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WSQ: Solidary Editor's Note

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Editor's Note

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw addressed “the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis” in a law journal article that brought the term *intersectionality* into feminist discourse. Crenshaw—among others, including Patricia Collins Hill and bell hooks—argued that dynamics of privilege and subordination rarely depend on “a single categorical axis.” They saw any movement that fails to recognize multiple registers of social identity as fragmentary, reinforcing marginality rather than fostering what Crenshaw called “unifying activity.”

Crenshaw and others built on a discourse that was already in development. For example, the Combahee River Collective’s 1978 “A Black Feminist Statement” clearly stated that “the most profound and most potentially radical politics come directly out of our own identity, as opposed to working to end somebody else’s oppression,” but also insisted upon the necessity to “address a whole range of oppressions.” In doing so, they recognized the complexity of both individual and social identity formations—and the possibility of solidarity across identity axes and coalition-building in political work.

Four decades after the Combahee River Collective was founded, doing political work across axes of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and national origin remains challenging. As Jillian Schwedler asks, “Why do we have to elevate one cause over another?” Writing about the Twitter campaign #BringBackOurGirls, launched to raise awareness of the kidnapping of some 200 girls by the group Boko Haram in Nigeria, she laments the singular foci of too many human rights campaigns: “Can’t we advocate for

these girls while also noting that yes, the concerns of people of color are wrongly ignored on a daily basis, domestically and internationally? Can't we point out that drones kill thousands, including hundreds of innocent children, but that governments should be held accountable even while we condemn radical groups for atrocities like mass kidnappings?"

It is all too apparent that the foundational texts of Black feminism, which called for simultaneous action in multiple political registers, remain apt for the twenty-first century. Accordingly, we are delighted to feature the Combahee River Collective's statement in the Classics Revisited section of this issue. We appreciate the generosity of Monthly Review Press for permission to reprint the Statement. Three diverse responses to the Statement index its ongoing utility.

Lynn Darwich and Haneen Maikey acknowledge the groundbreaking work around sexuality as a central axis for coalitional politics, but pivot away from sexuality as a primary lens for understanding the anti-pinkwashing campaign against Israel. Their narrative of how solidarity work must evolve speaks not only to the complexity of the Combahee River Collective Statement, but also to its radical generativity. Gee Imaan Semmalar adapts the vision of the Statement for his own purposes as a savarna trans activist from Kerala, India. Given the diversity of trans experience in India, that vision is both sustaining and elusive, especially where "solidarity is not even used as a rhetoric." Taking the collapse of Rana Plaza in Savar, Bangladesh in 2013 as her subject, Dina M. Siddiqi critiques the rhetoric of "slavery" that has situated exploitation outside the liberal capitalist system of which it is in fact constitutive. In her discussion of raced bodies, media, and consumerism, Siddiqi draws on the anticapitalist analysis of the Combahee River Collective as "a powerful point of departure for building horizontal solidarities." These reflections on the contemporary resonance of the Statement appear within an issue that surveys an array of feminist, antiracist, and anti-imperialist projects.

In their introduction to the issue, guest editors Saadia Toor and Shefali Chandra contextualize the trope of solidarity within a progressive Left that is both internally, deeply fragmented, and to an unprecedented degree, globally networked. While new technologies allow for virtually instantaneous transnational exchanges, they hardly assure unity—let alone unify-ing action—and invite the machinations of interwarring political factions, corporate media spin, subverted agendas, and trivial diversions. Still, there

is room for optimism, perhaps in the kinds of politics of co-presence that rediscover the subject who may have been lost in the cacophony of politics abstracted at unscalable distance. Such subjects may be observed in the corporeal agents of the Women in Black antiwar protests, the exploited labors revealed in the Gulf Labor Project, and in other solidarity projects discussed in this issue.

Dean Spade's *Normal Life*, reviewed by Amy L. Livingstone and Peter Odell Campbell, draws on women-of-color feminism to craft a critical trans politics that can resist administrative norms that distribute life chances unevenly. In her review of Sharon Patricia Holland's *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Amber Musser reflects on the ways Holland weaves together critical race theory and queer theory to argue for the ubiquity of the binding force of the erotic. Madawi Al-Rasheed's *The Complexities of Gender Relations in a Masculine State*, reviewed by Laleh Khalili, examines the lives of women in Saudi Arabia, complicating the stereotypical models of female subservience and glamor. Rajbir Purewal Hazelwood reviews Kyla Wazana Tompkins' *Racial Indigestion*, which argues that eating was a social process and symbolic act important to the construction of identity in nineteenth-century America. Leela Fernandes' *Transnational Feminism in the United States*, reviewed by Julie Laut, warns of the potential of transnational feminism to reproduce normative structures of power when it replaces material knowledge production with theoretical epistemologies. Finally, Sowande' Mustakeem uses the Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black* to situate three analyses of prison, gender, and race in the U.S.: *The Meaning of Freedom and Other Difficult Dialogues*, by Angela Davis, *Breaking Women*, by Jill A. McCorkel, and *Arrested Justice*, by Beth Ritchie. Each of these publications, and their encapsulating reviews, offer opportunities to continue this issue's interrogation of solidarity.

The poetry and prose pieces of *Solidarity* render the theme in nuanced light and suggest that solidarity work and self-questioning go hand in hand. Kaethe Schwien's poem, "Master:," captures the voice of dispossession and succeeds in highlighting the conflict for the artist in representing dignity in the face of dehumanization. Colette Phair's "Emily" unravels American presumptions behind the urge to "be a part of something bigger than myself." Sarah Blake takes up this theme of human scale in "Does the Earth," which telescopes from planet to stem cell as she locates self and other. In "Poem about Nothing," Arielle Greenberg nimbly reveals

the structures of privilege that saturate “nothing” with racism and environmental destruction. Referencing displaced privilege, Allison Amend’s “Not So Safe” questions how the author’s intertwining racial and religious positioning makes her a potential target of violence. Ellen Devlin’s “Litany” hammers home the role of witnessing, a recurrent theme among many of our writers including Joseph Harrington in his memorial poem, “The Spirit of the Laws.”

Yet witnessing seems always to be an incomplete project. Justin Sherwood, in “Poem,” and Mark Bibbins, in “Strategy,” convey complex encodings of erotic power, what Audre Lorde in another context called the “misnaming of the need and the deed.” Susan Bruce’s poem of acidic sustenance, “Which is Coffee,” evokes the dry frictions of “the covenant” of feminine and maternal solidarity, while David Trinidad’s “I Met May Swenson Just Once,” reads in a California wildfire the traces of a failed inscription of one artist on another. Taken together, the poetry and prose that follow reinscribe the question, if not the answer, of how to be in solidarity. Approaching these challenges from another perspective, Tedd Kerr critiques “HIV neutral” movements, where serostatus is made ambiguous, ostensibly as part of a politics of inclusion. But as the positive/negative binary is breached, and uninfected people claim new and ambiguous HIV statuses, Kerr asks the provocative question, who is HIV for?

It is apt that this issue takes as its theme Solidarity. As newly appointed general co-editors, we are particularly aware of how this issue, and the journal as a whole, is made possible by the “unifying action” of many individuals. For us, that team begins with the previous general editors Amy Herzog and Joe Rollins, who we thank, alongside outgoing section editors Margot Bouman and Nicole Cooley, for their years of service ensuring *WSQ*’s legacy of celebrated interdisciplinarity and creativity. We also thank the Editorial Board, which has greeted us with vigor and warmth, as have Jennifer Baumgardner, executive director of the Feminist Press, which publishes the journal, senior editor Jeanann Panasch, and editorial associates Elena Cohen and Lindsey Eckenroth. We also extend our gratitude to poetry editor Kathleen Ossip, and to fiction editor Asali Solomon and several new Editorial Board members who have joined *WSQ*. Finally, we are pleased to announce that with this issue, the College of Staten Island becomes a valued supporter of *WSQ*, thanks to the generosity of the Offices of the Provost Fred Naider, and the Dean of Humanities and Social

Sciences Nan Sussman, continuing a long and vital history of engagement with Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies at CSI.

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