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“The Work We Came Here to Do”: Crossings, An Introduction

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“The Work We Came Here to Do”: *Crossings, An Introduction**

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You stop in the middle of the field and, under your breath, ask the spirits—animals, plants, y tus muertos—to help you string together a bridge of words. What follows is your attempt to give back to nature, los espíritus, and others a gift wrested from the events in your life, a bridge home to the self.¹

Crossings as Offering

I start this introduction with acknowledgments and gratitude for the world around me. I thank my grandmothers, my mother, my sister, my best friends, and all the women of my family—alive and deceased—who have daily inspired the work I pursue. Thank you to my trans* and non-binary femme sisters/siblings for supporting me in my journey, for teaching me the sacredness of femininity and that it’s okay to uphold my masculinity too, to love the parts of my body with which I struggle. Thank you to Spirit, my ancestors, *y todos mis santos/as/xs, en especial a San Judas Tadeo*. Thank you to Dr. Patricia White, coordinator of the Gender and Sexuality Studies Program at Swarthmore College, and Maria Aghazarian, scholarly communications librarian at the Swarthmore College Libraries—this Journal would not have been possible without your assistance and guidance. Thank you to the co-founder of this beautiful Journal, Eva Logan, and to all the contributors to this issue for sharing their vulnerability and wisdom with the world. And finally, thank you to my creative and intellectual ancestors, the Black and Brown women who have inspired the creation of this Journal: Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Alice Walker, Ana-Maurine Lara, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, La Bruja de Texcoco, Carol Boyce Davies, Cherríe Moraga, the women of the Combahee River Collective, Dora Silva Santana, Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Hortense J. Spillers, Kimberle Crenshaw, Krudxs Cubensi (Odaymar Cuesta and Oli Prendes), Lía “La Novia Sirena,” María Lugones, Mayra Santos-Febres, Mikaelah Drullard, M. Jacqui

* Audre Lorde, quoted in M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 303.

¹ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “now let us shift... the path of conocimiento... inner work, public acts” in *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, eds. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Analouse Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002): 540.

Alexander, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, Patricia Hill Collins, Rita Indiana, and so many more.

These acknowledgments are necessary to open this Journal. They are the personal aspects of my life that inform every scholarly decision I make. The personal *is* political, *is* scholarly, *is* wisdom... Above all, this Journal is an offering to all the people I have mentioned and to all the women and queer femmes of color around the world, those who stand beside us as accomplices, before us as elders, and behind us as ancestors: take this spiritual offering. Take this Journal as an altar—read it, feel it, gaze upon it, contemplate it with an eye for aesthetics, for decoration, for that which is shiny and new. Writing of a “theory of altars,” Natassja B. Gunasena states, “the theory of altars, a theory that thousands of Black and Brown women create and recreate daily in their work, resistance and survival, is one that challenges us *to cross epistemological and disciplinary boundaries* to generate necessary and complex dialogues.”² Additionally, Lara Medina writes of altars in the lives of racialized women and femmes, “[creating] sacred space is fundamental to nourishing our holistic sense of self and for reminding us who we are. Altars, or shrines, feed our spirit and psyche as they make visible our intent of bridging the physical and the spiritual realms and of sustaining the relationship between the two.”³ *Crossings*, then, is an altar of its own. It is the culmination of the creative, scholarly, and spiritual labor of the contributors and editors, as well as all of our intellectual ancestors. It is an offering “that challenges us *to cross epistemological and disciplinary boundaries*” in the pursuit of healing and knowledge.

The initial call for *Crossings: Swarthmore Undergraduate Research Journal* came from a lack of publications dedicated to the topic. Undergraduate research is abundant, but undergraduate feminist and queer research—especially that written by/about women and femmes of color—is few and far between. This is not because there is a lack of interest, or a deficit in quality research, but because there are no outlets for our kind of necessary activist, creative, political, and spiritual work. In the call to our contributors, we asked, what does it mean to cross boundaries within interdisciplinary feminist research? What are the kinds of epistemological traversals that arise at the Crossings, which push us, in the words of M. Jacqui Alexander, “to apprehend (...) new ways of being and knowing and to plot the different metaphysics that are needed to move away from living alterity premised

² Natassja B. Gunasena, “I am Pouring Sweet Water on my Altar for You: Theorizing Women of Color Feminism at the Junctures of Storm/water, Femininity, Race, and Power,” M.A. Thesis (University of Texas at Austin, 2015): 22–23 (emphasis added).

³ Lara Medina, “Creating Sacred Space” in *Voices from the Ancestors: Xicanx and Latinx Spiritual Expressions and Healing Practices*, eds. Lara Medina and Martha G. Gonzales (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019): 37.

in difference to bring intersubjectivity premised in relationality and solidarity”⁴ To live an epistemological, methodological, and personal-political Crossings, Alexander reminds us, “we would need to adopt, as daily practice, ways of being and of relating, modes of analyzing, and strategies of organizing in which we constantly mobilize identification and solidarity, across all borders, as key elements in the repertoire of risks we need to take to see ourselves as part of one another, even in the context of difference.”⁵

Alexander’s understanding of Black, feminist spiritual activism is based on transitions and movements: “These metaphors of links, charts, journeys, bridges, and borders are neither idle nor incidental, however, as we come to terms with the different cartographies of feminist struggle in different parts of the world; our different histories; where they change course and how they diverge.”⁶ It is both Alexander’s and our call that the contributors listened to in their own Crossings of epistemological and methodological boundaries, in their charting of new journeys, in their crossing the borders of feminist research. Contributors have engaged in forms of scholarly work that are also healing; and, as Alexander notes, “to function as an antidote to oppression, healing work, that is, spiritual labor, assumes different forms, while anchored in reconstructing a terrain that is both exterior and interior.”⁷ This scholarly-spiritual labor, then, is what enables us as contributors and editors to, in the words of Audre Lorde, “do the work we came here to do.”

M. Jacqui Alexander & *Pedagogies of Crossing*

Borderlands. Boundaries. Bridges. Crossroads. Horizons. Transitions. These are all words associated with fluidity, movement, the constant flux of energies, political and spiritual. But why Crossings? Why Alexander? What called us to this work? Why not any other word or any other scholar? Crossings is not an easy metaphor. It is a painful, bloody, and visceral (re-)memory of Blackness in the construction of empire and modernity. It rises from the Middle Passage. That more than three-hundred-year journey across the Atlantic, over and over again, is the space of liminal Crossings that left Black bodies in suspension, re-constructed—or, perhaps, unmade—into the chattel of white men. It is a fraught memory, tied together by aquatic histories of (dis)possession. As one of the contributors to this issue, Eden Segbefia, explains, “the ocean, specifically, plays a vital role in holding memory as a site of intense and expansive grief. Here, Alexander refers to a literal

⁴ Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 7–8. I use several orthographical notations in referring to “crossings,” Crossing/Crossings, and *Crossings*. The spelling without capitalization (crossings) refers to the act of moving across boundaries; it is the verb form of the constant movements we undertake as activists, artists, practitioners, and scholars. Crossing/Crossings (both singular), with capitalization, is the metaphorical and theoretical space of the Middle Passage and its re-memory. *Crossings* simply refers to the title of our altar-Journal-offering.

⁵ *Ibid.*: 265.

⁶ *Ibid.*: 264.

⁷ *Ibid.*: 312.

crossing of bodies during the transatlantic slave trade, but also an ontological crossing between spirit and flesh, between the human and the nonhuman. Grief, too, accompanied this crossing.” For Alexander, “pedagogies that are derived from the Crossing fit neither easily nor neatly into those domains that have been imprisoned within modernity’s secularized episteme. Thus, they disturb and reassemble the inherited divides of Sacred and secular, the embodied and disembodied, for instance, pushing us to take seriously the dimensions of spiritual labor that make the sacred and the disembodied palpably tangible and, therefore, constitutive of the lived experience of millions of women and men in different parts of the world.”⁸ The Crossings is a place of re-memory: a crossroads of violence and generation, of dismemberment and re-membering. Gunasena aptly notes that “‘water always remembers’ as Alexander reminds us, and like the practice of water gazing, the woman of color solidarity she invokes is never given to easy fluidity, but rather requires active, painful, work, learning and unlearning languages, making creative, courageous space for all of our weighted sorrows.”⁹

There is nothing easy about Crossings; nothing simple about fluidity; nothing passive about the movement of these oceanic currents, filled with residues of memory, pieces of history, scraps of lives lost and regained. While we choose to engage Crossings—to contemplate the ambivalence of creativity and pain found within them—there are many other ways in which feminist activist-scholars have theorized similar kinds of movements. In keeping with the aquatic/oceanic, Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley writes of “transoceanic currents,” for example, “these are theoretical and ethnographic borderlands at sea, where elements or currents of historical, conceptual, and embodied maritime experience come together to transform racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized selves.”¹⁰ Similarly, Black trans* feminist Dora Silva Santana, speaking on transatlantic poetics or “the right to write,” says, “The transatlantic is in that space of simultaneity in which the body is also water and energy, the water is also energy and body, and the energy is also body and water. Transing, in this sense, is finding that space of transition with(in) body-water-energy. Water is the embodiment of trans orientation. The illusion of horizontality contrasts with the shape-shifting, leaking, bleeding, in-corporating, *em corpo*; water is membrane, burial, means, memory, and a connection.”¹¹ Other feminist activists, artists, and scholars, moreover, have explored the borders, boundaries, comings-together, intersections, and interstices of Crossings by many names and given particular contexts.

⁸ *Ibid*: 7.

⁹ Gunasena, “I am Pouring Sweet Water,” 12.

¹⁰ Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14, no. 2–3 (2008): 192.

¹¹ Dora Silva Santana, “Transitionings and Returnings: Experiments with the Poetics of Transatlantic Water,” *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 4, no. 2 (May 2017): 183.

The Boundaries of Feminist Research

Crossings is an apt metaphor for Alexander. She describes “the experience of freedom in boundary crossing”—the same freedom we find in *Crossings*.¹² But what are some of the other ways that scholars have theorized the boundaries of feminist research?

Borderlands and Bridges

Among Alexander’s intellectual ancestors is the Chicana activist-scholar Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1942–2004). She is important enough to Alexander so as to receive a chapter of *Pedagogies* dedicated to her and Cherríe Moraga’s edited volume *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Alexander writes of Anzaldúa:

Your death was tragic, Gloria, not only because you died alone, but we relied on you as artist to provide our sanity, and we kept asking for more while you wrestled with terror day and night—the reality, as you said, of having a disease that could cost you your feet, your eyes, your creativity, the life of the writer you worked so hard to build... life itself (...) You who wrote the borderlands that we appropriate to signal how “queer” we were. There is no romance or seduction to living on the borders. You taught us about the need to shift consciousness, to build common ground, to move from the militarized zone to the roundtable, to view the artist as healer, without separation. You taught us that our politics would not be effective without a spiritualized consciousness. *Conocimiento*. You taught us about Divine intelligence. But we consumed without digesting. You taught us; the question remains, What did we learn?¹³

As Alexander aptly notes, Anzaldúa has taught us much. We, too, have decided to “appropriate” the borderlands, to use them as another space for understanding the Crossings.

Anzaldúa was among the first and most prominent “Third World Feminists” to theorize racialized women and femme’s in-between existence in borderlands and bridges. According to her, the borderlands “is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is a constant state of transition (...) *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal.’”¹⁴ The borderlands that we inhabit, then, is a non-place; it is the “residue” of our existence,

¹² Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 258.

¹³ *Ibid*: 285–286 (emphasis original).

¹⁴ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987): 3 (emphasis original).

a place of constant “transition.” This place, like the Crossings, is one of ambivalence, contradiction, *mestizaje*/mixing... It is painful and visceral. It demands us to find new ways of surviving, strategies for resisting, and tactics for overcoming. Anzaldúa writes, “*cuando vives en la frontera*/people walk through you, the wind steals your voice,/you’re a *burra*, *buey*, scapegoat,/forerunner of a new race,/half and half—both woman and man, neither—a new gender (...) To survive the Borderlands/you must live *sin fronteras*/be a crossroads.”¹⁵ La frontera, the borderlands, is a state of non-being or larger-than-being; it is to be something else, something Other. But the question remains, just how do you survive the contradiction of the borderlands?

Like the borderlands, bridges have been key to the legacy Anzaldúa has left behind for us. They are equally painful, as the title of this edited volume, *This Bridge Called My Back*, painfully connotes. Bodies that are constantly crossed, painfully crossed... For Anzaldúa, “there is an enormous contradiction in being a bridge (...) This task—to be a bridge, to be a fucking crossroads for goddess sake.”¹⁶ But what is a bridge?

While there are contradictions—ambivalences—to being a bridge, there is something more; something more generative, transformative. In a follow-up to *This Bridge Called My Back*, Anzaldúa and other feminists of color began to theorize a new way of perceiving the bridge; one that is, perhaps, less painful. In *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, Anzaldúa continues to capture the nuance of bridging:

Whenever I glimpse the arch of this bridge my breath catches. Bridges are thresholds to other realities, archetypal, primal symbols of shifting consciousness. They are passageways, conduits, and connectors that connote transitioning, crossing borders, and changing perspectives. Bridges span liminal (threshold) spaces between worlds, spaces I call *nepantla*, a *Nahuatl* word meaning tierra entre medio. Transformations occur in this in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space lacking clear boundaries. *Nepantla es tierra desconocida*, and living in this liminal zone means being in a constant state of displacement—an uncomfortable, even alarming feeling.¹⁷

Here, the key is transformation. The bridge, that place that women of color call home, is a space of transformation, liminality, and endless possibility. Like the

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 194–195 (emphasis original).

¹⁶ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “La Prieta” in *The Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002): 229.

¹⁷ Gloria E. Anzaldúa, “Preface: (Un)natural bridges, (Un)safe spaces” in *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*, eds. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and Analouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002): 1 (emphasis added).

borderlands, a non-place, the bridge is an “in-between space, an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, always-in-transition space.” It is much like the Crossings, which refuses to be delineated by boundaries, epistemological, gendered, linguistic, national, racialized, temporal, or any other.

Intersections, Matrices, and Transversals

A discussion of Crossings—with its emphasis on the experiences of queer, trans*, non-binary, and racialized women and femmes—would be incomplete without an understanding of other kinds of crossroads: intersections, matrices, and transversals. Those spaces where ideologies, identities, languages, symbols, and systems violently collide—the turbulent transoceanic currents in which the Crossings resides.

Among the earliest theorists of what has now been termed “intersectionality” are the women of the Black lesbian feminist organization, the Combahee River Collective. Their statement, also published in *This Bridge Called My Back*, speaks to the specificities of their experiences as poor Black lesbians—experiences which were not captured by the Black Power movement, Women’s Rights Movement, or even by other cisheterosexual Black feminists, at the time. In 1979, addressing the importance of their movement, the Combahee River Collective proclaimed: “The most general statement of our politics at the present time would be that we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. The synthesis of these oppressions creates the conditions of our lives.”¹⁸ This early statement on intersectionality illustrated how racialized women’s oppression was the coming-together of institutionalized and systemic forces—those of “racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression.” This is not dissimilar to the most prominent theorist of intersectionality, legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw, who coined the term. Dealing with the violence experienced by her Black women clients, Crenshaw argued that intersectionality was useful to understand how “race and gender intersect in shaping structural and representational aspects of violence against women of color.”¹⁹ Intersectionality has been a key framework to feminist theory, which has lacked in its attention to the experiences of disabled, poor, queer, and racialized women and femmes.

Later Black feminists, like Patricia Hill Collins, expanded on intersectionality to capture even more specificity, especially when dealing with the projects of domination that empire and modernity represent. She theorized

¹⁸ Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement” in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherríe L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: Third Woman Press, 2002): 234.

¹⁹ Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1244.

“matrices”—or a matrix of domination—and transversals—or a transversal politics—to understand larger forms of violence (and how to resist them) than intersectionality could account for. Hill Collins writes, then, “intersectionality refers to particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation. Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice. In contrast, the matrix of domination refers to how these intersecting oppressions are actually organized. Regardless of the particular intersections involved, structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal domains of power reappear across quite different forms of oppression.”²⁰ So, while intersectionality refers to the crossing of identities, the matrix of domination could refer to how major *systems* of oppression intersect and are organized on a global scale, “regardless of the particular intersections involved.” Where other Black feminists have been unwilling or unable to deal with the global and transnational systems of oppression, Hill Collins understands that U.S.-based experiences cannot be the end in itself of Black feminism. In discussing the work of Nira Yuval Davis’ “transversal politics,” then, Hill Collins grounds coalitional politics between Black and Brown women on a transnational scale, further emphasizing the kinds of boundary-crossing that *Crossings* calls upon us: “Within this framework, African-American women and other comparable groups constitute ‘political actors’ or ‘messengers’ aiming to craft a Black feminist ‘message.’ Within the assumptions of transversalism, participants bring with them a ‘rooting’ in their own particular group histories, but at the same time realize that in order to engage in dialogue across multiple markers of difference, they must ‘shift’ from their own centers.”²¹ These kinds of movements, *Crossings*, journeys across experiences are the necessary forms of resistance to global projects of domination that are acted through and upon the bodies of racialized women and femmes.

(World-)Traveling

Another Third World feminist to deal with the trappings of *Crossings*, but in another form, with particular attention to the ways we resist, is Argentine feminist María Lugones. She theorizes “world-traveling” and “playfulness” as women of color strategies that allow for a coalitional politics based on resistance—not the resistance of victims but that of loving accomplices. For Lugones, women and femmes of color all inhabit multiple worlds that we are constantly crossing, moving between one and another in order to survive the realities of racial, gender, and sexual, and class oppression. Being that we inhabit our own worlds, what is at stake in crossing into each other’s worlds? Lugones writes, “I am incomplete and unreal

²⁰ Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000): 18.

²¹ *Ibid.*: 245.

without other women. I am profoundly dependent on others without having to be their subordinate, their slave, their servant.”²² This understanding of coalition is one in which radical relationality or “[profound dependence]” is not synonymous with subordination or subjugation to the will and worlds of others. Instead, it is to understand that even within and across difference, there are forms of identification that allow us to struggle together. We do not need to be the same person to fight the same battles, Lugones argues: “to the extent that we face each other as oppressed, we do not want to identify with each other, we repel each other as we are seeing each other in the same mirror. As resistant, we are kept apart by social fragmentation. To identify with each other, we need to engage in resistant practices that appear dangerous. We have not realized the potential lying in our becoming interdependently resistant.”²³ To engage in world-traveling, then, is to become “interdependently resistant,” not oppressed; it is to find a way of coalition which emphasizes our strategies of survival, more so than the tactics of our killing. I am particularly attracted to a combined understanding of Crossings and world-traveling because of its emphasis on playfulness and love, as opposed to oppression and pain—even if these are important parts of the Crossings.

Lugones can theorize her coming-to-consciousness as a woman of color alongside coming to love her mother—a relationship which is, especially for women of color, fraught with contradictions, as Gunasena argues, “the through-line between mother and daughter is rarely legible, is often bloody and blurry with historical waters.”²⁴ Upon reflecting on why she didn’t want to identify with her mother—to commit the same mistakes, to become the same person—Lugones concludes that it is ultimately playfulness and world-traveling which allowed this identification-as-love: “We are fully dependent on each other for the possibility of being understood and without this understanding we are not intelligible, we do not make sense, we are not solid, visible, integrated; we are lacking. So traveling to each other’s ‘worlds’ would enable us to be through loving each other.”²⁵ Through her framework we can begin to ask, what would it mean to *be* through loving? How would this theory-praxis standpoint based on radical feeling—*sentimiento*—shift the boundaries of feminist research? These are among the questions that have motivated our call and the responses from our contributors in *Crossings*.

Discussion of Articles

For our inaugural issue of *Crossings: Swarthmore Undergraduate Feminist Research Journal*, we received an overwhelming amount of submissions that did exactly what we asked—cross the boundaries of undergraduate feminist research.

²² María Lugones, “Playfulness, ‘World’-Traveling, and Loving Perception” in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003): 75.

²³ *Ibid.*: 76.

²⁴ Gunasena, “I am Pouring Sweet Water,” 2.

²⁵ Lugones, “Playfulness,” 76.

This response from undergraduates all over the world illustrates just how urgent a publication of this nature is. As with other interdisciplinary journals, it is often difficult to find ways in which articles from vastly different fields on varied topics could somehow be grouped into a single issue based on the Crossings. In order to account for the diversity of the articles represented in this issue, I have chosen to organize the research into “clusters” based on content, methods, and style. These clusters are “Queer Studies”; “Category of ‘Human’ and the Body”; “Science/Medicine”; “‘Third World’ Feminism(s)”; and “Personal Narrative.” While there is significant overlap among the clusters—as several articles cross even the heuristic borders which I have created to organize this issue—I have designated each article into the category which it most *represents*. What follows is a short discussion and outline of our contributors’ articles.

Queer Studies

Our contributor Max D. López Toledano’s article, “The Afterlife of Jennifer Laude: Trans Necropolitics and Trans Utopias,” explores the tragic (after-)life of one trans* Filipina woman, Jennifer Laude (1987–2014). On 11 October 2014, Jennifer Laude was murdered in Olongapo, Philippines, by Joseph Scott Pemberton, a Lance Corporal in the United States Marine Corps. He was convicted on homicide charges on 1 December 2015 but was later pardoned by President Rodrigo Duterte in September 2020. What ensued was mass protests from trans* rights and anti-imperial/decolonial organizations in the Philippines and abroad demanding justice for the life and death of Jennifer Laude. Analyzing news reports, art, and protest advertisements related to her death, López Toledano asks, “for the people who *laud* her, what does Jennifer Laude’s afterlife mean?”

Taking into consideration the work of Achille Mbembe’s *Necropolitics* and José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, López Toledano analyzes the materiality of Laude’s life, interrogating how an afterlife can be mobilized to disrupt the death-dealing politics of trans* lives and imagine livable futures. She argues that “Laude’s afterlife, in this sense, is extremely palpable: its affective reach is expansive, as the political action that has been done in her name produces moments that not only memorialize her but also counteract the reality of her death.” Ultimately, they “situate Laude’s afterlife in the context of continued necropolitical violence” to conclude that “Laude’s memorialization has been a crucial intervention that reconfigures trans bodies in life.”

Category of “Human” and the Body

Many boundaries still need to be crossed within feminist research. Queer of color critique—particularly trans* and queer futurities—begins to chart journeys into new grounds of inquiry. But what are some of the most solid boundaries that we have yet to cross? Where has feminist research—and many other fields, for that matter—been the most resistant? The human and the body are sites of contentious theorization, shaky borders in the construction of our theories and practices. The

articles in this cluster attempt to deconstruct these categories from something “fixed” or “static” to something more “malleable,” more “constructed” and “abstract” than humanist discourse has allowed.

Also grounded within queer theory, our contributor Jared Z. Sloan’s piece “Sitting Here with You in the Future: Reimagining the Human through Digital Art” attempts to challenge these categories through its analysis of different artists’ interactions with digital worlds. Taking into account Afropessimist and Black feminist theories of the “Human” such as those of Frank B. Wilderson III and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson—supplemented by the radical world-building of M. Jacqui Alexander—Sloan analyzes digital art by queer Canadian artist Lucas LaRoche; non-binary Tanzanian artist Arafa Hamadi; and Black South African artist Natalie-Ann Paneng. Sloan identifies Wilderson and Jackson’s work as the basis for his understanding of the relationship of between Blackness and the “Human”: “[T]hese constructions of the Human position Blackness as its nadir (...) Under this framework, instead of conceiving of Blackness as non-Human, it is recognized as embodying the limit of the Human. In fact, it is only through the nadir of Blackness that the Human can cohere as an analytical frame.” Analyzing the radical world-building and queer/Black futurities of these digital artists, Sloan argues that, unlike Wilderson’s Afropessimist position on the destruction of the world, we must look to the radical futures imagined by Black feminist scholars like Alexander: “I contend that while the Human *must* be abolished in the pursuit of a truly free society, this abolitionist project, in the same vein as the generations of prison abolitionist organizers in the US, is primarily a constructive project focused on building new worlds rather than merely destroying the old.”

Another one of our contributors who questions the category of the “Human” and understands the violence it imposes on non-human species is Anisha Prakash. In “Masculinized Sovereignty: Understanding Violence Towards Mice and the Nonhuman,” Prakash combines personal narrative experiences of her research as a chemist and gender studies student, stating, “[t]here is no question that I, as an animal researcher, commit ethical crimes: I confine a mouse in a small cage, take it away from its family, anesthetize it, and physically take its body apart.” She utilizes frameworks like “masculinized sovereignty,” the “Black captive body,” and the “masculine state” to understand how hierarchies of the “Human” are violently imposed upon both non-cisgender-male/non-heterosexual/non-White humans and non-human species. Situating her research in the context of scientific and medical intervention, Prakash concludes, “I view the lab as a site of social advancement where the differences between humans and nonhumans create a community of shared purpose. However, an interrogation of the lab as a site of violence can help us better understand how the State’s capitalist modes of advancement and production harm those of Indigenous people, Black women, and other minorities.”

Two of our contributors have submitted a unique piece to *Crossings*: Yeh Seo Jung and Ray Craig’s zine, which was the product of their independent study course

at Swarthmore College, “Queer Ecologies.” While the zine could have easily fit into the “queer studies” cluster, I decided to place it within “Human and the body” because of how it *mobilizes* queer theory. The authors hold that “[w]hile queer theory most directly interrogates the normative structure of heterosexuality both in humans and in biology, more broadly, these studies include analyses of hierarchy, power, and value.” In other words, their *use* of queer theory does more than highlight the “normative structure of heterosexuality”; it deconstructs hierarchies of being (human) through its application of queer theory to biology and environmental studies. In analyzing her own queer body in relation to nature, Jung writes, “[t]he way a clownfish can slip from being father to mother to father again, how trees change their colors in the fall, how my queer body fits into the landscape seamlessly, as if it belongs there against all the odds. These are the things that I think about when I think about queer.” Jung and Craig’s use of queer theory in nature illustrates how the “Human” is intimately tied to the landscapes around it; we rely on so-called “non-human” species to be whole, to live, to thrive... The authors conclude that interconnectivity is key to queer ecology: “*Natureculture* also allows us to describe entangled multispecies histories and worlds that are more than human, encompassing hippo and human alike. It contests the dominant paradigm that separates man from animal.”

“Third World” Feminism(s)

There are many borders and boundaries that, even in the twenty-first century, we must confront as feminist activist-scholars—national borders among them. This research cluster questions the very nature of feminism by pluralizing it—feminisms. By taking into account the work of racialized women and femmes outside of the U.S., the contributors in this section disrupt feminist trends that uphold Western, patriarchal values without acknowledging them. In its failure to deal with transnational feminisms, diasporic feminisms, “Third World” feminisms, U.S.-based feminists have replicated many of the same issues they seek to dismantle with their research.

Our contributor Eden Segbefia’s personal narrative-research article, “Àşẹ After Man: The Rupture of the Christian-Colonial Project as Decolonial Ceremony,” precisely questions Western values through its use of Afro-diasporic spiritual traditions. Through their use of their own spiritual experiences, and the knowledge of Black Caribbean feminists M. Jacqui Alexander and Sylvia Wynter, Segbefia deconstructs the Christian-Colonial framework which dominates in the West, even in the most “benign” strands of U.S.-based feminism. In describing their experience whale-watching in Bahia, Brazil, Segbefia muses: “These nonhuman lives were much more than I had been taught. Humpback whales can immerse themselves in 700 feet of water for up to thirty minutes. Emerging from the papery thin walls of a cocoon, this inquiry, too, surfaced from the depths of the ocean. It appeared there millennia ago. I believe strongly that the personal is political but what of the spiritual? What of the limits of the personal? What of flesh and spirit intertwined

or... disentangled, ruptured, by the force of the Christian colonial project?” These personal spiritual reflections are grounded in the kind of spiritual labor that *Crossings* seeks to offer the world—scholarly work as healing work; theoretical labor as political labor; analysis as spirituality... Segbefia, then, “aim[s] to view Afro-diasporic spiritual concepts not as the antithesis of Christian coloniality but as a decolonial framework that could demolish Christian coloniality and its effects.” They conclude that “[u]pholding right relationship between humans and the (un)natural world saves the lives of many, both beings whose lives are recognized as life and beings whose lives are not. Under the regime of Christian colonialism, it is difficult to maintain right relationship but not impossible. In fact, it becomes that much more meaningful and important to, in the face of hierarchy and oppression, hold ceremony, to hold ourselves, and those we love. And in the process, we detach from all that fails to recognize the vital force within us.”

Two contributors have separately dealt with the historical-mythical figures of Malintzin-La Malinche. She is, perhaps, the most renowned woman of pre-Conquest and Conquest Mesoamerica due to her extraordinary language abilities. Through a complicated and not completely known story, Malintzin ended up in the hands of Hernán Cortés. Fluent in several Indigenous languages of Mesoamerica, she was able to learn Spanish and became the enslaved tongue (translator) of Cortés and the Spanish *conquistadores*. In popular (masculinist) Mexican culture, Malintzin is known as La Malinche, the great traitor, the woman who “facilitated” the Conquest of her own nation; she is La Chingada (the Fucked One), who, her enslaved status notwithstanding, has been demonized within the popular cultural imaginary. In her piece “Hija de la Chingada: Visibility and Erasure of La Malinche in Contemporary Mexican Discourse,” contributor Tania Del Moral “[utilizes] Malintzín’s story as a case study [illustrating] the deeper colonial structures that have created the figure of La Malinche as a dishonorable and treacherous woman.” Attending to feminist and post-colonial theory Del Moral “intends to answer in what ways the metaphor of La Malinche has been utilized as a form of abstraction to both uplift and oppress the Mexican woman who is either ‘traditional’ or ‘sexually treacherous.’” She connects popular myths about La Malinche to the kinds of victim-blaming that occur in the now-too-frequent rapes and feminicides of twenty-first-century Mexico. Similarly, in Alma D. Elías Nájera’s “Malintzin: La Mujer Americana,” they argue that “[t]hrough Malintzin’s story, we recognize the interpretation of womanhood as a dehumanized identity that society freely abuses, exploits, polices, and silences, thereby showcasing gendered issues as a cultural concern rooted in settler colonial, misogynistic, and anti-Indigenous principles.” Elías Nájera holds that “[w]ith the careful integration of feminist theory, Malintzin challenges the misogynistic anti-Indigenous narrative by reconfiguring the phallogocentric Mexican psyche and its identity while simultaneously nurturing the wounded nature of the feminine entity in opposition to the adverse effects of patriarchal, manipulative control, and censorship.”

Science/Medicine

The humanities have had difficulty dealing with the supremacy of the medical sciences, what Michel Foucault has termed “the medical gaze,” because of its monopoly on legitimate knowledge. Without falling into the traps of the medical gaze, the contributors in this section attempt to grapple with medical institutions through their own personal narratives, crossing the boundaries of legitimate knowledge by de-centering medical professionals in a field that often lacks attention to the invisible subjectivity at its foundation.

Through their piece that combines autoethnography with literary and social theory, Katrina Jacinto’s “Skin Stories and Family Feelings: The Contradictions of Skin Picking in Mother and Daughter,” asks, “How could our picking be understood, and addressed, through such different terms? How does skin picking simultaneously link and separate my body from my mother’s?” Analyzing what has been termed as “dermatillomania,” a skin picking disorder, according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5), in her and her mother Jacinto utilizes polyvalence and Marcel Mauss’ “techniques of the body,” to question the kinds of relationships we have with our bodies. Jacinto argues that “[a]s a result of this stigma, skin picking becomes pathologized and rendered as a site of medical intervention. Yet, even the notion of ‘medical intervention’ is more pluralistic than one might assume. I was fascinated by how differently my mother and I treated our skin picking (...) This difference, I argue, reveals that skin picking is *polyvalent*.” They conclude that “the same technique can hold different meanings in different bodies (...) These meanings invite different kinds of medical intervention, influenced by our individual beliefs about the body in general and about our own bodies. Our bodies as medical objects thus come to be managed and produced through situated knowledge, practices, and socialities.”

Another contributor, Janessa Harris, also questions the relationship between certain bodies and medical institutions in her piece “Mommy, Me, and We: Why Black Mothers Have Turned to Doulas.” Through the personal narrative of her sister’s pregnancy experience, Harris “investigate[s] the power in reclaiming and returning to these natural forms of healing for the Black community as an act of resistance.” With a narrative style that exudes vulnerability, Harris confronts some of her most entrenched fears: “Here, in this moment and in this paper, I begin to come to terms with the reality that I may be enfolded within that sentence—that phrase, *Black mothers are dying*. I say that now I have no choice to come to terms with this reality because my sister is due to have her baby at the end of this week (...) My sister as a mother was a memory I was excited to witness, but it was my sister as a coffin plate that I could not bear to face.” She concludes that “we choose doulas because they support us. We choose doulas because they help us... Live.”

Personal Narrative

While several of our contributors have already combined scholarly analysis with personal narrative, the articles in this section almost completely take up a narrative style to produce boundary-crossing research that affirms just *how* the personal is political. Refusing to stay within the borders of “acceptable” or “respectable” scholarly voices, these contributors break with conventions to push us into new directions of feminist research.

In her extremely vulnerable piece, “Development of Southern Interracial Marriage and Divorce: Why Our Children Are Code-Switching,” Zoe R. Grant narrates her parents’ interracial marriage and divorce, locating it into the specificity of a U.S. Southern context. Grant states, “I am focusing on the aspect of code-switching amongst mixed-race children (...) The paper will hold the specificity of a case study with the emotion of a biography. I will shift from a third-person point of view, to a first-person point of view, and back again. It is crucial for a better understanding of what their children have gone through, are going through, and what they will continue to go through.” Using notions of code-switching and *mestizaje* informed by Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Grant describes the complexities and contradictions in the lives of mixed-race children, as they attempt to navigate the different cultural worlds in which their experiences are embedded. For Grant, code-switching is not a simple process: “So often with code-switching you don’t even realize you’re doing it. You think you’re just listening to music. You think you’re just being yourself. You don’t realize that being yourself is actually a multitude of people and personalities inside of you that is creating this one person who can carry themselves across borders and conversations. Because you don’t grow up listening to one kind of music, you learn what is put in front of you.” She points to the ways in which a scholarly and personal voice are always already imbricated in any research project.

The final piece for the inaugural issue of *Crossings* is contributor Gabriella Raffetto’s “Sex in the Bible: A Poetic Female Retelling.” This piece of poetry-research breaks many of the conventions of genre and language through its use of scholarly sources, poetic retelling, and a unique use of punctuation and orthography that disrupts the coherence of its reading. It truly crosses boundaries that may be unsettling to its readers. Raffetto states, “[i]n my poetic analysis, I tease out the differences between Biblical and modern conceptions of rape. Many of my ‘episodes’ feature rape narratives between a husband and wife or concubine/slave; in the Biblical narrative, these relations were not considered rape, because rape only constituted relationships outside of legal bounds (...) In stories that originally assumed female perspectives, such as Leah’s and Bathsheba’s, I decided to re-envision their stories—because why should we assume consent when we never hear their thoughts or words?” Taking up the voice of women in the Bible, Raffetto’s fictitious personal narrative blurs and *crosses* the lines between voices, between genres, between time and space, to offer a new reading of an ancient text.

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