

ONE

## Introduction

### Women on the Verge of Home

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BILINDA STRAIGHT

There's no place like home.  
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—Dorothy,  
The Wizard of Oz, 1939

HOW DO WOMEN EXPERIENCE “home”? What does “home” mean to women in different social, class, sexual, ethnic, and racial contexts at different times and in different places? Is there more at stake for some women in identifying themselves through their ideas of home than others? Can women lay claim to home even when they are literally homeless, on the move, or when home is neither cozy nor secure? Conversely, can women strategically lay claim to the idea of home as a way of asserting their right to home and a secure identity?

While men and women may equally need the stability of home, “men” and “women” as contextually shifting categories differ enormously with respect to home. Thus, the modernist idea of home as stable center of safety and domestic virtue often assumes women as the very embodiment of that center while men offer the financial support to enable women to uphold home’s ideal qualities. How do real women relate to these idealized notions of home when their positions “on the ground”—as poor women, as slaves, as

non-Westerners, for example—conflict with the dream? What do women do with a fictional set of categories—“home,” “man,” “woman”—that erases crucial differences between themselves, men, and other women? What do they do with a fictional idea of home that may be so distant from their reality as to make the safety of home almost unimaginable? In other words, what do women do when home always seems to lie elsewhere, when a trip over the rainbow may make the necessity of home transparent to some while for others, home is no more obtainable than Oz?

The papers in this volume explore the immediacy with which women create the possibilities for their own existence out of the dense narrative fabric of home. In telling or retelling women’s stories of home, these essays suggest the richness with which home is imagined against its antithesis: movement as a foil for staying in place, the urban as a foil for homely tradition, anti-home or inaccessibility of home as a foil for an idealized version of home. As these essays reveal, women often have a peculiarly intimate relationship to home because they are constrained by its borders as keepers of tradition, as material symbols of home that protect or control it, or as the primary consumers of homely desires. Idealized in modernist narratives as the protective site of warmth and security against a cold outside world, women approach the fictions as well as the lived-in realities of home with ambivalence, nostalgia, or terror, depending on biographies forged in the crucible of multiple identity-shaping differences. To borrow Homi Bhabba’s (1994) strategic translation of Freud’s *unheimlich*,<sup>1</sup> these essays are “unhomely” narratives, revealing the forgotten but familiar strangeness of home as a site that elicits enigmatic longing, control, or outright violence.

While home as a discursive production is not new, colonialism, industrialization, slavery, and, more recently, globalization have made home into a precious and rare imaginative space in contrast to displacement and other precarious realities. In such a context, it is not surprising that the displaced should view home with a more urgent longing than the elite and secure (Spivak 1988). The force of such longing can be great indeed, and as Mohanty and Martin (1986) have argued, desires for an idealized home may even suppress crucial differences within local communities (or, one might add, between subaltern groups). In spite of this, Mohanty and Martin, and more recently Dorinne Kondo (1997), suggest that it is crucial that marginalized people craft home (cf. Alarcon 1996). With this I would agree, adding more precisely, in Angelika Bammer’s phrasing, the need for a “move between marking and recording absence and loss and inscribing presence” (1994:xiv). This volume effects that move, both as a whole as well as within many of its essays, describing women’s crafting of themselves within and against their desires and understandings of home as they variously experience or imagine it. Moreover, these essays address, from a variety of perspectives, the important questions of how women’s stories should be read and how they might be spoken.

Nevertheless, women's unequal status as measured within patriarchal systems and other disciplining (or, worse, terrifying) structures must not be forgotten in attesting to their creativity in crafting their identities through home. This is not least because women's different positionings with regard to home's discursive fictions do more than attest to the starkness of such differences; modernist versions of home are subtle truths by which individuals *reveal to themselves* their places in a global hierarchy. Moreover, if those at the bottom have no choice but to desire home (Spivak 1988), the home they desire is more often than not an "other" home which doesn't merely elude them: It was *imagined* in order to exclude them.<sup>2</sup>

This volume foregrounds these exclusions in two ways. First, it does so by placing side by side the "unhomely" narratives of women whose experiences are incommensurate with one another.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the women described in these essays range across global power hierarchies, conveying the stories of elite white U.S. and Canadian women (Stewart and Brettell), rural poor and peasant white women in the U.S. and France (Stewart, Straight, and Reed-Danahey), Southern Egyptian women (Zirbel), and West African women (Rosenthal), as well as the stories of a Haitian woman scholar (Ulysse) and a British Caribbean freed slave woman (Bohls). Secondly, the contributors attend to local, regional, or global structures of difference and/or exclusions through which women idealize home. These range from the differences inscribed within urban *vs* rural discourses, to subtle local patriarchal idioms shaping, constraining, or preventing women's search for home, to colonial structures which force women to reclaim their humanity as well as their rights to home.

Underlying the volume's concern with women's constructions of home and identity is a commitment to narrative as a means of conveying these women's experiences. Here, the contributors respond to the need for new ways to translate the dynamic immediacy of individual women's lives. Thus, many of the volume's contributors draw upon women's own life narratives to examine those women's attempts at self-definition. In some cases, these contributors are simultaneously experimenting with forms of autoethnography (Behar 1993; Reed-Danahey 1997),<sup>4</sup> serving as interlocutors to their own mothers, grandmothers, friends, or selves. At the same time, several contributors explore the potential of narrativity for grasping the strategic force by which individual and collective stories shape reality (Mannheim and Tedlock 1995). In this case, contributors examine the ways in which women's experiences or stories of home are framed against the prevailing hegemonic discourses which affect them.

#### POSITIONING WOMEN IN THE FEMINIST CANON

A number of feminist theories pertaining to women's identities have increasingly adopted a circumspect avoidance of unifying or totalizing narratives and

an awareness of plurality and contradiction. While this represents an important trend in Euro-American feminist discourses, it has not been without struggle. The naivete of the assumption of global sisterhood by feminism's second wave is by now familiar. Inspired by the pioneering work of Simone de Beauvoir on Otherness as it pertains specifically to the relationship between men and women, second-wave feminists examined in multitudinous ways how Otherness was formed and how and where it operated. Yet their attempts to export their formula for equality met with ambivalence or even hostility on the parts of women of color at home and in the so-called Third World: If inequalities were global, white western women were culpable along with white western men. Moreover, in the area of political praxis, any hopes for global coalitions of sisterhood were shattered by the realization that their goals were as varied as their positions within global structures of power.

The shocks and aftershocks of the crisis continue to be felt. As feminist theory gave way to feminist theories, "woman" has given way to women and gender, to the politics of identity and difference, and, intriguingly, back to "woman"—this time as an unstable, historically shifting signifier. Most feminist scholars would tend to agree that, to borrow Rosi Braidotti's (1997) phrasing, the "feminist subject is multiple, discontinuous, and internally contradictory." Thus, rather than replicating hegemonic constructions of gender differences by offering unifying frameworks of (unqualified) womanhood or manhood, one option has been to attend to the ways in which gender is performed—repeatedly, punitively—within those hegemonic constraints (Butler 1990)—as well, perhaps, as against them, at the margins, as playful, momentarily liberatory acts (Lancaster 1997). Gender in this sense is both performative and constructive, *creating* discrete categories of (heterosexual) woman and man.

At the same time, and not to lose sight of the feminist subject's multiplicity, since the 1980s, another (sometimes simultaneous) option has been to pay heed to identity as positioned at the confluence of race, class, as well as gender without subsuming any one of these sources of difference within the Other (Amos and Parmar 1984; Minh-ha 1987). Yet for some "Third World" theorists, this is not enough because gender may not be a crucial organizational metaphor, and "woman" as a specific category may not exist in some cultural contexts (Oyewumi 1998). Nevertheless, while they do not necessarily attend to the heady problem of whether woman exists, feminist scholars have been attending to the discursive categories woman/man and femininity/masculinity as historically and spatially contingent. The crisis in specifically white Western feminist theorizing, then, has resulted in richly problematized approaches to both gender and women. Thus, a growing number of studies are trying, in different ways, to analyze sex-gender systems and describe feminist subjectivities while conceding to the contestations involved in producing them and to the necessarily partial truths that such

studies are limited to deciphering (see, for example, Ong 1988; Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Tsing 1993; Kapchan 1996).<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, besides the messiness of this state of affairs, other difficulties remain in the area of theory/praxis. Angelika Bammer (1994) has astutely pointed out that the celebration of differences and multiple positionings has often obscured the varieties of concrete lived-in experience. On a similar note, Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (1996) have pointed out that postmodern attention to fragmentation has ignored differentials of power, both from center to margin as well as within the margins. Finally, Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan (1994) likewise decry the homogenizing effects of Euro-American theorizing but add a critique of forms of feminism that misrecognize Euro-American feminists' own participation and stake in modernity, thus contributing to women's oppression.<sup>6</sup>

The essays in this volume tread cautiously on this fragile terrain, concretizing women's lives in their specific historical, spatial, cultural, and biographical contexts while simultaneously deploying a variety of ethnographically informed approaches that use narrative as their medium or method of telling. In so doing, these essays avoid treating all marginal or all elite women as if they were equal, yet simultaneously nurture the possibilities for a dialogue across incommensurate experiences. Additionally, in their ethnographically informed attention to narrative, the contributions to this volume attempt to grasp the elusive shadow cast by women's bodies-on-the-ground. Here, these authors do not follow the modernist move of presuming to represent the lives of the women who are their textual and/or ethnographic interlocutors. Instead, they recognize their own positionings in dialogic encounters that produce new tellings of their interlocutors' lives, tellings that simultaneously speak women's experiences and foreground for us in the present the ways imaginings about home illuminate the often troubling aspects of modernity through which women have differently understood and created themselves anew.

#### UNHOMELY HOME(S)

By attending to women's narratives about home ethnographically (or narrativizing home, in some cases), the contributors to this volume position themselves at a tellingly stormy crossroads between discourses about women and domesticity elaborated forcefully within feminist theorizing, and Euro-American elite modernist conceptions of home with which anthropology has a singular and sometimes problematic relationship. The problem of difference is common to both, making the convergence a symptom of a long-standing debate in western philosophical history (see Bell 1998) but, moreover and more importantly, a symptom corresponding to often stark material realities.

While their antecedents can be found in a philosophical tradition which the so-called West has inherited (and reinvented) from the ancient Greeks,<sup>7</sup> the dichotomous permutations of self/other and subject/object, which have held such problematic inscriptions of difference for postmodern scholarship, are more recent.<sup>8</sup> That is, even if they owe much to the eighteenth century and Descartes,<sup>9</sup> these dualisms are most fruitfully read in the context of shifting geo-politics and as a solution to Europe's own cosmological and philosophical problems as they surfaced in that global arena.<sup>10</sup> If we begin in the nineteenth century—closer to problems of worldview that are our own—the legacy of Cartesian dualism gave rise to modernisms that not only separated mind/soul/ body, but that—in the context of accelerated colonial expansion and capitalist development—self-consciously pursued the differences between magic and science, primitive and modern, Self and a myriad of gendered, raced, and classed Others.

Such modernist renderings of reality are fundamentally linked to the rise of anthropology in tandem with other social as well as natural sciences, on the one hand, and feminist theories underscoring gender difference, on the other. For anthropology's part, its explicit focus on "primitive" (usually colonized) peoples made it peculiarly culpable in helping elite, white American and Europeans construct notions of themselves and of home in contrast to their Others. While critiques of anthropology have long since pointed to the discipline's role in this mythmaking (for example, Gough 1968; Said 1978; Fabian 1983; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996), recent scholarship has broadened its analytic range and exposed additional sites for collective Otherizing. Thus, a growing and richly varied literature is examining the myriad ways in which the "West" has imagined itself in relation to the "rest" right into the twenty-first century (see for example, Stoler 1989; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991; Pratt 1992; Stewart 1993; Appadurai 1996; di Leonardo 1998). These works examine the construction of Euro-American subjectivity in relation to an exotic that was understood in racial, sexual, gendered, religious, as well as temporal terms. Thus, on the positive side, the exotic may inspire bodily transcendence (Torgovnick 1997) or a nostalgic past (Stewart 1993, Appadurai 1996, di Leonardo 1998); or more negatively, the exotic may embody fertile ground for civilizing social engineering (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), signifying timelessness (Wolf 1982) or, more dangerously, challenging the hierarchical order assumed in these exoticizing tendencies by transgressing racial and sexual boundaries (Stoler 1989).

Well before anthropology's self-critique, of course, the mapping of the self/other dichotomy so prevalent in Euro-American thought from the nineteenth century forward had led to brilliant illuminations in feminist thought. However, as noted in the previous section, the literature stemming from insights such as de Beauvoir's (1949) notion of woman as the Other of man failed to take account of exclusions beyond gender. Thus, even as

(Euro-American) feminist scholarship produced rich work illuminating the underside of home and motherhood for women, including its heterosexism (Rich 1976), this literature often neglected to note how failures to attain the promises of home were complicated not only by gender and sexuality, but by race, class, ethnicity, and nation. However, the raised voices of women from the margins infused much-needed critical insights into both feminist theorizing and anthropology. Within anthropology, this led to the recognition of white, Euro-American women's culpability in forging a subject/object relationship that positioned them as subjects in relation to marginal men and women (Mohanty 1984, Ong 1988). Subsequent scholarship in the 1990s and 2000s has thus brought feminist theories pertaining to the domestic and to home to bear on anthropological and cultural studies work on exotic Othering.

Recently, some scholars have drawn upon this crucial convergence to turn some attention to the notion of travel and at times, more specifically, to the notion of home as strategic sites of imagining (white, Euro-American) self in relation to (exotic and miscegenistic) Other. Such work goes far in showing us the dire material concomitants of some discursive tendencies. For example, Wendy Webster (1998) examines ideas of home in Britain between 1945 and 1964 as accessed through film and narrative as well as in official policies. Her book is a melancholy portrait of ideals of home clearly designed to exclude on the basis of race, ethnicity, sexuality, nation, and class. At the close of British imperialism, the British home was white, heterosexual, and middle- to upper-class, with a woman at the domestic helm, and the discourses that constructed home in this way often accompanied policies that helped to effect its exclusions as on-the-ground reality. Dorinne Kondo (1997) has charted some of the exclusions of American home likewise arising in the period of the Second World War. Clearly, U.S. notions of home did not allow for the inclusion of Japanese Americans, and this silence in American hegemonic imaginings of home erupted forcefully and poignantly in the incarceration of Japanese Americans.

If the white, Euro-American version of home has implied stability both as a fixed point in space and as an emotionally safe pivot for individual and collective memories, that very stability has been denied to marginalized groups.<sup>11</sup> Individuals in such groups have found themselves literally and figuratively pushed to the margins of safe home. On the one hand, then, colonial and postcolonial geopolitics have translated into the massive displacement of people at and on the edge while simultaneously Euro-American understandings of home have been imagined to exclude these, their Others. On the other hand, however, marginalized groups comprise living, breathing individual human beings who *continually imagine themselves at home*. Thus, "home" can destabilize itself: "'Home' can serve to encapsulate, but also to link and transcend, traditional classifications . . . it can and must be

sensitive to numerous modalities, conventional and creative, and to allocations of identity that may be multiple, situational and paradoxical" (Rapport and Dawson 1998:8; see also Behar 2000). Whether longing for home or pointing to home's failures to live up to what it ought to be, individuals speak the possibilities of an "other" home, their home, a home that would embrace and nurture them. If necessary (or even desirable), such possibilities of home can be spoken, and in the midst of literal or figurative movement, exclusionary visions of home can be destabilized from positions of exile, from points-in-between.

### SPEAKING HOME

If the modernist home was imagined to the exclusion of its Others—the slave as not human enough, the poor as not fit enough, for example—its contours have been tantalizing both to those who could have it as well as those who could not. Indeed, if exclusionist imaginings accompany and give moral force to exclusionist material practices,<sup>12</sup> the work of the imagination is undoubtedly a crucial part of the process of breaking those barriers. Here we see precisely the simultaneous longing for and ambivalence on the part of a middle-class, white, Canadian woman for whom modernist discourses about home were created (Brettell's essay) and how tantalizing those discourses could be for rural white women who were in a position to actually imagine attaining home (Reed-Danahay's and Straight's essays). The appeal of home is no less tantalizing to a nineteenth-century slave woman, however, who was least positioned to realize the dream of home but who dared to imagine and claim it anyway (Bohls's essay). Similarly, a southern Egyptian woman in the 1990s shows us the higher stakes for women in a context in which modernity is a complex border phenomenon straddling both Egyptian national as well as global fractures (Zirbel's essay). Finally, and remarkably, the spirits of slaves from the ex-Slave Coast who were purchased by Ewe and Mina lineages in southern Ghana, Togo, and Benin continue to lay claim to the homes of their former owners by the southerners whose bodies they inhabit and whose homes they protect. The force of home is palpable in these essays, in its recurring failure to deliver on its promises (seen especially in the essays by Bohls, Stewart, and Straight and in Ulysse's poem), but most strikingly perhaps in the consistency with which marginal women engage with those promises.

That engagement is rendered more challenging by these women's multiple positionings with regard to home, however. Thus, in their juxtaposition, these essays give voice to home's silent exclusions: By asking the questions "Where is race? Where is class? Where is sexuality? Where is gender?" for each of these essays, we begin to see in powerful terms the *heaviness of home* for women who must consider many or all of these exclusionary structures. We see the weight of being a middle-class white woman forced to think home through



the gendered expectations of her cultural and historical context, which calls her homeward when her nationalist home is under siege (Brettell's essay). At a different extreme, however, we see the *multiplied* weight of being a slave who thinks home through race, class, gender, as well as sexuality (Bohls's essay). The gloominess of this configuration must be balanced, however, by the fact that the women in this volume actively engage in making themselves subjects of their own stories, stories that include critically evaluating the promises of home and imagining it as a space they had a claim to.

The contributors to this volume are sensitive to the importance of storytelling both for individuals in their daily lives and for us. For individuals, stories are a means of claiming the space of home, for example, but they are also crucial to the everyday creation (and justification) of self, community, and world. Similarly, scholars can glean people and their world-making from everyday and extraordinary stories; moreover, stories are powerful in their ability to convey, in textual form, the sensuousness, suffering, and joy of being alive. The latter benefit of storytelling is important in the use to which scholarship is put: The greater immediacy of women's own stories makes it more difficult to forget that even if stories create self and world anew, they do so based on experiences marked by physical pain, hunger, and other deprivations; by pleasurable touch; and by emotive responses such as shock, delight, fear, and joy. We may question the varieties of perception, but it is morally dangerous to question the presence or absence of *life*. It is crucial, in other words, that we eschew approaches that are so text-bound as to call into question the embodied, prelinguistic reality of the people whose lives are being analyzed.

How do stories create self and world? Numerous anthropological scholars,<sup>13</sup> particularly within linguistic anthropology, have drawn upon the work of Bakhtin (e.g., 1981) to suggest that cultural practices and understandings emerge out of dialogues (including dialogues with self). These scholars have found Bakhtin's thought to be inspirational in suggesting the importance of stories to the creation and continual re-creation of cultural understandings. Indeed, scholars like Bruce Mannheim and Dennis Tedlock (1995) have drawn upon Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva in order to suggest the ways in which culture itself emerges out of the dialogic encounter. Integrated with the seminal works of theorists that include Michel Foucault (e.g., 1970; 1979; 1980), Anthony Giddens (e.g., 1984), and Pierre Bourdieu (e.g., 1977), Tedlock and Mannheim address the difficulty of understanding the continually vexing problem of how individual understandings become collective understandings, of how individuals constrained within institutional structures and sets of practices put their understandings of those structures to (potentially transforming) use in the act of telling stories.

Tedlock and Mannheim's approach to narratives then, emphasizes the importance of storytelling to the continual creation and re-creation of culture—

to the process whereby individual and collective stories make a world. In contrast, Michael Jackson (1996) has examined storytelling specifically in relation to understanding individual lives engaged in the ongoing process of being-in-the-world. Bourdieu's work is key here as well, particularly in his stress on the importance of individuals' own bodies to the disciplining of cultural practices. While Bourdieu may at times underestimate individual agency, his notion of the habitus provides a blueprint for understanding the mechanisms by which individuals are irreducibly connected to the sets of cultural practices that comprise their worlds. Thus, in his phenomenological approach to storytelling and human experience, Michael Jackson finds in Bourdieu the opportunity to understand "the way human experience vacillates between a sense of ourselves as subjects and as objects; making us feel sometimes that we are world-makers, sometimes that we are merely made by the world" (Jackson 1996:21).

Of course, the tension between self and world continues to be at the center of numerous scholarly approaches within and beyond anthropology. While Jackson attends to that tension by exploring the experiential side of individual being-in-the-world, and Tedlock and Mannheim emphasize world-making as it emerges out of dialogic interaction between individuals, collectivities, and texts, Thomas Csordas (1994) explores another possibility. Likewise concerned with experience as Jackson is, Csordas grapples with the thorny issues posed by approaches to the body. Criticizing the tendency (within anthropology particularly) to treat the body as a text from which cultural phenomena can be deciphered, he asks: If individuals tell stories of pleasure, pain, suffering, and joy, what indeed is the relation between body and text in those tellings?<sup>14</sup>

The problem of representation and experience is crucial to approaching these women's stories. Csordas' well-placed critique of course takes us back to the dualist legacy of Descartes, drawing attention to how even some of the most influential and otherwise inspirational approaches within philosophy and anthropology have failed to adequately deal with representationalist dualisms. Thus, as Csordas points out, hermeneutic approaches influenced by Ricoeur tend to emphasize Ricoeur's more text-centered works, Foucaultian approaches treat the body as a site of inscriptions of domination, anthropologists influenced by Geertz invoke the metaphor of the text, while Derridean post-structuralists subsume everything under the text. However scholars have attempted to navigate the mind/soul/body problem, then, the tendency has been to read the body as an object apart from and driven by a mindful subject. While Csordas' solution to this conundrum of offering a notion of embodiment as a "dialectical partner to textuality" is promising, the task remains of unchaining story from objective text,<sup>15</sup> particularly when the issue at hand is not the body itself. How, in other words, should we speak these women's stories? How should we read them?

As Swamiji told Kirin Narayan, "All stories are told for some purpose" (Narayan 1989:37). The stories told in these essays have multiple purposes,

not all of which can easily be unfolded. In their variety, these stories do indeed unchain story from objective text at particular moments, while self-consciously putting text to work as an illuminating, liberatory object at others. At times, then, these essays work alongside rather than within text in an attempt to convey the immediacy of a life—a life of a person whose experiences are embodied, sensuous, and mindful. When Kathleen Stewart tells us, “My earliest memories are fragments of trauma and beauty. . . . My kindergarten class walking back from Woolworth’s carrying a box full of furry yellow chicks, the warming spring sun on our backs. . . . There were fingers crushed in doors, blood spurting out while wild pet rabbits ran around the cellar in secret,” this sensuous immediacy of living a life is conveyed eloquently. Similarly, that immediacy comes to us when Katherine Zirbel tells us that “‘Aziza asked me if I didn’t think she looked like Na’ima ‘Akef, to which her sister responded, teasing that she didn’t know henna flowers came in black, as ‘Aziza had dark skin, while Na’ima ‘Akef did not.” And when the narrator in Ulysse’s poem says, “we’d throw rocks like boys at the zanman / until we knocked them onto the ground / we would wipe them off our uniforms / and stuff them into our mouths.” When women speak their stories, their bodies spring to life as does the sensuous world around them. In such tellings, the objective text is forced to confront the tension between the nearly unassailable claim that experience is mediated by language and text, and the moral imperative that, indeed, there is a Kristevan convulsive moment<sup>16</sup> prior to such mediation. Were there not, stories of domination would lose their force and their meaning.<sup>17</sup>

At times, some of the essays in this volume do indeed allow these women’s stories to disclose domination, exploring the tension between control and freedom (see Wesley 1999). Here, the stories inhabit their objective text, bringing us closer to understanding the confining dimensions of women’s life-worlds as well as their world-creating engagement with those worlds. Here, it is possible for us to read the revelations these essays offer of how women make sense of their life experiences—experiences located in a web of connections (Haraway 1991) that are orienting without wholly imprisoning the women.

Finally, besides moving between the difficult poles of understanding self and understanding world—of understanding story as objective text and as indentation left by embodied experience—these essays speak women’s imaginings of home for the contributors’ personal reasons. Such reasons range from tenderly pausing over the life of a loved one to earnestly seeking to understand forms of control and domination while recuperating the freedoms snatched from the wind by those experiencing them. On the balance, these essays ask to be read as open-ended and varied possibilities for understanding and experiencing women’s imaginings of home. They ask to be read together, comparing the incomparable; to be read apart, experiencing the singularity of a life; and to be read as a series of questions raised from within the life-world imagined by their authors without being bound by it.

## THE CONTRIBUTIONS

This book offers a collection of stylistically varied essays that grapple with the contradictions of voice and locatedness in a variety of contexts. Ruth Behar's preface and this introduction open onto seven essays that explore the volume's issues critically and often lyrically. The volume then closes with an eloquent poetic reflection by Gina Ulysse that leaves the book open to multiple readings/writings, voices, and possibilities for engagement.

Kathleen Stewart tells a poignant, confining story in "Still Life," a poetic meditation on the "ordinary" effects of the stilling and distilling process of contemporary U.S. public consumptive culture. Stewart's still, like the moonshine still that distills liquor, is the public consumptive machine that moves the images—both the idyllic and terrifying—of the American Dream along. In this process, a barrage of images proceed in a "jumpy logic," the intimate and the public become continuous, desire and knowledge become eerily juxtaposed, and "ordinary" life is "stilled."

Stewart tells her own story of home from within but also across this (dis)stilling process. Yet Stewart's story, her mother's story, and her West Virginia friend Sissy's story, are in a constant state of interruption—submerged or set aside temporarily for the sake of the constant play of images processed through the still. In this play of images, the "dream of an unhaunted home" constantly meets its opposite. Thus, images from the television show "America's Most Wanted" is interrupted by a brief vignette: "Houses painstakingly kept up, yards kept trim and tended, the little family stands beside their sports utility vehicle in the driveway looking up. . . ." Martha Stewart reminds American women of what they would like to have and be, while news stories and reality TV interpose the shock of what they really have or of what they most fear.

In this series of images, vignettes, and Stewart's own home-tellings, home is a cozy refuge for women, against the "still life," against the images of horror we consume. Yet, paradoxically or ironically, home is itself an amalgamation of still lifes—those images and objects of consumption that construct home as a site of unattainable desire. The play on "still" evokes the passivity of this process of construction—the image machine feeds us, feeds on us, and the liquor of desire streams out but is undrinkable.

The potential terror of home is also realized in Elizabeth A. Bohls's essay "A Long Way from Home: Slavery, Travel, and Imperial Geography in *The History of Mary Prince*." Here, Bohls tells us the tale of Mary Prince, a nineteenth-century slave whose published autobiography lays bare the contradictions between the modernist home and its violent antithesis—the anti-home of slavery—which provided the material as well as discursive fabric for the cozy home of empire. If the American Dream is undone in its own convulsive images in Kathleen Stewart's essay, Elizabeth Bohls reminds us of the exclu-

sions that made the American Dream imaginable in the first place. Indeed, the specifically racialized exclusions muted or forgotten in the auto-tellings Brettell and Reed-Danahay explore later in the volume are the very ground upon which Mary Prince's journey home is based.

Bohls tells us that Mary Prince's autobiography was mediated through editors who had their own agenda. In this case, Mary Prince dictated her story to a white woman abolitionist in collaboration with the Secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society. The resulting publication, then, was a joint effort between Mary Prince and her abolitionist sponsors, and, as Bohls tells us, we should "try to understand its [the text's] words and silences as the product of tacit negotiation between the semi-literate slave and those who took an interest in her story." If Mary Prince's authentic voice is not easily recoverable (if at all), Bohls suggests we attend to the collaboration between Prince and her sponsors for what it can tell us about "the cultural incommensurabilities between the slave woman and her sponsors," but also about the "imaginary mapping of abolitionist assumptions onto the transatlantic geography of British Empire."

As Bohls tells us, those assumptions included checking the veracity of Prince's story—including seeing the scars on her body. Once verified, the telling of Prince's tale required careful editing with attention to those elements that were, in Bohls's terms, culturally incommensurable. Here, Bohls describes what was at stake for abolitionists as they tried to give humanity to a population so far denied it. The most palpable silences of the text are those events and topics, then, the telling of which would have offended white, genteel sensibilities and risked the abolitionist project altogether. Mary Prince's sexuality and her Caribbean-inflected language for example, are excluded from the text and the portrait of Mary Prince matches, as closely as possible, that of a pious, enlightened Christian woman.

If abolitionist assumptions are legible in the silences of the text, Bohls finds in the words themselves Mary Prince's creativity in laying imaginative (and then physical) claim to home despite its seeming impossibility for a slave. Indeed, in Bohls's essay, it would seem that Prince's voice is at least partly audible—speaking her mother's grief over the loss of her children as well as speaking her own sufferings. It seems to be audible, too, in Prince's telling of home against the grain as it were—as she tells a counterstory to white, middle-class, genteel home. If home is a haven for the white metropole and colonies, it is so at the expense (and because) of slaves. As Bohls describes, for Mary Prince, home is in the company of loved ones, while white, middle-class home is a fiction that forgets the cold reality of whippings, displacements, and the forcible partings of its excluded inhabitants.

In "My Shafiq: Concerning the Travels and Transgressions of a Southern Egyptian Woman," Katherine Zirbel tells another story of the journey to freedom, but in this case it is freedom from the patriarchal control of home.

Zirbel's essay juxtaposes the story of her ethnographic encounter with 'Aziza, a young Egyptian woman who "transgressively traveled" to Cairo, with Egyptian narratives about the dualities of home/travel, honor/shame, south/north, and country/city. Posing the questions, "Can there be honor and freedom? Must the road to women's increasing autonomy merge with debauchery?" Zirbel finds 'Aziza's freedom written in the gap between competing, contradictory narratives about honor and shame, and 'Aziza's interpretations of them.

As Zirbel tells us, honor killings still occur in Upper Egypt, and men steadfastly circumscribe their female relatives' movements outside the home. Such control is echoed in tales like that of "Shafiqqa and Mitwalli," which end in the honor killing of the transgressive woman. If Southern Egyptian women pay heed to these stories in understanding themselves and their place in the world, Zirbel points out that there are other, more liberatory narratives competing for women's (and men's) attentions. Indeed, there is a counternarrative to the story of Shafiqqa and Mitwalli itself, and it is between such narratives and counternarratives that Zirbel's young friend, 'Aziza, seizes some degree of freedom from the authority of her own male relatives.

Zirbel's story of her somewhat complicitous relationship with 'Aziza illuminates the readerly/writerly nexus of storytelling. As we come to understand, 'Aziza and her female relatives performatively draw upon the repertoire of tales and poetry available to them to comment on their everyday lives and choices. Giving fresh readings of old tales and offering narratives of one's own small adventures provides a means of communicating mutual collusion in wrenching temporary freedoms from vigilant male control. If that freedom was narrativized, however, it was also lived. In this respect, Zirbel's essay is a comment on the interpretative force of narratives in juxtaposing self and Other (in Zirbel's essay, north/south as well as men/women) tempered by the caveat that lives understood and lived through narrative are not bound by the neatness of narrative convention.

The unruliness of everyday lives in comparison to local narrative convention is also apparent in Bilinda Straight's essay, "Cold Hearths: The Losses of Home in an Appalachian Woman's Life History." Straight's essay tells two tales, one about Marie Miller, a white woman who traveled in the 1940s to escape her Appalachian home following the loss of her infant daughter, and another about the telling of the tale itself. In Marie's self-narration, a home of coldness, poverty, and loss is implicitly juxtaposed with the warm comforts iterated in U.S. modernist discourses, while the telling of a poignant tale to her granddaughter (Straight) becomes a performative journey through which Marie's and Straight's understandings of one another and of Marie's life choices are transformed.

As in the case of 'Aziza that Zirbel describes, Marie understands her life experiences and choices through local and national narratives. In this case, the narratives Marie draws upon are about home, and Marie emphasizes her

expectations of what a home should be in contrast to what she remembers experiencing. Thus, Marie's understandings of an ideal home entail a husband providing the material necessities that would enable her to make a home—including a warm house. Marie contrasts this image with that of an anti-home of violent conflict within a drafty shanty in West Virginia's hills. Marie's own ideal notions of home and of women's domestic roles also conflict, however, with Marie's choice to leave home, husband, and children, ultimately to migrate north to Ohio. However, in Marie's self-narration, the theme of the cold house eventually culminates in Marie's relating the story of her infant daughter's death from pneumonia—a loss she attributes to the coldness of the house itself.

As Straight illuminates, then, modernist narratives of home become powerful vehicles for the self-understanding and justification of Marie's life's decisions to her self and her granddaughter/ethnographic interlocutor. Whether or not stories of the American dream of home informed Marie's understanding of her life experiences and decisions in the 1930s and 1940s, they clearly informed her understanding of those experiences and decisions as a woman in her eighties. For Marie, the failure of her home to live up to the material merits of the modernist American concept of home made it the antithesis of home and reduced her existence to a brutish one. If Marie herself failed, then, in her attempts to be homemaker, her transgressive travels away from husband and children were inspired by a search for the ideal home—revealing the remarkable strength of that modernist fiction.

Caroline Brettell's essay, "Liminal Space and Liminal Time: A Woman's Narrative of a Year Abroad, 1938–1939," tells the story of Brettell's Canadian mother, Zoë Browne-Clayton, during a year she spent abroad when she was twenty-three years old. As Brettell tells, Zoë's letters home during that period reveal her yearnings to re-create herself and the meaning of home during a moment when the modernist nation and home were in crisis.

Zoë Browne-Clayton's journey began at home following her mother's death from cancer. Thus, it is, Brettell tells us, a "wistful" departure, blending both desire and transgression as Zoë overcomes the pull of duty towards her father and brother and sets off with money her mother left her to explore the alternatives to a Canadian woman's place in the home. Once off, Zoë's letters home are at once testimony to her inner journey, a collection of witty, gender-conscious descriptions of the people she meets, and an intimate portrait of Britain and France on the eve of war. As her year proceeds, Zoë's liminal journey is matched by the liminality of the world around her: Her own free-spirited yet uncertain experimenting is echoed by a seemingly unbridled freedom in Paris, but by a more subdued "false gaiety" in Britain, as the tension of war looming "loosened English reserve."

Brettell's narration of Zoë Browne-Clayton's letters home reveal home as a comforting site of "safety, security, and rootedness"—a place that anchors

her journey of imaginative freedom. Even if the modernist home was threatened in 1939, Zoë herself was only temporarily adrift, in a liminal period rather than a marginal predicament. For her, the modernist home was always a possibility, and she was able, ultimately, to create an empowering version. If some of her contemporaries were limited by the constraints imposed on women in Canada and the United States, Zoë Browne-Clayton succeeded in using her journey abroad to create a liberatory version of home.

If the rural French women whose stories Deborah Reed-Danahay tells freshly for us were more modest in the means at their disposal, they were at least similarly positioned to imagine attaining a positive dream of home. In her essay "Desire, Migration, and Attachment to Place: Narratives of Rural French Women," Reed-Danahay compares the life stories of three rural French women, revealing how these women's published biographies reflect "transcendent French values of place and home" even as the women turn those values to their advantage in powerfully (re)creating their identities.

Reed-Danahay accomplishes at least three things in her examination of these published autobiographies. First, she addresses the issue of mediated tellings. While Caroline Brettell becomes her mother's interlocutor, weaving her own telling of her mother's story within a tapestry of quotes from her mother's own letters, the issues of narrativity in Reed-Danahay's essay are more complicated, taking us even further from the illusion of unmediated experience. Reed-Danahay tells twice- and thrice-told tales, with hidden agendas slipping unbidden from between the lines of the text, as it were. In the texts Reed-Danahay examines, three rural French women tell their stories from the perspective of old age—with a variety of personal motives one might assume for constructing their life stories into organized narratives as they do. They tell these stories to a variety of male interlocutors, each with his own motives for writing them down. Finally, the stories have been published, Reed-Danahay informs us, in the larger context of a highly gendered French nostalgia for the home of the countryside.

Second, in contextualizing the tellings of three French rural women's life stories, Reed-Danahay accomplishes at once, a nuanced examination of the inherently mediated nature of narrativity—which is always laden with individual and collective cultural understandings and intentions—as well as her stated goal of "understanding images of rural women, and ideologies of family and gender in French popular culture during the late twentieth century." Third, in drawing upon these published autobiographical texts to elucidate ideologically heavy images of French rural women, Reed-Danahay brings these women's own desires to bear on their stories. Here, their own ideas of and desires for home emerge—however mediated by the passing of time, changing personal circumstance, and editing by others' hands. If their autobiographies are publically consumed nostalgically, the details effervescing from these three women's narratives attest to lives lived through everyday



sensuous and emotional experience, and to their attachment to the idea that not only were choices available to French rural women, but that the ones they made were good.

In “Foreign Spirits inside the Family: Vodou Home on the Ex-Slave Coast,” Judy Rosenthal explores the play of the homely (*heimlich*) and unhomely (*unheimlich*), the movement across oppositions as spirits of formerly enslaved persons from the north make themselves at home in southern hosts descended from the same southerners who once owned them.

Rosenthal’s portrait of Gorovodu and Mama Tchamba spirit possession is moving and beautiful, weaving lines from a poem composite/interpretation of Gorovodu evocations with Rosenthal’s narrativized tellings of the (un)canny lives she found ethnographic home with. For the Gorovodu and Mama Tchamba (women) spirit hosts Rosenthal came to know, home is always “in-the-midst,” always a haven in movement. Indeed, Rosenthal foregrounds such movement in her chapter, treating the essay’s sections as movable pieces in an ethnographic translation of a traveling-home. That is, these women who host northern spirits constantly make home between house and *zogbe* (Gorovodu sacred space), between woman and spirit host; more pointedly, they make home by bringing the foreign into the familiar, the spiritual into the corporeal.

The women spirit hosts Rosenthal remembers for us in this volume live a transgression of boundaries, enunciating difficult oppositions—that is, speaking paradoxes—yet leaving them trailing unfurled but not explained away. One of the most troubling oppositions is that of echoing slavery in the act of spirit possession. The spirits of formerly enslaved persons were real, named people—victims of the Atlantic slave trade who were purchased by members of Ewe and Mina lineages in southern Ghana, Togo, and Benin. While the southern lineages incorporated “bought persons” into their homes, eventually making them at home in the broadest sense, southerners continue to remember the inequalities of this process and their debt by making the spirits of slaves at home in their beings. In this way, the past—another binary—is brought into the present, and its most troubling aspects re-imagined, re-lived and re-cognized. While earlier chapters in this volume attest in different ways to the way in which home is realized against its unhomely antitheses, including the notion that the modernist home was made possible through the imagining of others and their disenfranchisement, Rosenthal’s spirit-adepts bring such issues into brutal conscious awareness. Thus, Rosenthal’s narrativized tellings of women whose spirit-husbands accompany them amidst their daily struggles to make a home and financial difficulty is an evocation of home that always dwells with its opposite. More than that, it is a home that recognizes that its real and imagined antitheses are what affords it a cozy space to dwell.

In her haunting poem “Concepts of Home,” Gina Ulysse tells intertwining stories of home and anti-home, home and exile, thus reminding us of the

play of oppositions we have witnessed throughout the volume. Indeed, Ulysse's concepts of home are troubled by exile and intrusion throughout her story. She begins with a memory of her grandmother, disturbed by the contents of Milan Kundera's novel *Immortality*, and she ends lost in a search for home that itself threatens the possibility of finding it.

Within the poem's exilic framing, Ulysse speaks memories of home with the dexterity of the best local color writer: "I skipped about in my yellow flowered dress / the blue bay / the escovitched fish / small strips of kan in a plastic bag tied with a twist / for the tourist price of 30 J / the smell of and the taste of blue mountain coffee. . . ." Yet she does not let us forget that race is a bitter and often violent intrusion that cannot let home be quite realized. Postcolonial race intrudes in the faces of tourists relaxing beneath the almond tree that Ulysse's narrator claims ownership to, that Ulysse's narrator "wanted to climb / I jumped trying to catch extended branches / jumped again." It intrudes in the sugar that must be white and refined on hotel tables rather than raw and brown and in the deaths of unborn children that contrast so bitterly with white tourists talking pleasantly beneath almond trees.

Ulysse speaks the longing of home eloquently and lucidly, but in counterpoint to the modernist imaginings of Marie in Straight's essay, for example, Ulysse's narrator does not seem to be seeking a home of "white, refined sugar," a home conjured in the minds of privileged Others, but instead a home free of the intrusions of postcolonial violence and poverty. Ulysse's narrator seems to want to reach the branches of her own trees, taste fruits "soft enough to let spots of juice seep through," hold the stones of home "tightly within closed fists." Her desire for home possesses her as she tries to possess it, and yet, tragically, she can neither find home nor want it as long as it struggles in blood that kills children "in their mother's womb."

Idealized notions of home, especially, though not exclusively, Euro-American modernist versions, surface forcefully throughout these essays. Yet the variety of women's understandings of home in these essays reveal the profound complexity of individual experience. Certainly, useful comparisons can be drawn between the narratives explored in these essays: The contrast between home and travel is of continuing salience, and a critique of home is often crucial as well. While such themes are useful in organizing our own understanding, however, often what is most interesting and important is seeing how individual women bring a unique vision to the task of action and self-understanding. Thus, for Zoë Browne-Clayton in Brettell's essay, understanding requires a journey away from home. For Yvonne, Emilie, and Antoinette in very different ways in Reed-Danahay's essay, contentment with one's life choices requires a coming to terms with the contrast between home and travel, rural and urban life. For Stewart, everyday experiences are understood through home as a set of fictional, imagistic promises competing with its dark, at times terrifying antithesis. In Bohls's essay, Mary Prince like-

wise critiques home as a Euro-American modernist fiction in relation to a home of “heart” realized in relation to the people one loves. Gina Ulysse speaks her Haitian home vividly, but contrasts it with the racial exclusions and violence that are simultaneously part of its making and its undoing. Rosenthal brings enslavement into the unstable core of homemaking itself. Zirbel’s ‘Aziza finds home to be a place of patriarchal control and yet one she can leave clandestinely and safely return to. Straight’s Marie likewise leaves home, but in her case she leaves what she perceives to be a home failing to attain the modernist fictions. Yet those very fictions seemingly send Marie on a transgressive journey to find ideal home. Home, then, is often experienced as unhomey—as stifling, controlling, traumatic, or terrifying, and thus as Other to its imagined realness. The unsettling feelings and dialectical contrasts that various ideal versions of home have the potential to reveal should not be permitted, however, to upstage unique experience. Multiple readings/writings of these women’s stories are necessary, including (but not only) those that foreground the incommensurability of their experiences as differently positioned human beings; those that remember that the pain, joy, and longing through which women understand home once had a reality for them as living, breathing, paradoxical beings; and those that keep in mind that these pages are filled with stories the authors told themselves awhile before this book came to print.

## NOTES

1. *Unheimlich* is customarily translated as “uncanny.”
2. There is a vast literature that points up the ways in which Euro-American whiteness, bodies, home, and nation were conceived in racialized and sexualized terms. Edward Said (1978) is seminal. See also, for example, Taussig 1984; Mosse 1985; Gilman 1985; Stoler 1989. Also important is Partha Chatterjee’s (1990) work on the ways in which Indian nationalists constructed understandings of world and home that critically responded to British understandings of world and home.
3. See also Romero and Stewart 1999 concerning the importance of women telling stories to one another across sameness and difference to effect liberatory social change.
4. See Reed-Danahay 1997 for a history of this term.
5. Although the notion of partial truths has gained ascendancy in recent anthropological scholarship, Margaret Mead (1949) was probably among the first, if not the first, anthropologist to frame the ethnographer’s limited position as a problem in need of attention (see Lutkehaus 1995).
6. See also Mary E. John (1996) for an engaging, critical examination of the tense problematics associated with locating home for feminists internationally, and Caren Kaplan (1996) for a feminist critique of the tropes “home,” “exile,” and “travel.”

7. Julia Kristeva's exploration of the foreigner is a *tour-de-force* that indeed takes us back to ancient Greece. It is inspirational in illuminating the West's preoccupation with self in relation to others. A word of caution is needed, however, to underscore that Kristeva's is a presentist archeology of Otherness that does not take cultural difference into account. Notwithstanding the legibility of discourses about citizen and foreigner in ancient texts, it is challenging at best to decipher ancient Greek understandings of self as they pertained to such discourses.

8. It is possible to find the crucible of humanistic thought in the fascination with human history that coincided with Europe's sixteenth-century colonial "discoveries" of soon-to-be colonized peoples and objects—discoveries that, moreover, raised philosophical and theological questions concerning the (cartographic) universal order of things. The seventeenth century put these discoveries to more dramatic effect, culminating in the undermining of medieval Christian cosmology, most notably in the person of Galileo. It is Descartes, however, to whom we owe the greatest debt for the dualistic fictions we continue to grapple with presently.

9. Ironically, Descartes was attempting to reconcile physics and Christian theology. In dividing humans into two beings—one physical and subject to natural laws, and the other a soul who thinks—Descartes helped make humans an object of scientific measure and study. Thus, when empiricism based on observation and measurement came into its own in the eighteenth century, human minds became as "real" as human bodies. This perhaps strange twist on Descartes seems to have added to Descartes' mind/body distinction a separation between a mind of which we can only ask "How?" from a soul of which we can only ask "Why?"

10. Moreover, those problems were ever transforming in historical context, making dualistic thinking impossible to pin down from one context to the next. This renders problematic the premise of Jeffrey Bell's (1998) otherwise thoroughly illuminating study of the problem of difference. Bell does a wonderful job of explicating the thought of Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze but homogenizes the problem of difference as it transforms over time and perhaps misses the ways in which they and other thinkers (most notably Charles Sanders Peirce) might open a space for an alternative to rather than a solution for the problem of difference.

11. See especially Ruth Behar 1993 for a creative and compelling narration of the crossings between women at the margin, center, and points-in-between.

12. Indeed, I would suggest that there is no easy separation between discursive and material realities, while simultaneously adding the caution that such a statement should not lead us to write as if people were texts, lacking in sensuous experience, suffering, and joy. See Michael Jackson's point (1996) that "the domain of knowledge is inseparable from the world in which people actually live and act" (4).

13. See, for example, Bauman 1977, 1986; Daniel 1984; Briggs 1988; Briggs and Bauman 1992; Tedlock and Mannheim 1995.

14. Csordas is in excellent company on this, following rich feminist scholarship on this issue, including Haraway (1991). He also mentions Julia Kristeva's (e.g., 1980, 1991) radical critique of representation. See Csordas 1994 for an excellent critical review of anthropological and feminist approaches to the body.

15. I am using “objective text” with an oblique nod to Csordas’ (following Barthes) distinction between “text” and “textuality” (Csordas 1994:12). In that formulation, text is the object, treated as such, while textuality refers to a multivalent methodological field. Csordas twins this with body (as object) and embodiment (as methodological field). By “objective text,” I mean to cross Csordas’ “text” and “textuality,” emphasizing that our best attempts to disclose the text as a rich methodological field still treat narrativized human experience as textual objects. It may be that our best route to remembering the *person* would be to lay claim to and evoke prelinguistic experience (within which body and mind are irreducible). See Tyler (1987) and Kristeva (1986), both of whom Csordas mentions.

16. I am referring to prelinguistic experience here. See Kristeva 1980, 1991.

17. A theory of perception capable of taking immediate experience and its relationship to moral action is necessary here. I take this issue up in “World-Making and Belief” (forthcoming in *Talking About Religion*, ed. James White, University of Notre Dame Press).

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