

## **UC Santa Cruz**

### **Women of Color Cluster (WOCC) in Collaboration and Conflict Research Journal 2019**

#### **Title**

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Witnessing and Testimony: Hurt, Healing, and Herstories

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## **Women of Color (WOC) in Collaboration and Conflict *Witnessing and Testimony: Hurt, Healing, and Herstories***

The University of California Research Cluster for the Study of Women of Color in Collaboration and Conflict was founded in 1991 by faculty and graduate students at UCSC. Reviving the cluster, and continuing and expanding this work, in 2015-2017, doctoral students from across different California institutions (UC Santa Cruz, UC Davis, UC Berkeley, Hartnell College, California State University, Long Beach) have collaborated to co-author and co-edit this journal on the theme of witnessing and testimony as a decolonial feminist methodology. This collaboration across disciplines has allowed us to build upon our diverse experiences and training as we deeply examine and push the nexus of identity, subjectivity, violence, conflict, and collaboration.

This journal's contributors engage critically with the political, socio-cultural, and spatio-temporal meanings underpinning the category and experience of 'women of color' within and outside of the academy. In *Building on the 'Edge of Each Other's Battles': A Feminist of Color Multidimensional Lens*, previous WOCC members suggest that "women of color feminisms allow for the necessary alignment of mind, body, and spirit, thus making the intangible visible through a vigilance of hierarchical systems of domination and imposed silences due to racism and heteropatriarchy"<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, our understanding of women of color feminisms, methodology and praxis critically engages with, and foregrounds, the political-ness of the term. Our forms of solidarity to each other, to other women of color—at UCSC and beyond—are rooted in understanding the complexities that come with embodying this political identity/space in moments of agreement as well as in conflict.

In this spirit, we invited submissions on the theme of *Witnessing and Testimony: Hurt, Healing, and Herstories* and welcomed all self-identifying — trans, gender non-conforming, and cis — women of color to contribute to this journal. The WOCC multi-campus working group came together as writers, editors, students, teachers, and learners to collaborate and mentor each other in the process of creating this journal culminating in a workshop held in Santa Cruz, California in the Summer of 2016. With a commitment to working across disciplinary boundaries, we invited submissions that include, conventional academic essays, interviews, creative writing, poetry, personal narratives, as well as visual art. To think through our theme, we privileged testimony and personal stories as a critical feminist methodology, as it allows for the understanding, (re)creating, and (re)framing of our identities. To this aim, we sought to destabilize static understandings of the category "women" while holding onto storytelling and

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<sup>1</sup> *Building on "the Edge of Each Other's Battles": A Feminist of Color Multidimensional Lens* Santa Cruz Feminist of Color Collective p. 25

testimony as practices attentive to the ways women/womyn of color have reflected on, and creatively contested, oppressive systems that seek to control bodies of color.

In the process of developing our approach to this journal we were guided by the following questions: In what ways does working in collaboration make visible our lives and experiences, and thus challenge the erasure of us as women of color scholars in academia? How does centering witnessing, testimony, and storytelling, as decolonial feminist methodologies, help us think through/contemplate/complicate our relationship, experience, and/or interactions with any of the topics below? How do these interventions shape and impact, transform and shift, identities and understandings of the categories of womxn of people of color? How can we collectively engage with these different experiences through a decolonial feminist praxis?

What elements of our lives, experiences, or approaches in relation to, or with, the below topics make centering witness, testimony and storytelling uniquely useful or imperative to our survival?

We believe collaborative work develops and puts into practice, alternative methodologies that challenge dominant epistemologies, enabling and facilitating a multidimensional framework for examining identity-formation, as well as political and personal practices.

The stories herein came in response to our clusters call for papers on the theme of "Witnessing and Testimony: Hurt, Healing, and Herstories". These testimonies coalesce to form a body of work that resists and transforms the production of knowledge in academia. As a cluster united around our multiple and conflicting identities as women of color, we value collaboration as a community-building practice and storytelling as a source of healing. We center Memory, Womxn of Color Epistemologies, Trauma, The Body, and Embodied Resistance as a decolonial praxis. By embracing feminist, queer, interdisciplinary, and transnational perspectives, as well as creative scholarship, this work will illustrate our multiple ways of knowing and the intergenerational significance of these knowledges. Together, we enact the preservation of our histories, our ancestors, and ourselves through a kaleidoscope of word, art, and poetry.

This project is a labor of love that springs from the collaboration and commitment of our organizing committee, editors, and submission authors. We hope to inspire the continued collaboration between women of color both within and outside the institution of higher education.

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## **MEMORY AND RE-MEMBERING**

Derika's piece mobilizes Black feminist epistemology to re-member intergenerational knowledge and to privilege the importance of Black feminist thought by redefining who is an intellectual.

Hannah reimagines the archive as a decolonial practice of remembering, using the archive as a personal form of memory rather than something that has to be excavated.

Nicole engages with the idea of embodied wisdom and looks at hula hooping as a "playful praxis and unwavering trust in grace" as she centers the altar.

## **PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE**

Rosalinda uses women of color epistemology to reclaim stories of labour and migration centering her mother as a source of wisdom and strength.

Christine interviews her mother as a form of knowledge production addressing head on the trauma of her mother. She challenges traditional citational practices and focuses on Conocimiento, knowledge, in a deeply personal way as an act of healing, surviving and excelling.

Saugher writes about the process of producing knowledge through research.

## **TRAUMA/HEALING**

Lucero examines the relationship between trauma, healing and the transmission of knowledges across generations. Themes of family, religion and the sacred figure prominently in her work.

Joanna's work engages with themes of gender and transgenerational trauma, social norms, and normative beauty standards. In her piece, she invokes her ancestors in a call to resistance and self-empowerment.

In her essay, A Mixtec filmmaker's approaches towards generational sexual abuse in *La Tiricia O Cómo Curar la Tristeza*, Candy explores the ethical approaches to representing sexual trauma in film. She asks, "How do you represent the unrepresentable?"

## **MEDIA/RACE AND THE BODY: commodified, colonial culture**

Hortencia conducts an analysis of folkloric figurines and the commodification and sexualization of Afro-Cuban blackness. She asserts that "folkloric packagings of female figurines must be understood as gendered, sexualized, and racialized, promoting (mis)representations of racialized stereotypes of Afro-Cuban blackness."

Nadia explores the ways in which discourses of the body and embodiment can be used to deconstruct and understand the possible violent and affectual

economies at play within advertising images, as well as what these encoded meanings suggest about material bodies, subjectivities, and social citizenship.

Istifaa traces histories of sexual exploitation, violences, and stereotyping played out on the bodies of black women in private spaces. She critically unpacks the absence of such histories in the colonial archives and examines the work of Tameka Norris.

### **RESISTANCE, RACE, AND REVOLUTION**

Kashmir's piece uses prose and poetic language to address themes of resistance and storytelling. She writes about black women's narratives and exchanges with black elders.

Erika uses poetry to critically examine her own experience and relationship to Guatemala and the US and as an immigrant, as well as engage in narratives of the revolutionary, both as modes of contesting and challenging capital.

Victorica's piece intimately deals with her own identity as afro Latinax and afropuertorican as a decolonial practice, using queer politics as a way to resist capitalism and the sexualization of the black body.

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