundbreaking scholarship and research, creative expression, and political commentary. Since 1972, our founding year, women around the globe have gained considerably greater access to higher education, professional occupations, and political participation. But apparent advances for women have occurred in contradictory contexts to which we can too often be inattentive. In 1972, too many people in the United States had only begun to recognize its deeply entrenched heritage of racism, and the country was embroiled in a cruel and misguided imperialist war in Vietnam. Average wages were at an inflation-adjusted peak then, but increased inequality means that they have eroded since. And many technologies devised in past decades have contributed to a series of climate emergencies harming our planet. In other words, in celebrating the journal's past, we also look somewhat soberly toward the future in this issue.

As we write in 2022, Iranian women and men are heroically protesting a repressive theocratic state's effort to strip them of their rights to education, work, and bodily autonomy. The Kurdish revolutionary slogan "Woman, life, freedom!" — is also an aspiration for others around the globe. For us in the United States, the terms "woman," "life," and "freedom" reverberate with questions. We now understand "women" as a vital

but ambiguous category variously dissected by old debates about culture versus biology and more recently divided by changes in our categories and systems of gender and sexuality. What “life” means is very differently interpreted by “pro-life” crusaders, advocates for women’s reproductive choices, and again by those who decry humanity’s arrogance in usurping the claims and opportunities of non-human entities. And “freedom” confronts the devastating persistence of wars and the too-feeble institutions dedicated to peace and justice.

In the face of such challenges, the essays published in this issue clarify our categories, illuminate the struggles we face, and interrogate our efforts toward solutions. The first scholarly essay in this issue, Clare Hemmings’s “‘But I thought we’d already won that argument!’: ‘Anti-gender’ Mobilizations, Affect, and Temporality” re-evaluates debates among feminists about “gender” and “sex.” Tracing the “affective teleologies” in what she labels as the positive, “loss” and “return” narratives among feminists, Hemmings implicates her own position as also responsible for the separation of feminism and women’s rights in the global field. Hemmings argues that we should return to Gayle Rubin’s exposition of the sex/gender system that shows the co-constitution of gender and sex and its extension by Hazel Carby that demonstrates how the sex/gender system oppresses both those women who are exchangeable and those, like Black women—and Hemmings adds trans people and all others marginalized—who are coded as disposable. The stakes are high, she reminds us: we need to reconstruct an expansive feminist canon that does not inadvertently find our positions aligned with right-wing normative politics about sex difference, family, and nation.

Robyn Wiegman, in her essay “Loss, Hope: The University in Ruins, Again,” uses her signature clear-eyed approach to think through feminist power within contemporary universities. She addresses the “kinds of institutional power we already have and don’t want to lose” as well as stressing the kinds of transformation that this political moment calls for beyond “issues of self-representation and non-complicity.” She offers a sharp albeit pessimistic view of the current state of our field, recognizing the hazards of uncritical optimism. The essay also dwells on varied moments of apocalyptic thinking and refuses the “theological” ring of such framings.

A more positive view of feminist scholarly collaboration and the advantages of women working together appears in the “Notes of

Appreciation” from authors published in this journal who join us in celebrating fifty years of publishing *Feminist Studies*. Gratifyingly, many of our authors thank the journal for its attentive and detailed review processes, and several authors indicate how publication in *Feminist Studies* helped start their careers.

Another kind of collaborative project is featured in the incisive forum “Feminism and Geopolitics: A Collaborative Project on the Cunning of Gender Violence,” in which Lila Abu-Lughod, Rema Hammami, Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian, and Laura Charney interrogate the ways in which feminist visions and practices have been mainstreamed and codified in a range of state and foreign policies, including those of humanitarian organizations and international development. Reflecting on years of individual and collaborative scholarship, they underscore how gender-based violence and violence against women initiatives legitimize and reinscribe dominant rationales of power, including border control, states’ legitimacy, securitization regimes, and surveillance technologies.

In her essay on “Fifty Years of Art in *Feminist Studies*,” art editor Bibiana Obler takes a retrospective view of artworks published in our journal over its history, emphasizing the range of artists, their varied media, and their contributions to feminist approaches to the visual arts. Obler suggests that this journal’s approach is “less tethered to the fixations of the art historical field” that “sometimes risk reinforcing greatness as the prime criterion of artistic value” and instead to feminist “critiques of [artistic] greatness.” While celebrating the astonishing diversity of art found in our journal’s pages, Obler reminds us that “the challenges in publishing a meaningfully inclusive range of artists’ work — and of featuring incisive commentaries . . . persist.”

Jennifer C. Nash’s review essay titled “Masochistic Feminism, or Reflections on the White Feminist Industrial Complex” powerfully explores a recent subgenre of feminist scholarship through three books by white women grappling with the complex and often detrimental racial politics of white feminism: *Against White Feminism: Notes on Disruption* by Rafia Zakaria; *White Tears/Brown Scars: How White Feminism Betrays Women of Color* by Ruby Hamad; and *The Trouble with White Women: A Counterhistory* by Kyla Schuller. In order to robustly engage anti-racist feminisms in the tradition of radical feminist solidarity and coalitional politics, Nash pushes us to reconsider white feminist praxes overdetermined by where they fail rather than by what they mean for white

feminists. Nash critiques white women's lamentations over where they continue to fall short in their work with and alongside Black, Indigenous, and other feminists of color as simply not substantive enough to be a transformative feminist practice. Instead, she upholds a feminism that can "claim uncertainty . . . and paradox, rather than political virtue, as the continued hallmark of feminist political life."

In "What's the Use of Feminist and Queer Theory?: On Messy Methods, Archives, and Objects," Hemangini Gupta and Carly Thomsen reflect on a workshop they ran for colleagues on their campus who are not gender, sexuality, and feminist studies scholars but who wanted to be in deeper conversation with contemporary feminist and queer theory. Eight participants offer brief meditations on the workshop, readings, and/or resonances with their own research. The essay offers one model of how to spark "new engagements" and tracks new vocabularies engendered by feminist and queer theories as they travel "across and against varied disciplinary persuasions."

In her essay "Intersectional Saturation: Toward a Theory of Feminist Organizations' Intersectionality," Anna Chatillon presents us with an analytical toolkit to assess the extent to which intersectionality permeates feminist organization's work and discourse. Illustrating her "intersectional saturation framework" through an examination of two case studies, the National Organization for Women and the Feminist Majority Foundation, Chatillon focuses on three aspects in her analysis: feminist organizations' rhetoric, understanding, and application. She writes that her work is an effort to "provide useful recommendations to mainstream feminist organizations attempting to organize intersectionally."

Reviewing five books about "navigating online misogyny," Cara K. Snyder describes the "strategies, methods, and debates" through which misogynists seek to "push women out of digital spaces" by using shaming and sexualized and racialized threats of physical harm. These books — *Gendertrolling: How Misogyny Went Viral* by Karla Mantilla; *Sexual Harassment Online: Shaming and Silencing Women in the Digital Age* by Tania G. Levey; *Credible Threat: Attacks against Women Online and the Future of Democracy* by Sarah Sobieraj; *Digital Feminist Activism: Girls and Women Fight Back Against Rape Culture* by Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose, and Jessalynn Keller; and *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* by Moya Bailey — describe the general operations of online shaming and silencing and the resulting threats against democracy,

including the specific attacks leveled at black women and their digital resistance in response.

While shaming and racialized threats of physical harm are leveled against many women, people with nonnormative sexualities are especially vulnerable to current attacks. However, in “‘Gay Genes’ and the Contested Origins of Same-Sex Desire,” Meg Wesling argues that the defensive response that homosexuality has a biological, rather than cultural, origin is misguided. Wesling claims that the widespread consensus in the United States today that homosexuality has a biological basis is deeply troubling. Popular cultural representations, scientific studies, doctors, politicians — on both the Right and the Left — and lesbian and gay advocacy groups all now propound the notion that “people are born that way.” This may make gayness more acceptable for a privileged few individuals, but it erases the social, collective, and political character of sexuality even as it upholds heteropatriarchy and white supremacy. Wesling compels feminists to question the hegemony that lets biology do the work of politics.

Continuing the interrogation of Second Wave feminist identity categories into “The History of the Present,” Eve Brown, Trystan Cotten, Che Gossett, LaVelle Ridley, and C. Riley Snorton, six participants in a Zoom roundtable convened by Matt Richardson, place Black trans feminism “between inconceivable and criminal” and so help reconfigure the comfortable umbrella term “women.” Their dialogue discusses how Black feminism and Black trans feminism come together and diverge in the context of anti-trans and anti-Black politics in the United States.

In another forum about a central and controversial feminist issue, “Fifty Years since *Roe v. Wade*,” Karen Weingarten, Johanna Schoen, Belinda Waller-Peterson, Heather Latimer, Melissa Huerta, and Leslie J. Reagan show how *Roe* has shaped both the history of abortion access and the ways that feminists discuss abortion. As abortion became “a key arena for contesting power relations between women and men” in the United States, the debate has been “deliberately linked to race, gender, and socioeconomic status” to the disadvantage of people of color. Sadly, historian Leslie Reagan predicts the harms women will again experience through conservative takeovers of claims to “life” through the re-criminalization of abortion.

Next, Amy Obermeyer’s “Moving Mountains and Uprooting Weeds: Literary Subjectivity, First Wave Feminism, and Women’s Magazines in

Latin America and Japan” moves beyond Eurocentric histories of global women’s movements at the turn of the twentieth century. Through the lens of female liberation-oriented literary cultures as shown in two well-known journals — *Búcaro* from Latin America and *Seitō* from Japan — Obermeyer argues first, these literary cultures focused on the development of women’s subjectivities rather than merely their rights; second, they stressed an international more than a national subjectivity; and third, they demonstrate the interrelationship between the rise of liberalism and feminist literary culture. Obermeyer concludes that a focus on subjectivity, rather than rights, offers more expansive possibilities for understanding the global women’s movement of the time.

Continuing the focus on individual subjectivity and its connections with global issues, four of our journal’s former creative writing editors — Minnie Bruce Pratt, Evie Shockley, Shirley Geok-lin Lim, and Rachel Blau DuPlessis — help us commemorate the creative writing published in *Feminist Studies* over the past fifty years by sharing their own poems for this occasion. Their poems are prefaced by an introduction by our current creative writing editor, Alexis Pauline Gumbs. Pratt connects generations to show us a picture of “three women beside the road / and a girl, reading.” Shockley reads the current climate emergency and the erosion of glaciers to remind us that the repeated patterns in nature and societies tell us, “there’s a pattern / here — you follow? i left tracks for you.” Lim highlights her position as a “second-tongue poet” and also pays tribute to Nobel award-winning Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska. And DuPlessis uses the metaphor of “plexiglass” to judge that “apparent clarity insults the sights / one knows are real.”

Finally, in a News and Views piece “In Her Name,” Nazanin Shahrokni helps us to rethink our ideas of “woman, life, freedom” and feminism by “(Re)Imagining Feminist Solidarities in the Aftermath of the Iran Protests.”

In closing, we invite all our readers, authors, and benefactors of the journal — and there are so many of you! — to enjoy a video we created about our journal’s history and ethos, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJqwuO2Dkxo>. We thank you for your support over the past several decades. We gratefully acknowledge the instrumental role played by our editorial director emerita Claire Moses, who helped make our

journal what it is. And we thank all members of our staff, especially Karla Mantilla and Brittany Fremaux, for persevering mightily in one of the few autonomously published nonprofit feminist journals in the world!

Judith Kegan Gardiner and Ashwini Tambe,  
with the *Feminist Studies* editorial collective:  
Attiya Ahmad, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Treva Lindsey,  
Kathryn Moeller, Bibiana Obler, Priti Ramamurthy,  
Matt Richardson, Lisa Rofel, Megan Sweeney, and Millie Thayer