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PAULA J. GIDDINGS

Introduction

Ways of Framing

A central task of feminist scholarship is to provide new frameworks—and new applications of existing ones—that correct, explain, and analyze the gendered experiences of women across and within multiple cultural contexts.

The meaning of imitating “white” standards of beauty is a case in point. In this issue Ayu Saraswati argues that the skin-whitening practices among women of color should not be reflexively conflated with the desire to emulate the “Caucasian whiteness” of women of European descent. Her essay, “Cosmopolitan Whiteness: The Effects and Affects of Skin-Whitening Advertisements in a Transnational Women’s Magazine in Indonesia” looks at how whiteness is not racialized as such but instead represents a “cosmopolitanness” that signifies not imitation but transnational mobility.

I “morphed from different shades of white to, well, something else,” is an introductory line in Judith Ezekiel’s memoir, “I Grew Up White: Crossing Borders and Changing Race.” The autobiographical essay is a meditation on how Ezekiel, who is Jewish, was racialized and imagined through the prism of different cultural contexts. Her “borders” include the North American Midwest, France, and Brazil, locations that range from racial binaries to varying degrees of liminality.

The transformational event of 9/11 has, among other consequences, intensified the West’s xenophobia toward women of color, including Asian women. Author Shoba Sharad Rajgopal has encountered this “clash of

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civilization” attitude in her college classroom and shares with us some of her strategies to counteract it through her teaching praxis and curriculum. “‘The Daughter of Fu Manchu’: The Pedagogy of Deconstructing the Representations of Asian Women in Film and Fiction” describes her approach that includes historical texts and fiction but which foregrounds the use of visual media in which iconic cultural images that signify women as “the other” can be effectively deconstructed.

“Performance and the Gendered Body in Jamaica Kincaid’s ‘Girl’ and Oona Kempadoo’s *Buxton Spice*” by Carol Bailey applies the frameworks of Judith Butler and others to examine postcolonial performative constructions of gender in two Caribbean societies. In her analysis of the protagonists in Kincaid’s classic short story and in the lesser known but highly touted work by Kempadoo, a Guyanese novelist, Bailey brings to light the tensions, contradictions, and subversive acts that undermine gendered/sexual scripts that are imposed on young women.

One of the paradigm-changers of our time is Blanche Wiesen Cook, biographer of Eleanor Roosevelt, and a groundbreaking historian and social-justice activist who has had a considerable impact on the contemporary peace, LGBT, criminal justice, and civil rights movements. Her achievements were recognized at the American Historical Association’s (AHA) 2010 meeting in San Diego, California, where historians honored her life and work. As I mentioned at the AHA roundtable, Cook—who wrote about Eleanor Roosevelt’s same-sex intimacies, revealed covert documents detailing the machinations of the CIA under President Dwight D. Eisenhower, and helped bring to light documents delineating the FBI’s surveillance of Martin Luther King, Jr.—hates secrets. In this section, Lawrence S. Wittner, Marcia Gallo, Linda Kerber, Debra Schultz, Jane S. DeHart, and Paula J. Giddings comment on different aspects of Blanche Cook’s scholarship and activism.

An issue that has vexed reproductive activists of color is the fact that the discourse around “choice” has been expressed through the classic liberal framework of individualism and privacy. In the essay, “What is Reproductive Justice? How Women of Color Activists Are Redefining the Pro-Choice Paradigm,” Kimala Price explores how organizations created by women of color are seeking to move beyond this model by connecting “choice” to other social justice issues such as education, immigrant rights, and globalization. Indeed, the impact of social justice activism is underscored throughout

Loretta Ross's interview with activist Peggy Saika , which traces Saika's journey from the internment experience to a life time dedicated to activism advancing anti-racist and feminist social justice agendas.

The cover image, "The Window Overlooking Wheatland Street Was My First Dreaming Place" by Ming Smith invites readers to envision such new perspectives, to cast an eye beyond the comfort of the window's sill to the shifting geographies that frame contemporary global feminisms. In similar spirit, poet Meena Alexander traverses familiar landscapes of temporality, home, self, and history across unstable terrains in which "All borders vanish" ("The Garden").

Finally, we at *Meridians* would like to memorialize the late Wilma Mankiller, the first female chief of the Cherokee Nation, a recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1998, and a founding board member of our journal. Soon after her death on April 16, 2010, I was at a meeting that Ms. Mankiller's good friend, Gloria Steinem, had been expected to attend. Gloria, however, had gone to Oklahoma to be at Wilma's side and so called on a speakerphone to apologize for not being at the meeting, but mostly to talk about her friend. Gloria's words moved us; her sense of loss was palpable—and so is ours. Please visit the *Meridians* website (www.smith.edu/meridians) for links to biographical information as well as memorials and celebrations of the life of Wilma Pearl Mankiller.