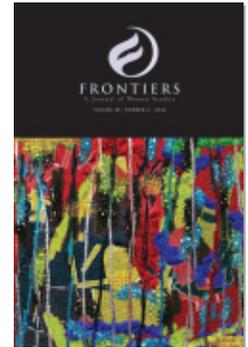




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Introduction

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Introduction

This year marks forty years since Mexico City hosted the first United Nations Conference on Women. The hope in 1975 of a feminism that brought women together across the globe has since been replaced with a deeper understanding of how geopolitical and economic structures divide women by reproducing differences and inequalities resulting from imperialism, colonization, and patriarchy, and with a wariness of the ways in which hegemonic structures such as capitalism and liberalism have taken on new forms in the current neo-liberal moment. This special issue of *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* explores what constitutes transnational feminism and its contributions to understanding the interconnectedness of women's lives as well as feminist methodologies and theory. In so doing, we hope to interrogate how transnational feminist analyses illuminate the contradictions embedded in knowledge production, politics, and activism in different locations.

In the past four decades, feminist scholarship in the global North has been marked by contestations over issues including women's rights and the bases for women's equality; constructions of women, patriarchies, and genders; and inclusions/exclusions of race, sexuality, and class. As part of these conversations, transnational feminisms have called our attention to gendered and racialized processes such as colonialism, globalization, and neocolonialism; institutions such as multilateral organizations, the military, and NGOs; and colonial and postcolonial legacies and how they structure the lives of men and women around the world. They have critiqued the universalizing tendencies and gazes of feminist scholarship, narratives of rescuing women and girls in the global South, and ostensibly transnational human-rights organizations' reproductions of unequal relations of power. However, as transnational feminism is mainstreamed, institutionalized, and increasingly offered up as a ubiquitous term in women's studies scholarship, what it signifies and what potential it offers, in many ways, has become less clear. As transnational fem-

inisms circulate both within the academy and beyond, we ask: What constitutes transnational feminisms, what do they do, and do they do what feminists want them to do?

The vision for this special issue of *Frontiers* emerged from a specific place. For the editorial collective, this conversation began in the fall of 2010. It resulted from the collaboration of faculty and graduate students from various departments, schools, and the Institute for Humanities Research (IHR) at Arizona State University in Tempe. Tempe is located in Maricopa County in the border state of Arizona, and thus heavily influenced by the Mexican-US borderlands. Arizona is also home to twenty-one federally recognized American Indian tribes, and over 25 percent of the state's land is reservation land. This convergence of the borderlands, American Indian sovereign nations, and an expansive university influenced the ways in which the ASU Local to Global IHR Norton Research Cluster interrogated transnational feminism as a concept, form of activism, and heuristic.¹ We sought to provoke productive and interdisciplinary conversations that drew upon postcolonial feminist literature, theories of intersectionality, Native feminisms, and transnational feminisms, and we paired readings from these areas in unexpected ways.² These rich discussions inspired certain members in the research cluster—Roberta Chevrette, Ann Hibner Koblitz, Karen Kuo, Charles Lee, Karen J. Leong, and Heather Switzer—to propose a special issue of *Frontiers* that would interrogate how the emergence of transnational feminism has reconfigured existing terrains, creating new possibilities and limitations.

Over the course of six semesters, the research cluster repeatedly confronted two prevalent tendencies regarding transnational feminism. The first was the dominance of transnational feminism as the academic discourse of the moment. From our location, we could not help but wonder why it seemed that transnational feminism at times obscured women-of-color feminisms and ongoing racial struggles in the United States. Our interests were especially piqued by what seemed to be increasing attacks on intersectionality as inadequate for theorizing the specificity of women's lives and experiences, particularly in regard to how gender is linked to other localized social formations. We questioned whether intersectionality theory is as overdetermined as some scholars argue and whether new models are really as dynamic as promised. We also considered how both transnational and women-of-color feminisms have elided Indigenous feminisms. For example, we recognized American Indian women's dual locations as both women of color via racial formations in the United States and as transnational women via political relationships between tribal nations and the United States. We asked how understanding these dual

locations might remap the ways we teach and think about US women's studies and transnational feminisms.

These interests resulted in our inviting Mino Moallem and Renya Ramirez to participate in a workshop that explored feminist concepts of the transnational. We asked them to address how their own work resists renationalization in terms of what Moallem calls "critical transnational feminist inquiry," and the ways in which Ramirez suggests that transnational feminism disputes how the nation traditionally has been defined by location, place, and categories of belonging.³ Additionally, because their scholarship examines how gender intersects with other factors such as nation, religion, class, and citizenship, we asked them to discuss the relationship between intersectionality and transnational feminist analyses. The richness of this conversation convinces us that bringing together intersectionality and transnational feminisms—the two most significant intellectual formations in women's studies at the turn of the twenty-first century—sharpens the analytical potential of each.

A second prevalent tendency we faced was that the transnational refers to anywhere but the United States and Europe. In what ways does "transnational" simply become a code word for "elsewhere," and transnational feminism a geographic descriptor naming women's activism that occurs anywhere else but "here"? These imagined geographies ignore the complexity of communities that transcend nation-state borders, as well as the existence of transnational processes and communities in sites not readily acknowledged to be transnational. In order to begin to think about how feminisms can engage transnational processes within nation-state borders, the research cluster during its third year invited Chandan Reddy and Khiara Bridges to discuss their work. Reddy's expansive discussion of queer futurity and the new queer immigrant body in the United States, in relation to Bridges's cogent analysis of a New York public hospital as a transnational space where US health-care and welfare policies produce poor women of color as racialized, Othered bodies in need of discipline, highlighted how the United States is a transnational formation.⁴ We assert that focusing only on political and economic processes between nations shifts attention away from how transnational processes generated by late capitalism and neoliberalism, such as outsourcing and global labor migrations, generate new spaces and new forms of difference that inform social relations within and between national borders.

The planning of this special issue also converged with the planning of the inaugural Transnational Feminisms Summer Institute (TFISI). In 2012, Judy Tzu-Chun Wu and Laura Briggs began discussing how feminist scholars might gather and create something distinct from the normative academic conference. They were inspired to propose a "feminist summer camp" in

which scholars would explore the meanings, possibilities, and limits of transnational feminism. Anyone who knows Judy Tzu-Chun Wu knows that when she says “Let’s put on a summer institute!” it will happen. In this case it happened because of the outstanding efforts of a local arrangements committee that included *Frontiers*’ editorial assistants, the staff of Women’s, Gender and Sexualities Studies, other students and faculty at the Ohio State University (OSU), and funding support from OSU units as well as other women’s, gender, sexuality, and feminist studies programs in large research institutions from around the country.⁵

The TSFI program committee consisting of Wu, Briggs, Leong representing the ASU editorial collective, and OSU colleagues Katherine Marino, Jennifer Suchland, and Daniel Rivers, acknowledged a third tendency regarding the deployment of transnational feminism: to either celebrate transnational feminism as a critique of a global feminism that reproduces inequalities, or condemn transnational feminism as only reproducing existing inequalities. Believing that these polarized positions do not address how transnational processes are shaping people’s everyday lives and structuring social relations, the TSFI—a collaborative five-day workshop that took place at OSU in July 2014—sought to explore transnational feminism not only as theory or paradigm but also as praxis. The Institute was framed by two broad questions: What can feminist analyses of transnational processes contribute towards interrupting the reproduction of global and local inequalities? And what theories and practices can provide a path for coalition building across real differences and national borders?

The response to the TSFI call for papers to be workshopped in intensive sessions was much larger than expected—with over 142 applicants for fewer than 60 spots—suggesting that scholars were eager to participate in this discussion. Some of the authors who submitted papers to the *Frontiers* special issue also submitted their papers to the TSFI. Other papers presented at the Institute were solicited for this special issue. Additionally, our editorial collective organized a roundtable on transnational feminisms. Reflecting the interests of both the ASU editorial collective and program committee, the latter organized a roundtable that explored the binational status of Indigenous women and Indigenous feminisms in a transnational framework. A third roundtable focused on transnational body politics, and a fourth explored transnational feminist methodologies.

This special issue begins with the Transnational Feminisms Roundtable first presented at the TSFI, featuring Laura Briggs, Maylei Blackwell, and Mignonette Chiu.⁶ In this roundtable, Briggs provides an overview of key intellectual developments in transnational feminism and explores how transna-

tional feminist activism may impose homogenizing and hegemonic policies on communities as well as provide resources that contribute to local activist efforts; Blackwell maps out a transnational feminist genealogy based in the activism and theorizing of women of color and Native feminists and explores how the global is always local; and Chiu questions whether transnational feminism is an extension of neoliberalism or a political project that has the power to intervene in neoliberal processes of globalization.

The opening roundtable is followed by two articles that critically analyze how transnational collaborations reproduce inequalities of power. Debjani Chakravarty critiques the pattern of feminist scholars in the global North who utilize women in the global South as subjects for their research. In “On Being and Providing ‘Data’: Politics of Transnational Feminist Collaboration and Academic Division of Labor,” she draws upon interviews with women in India who have participated in research projects and shows how their knowledge and experiences provide the source material that feminist scholars in the global North then (re)produce as academically valued “knowledge.” David A. Rubin addresses a similar dynamic between the global North and South in his article, “Provincializing Intersex: US Intersex Activism, Human Rights, and Transnational Body Politics.” In his analysis about how the US-based Intersex Society of North America lobbied to include intersex surgery in the federal ban on female genital mutilation and inform a court decision in Colombia regarding intersex genital surgery, Rubin applies Quijano’s “coloniality of power” framework to demonstrate the necessity for “provincializing,” or consciously localizing, intersex activism in order to engage situated practices of embodiment, subjectivity, and community.

These analyses are followed by the Indigenous Feminisms Roundtable—perhaps the most provocative session of the TFSI, because it dramatically reorients the discussion of transnational feminisms from “anywhere but here” and illuminates how democracy is inextricably linked to imperialism, colonization, and ongoing neocolonialism. How have logics of containment and colonization obscured Indigenous experiences as nations within nations (referring to American Indian–US and First Nations–Canada relations as well as relations within and between American Indian nations and First Nations? Hokulani K. Aikau, Maile Arvin, Mishuana Goeman, and Scott Morgensen deconstruct the nation-state as a colonial construct that obscures alternate structures of social relations based in Indigenous epistemologies. The existence of Indigenous governments and sovereignty prior to colonization challenges dominant feminist paradigms that ignore the complicity of most feminisms with settler colonialism and nationalist narratives. The roundtable participants instead articulate an Indigenous ethic of care and responsibility

that is not based in capitalism, as well as an Indigenous feminist framework for how people from different communities might acknowledge their differences while also forming coalitions for social justice.

Sonia Hernández's "Revisiting Mexican(a) Labor History through *Feminismo Transfronterista: From Tampico to Texas and Beyond, 1910–1940*" builds upon the work of Chicana scholars who have documented the border-crossing activism of Mexican/American women. Further developing some of the observations Blackwell makes in the opening roundtable, Hernández elucidates how Mexicanas and Chicanas mobilized existing social and political networks between the United States and Mexico to assert female workers' rights as equal to those of male workers. Importantly, this work highlights not only connections across the Mexico-US border but also reaffirms Anzaldúa's observation that these borderlands are transnational sites of violence, resistance, and regeneration.

A visual artist as well as scholar, Debjani Chakravarty next discusses the cover artwork, *Violent Journeys*. The editorial collective chose her artwork because its abstraction avoided the oftentimes imperial or consuming gaze of photographic work as well as any misinterpretation of a specific culture or embodiment. Nonetheless, Chakravarty's artist statement explains that violence can be articulated even in abstraction, and she reminds us that transnational processes are now and always have been violent—in their origins and their multiple histories as well as their current incarnations.

The very opposite of abstraction is Engkey, a robot who teaches English in South Korean classrooms and is remotely controlled and voiced by workers outside the country whose own subjectivities are erased in favor of a white female avatar. In "Techno-Modeling Care: Racial Branding, Dis/embodied Labor and 'Cybraceros' in South Korea," Anna Romina Guevarra discusses how Engkey is a technological manifestation of US economic hegemony, the alienation of the Filipina worker, and the embodiment of colonial knowledge and desire. She addresses how the Filipina workers remotely operating Engkey in South Korea form global chains of care that also reflect the ways South Korea and the Philippines are linked together through the influence of US militarization and the emerging emphasis on English fluency for economic development. Both Hernández and Guevarra apply intersectional analyses to their case studies, demonstrating how social formations specific to a location's culture and history mutually inform each other and are critical to understanding transnational relationships.

Annie Isabel Fukushima's essay, "Anti-Violence Iconographies of the Cage: Diasporan Crossings and the (Un)Tethering of Subjectivities," addresses how US anti-trafficking campaigns continually "tether" feminized transnational

and migrant subjects and their traffickers to visual and narrative binaries of victim/victimizer, legal/illegal, and citizen/non-citizen. These campaigns serve to forward neoliberal agendas and reify nation-state constructions of racial, sexual, and national differences. But importantly, Fukushima suggests creative interventions for “untethering” the female transnational subject from the position of a victim by re-visioning and re-narrating her experiences, histories, and locations through embodied performances.

While drafting the call for papers, participating in the TFSI, and discussing submissions, the editorial collective continually returned to the original question: What is transnational feminism? The contributors to this special issue provide clear and compelling articulations for how they understand transnational feminism as well as ideas for engaging in transnational scholarship and praxis that rely on and espouse an ethic of care and responsibility as political mooring. What we have come to recognize and want to emphasize here is the importance of process. Transnationalism is not a thing, it is not an entity, but a process, just as neoliberalism is not an event or an all-encompassing explanation for every current social ill. Transnational feminism therefore refers to feminist analyses of transnational processes and relationships. Drawing upon postcolonial, women-of-color, queer, and Indigenous feminist critiques, as our research cluster did during our exploration of the synergies and points of tensions of these theories with transnational feminisms, enhanced our understanding of the potential of transnational feminist analyses. In addition, this process made us more aware of the pitfalls as well as the liberatory potentials of transnational feminisms. And, perhaps most important for transnational feminist analysis and practice, we are even more acutely conscious of the need to continually acknowledge the power and privilege of our own positionality, and continually reflect upon our practice as teachers, researchers, and collaborators in our ongoing efforts to generate socially relevant, nonhierarchical, locally contextualized, and useful knowledge.⁷

We hope that this special issue will invite readers to participate in this ongoing conversation as it continues to shape women’s studies scholarship and activism.⁸

— Karen J. Leong, Roberta Chevrette,
Ann Hibner Koblitz, Karen Kuo, and Heather Switzer

NOTES

1. The Institute for Humanities Research at Arizona State University with the support of the Reverend Jenny Norton funded the activities of the Local to Global Femi-

nisms Research Cluster from 2010 to 2013. Our thanks to IHR director Sally Kitch and staff and to the participants who made this intellectual community possible.

2. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Ien Ang, "I'm a Feminist But . . . : 'Other' Women and Postnational Feminism," in *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms*, ed. B. Caine and R. Pringle (London: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 57–73; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2012); Kimberlé William Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (July 1991): 1241–99; Fatima El-Tayeb, "'Gays Who Cannot Properly Be Gay': Queer Muslims in the Neoliberal European City," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 19, no. 1 (2012): 79–95; Leela Fernandez, *Transnational Feminism in the United States: Knowledge, Ethics, and Power* (New York: New York University Press, 2013); Ruth Frankenberg and Lata Mani, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality,' and the Politics of Location," in *Displacement, Diaspora, and Geographies of Identity*, ed. Smadar Lavie and Ted Swedenburg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 271–92; Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, "Postcolonial Scholarship," in *A Companion to Gender Studies*, ed. Philomena Essed, David Theo Goldberg, and Audrey Kobayashi (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 51–61; Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Marie Anna Jaimes Guerrero, "Civil Rights versus Sovereignty: Native American Women in Life and Land Struggles," in *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, ed. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty (New York: Routledge, 1997), 101–21; Grace Kyungwon Hong, *The Ruptures of American Capital: Women of Color and the Culture of Immigrant Labor* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006); Miranda Joseph, "Family Affairs: The Discourse of Global/Localization," in *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*, ed. Arnaldo Cruz Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 71–99; Katie King, "'There are no Lesbians here': Lesbianisms, Feminisms, and Global Gay Formations," in *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism*, ed. Arnaldo Cruz Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV (New York: New York University Press, 2002) 33–48; Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin F. Manalansan IV, eds., *Queer Globalizations: Citizenship and the Afterlife of Colonialism* (New York: New York University Press, 2002); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Adele Mueller, "Beginning in the Standpoint of Women: An Investigation of the Gap between Cholas and 'Women in Peru,'" in *Knowledge, Experience, and Ruling Relations: Studies in the Social Organization of Knowledge*, ed. M. Campbell and A. Manicom (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 96–107; Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Yearning for Lightness. Transnational Circuits in the Marketing and Consumption of Skin Lighteners," *Gender and Society* 22, no.

3 (June 2002): 281–302; Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Dean Spade, “Intersectional Resistance and Law Reform,” Special Issue, *Intersectionality: Theorizing Power, Empowering Theory*, *Signs* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2013): 1031–55; Aili M. Tripp, “Rethinking Differences: Comparative Perspectives from Africa,” *Signs* 25, no. 3 (Spring 2000): 649–75; Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill, “Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism,” *Feminist Studies* 22, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 321–31.

3. Renya K. Ramirez, “Henry Roe Cloud: A Granddaughter’s Native Feminist Biographical Account,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 24 no. 2 (2009): 77–103; Renya K. Ramirez, “Learning across Differences: Native and Ethnic Studies Feminisms,” *American Quarterly* 60, no. 2 (June 2008): 303–7; Renya K. Ramirez, “Julia Sanchez’s Story: An Indigenous Woman between Nations,” *Frontiers* 23, no. 2 (2002): 65–83; Minoo Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

4. Khiara Bridges, *Reproducing Race: An Ethnography of Pregnancy as a Site of Racialization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Chandan Reddy, *Freedoms with Violence: Race, Sexuality, and the US State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011).

5. The hardworking and patient local arrangements committee consisted of Judy Tzu-Chun Wu, Lynaya Elliott, Krista Benson, Peggy Solic, Adrienne Winans, Toni Calbert, Maria Merrill, Denise Fuller-Delgado, Lucy Murphy and Tess Pugsley. The Ohio State University sponsors included the Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies, *Frontiers: A Journal of Women’s Studies*, Office of Diversity and Inclusion, The OSU Women’s Place, the Asian American Studies Program, the Center for Slavic and East European Studies, the Multicultural Center in the Office of Student Life at OSU. National sponsors included Arizona State University Women and Gender Studies in the School of Social Transformation; University of Massachusetts at Amherst Department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies; Rutgers University Department of Women’s and Gender Studies; Indiana University School of Global and International Studies, College of Arts and Sciences and Department of Gender Studies; University of Arizona Department of Gender and Women’s Studies; Emory University Department of Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies; University of California, Santa Barbara Department of Feminist Studies; University of Minnesota Department of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies.

6. Wairimu Njambi was part of this roundtable but declined to include her comments in this issue.

7. An ASU colleague, Sally L. Kitch, deploys narrative to explore these power differences and the role of personal relationships in working across national and other differences. Kitch, *Contested Terrain: Reflections with Afghan Women Leaders* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2014).

8. Due to space limitations, not all the articles we accepted could be included in the special issue. They will appear in later issues of *Frontiers*.