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EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

The mission of *Critical Theory and Social Justice: Journal of Undergraduate Research* states that this publication “offers a transformative space for undergraduate students to engage critical theory in the pursuit of social justice.” From the unmaking of refugees, asylees, immigrants, and families at and across the Mexico–United States border,¹ to the consistent, historical, and escalating disappearances/murders of indigenous women (many of whom are trans),² to the ever-approaching irreversibility of terrestrial extinction from climate change,³ these reminders of what is worse to come can make one feel reluctant to affectively invest in scholarly interventions in contemporary sites of injustice. Constructing this editorial introduction for *CTSJ*’s eighth volume from this disposition has been challenging, then, following our times of increasing crisis that trend toward genocide.

However, it is not the task of praxis to bend in the midst of the extreme — often-times, the extreme can produce events that might bring about the radical change necessary for a moment. In considering a meaningful way to share Volume 8 with *Critical Theory and Social Justice*’s readership, we are struck by how each of these articles addresses its own small corner of the emergency of the structure of relation: colonialism and its antecedent violences in Palestine; navigation, movement, and existence outside of cis-heteronormativity; ethno-racial liminality; social complicity in anti-Black violence; hegemonic masculinities in sexual assault prevention; and the possibility for the continued existence of direct, student-led protest action. Our authors have treated each of these sites of/for altercations against the empowering of eradictory logic with care, concern, and direction for action. Tenderly as a torpor, we invite you to encounter a taste of these undergraduate scholars’ vigor and energy toward this thing we attempt to signify as “justice.”

Volume 8’s first article comes from Erin Yantzi (University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada) and focuses on the highly underanalyzed area of Jewish Israelis who receive mental health exemptions from compulsory military service in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). By connecting histories of Jewish Israeli ethno-political socialization and identity development, Yantzi is able to texture-out the processes by which militarism of and in Israeli society functions. Yantzi goes beyond this aspect of the scholarship (i.e., “academics tend to associate certain methods of refusal or exemption with particular ethno-class groups in Israel”) to bring a broader insight to the issue of gaining exemption from service.

1 John Carlos Frey, *Sand and Blood: America’s Stealth War on the Mexico Border* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2019).

2 Merrit Kennedy, “‘Genocide’ Has Been Committed Against Indigenous Women and Girls, Canadian Panel Says,” *NPR*, 3 June 19, <<https://www.npr.org/2019/06/03/729258906/genocide-has-been-committed-against-indigenous-women-and-girls-canadian-panel-sa>>.

3 Alexander Koch, Chris Brierley, Mark M. Maslin, and Simon L. Lewis, “Earth System Impacts of the European Arrival and Great Dying in the Americas after 1492,” *Quaternary Science Reviews* 207 (2019): 13–36. See also, Martin Mahony and Georgina Endfield, “Climate and Colonialism,” *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 9.2 (2018): e510.



Yantzi bridges the issue of mental health exemptions and pacifism through their depiction of the process involved in attaining conscientious objector status, saying that those who claim “conscientious objection and pacifism cannot be political, cannot be selective, and must not mention Palestinians or occupation.” Further, Yantzi explains that “conscientious exemption is a disability, an incapacity to stand violence, and a physical embodiment of beliefs rather than a political ideology or ethical demand.” The implications for political agency in the midst of/for hyperreal signification of disability as an act of resistance to militarism become clear, then, with Yantzi noting that “individuals must find ways to train themselves to externalize (or perform) what might be recognisable as symptoms associated with a mental disorder. In other words, they must embody the military’s pathologized definition of a mental disorder.”

Volume 8’s second article builds on this topic of embodiment by investigating the aspects of securitization in and of the body as it is impacted by the gaze and power of cis-hetero normativity. Observing the precarity of air travel for trans and nonbinary people, Brigitte Pawliw-Fry (Stanford University, Palo Alto, California) analyzes the linkages between their politics of their border crossing and the violences they experience as targets of (particularly American) threat identification and construction. Using Gloria Anzaldúa’s writings on the liminality at/of the border, Pawliw-Fry identifies the increase in use of biometric security measures at airports as a new function of colonial control over the body/border, saying, “Stemming from these early histories of borders as sites of control, especially against the perceived invasion of non-normative bodies, the TSA introduced the Secure Flight Program (SFP), which focuses on calculating risk on the level of identity.”

Pawliw-Fry brings their analysis of the border/body control at the airport to a larger critique, not just of the institution of power, but also of its methodology of deployment by reading Transportation Safety Administration policies through the lens of biopower. In doing so, Pawliw-Fry draws out strategies for resistance and intervention at the airport as an instantiation of the securitized border. While not calling for the end of the geopolitical representation of states, Pawliw-Fry argues that a lens of queer futurity — one that places optimism in new forms of hospitality and “belonging” rather than procedural, legal progress — is a crucial analytic for changing the ontological formation of individuals at and through the border. Indeed, through their description of ways in which queerness has been deployed to resist homogenous identification, Pawliw-Fry reminds readers of the importance of disidentified community formation as a precursory site to the state, and as such, a place always already made for resistance.

While some individuals are made liminal because of their identity development amid socio-political consolidations of normative power, others like Volume 8’s artist Meghan Kelly (Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pennsylvania) are born into a space betwixt and between. Exhibiting a marked aesthetic of flux and (dis)continuity in their artwork, Kelly deepens understandings of the everyday elements of subject formation of transracial adoptees (individuals who do not correspond to or are normatively connected to the ethno-racial sovereignties of their adoptive parents). Exploring liminality to navigate the perils and pressures of this identity, Kelly exposes the possibility of transraciality as a hermeneutic for empowerment: “Transracial adoptees expose the arbitrary nature of categories of race because their identities fall between (or outside of) such monolithic labels.”



Importantly, though, Kelly bridges their reflection critically and with consideration of the implications of colonialism involved in the adoption of individuals beyond the Global North by Global North individuals. Kelly is rightly hesitant to offer their positive parent-child transraciality as a widely applicable hermeneutic out of “fear that encouraging such a narrative suggests adoptions are miraculous, divine interventions when this is not the full truth of my story of loss.” The loss Kelly describes is one connected to culture, heritage, language, and community — central structural roots of an individual’s socio-political positioning — and the place this leaves transracial adoptees is seemingly out of phase. The recognition of loss can also be an opportunity to find solace and power in liminality without devolving into nihilism.

Tracing back from liminality into concretized formations of power, Sierra McCormick (Scripps College, Claremont, California) brings this volume of *CTSJ* both a historical and a media analysis of the imagery of anti-Black ideology in the United States.

The care in McCormick’s method should also be noted: She presents data from 1917 and 2014 because these years, nearly a century apart, “reflect times of mass mobilization and resistance to these forms of anti-black violence, and as a result, evinced ample primary source material [150 incidents for which names, dates, and locations were available].” Through a careful discourse analysis, combined with the lens of critical media studies, McCormick presents an incisive archeology of

twenty-first century police executions of Black people that goes beyond a discourse of anti-Black violence in the United States.

McCormick effectively identifies that the (necro)*polis* of the Global North is one where meaning can only be (media)ted by routine and spectacularized Black death and dehumanization. Rightly, McCormick demonstrates this not just in her theoretical analysis — “The association between blackness and criminality continued beyond the era when biological determinism bestowed ‘legitimacy’ on this coupling” — but also in their consistency with the extinction-level event that is anti-Black violence and politics:

This article was in the process of edits when Alton Sterling and Philandro Castile were killed a day apart. After their executions, it was apparent that the same sequence of events would emerge as with other black victims killed by police: Police would be put on paid administrative leave, the white media would conjure up criminalizing evidence and dehumanizing characterizations, while the video evidence would continue to be played over and over again until the trial would begin and the police officers would be exonerated.”

As Castile and Sterling’s executioners walk free,⁴ one of the only sensationalized murders-by-police to receive a guilty verdict is the twelve-and-a-half-year sentence given to Somali-American police officer Mohammed Noor for shooting Justine Ruszczyk, a white, Australian woman.⁵

Thematically entwined with McCormick’s representation of Black social death, Erzsebet

4 See Mitch Smith, “Minnesota Officer Acquitted in Killing of Philando Castile,” *New York Times Online*, 16 June 2017, <<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/06/16/us/police-shooting-trial-philando-castile.html>>; Jason Hanna, “No Charges Against Officers in Alton Sterling Death; Other Videos Are Coming,” CNN, 27 Mar. 2018, <<https://www.cnn.com/2018/03/27/us/alton-sterling-investigation/index.html>>

5 Ralph Ellis and Melissa Alonso, “Mohamed Noor, Former Minneapolis Police Officer, Sentenced to 12½



Helmeczy (American University, Washington, DC) makes a similar intervention in the politics of sexual violence in a cis-hetero-patriarchal society, going beyond the event of violence itself by layering a critique of bourgeois liberalism and its site of individuation, the university. Helmeczy sets up her argument with the real, material elements that constitute and legitimize the structure of rape and sexual assault as tools of violence: “On college campuses, sexual assault makes up 32 percent of all violent crimes reported under the Clery Act.” Helmeczy’s sober assessment that “institutions of higher education are spaces where sexual assault occurs frequently” should not be read merely as the rendering of popular culture into some intellectual treatment; rather, it is a statement that disarticulates the safety the university claims to offer from those deemed unworthy of an admissions letter. Unflinchingly, Helmeczy reminds readers that rape culture and sexual violence are tools deployed as agents of power formation to achieve the hollowing objectification of individuals who particularly identify (and/or are identified as) women as a signifier of humanity.

Importantly, though, Helmeczy’s article is not about these tools. Much more intent on encountering those things that lurk in the lacunae of the colonized violence that is gender, Helmeczy’s work identifies the functions of masculinities involved in the anti-queer, patriarchal valorization of sexual violence prevention efforts in the Academy. Thankfully, no men are safe from Helmeczy’s throttling of the categorical binary of “good” and “bad” men — Helmeczy’s work strikes at a root limb of misogyny by sinking Being into the heart of cis-hetero-patriarchal

knowledge production. That is to say, by operating an ontological jamming of the discourse of “what it means to be a man,” Helmeczy ensures a readerly understanding of masculinity as determined by an individual’s choice to participate in a culture that makes rape and sexual assault the only method of communication between subjects.

Following Helmeczy’s demonstration of a clear need for consistent, contemporary questioning of the University by the populations it was allegedly “designed” to serve — students — Eugenia Huang (Wake Forest University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina) continues on Volume 8’s interrogation of power: the future of the university. In their article, Huang structures an organizational and discursive analysis of higher education institutions to produce a critique of the ways in which sites that operate through the appearance of political “freedom” have instead become co-opted by the same institutions their faculty and critical students attempt to deconstruct through direct political action. Huang’s scholarship is unique in that it takes the public, functional policies and procedures regarding interactions with “student activists” and subjects them to a Foucauldian analysis of power. Huang concludes that “while these policies attempt to offer students avenues for dissent, they ultimately view student protest adversely” and that “the implicit narrative in the report is that student activism and protest is disorderly, dangerous, and disruptive to the university; therefore, protest on campus must be regulated and subverted.”

Not content with assessing only the façade of the University, Huang teases out the ways in which these student protest policies commodify

Years in Fatal Shooting of Woman,” *CNN*, 7 June 2019, <<https://www.cnn.com/2019/06/07/us/minneapolis-mohamed-noor-sentenced/index.html>>



student activists at the level of entity and essence. Huang continues their insight, remarking, “The docility of individuals ... is maintained through the fear or threat of legal consequences, such as imprisonment, social isolation, financial burden, or even physical violence.” As such, Huang is uncovering a core artifact of the process of meaning-making that activates the university in the colonized/colonizing Global North by saying,

Higher education’s mission to create civically engaged, critical, and empowered youth is undermined when our universities are turned into spaces of docility and punitive factories that simply reproduce normalized ideas of behavior and thinking. Consequently, the dominant forces and ideas in larger society go unchallenged and unchecked.

As an extension of the violent, mobile nature of hegemonized colonial power, the University cannot be rendered neutral as a site of “free speech” or as entirely and pathetically useless in its function as a base for resistance, reparation, and restoration.

Thinking, then, against the design of the university, we wish to thank our faculty editorial board in the Critical Theory and Social Justice Department at Occidental College in Los Angeles, California, with particular gratitude to our lead faculty editor, Professor G.A.E. Griffin. In addition to the faculty who provide such intentional and well-directed guidance, we would not be able to make *CTSJ* possible without the consistent help and support of Administrative Assistant Betsy Dillon. Additionally, we would

like to take a small moment to express our thanks to our Managing Editor Tim Lewis (Class of 2017), who has served *CTSJ* for the last five years in core leadership positions. Tim’s commitment to this publication, its scholarship, and its mission cannot and should not be understated.

Following these small thanks, though, is a strong appreciation to our copy editor Karen DeVivo. Karen has worked with *CTSJ* since its infancy (nearly ten years ago!) and has always ensured that the quality of our communication is at its highest level and form. Lastly, we would like to thank our graphic design and layout editor Scott Wood for his willingness to assist us again with our design process and Amazon publication infrastructure. Without Scott’s excellent attention to detail and careful understanding of the layout aesthetic, *CTSJ* would not come close to visually matching the excellence of our written content. ■■

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