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New Directions in Feminism and Global Race Studies: A Book Conversation

On January 20, 2021, Samantha Pinto, associate professor of English at the University of Texas at Austin, organized a Zoom event on “New Directions in Feminism and Global Race Studies (a Book Conversation)” with authors Tiffany N. Florvil, Kaiama L. Glover, Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel, Katherine M. Marino, Robin Mitchell, and Jacqueline-Bethel Tchouta Mougoué. These scholars had all recently published books that expand how we think about transnational and global Black feminisms. Pinto brought them together in a virtual panel to spread the word about new books in the field and to foster community during the pandemic. Four hundred and forty-five people registered for the event. Pinto shared questions with the panelists ahead of time, but instead of following a question-and-answer format, the roundtable immediately became a conversation, with the participants engaging in generative dialogue with one another.

The lightly edited transcript of the conversation covers a wide range of academic, personal, and political terrains. These authors discuss how we can expand our understandings of the histories of global feminisms and race studies by putting Black women at the center and by exploring transnational and diasporic histories of the Americas, the Caribbean, Africa, and Europe. In a conversation that transcended discipline, scholars reflected on how they research Black women and other subjects who have been violently erased from the archives and, often, from global feminist histories. They reflected on how we define feminism and how we might broaden that definition. In addition to the intellectual richness of their conversation, the panelists discussed with unusual candor aspects of academic life that are often not talked about

enough—navigating the difficulties of doing research, confronting racism in the archives, drawing on personal and familial relationships while researching and writing, and sharing dynamic and creative intellectual practices with one another.

The dialogue also puts feminist and antiracist histories into conversation with events unfolding on the day it took place when, after a tumultuous presidential election, Joseph Biden was inaugurated as president and Kamala Harris became the first Black, South Asian, and female vice president of the United States. After a year of racial reckoning in the wake of the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and others; after a year of a global pandemic that highlighted deep inequalities around race, class, gender, and nation; and just weeks after the January 6 Capitol insurrection that saw marchers armed with guns and Confederate and neo-Nazi flags, the authors thought through the relevance and urgency of their scholarship, drawing powerful connections between their work on global and Black feminisms from the nineteenth century to today.

About a quarter of the way into the conversation, the panel experienced a Zoom bombing, where trolls took the names of scholars in the audience, posted hostile comments, and spoke over some of the panelists. The speakers continued, in spite of this disturbing interruption, while Pinto and the virtual audience jumped into action. Participants flooded the chat with words of support for the panelists and helped Pinto respond to the hate speech and eliminate the trolls from the zoom forum. Although the event was recorded, the organizer and panelists decided not to put the recording online because of the disruption. Given that decision, we think it is even more important to publish this conversation in *Signs*, which has been a space for antiracist and feminist intellectual thought and scholarship. We hope that this conversation reaches a wide audience, especially of graduate students, junior scholars, and nontraditional scholars, who will benefit from the authors' insights and advice. We also offer this conversation in this special issue of *Signs* because it represents a historical document itself. On an Inauguration Day that was freighted with emotion, the panelists underscored the political and personal stakes of academic work, and the contemporary salience of historical work. They demonstrated the urgency for Black feminist scholarship today. This conversation reflects a living example of feminist community. The authors actively draw on and support each other's ideas and writing, demonstrating both in word and in action how central feminist solidarity is to scholarship and to our well-being.

Samantha Pinto (SP): In preparation for this roundtable on “New Directions in Feminism and Global Race Studies,” I asked you all to think about

a few questions beforehand. They're big. They're broad. A lot of them are about how striking the work is as a collective, thinking across global feminisms and across the ways we try to think about race, both in Europe and the West and in the Americas. I think most significantly, the questions ask how your work expands this conceptual and material geography and joins other scholars who are working on those expansions as well.

Tiffany N. Florvil (TNF): My book, *Mobilizing Black Germany: Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement* (2020), focuses on Black German mobilization from the 1980s to the mid-2000s and how Black Germans were activists, scholars, and intellectuals in their own rights.

Through their mobilizations, they were able to create a new public sphere for Black Germans in which they pushed issues of race, racism, and what Ann Stoler (2010) has called “colonial aphasia” that defined Germany’s experiences. Ann Stoler coined the term “colonial aphasia,” and she uses it to describe white Europeans’ dissociation with their colonial pasts. With colonial aphasia, Europeans obscure knowledge and dismember the past, leading to incomprehension and unspeakableness. Black German activist-intellectuals confronted this colonial aphasia through conferences, through art installations, through art exhibitions, through music, through feminist conferences, and through diasporic engagements with Black History Month. They do this all in an effort to disseminate knowledge about who they were, who they’ve always been, and who they will continue to be, and to show that there’s been a prominent Black diasporic community in Germany that predates the twentieth century. The movement was engaged in the excavation of these larger narratives of the diaspora that predate German unification of 1871 and that show a dynamic Black community, even though it was a scattered one.

The movement was driven by men and women, but some of the prominent leaders were Black German feminists, and many of them were queer Black German feminist women who felt they could not ignore issues of gender and sexuality when talking about liberation, recognition, and belonging.

Kaiama L. Glover (KLG): Sam had asked us to think about the two or three takeaways from our books. So, the Twitter version of my book would be maybe two things: one, “community isn’t for everyone,” and two, “narcissism is underrated, at least when it comes to women, and particularly when it comes to Black women.”

But more substantively, the book, *A Regarded Self: Caribbean Womanhood and the Ethics of Disorderly Being* (2021), is really about what I’ve come to think of as defensive self-regard—practices or positions of refusal

in the face of unacceptable conditions for belonging. These are the basic ideas that I began with in the book and where the book itself begins.

More specifically, it's about works of Caribbean fiction that pay attention to the cost for women of privileging the self. I'm asking throughout the book that we consider women who aspire to an exclusive relationship with the self. And I ask that we think about how the fact of aspiring to adamant self-regard could be viewed as an ethical practice even in the context of ostensibly progressive or liberating or otherwise righteous communities, or communities that seem to be righteous, liberating, or progressive but are in fact revealed to be coercive if we look at the experiences of wayward subjects, to borrow from Saidiya Hartman (2019). Wayward, vis-à-vis whom, and vis-à-vis what?

Throughout the book, I tried to consider these questions both textually—that is, looking at how particular Caribbean women characters are configured with respect to their narrative communities, but then also extratextually—as in, how do these characters disorder or disrupt our desires and expectations as professional readers of literature? How do we value—or *do* we value—expressions of individual freedom that don't amount to antiracist, feminist, or otherwise political projects? I hope the book opens up conversations about how we might think about women's self-centeredness in the very most literal sense, when that self-focus doesn't necessarily attend to a polis-facing agenda or practice. What is individual freedom worth? How or how much do we value this if it doesn't actually get attached to collective liberation? So that's the nutshell of it.

Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel (AKJG): Thank you so much Sam and Tiffany for creating the space and bringing us together in community at a time when it feels very much needed. I guess because my book, *Reimagining Liberation: How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire* (2020), has been out for a year, I approach the question differently because I feel like I've been talking about it for so long now. I want to think about my book in terms of numbers in a way that kind of requires me to jump backward and forward in time, so bear with me.

I want to talk about today. Today is Inauguration Day in the US. I'll go back a little bit in November, right after the election. I was driving around, and I saw a yard sign in my neighborhood that said, "two plus two equals four again." There was this sort of idea of a return to reason, a return to a world that makes sense, a return to a certain kind of order that is captured in this mathematical equation. It's a return to a future that we have lived before—two plus two equals four, again.

My book has been out for a year. My book turned one very quietly on January 6, 2021, when what happened at the Capitol happened. And in

the early months when the book was out I thought a lot about the moment that it had come into, last summer, about what it means to read a book about Black French women's anti-imperialist thought in the time of protests against the police killings of two unarmed Black men, George Floyd in the United States and Adama Traoré in France, and in a time when the violence of empire was not new but was met with heightened awareness and a broader public conversation and consciousness. So I've talked about what the story of this book is, in countless Zooms. I've talked about how Central African Republic activist and writer Andrée Blouin's son was murdered in 1944 because he was condemned to death by a colonial administrator who withheld malaria medication from him because he was Black. And I've talked about Martiniquan writer, teacher, and activist Suzanne Césaire's insistence on life, on the Caribbean as teeming with life, even in the face of death wrought by colonial violence and by the Second World War, how thinking about life can be a blueprint for us thinking about the possibilities of Black life beyond the national and the juridical framing of citizenship.

So today, sitting here today now, I want to think about the story that my book tells for a time beyond the now, beyond the urgent nows that it felt like in the summer, and I want to think about my book beyond the relief that we might feel because we need to. And not because the math actually adds up. *Reimagining Liberation* is a story about seven women in various parts of the French Empire who also stood in a moment of transition at the end of World War II. And who found hope not in the fiction of a racial calculus that will never add up, because empire was then and remains now alive and well, but rather they found and enacted that hope by working against imperialism, as Suzanne Césaire did when she went toe-to-toe with a censoring colonial administration. By being in community, as Malian independent activist and writer Aoua Kéita did by allying her work as a midwife with her efforts to register women in rural areas to vote in Mali. And also, by thinking about Blackness, far, far beyond the US national frame as African American activist Eslanda Robeson did in her travels through Central Africa.

If I think about my book as a story, it's a story that I hope rejects the idea that the only future worth returning to is the old colonial order or the old imperial order. And it's a story that I sincerely hope allows us to expand our imagining of freedom beyond the very limiting constraints of what empire tells us freedom looks like.

So that's how I would frame the story of my book, because you've asked me this question today, and it's an answer that looked different last summer, and it's an answer that will look different tomorrow, most likely. But it's an answer that I hope remains one of hope, regardless of the moment we inhabit.

Katherine M. Marino (KMM): I also want to echo the thanks to Sam and Tiffany and to all the people on the panel, all scholars whom I admire. I have learned so much from all of your work.

My book, *Feminism for the Americas: The Making of an International Human Rights Movement* (2019), is about an inter-American feminist movement that thrived over the first half of the twentieth century, especially from the 1920s to the 1940s. The book argues that in spite of Anglo American US feminists' attempt to dominate the movement and control its objectives, usually around a narrow conception of feminism defined exclusively by legal, civil, and political equality under the law and through international treaties that they tried to push into intergovernmental bodies, this movement actually expanded quite dramatically to include radical goals, thanks largely to the collective efforts of Latin American feminists who banded together and also ushered in a broader grassroots form of this movement.

The book really focuses on six women in particular, one from the US and also women from Brazil, Cuba, Panama, Chile, Uruguay. It looks at how South-South collaborations were galvanized in part because of these encounters with Anglo American feminists who were often racist, who often deemed their brands of feminism as superior to those of their Latin American counterparts. It looks at how these South-South collaborations did help usher in a dramatic form of more grassroots inter-American feminist organizing led by Latin American feminists who prioritized social and economic rights—rights for children born out of wedlock and for their often single mothers, and for domestic and rural workers as well as state-sponsored childcare and maternity legislation. They upheld these goals also while often embracing anti-imperialism.

Women's anti-imperialist solidarities had been forged since the dramatic rise of US empire in the region at the turn of the twentieth century, and even before that with the Mexican American War, but these Pan-American encounters with US feminists often made anti-imperialism even more of a meaningful reality for many of these women. These interactions also helped them expand their visions of feminism to include multiple forms of inequality that thrived in the thirties and forties when these groups were intersecting with socialist and communist organizing, and in some parts of the Americas with indigenous groups and with African-diasporic communities—African-descended women who had also been obviously organizing their own feminisms long prior to these collaborations ushered in by the Popular Front years. The book argues that it was in this Popular Front nexus of inter-American feminism that the language of international human rights—rights for all regardless of race, class, sex, religion—became viewed as a meaningful, intersectional form of feminism. This was forged especially thanks to the role of Black leftist

women from Cuba and from other places who were insisting to their mestiza counterparts that antiracism needed to be part of an inter-American feminist agenda.

One of the outcomes of this was that it was a group of Latin American feminists who pushed women's rights under the UN Charter of 1945. They did this over the explicit objections of their British and US counterparts at the San Francisco conference that drafted the charter. There, British and US women who were delegates to the conference believed that women's rights were either unnecessary or too controversial to include in the UN Charter. So the book overall underscores a point that I think all of the works of these authors on this panel underscore—that feminism did not originate from white, Western European, or US women, and that in fact women from the global South—Latin American women, African-descended women—have been at the vanguard of global feminisms.

Robin Mitchell (RM): I echo the thanks for Samantha and for Tiffany for inviting us here today. Like Annette's, my book, *Vénus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century France* (2020), came out, officially, on January 1, 2020, although the press started shipping it sometime in December. And I found out about that from many of the people in this room posting pictures of it on Twitter. And it was absolutely amazing.

What the book looks at is the appropriation and the production of Black women's bodies, and the attempts to show how these bodies helped talk about what was represented as a defeat in what would become known as Haiti. My book takes place in the late eighteenth century through the end of slavery in France in 1848. What I wanted to do was to look at the defeat in Saint-Domingue that had always been represented to me as a white male defeat, and I mean that in terms of the idea of revolution as male space. I wanted to look at how that defeat helped fuel certain types of colonial fantasies, not only about a colony lost but how Black women helped white French men and women imagine a new identity. So, in essence, the book is about looking at the people who were looking at Black women's bodies and listening to Black women's voices.

I started out with a short biography of the three women that I talk about because I needed to show what white contemporaries knew about them, or thought they knew about them. I hope it helps the reader understand the lengths that these Black women went to, to manipulate them when they could. And so I chose three particularly visible women who loomed large on the French landscape in the beginning to mid-nineteenth century: Sarah Baartman, who's also known as the Hottentot Venus, who was brought from South Africa and paraded around as a spectacle; a young Senegalese girl by

the name of Ourika, who was purchased and gifted as a house pet to a French noble family; and Jean Duvall, the common-law wife of the poet Charles Baudelaire. What I wanted to look at is how colonial fantasies and colonial imagination intertwined with a type of racial ventriloquism, and how . . . white French people saw the Black female body as a useful way to talk about things that frightened them, that annoyed them, that angered them.

And what I found when I started doing my work was that while these women had all been talked about separately, none of them had been talked about together. I thought that putting them together gave us another conversation that would tell us something new about France itself. Annette's book referred to the imperial order, and for me what was important about the book was that the French Empire and the imperial order never looked like people thought it did, or how people talked about it. There were always Black people roaming around, and people saw them. They were present.

So, for me, it was a historical journey, but it was also a way of recalibrating twentieth-century France. By that I mean what this book shows is that Blackness was always built into a model of French republicanism and French imperialism, internationalism. Whatever you want to talk about related to universalism, Blackness was always there. Part of the project of nineteenth- and twentieth-century France, in my opinion, is erasing that Blackness in order to have some kind of universal France that doesn't exist. I hope the book complicates how we talk about France earlier and therefore how we talk about it now.

Jacqueline-Bethel Mougoué (JBM): I just wanted to echo what everyone has said thus far and to thank all of the panelists, Samantha, and Tiffany for bringing us all together.

My book, *Gender, Separatist Politics, and Embodied Nationalism in Cameroon* (2019), has several takeaways. I use Cameroon, a West Central African country, as a case study and key example of many of the research questions that I had and many of the conclusions that I made. One of the main takeaways is how ideas or issues related to ideal womanhood can shape imagining or ideas about the nation and drive nationalist movements. Women, and ideas about gender norms, have always been and will continue to be at the center of how we understand the nation.

Of course, you have multiple people who are debating and grappling about what this ideal womanhood looks like. And in the case of Cameroon, it's a very conservative ideal womanhood. But in my research, I found that women were exerting or exercising what I would call and what many scholars of gender studies would call "feminist actions." Many of the women I was looking at or researching did not identify themselves as feminists, even

though they were embracing and participating in what many scholars would call feminist actions.

The second key takeaway is that everyday actions are very much politicized. When I say everyday actions, I mean how we talk, comportment, how we walk, the clothes that we wear, whether or not we gossip. All of these issues can be at the heart of political debates and ideas. If we look at Cameroon as a case study, particularly during the 1960s into the early 1970s, what you have is a country that has just emerged from dual colonial rule—the British and the French. This newly independent country is very much fractured when it comes to ideas about the nation. And the areas that I specifically focus on are the formerly British-ruled regions. The political elites felt that they were under another form of colonization by their French counterparts in the country. And they were very concerned about this question of “who are we” as a nation in a Francophone, or French-speaking-dominated, African country. So what you see is that there are local African ideas about nationhood that are also drawing from European legacies to define themselves in terms of everyday comportment, clothing, and food: “We speak English, we wear British clothes,” or “our women know how to cook African food and also British pudding.” You see all of these debates unraveling in the 1960s and also in the early 1970s.

One of the main things that I would love readers to take away from my book is this idea about what feminism looks like. I remember giving a talk at an unnamed fancy school, and in the Q&A someone said, “but this is not feminism; the women you are talking about are not engaging in feminist actions.” I had to swallow and sort of think a bit. And then I had to respond and say, “Indeed it is. But it’s not the feminism that we may envision in the Western world.” What I find fascinating about the feminist actions that I look at is that the women were making changes; it’s conservative, but they’re absolutely making changes slowly. It’s not kicking down the door with guns, but change is happening, such as women progressively entering parliament and young adult women increasingly participating in organized sports.

So, that’s the overview of my work, which is very much about connecting the past and the present-day period.

RM: I want to respond to what Jacque just talked about because it’s really sticking with me—this idea of Black women’s feminism and what is exactly feminism? And what that looks like to other people.

I’m always particularly struck by the way so much of our work is sort of predicated on a belief by the dominant culture that Black women are safer in some kind of way, and are therefore useful to use, and how not safe we

are at the same time. But I'm also struck by how this is sort of expanding what feminism looks like. I work in the nineteenth century when this kind of terminology doesn't really exist. I'm early in the nineteenth century, yet I see a type of agency and feminism in the women I write about. If you look at Jean Duvall, who was married to Charles Baudelaire, on the face of it, it doesn't always look like she has a tremendous amount of agency. But she actually does, and she uses what agency she has when it is appropriate for her. For instance, Baudelaire hits her on the head with an anvil, he injures her, and then she poisons his cat. And to me that's feminist. That is a feminist moment. She has not a lot of agency, and she takes a moment where she can actually say, "I can actually do something to you too." And she does it. And I think that those are important moments. So I want to make sure we push the boundaries of what Black feminism looks like as much as we can. Because I think once we do that, we start seeing moments of empowerment everywhere.

TNF: I think Robin and Jacque raise really awesome points because I see that with discussions about Black German feminism, especially what constitutes Black German feminism. Oftentimes when we think about European feminism, it's certainly a sort of a white feminism that's pitched, and in many cases it's also a very heterosexual push for gender equality. And what I find fascinating about Black German activist-intellectuals in the 1980s and 1990s is that they were using very queer strategies. They're expanding what feminism can mean in Germany. They're *not* avoiding working with their fellow Black German men. That is *not* a possibility for them. They see men, see Black German men, and other men in the diaspora as a part of these larger discussions about liberation, how we articulate new visions of what Germany can constitute, how we also articulate new versions of belonging and citizenship. Even though Germans are like, Black Germans, they don't exist, or those numbers are small, why do we bother? But the Black German movement and activists in particular are pushing back and saying, "We matter because Blackness has always been here in a variety of forms. And we're raising attention, and excavating that knowledge so that you guys all can get it." The colonial legacy, in particular in Germany, is tied to particular notion of blood, descent, and identity, and this logic shaped othering practices and discourses that led to the Holocaust as well as a variety of other forms of genocide in the German context.

So I think what's so interesting is that we see queer strategies in place with Black German women. We see them really doing interesting things in terms of thinking about queer belonging. Their practice of queer belonging entails moving beyond biological kinships or even marriage; they form diverse

relationships that extend beyond filial connections. Black German women also used their marginality to challenge cisheteronormativity and essentialized notions and practices. That internationalism, for Black German women, in this case, is not only within the confines of Germany, but they're also expanding what they consider internationalism to be without even leaving the borders of Germany. Internationalism for Black Germans meant solidarity with South African antiapartheid activists who were living in Germany. It could also mean connecting with Nigerian expats who were drawing attention to difficulties in their country. As a result of this perspective, you see feminism coming in all of those versions of activism.

JBM: I wanted to add to what Tiffany and Robin were saying, and also, someone in the chat was asking, "what is feminism?" It depends on where your research is or who you are speaking to. The women I'm looking at were in the 1960s, 1970s, and I'm saying they're engaging in feminist actions. These feminist actions are ones in which they're embracing domestic roles but also cosmopolitan, progressive ideas. And to be fair, I just want to clarify that a lot of this is also based on their socioeconomic background. These women went to Christian mission schools; subsequently, they are high school and college educated. So there's this idea of, yes you can be a university-educated woman. But make sure you cook your husband's food with your own hands. And if you have a maid, the maid can cook your kids' food. But make sure that your husband's food is always cooked by your own hands. Women use their own labor for that as a way to embrace certain ideas about male domination. But at the same time, if you look at them within different spaces, particularly within women's organizations, they don't shy away from working with men. They absolutely want to work with men. Men show up at the women's meetings. Men are there, and the women keep saying we can't make changes without the men. Also, there's also a lot of emphasis on maternal power. And so the feminism that I'm particularly looking at is one that is really, really driven by maternal power, biologically and symbolically. There is this idea that girls and women are the *mothers* of the nation, or they're future mothers. Women who are mothers or seen to be mothers for the future understand that they hold some level of political power.

KLG: Let me just add that it seems to me, and what I'm hearing here, and I think what animates a lot of our works, is this notion of the danger of the definitional. That even feminism, which is a term that attaches to progressive, and to what is deemed correct and right, et cetera, can become something that's narrowing, excluding, and limiting. And going back to thinking about this, particularly in this moment, knowing that so many of us have just

come off watching the inauguration, and seeing Kamala Harris and Amanda Gorman, and thinking about the possibilities of feminism. The way in which my own work, and this book in particular, inserts itself is, I think, in asking that we resist demands for political heroism from women of color. Particularly in this really crucial moment.

This became incredibly stark for me in the days following Kamala Harris's nomination as vice president on the Democratic ticket. The Twitters came out and were kind of like, okay, cool. Now Kamala, what are you planning to do about racism, misogyny in the US, also the caste system in Southeast Asia and its diaspora? Also, how are you going to make amends for your time as a prosecutor and fix mass incarceration? And also how Black are you *really*? Do you know how to dance? And she'd *just* gotten the job. And folks were setting her up to fail in all the ways. And the people who were doing this, who *are* doing this, who I think are holding fast to some of these gendered expectations, are *my* Twitter folks—not racists and trolls but a community that I'm a part of in this world. So I've really been thinking about this today, a day that for me and for others is about celebrating women of color to a large extent. But I do think that as we're having this conversation, and what's kind of internal to our work, is that we have to be careful, full of care, when we put all the things that we hope for and need on the shoulders of Black women.

SP: I feel like I should acknowledge that we're having trolls invading the chat for those looking at it. Folks are hijacking names, but I'm just removing everyone doing it. I just wanted to acknowledge that was happening. You all are doing great. Keep talking to each other. And if I'm distracted, that's why. I just want to keep the conversation going. Thank you all for being here.

RM: I think what you just said is so important, because it was really important to me that the book not create heroines. I wanted you to see human beings, and I wanted you to see them in all of their complexity. I wanted you to see when they reacted with anger, or when they reacted, if they had a moment of joy, if they made decisions that were hard. That was really important to me. I didn't want people thinking that they were anything but human beings who lived lives of enslavement sometimes, of freedom sometimes, of degradation and humiliation, but were always human beings. And I thought if I did that, then the book was okay.

So I was just thinking about Kamala, and you're right. I mean, literally ten seconds after, it was how is she gonna create world peace by herself? And it was like, damn, can she have five minutes to like sit? And I think it's really important. I also think that most of us feel an incredible responsibility to the women we write about, to our subject matter, to get it right because

so much of it is what lives in the archive, it's fake. So how do we tell stories about people whose contemporaries did everything they could to erase them from the archive?

AKJG: I guess I'll jump in and say too that there are such beautiful connections between what Kaiama just said about the dangers of the definitional and what Liz Jacob is saying in the chat. That there's possibly something liberating, something valuable about this kind of shape-shifting quality of feminism based on the corpus of texts and the people that we think about and write about, a kind of feminism that refuses that order, that refuses to be pinned down into a particular kind of definition.

I think there's value in that. It's challenging because at the same time we're producing this work *about* that kind of feminism *within* a particular order of knowledge that thrives on the definitional. And so I know that one of your questions, Sam, was about disciplines, that our work is also interdisciplinary. And part of that work of disciplining is also the work of defining, defining in ways that are legible because apparently having that common definition as a baseline allows us to have a conversation. And in some ways that's true. But in other ways, also, the women we write about, think about, are ones who at the same time are straining against the limits of those definitions and of those disciplinary ordering gestures in ways that I think are really productive.

Where my thinking and my research is going now—this is like a third book down the line, but I really want somebody to write this book, and if nobody does it I guess I'll have to write it myself: I really want to read a book about French Caribbean feminism. What does it mean to think about, to come back to your question, Sam, about geography? The ways that feminism or Black woman's practices of feminism challenge and exceed the boundaries, not only of definition, not only of time, not only of discipline, but also of geography. What does it mean to locate Black feminism beyond certain national borders?

So I think that ultimately if we don't walk away with a clear and single definition, that's actually the point, that's actually what's productive because it allows for so many more possibilities.

KMM: I just wanted to say that I appreciate this question that Robin posed: how do we tell stories about people whose contemporaries did everything they could to erase them from the archive? I've been thinking about that question a lot lately, partly because I just read Jessica Marie Johnson's wonderful book *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (2020), which does such a successful job excavating a network

of women, and relatedly I think her book offers a wonderful way to expand our notion of global feminisms. I found her concept of Black femme freedom, her use of intimacy and women's relationships with each other, especially her use of baptismal records and naming practices, moving and so theoretically, methodologically, and historically helpful in thinking of the question in relation to my future work. I'm starting to focus on Afro-Panamanian communist feminist Felicia Santizo. She was surveilled by the US Army in the Panama Canal Zone for a decade in the 1950s. So I've been thinking of this question about how to use these archives that are created in explicitly violent circumstances and, on the other hand, that do provide information. I'm finding all of your work and Jessica's work extremely helpful in helping me think through different methods of reading these sources, and also of learning more about Santizo and her networks, her relationships.

SP: Our next question was about archives, and that was a great segue into it because one of the things I'm thinking of is the methods everyone here innovatively uses to construct archives, which are radically interdisciplinary and also radically different across your texts. As a reader, I thought that was amazing, both on an intellectual level and, for those of us who are early in our research processes and practices, on an educational level of how to continue with this kind of research that's not clear from the usual archives.

JBM: Yeah, I just wanted to address the archives and issues about drawing on different disciplines in our work. As a trained historian, when you want to include issues of gender or feminism in your work, it can be a bit of a challenge. It's especially the case if you're working on particular areas or on a specific country like I am, Cameroon, where there's one, maybe two women historians; it's all men writing. And they're mainly writing men's history. I have to draw from other disciplines and other kinds of scholars who are writing about Cameroonian women—anthropologists, sociologists, and those in literature. So, I really had to stretch my definition of the methods that I could and should use and also really stretch the sources that I used. I'm a trained historian, but half of my book's citations are by those who are in anthropology and political science because those are the scholars who were addressing issues about women and gender. Not historians. And so, as I look at the new dissertations that are being done, it's really exciting to see this field of African feminist history slowly emerging. But when I started doing research, it was tough.

I have to acknowledge that it's really important to talk about one's standpoint when one goes to the archives. As someone born in Cameroon, I didn't have to jump through all of the administrative hoops that many people

had to jump through. I took a family friend, an “aunt” who was in her sixties. She cooked some food and took it to the chief archivist. Also, we had a bottle of whiskey that we gave to him, and we had access to the archives for a year. But this is just the way it is. I’m just being honest. I could pull on these family ties. I could pull on being born there, and having active family ties. But at the same time, I was at a disadvantage when I was pulling from oral histories or oral stories. People were saying, “you must know, . . . you must know.” No, I need you to spell it out for me. Whereas if I wasn’t from there, they might be more careful or detailed in the information they share. So I think that one’s standpoint is really important when we talk about archives and what we can access or not access. Also, one’s age. I was interviewing women who were in their fifties and sixties. I look young for my age, but I would come in there, and they’d be like, “who is this young girl?” So, I would once again rely on aunties, and they would show up and say, “This is our niece, her research is legit. Okay, time to start talking.”

KLG: So I dare say, I’m probably the most “not historian” of this little group, but that is not to say that I’m without an archive. And that’s because to some extent, in the worlds that most interest me, truths are best told in fiction in some ways.

Someone in the chat mentioned Marisa Fuentes, and I remember some years ago now in a workshop conversation with Marisa and Jennifer Morgan—this must have been right before Marisa’s book on the lives of enslaved women in eighteenth-century Barbados, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (2016), had come out. We got to discussing the inevitable questions, the ones that Jacque just raised, for example, of how to account for the experiences of those who aren’t documented or aren’t recorded by the archive and, especially in the case of this conversation, the experiences of the enslaved. How do you retrieve certain stories from the archive and integrate them properly into the historical record when that record actively denies or denigrates them? And I’m using that vague term “account for” very deliberately because it contains everything from narration to representation to enumeration and so forth. But anyway, Marisa and Jennifer were rightly and carefully addressing this question of the impossible accounting for as the fundamental conundrum and the fundamental bind that they faced as feminist historians of slavery.

And I remember feeling in that conversation, a certain kind of certainty about how much of a “lit person” I truly am—feeling kind of deeply aware of how the narrative fiction that I spend so much time immersed in readily awakens the ghosts in the archive. How certain works of literature can kind of posit a non-consumption-based empathy that, of course, while potentially

dangerously imperfect, also allows us to dwell a little bit in the space-time of history. And so when I was curating the sources for my book, the corpus, choosing the novels was a matter of identifying literary works that provoked me to want to dwell in and know stories at the same time that the stories were telling me that they couldn't be fully known. So these were kinds of reminders of the impossibility of fully knowing the past, fully knowing anyone's story, and understanding that that's a burden we all have to accept with a measure of grace as we pursue the work that we're doing.

AKJG: On the heels of that I'll say that I'm also a lit person; I'm not a historian. I pretend to be a historian on Twitter so I can get to go and stay at Robin Mitchell's villa with a pool [laughter].

But it's so interesting, Kaiama, what you're talking about, the unknowability. Valuing that quality of unknowability and sitting with that and wrestling with that. Because I've been thinking a lot about archives—the desire to recuperate that story, because the absence of that story, the truncation of that narrative is a violence that has been done. And we have this impulse for redress. How do we bring wholeness to this record of fragmentation?

And yet there's also *value* in that fragmentation, the ways that those fragments then *resist* certain kinds of wholeness and order. To maybe give a more concrete example from what I'm working on right now, it's an archive that begins for me in a conversation between two writers, between two Caribbean novelists, Évelyn Trouillot and Merle Collins, at that epic Caribbean Studies Association in Haiti. Évelyn Trouillot says, in passing, there's very little work that has been done on children and slavery. And I thought, oh, that's interesting. That's just a sort of passing thing. And then that opens up an archive for me that now goes into Trouillot's novel about an enslaved girl, *Rosalie l'infâme* (2003). And then that goes into an archive that engages with literature *and* with history because it's a novel that is based on a historical event that's also a myth that's also legend. So this archive is one that begins to weave among genres, where questions of recuperation and wholeness now have to take a backseat. Then we have to sort of sit with that fragmentation and think about what that fragmentation at once testifies to, but also what it *gets* us.

I think that with my first book, thinking about Black women in the twentieth century, I really wanted to bring that wholeness, because my point of departure was seeing this sort of gaping hole, right, and seeing that these women were *there*. And it's not only a question of hearing them; we think a lot about silencing in the archives, and rightly so, but also about *visibility*. What does it mean to quite literally *see* them? And so as I move into this new project, I'm thinking a lot about what it means to work with archives that crisscross genres.

But also beyond thinking about archives in this sort of abstract sense, I want to make this connection to what Jacque was talking about earlier about navigating archives as physical spaces, and navigating the things that we find in archives as very tangible, real documents. The frailty and the fragility of those documents, the incomplete nature of those documents, and sometimes being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of those documents. Navigating our access and our presence in archives, not only what we do *with* the archives and in the archives but also what we do *to* the archives.

To kind of piggyback off Jacque sharing a story in the archives, one of the really strange moments for me in that physical space—I was doing this research in Benjamin Franklin’s library at the American Philosophical Association Library in Philly. It’s this amazing, beautiful space. I’m sitting there, and I see this letter written by an enslaved boy to Benjamin Franklin. And it’s in French, and I’m like, Oh my goodness, it’s amazing. Now I’m the person you don’t want to sit next to in the archives, because I’m so very chatty. I talk so much. And it’s very, very irreverent, and I’m working on that. But in that moment, I’ve been having this conversation with this person in the archive who’s sharing the space with me. I’ll never forget, he’s a very well-meaning white Frenchman, and we’ve been having this conversation in French. That’s how I know he’s French. And so I see this document, and I can’t read the cursive, and so, in French, I say, “Can you help me make out the handwriting?” And he starts to read this letter aloud to me in English. And I’m so struck by what my physical presence in that archival space did to that archival space in that moment because there was this disconnect between this conversation we had been having in the present in French, and now suddenly the inability to understand me as someone who can be French or who can speak French, like in this historical exchange. And so it’s really striking to me to think about and to imagine with everyone else on this panel, the experiences that you’ve all had in archives as physical spaces. And what those elements and questions about access and navigation then do for our work.

RM: I’m going to jump in here, I’ll tell you another archival story. Because they’re absolutely right. I mean, our very presence in the archives, I don’t think I’ve ever been in an archive where someone else who looks like me was also in the archive. I’m usually the only Black face in an archive when I’m there. And so it’s scary and awkward, and when I first started doing my work, I had no idea what I was doing. And I still didn’t have the language to look for what I wanted. I went to Musée Carnavalet and said that I was looking at Black women. And she said, “You know, we don’t have any of those. You know, we sort of don’t *do* Blackness.” And there was a sign behind their head that said *nègré*, and I was like, “um.” And they were like,

“Well, we have that. That’s all we have.” And then there was a clock. That was a Black man with a clock in his stomach and I thought. . . . And they were like, “Oh, that too. But that’s it.” And I was so discouraged. And I thought, okay, I don’t know if I’m going to be able to do this. I was walking around Carnavalet and seeing the Palais-Royal painting and seeing the Black woman in the corner, who subsequently I found out was named Esther, front and center in this painting, and telling myself, “Okay, you’re going to have to figure this out, and you’re going to have to figure this out on your own. So what do you need the archives to sort of do for you?”

I was really influenced by Marisa Fuentes’s book, as I’m sure everybody in this room was. I came into the archives thinking I’m going to find these women, their voices are going to be clear, and they weren’t. If you’ve read my book, there’s one word from Sarah Baartmann. It’s “no,” and that’s a great word. And I’m happy that I got it, but I got that “no” through the autopsy performed by Georges Cuvier, who just didn’t care enough about her to sort of censor himself. While she was alive, Cuvier was obsessed with examining Baartmann’s physique, as that is why she was paraded around Europe. When asked if he could examine her, she responded, “no.” That is, until her death, when her body was dissected by Cuvier to contribute to his theories on racialized science and a body cast was made of her. He noted their conversation in which she denied him access to her body, and in her death, he took it upon himself to violate her body anyway.

What I found out was that was my entry point—reading things by people who didn’t feel the need to censor themselves about Black women because they didn’t think they were important. And *that’s* where I started finding what I was looking for. And for me, what ultimately became so important for my work in the archives and my work in general was, “Wow, these white folks are spending a lot of time trying to convince us that Black women don’t matter.” And it was like, there it is.

And so I’m sort of lucky in the historical work I do that truth isn’t just best found in fiction. It’s also found in history. It got to a point with my work that I don’t care whether what they’re saying is true or not. I just care that they said it. Now I need to figure out what they’re doing with what they just said. That was sort of my entry point—to stop pushing so hard against these terrible representations and then start to think about what work are these women’s bodies doing for them? And once that happened, I started to see not only what white French people were so worried about but why they thought a Black female body was so important to put in front of them.

The archives are tough. Anybody who tells you that they aren’t is lying to you. Most of the time, you know what you are looking for, but you do not

know where to find it. And it is disappointing, and it is violent. You are reading terrible things about these women, you are looking at images that are terrible. I do not know about everybody else, but this book took forever for me because I just had to step back a couple of times and just get my bearings. You know, it was like, how many times do you need, you know, Black female vagina shoved in your face, with, you know, pithy commentary to make you just go [*exhale*]. . . . So, it was both a violent process but ultimately for me, liberating.

And this is the point in my talk where I give a shout out to Johanna Montlouis-Gabriel, who came behind me and checked all my translations and wrote little nice things like “I don’t think that’s what that means in the nineteenth century.” But I had a group of people around me who were equally excited about the work I was doing. And I don’t just mean the people I know. I mean the people I read. I mean Jennifer Morgan. I mean Marisa Fuentes. I mean all of these women whose shoulders I stand on, helped me figure out how to negotiate the archive and helped prepare me for what I was going to see when I got in there.

TNF: I also want to talk about the archive. I think in the US when I went to, for example, the Audre Lorde Papers in Atlanta, I wasn’t the only one. I was like, Oh, there’s another Black person. Yay . . . I see you. You know, you’re excited that you can see someone and then exchange glances and smiles. In Germany, that was an entirely different experience. So I wrote all of these archives in Germany and certainly in German, and I asked, “Do you have any bits of information?” So I wrote to the Bundesarchiv and all of these national and also regional archives to say, “Do you have anything on the Black German movement of the 1980s and ’90s?” And they were like, “We don’t carry anything that’s less than twenty-five years old,” and I was like, “What about East Germany and the fall of the Wall? But okay” . . . So there’s nothing there about them.

And then I wrote to some people who I knew were involved in the movement. I wrote an email to Dagmar Schultz, and she said, “Okay, I’ll meet with you for coffee.” Who does she bring to this coffee meeting? Ika Hügel-Marshall and Ria Cheatom. Both Hügel-Marshall and Cheatom were activists in the Black German movement. And they give me this cursory look and start interrogating me. Through our conversations, they accepted me. They also acknowledged that, “I get it. I understand.” And then they opened up their homes and shared sources with me. Sadly, I actually had a horrible housing situation emerge during my dissertation research, and Ria Cheatom let me live with her. She was like, “Come, you’ve got mold in your apartment, come and live with me.” At her apartment, she

had a suitcase of minute meetings, of flyers, of letters, of this sort of archive of the Black German movement. She asked if this would be useful to me, and I was stunned.

On top of that, Regina Stein was moving from one Berlin apartment to another. She said, “I have many boxes of May Ayim, one of the most prominent Black German activists of her generation and a well-known writer, in my Berlin basement that I want to remove.” Ayim died in 1996 but was a key figure in the modern Black German movement. And so Ria and I basically moved these boxes of May Ayim, twenty plus boxes of stuff, from one Berlin basement to another Berlin basement; we ended up placing the boxes in Ria’s basement. Now these boxes are at the Freie Universität of Berlin, which is great. But I stumbled upon these things, and I forged kinships with people, with several people who were in the movement. Ria became like a mother to me. Ricky Reiser would invite me over and would give me copies of her issues of *afro look* and then share stories. We forged bonds. Bonds that sustained me.

My archive was personal and in homes. And my archive was in itself a queer type of connection. And I felt so honored that these women opened up their homes to me and that they said, “Hey, do you think this will be useful for you?” and just kept giving me stuff. And I’m certainly still in contact with them, and hope to ship versions of my book to them. But I think for me the book was so much more personal because I forged connections with people who were in the movement. They shared stories with me. With Ria, we sat at her kitchen table talking for hours about racial politics, about how feminism worked for Black German women. I had really interesting connections with an intergenerational group of activists who were critical to the modern Black German movement. And for me that was just fascinating.

And then I found sources in subcultural archives such as feminist archives or lesbian and gay archives. The Schwules Museum, a gay museum and archive in Berlin, didn’t have very much *on* Black German gay men or women. But it was through the Spinnboden Lesbenarchiv und Bibliothek, which was a lesbian archive in Berlin, that I was able to find a few issues of *Afrefekete*, an Afro-German women’s magazine that was published. And then I found advertisements of *Afrefekete* in some other mainstream lesbian journals, and so that showed me that there was some resonance and some sort of connection.

It was amazing to forge these connections. But it was also difficult to see the blatant erasure of these narratives in national archives in which they were also very German *in* how they dismissed this research. They’re like, “No, we don’t—What Black Germans? What?” Unless we’re talking about the sterilization of Black Germans from the interwar period *or* unless we’re talking

about the colonial period, which are all sort of important in this larger narrative about Germans, but I really wanted to focus on this modern movement. And they were not in the national archives.

I think for me the book is about giving more visibility to these narratives and showing how these narratives, these stories, these experiences matter in a landscape that is still grappling with issues of race and difference. Germans are like “Hey we got rid of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich, we’re done, we’re good. We’re not racist.” And the reality is far from that. The reality is that today there are discussions to purge *Rasse* [race] from the Grundgesetz/Basic Law [Constitution]. Because they assume this will resolve race racial issues in the German context. And this is not the tactic.

So this is a book that for me really represents my personal connections with people, some of the women in the movement but also the significance of the visibility and recognition that they fought for. Black Germans were doing the work, they were creating new spaces for knowledge. They’re creating new spaces for kinship, they’re creating new spaces for solidarity in spite of the blatant erasure, the insistence on that erasure.

I am like one of two Black women historians who focus on Germany. That is huge. There are only two of us, and I am the only one now who is tenured. I mean, well, they are probably three of us. I forgot to mention Tina M. Campt, who is a trained historian but is in a different direction now. So there are three of us, but that is not a significant number. It is terrible. And, and I think there’s a longer lineage in terms of thinking about Blackness in the British context, certainly in the French context, and even to a certain extent in the Belgian and the Dutch contexts. But for the German context, scholars like myself are pointing to similar dynamics in Germany. We are saying, “Hey, Black people are there. They have always been there.” And it’s important that *my* book emphasizes that legacy.

JBM: I just wanted to add one more thing about the archives. I also want to expand on what Annette was saying, that after your book’s been out for a year, you start to talk about and think about it differently based on people’s feedback.

Particularly in African history, there’s this debate—are archives mostly about colonial legacy, do Africans today have agency in telling their own stories in the archives, and so on? And one of the things I didn’t realize until speaking with someone who had recently read my book was that they had assumed that most of the things I found in the archives in Cameroon were available in Europe or were available in the US. I had to say, “Wait a minute. Most of the things I found were not scanned at all, you can only find it there [in Cameroon], and some of it is no longer there because there was a flood

and I was the one person who took a picture of it.” It really dawned on me the importance of who’s writing the history.

In Cameroon, having a dual-European colonial legacy, I grew up believing that there was only one national archive. And it wasn’t until I started doing research and realized there are two national archives, one in the formerly French-ruled region and the other in the formerly British-ruled area. In the latter, there was so much material on women. Women were everywhere. And it really brought home the fact that there are these very different histories of the country, and these ideas about who owns the archives, who is reproducing work, who is putting it in there. If there are any junior scholars out there, I just want to say that I think it is important to always, always go to the archives to see what’s there. And it might be surprising. For me, I found women’s voices everywhere, and *none* of the things that they had are replicated or available *anywhere* outside of those archives. And this assumption that “oh, well, I’m sure the British archives must have copies.” No, they did not.

KLG: I just wanted to say, Jacque and Tiffany, thank you so much, because I think what often happens is we fetishize and we celebrate discovery in “The Archive,” capital T, capital A, or we attend to the silences in “The Archive” capital T, capital A. And what both of you have done is remind us that there are *archives* that are ripe for discovery but aren’t codified or aren’t housed or aren’t thought about, that are screaming. There aren’t silences there, there are words and voices and peoples and figures, et cetera. So maybe making the distinction, it’s a hackneyed one, between capital H history and the *histories* of the global South but in the same way, thinking about The Archive and how much effort and labor is expended to dig into the colonial library without thinking perhaps enough about the libraries and mini-archives or enormous treasures of wealth that exist outside of the institutions that most readily call our attention as scholars.

SP: That was amazing, and I also wanted to say amazing in the face of many interruptions. I was wondering if, to close, if you all wanted to speak about how your work fits into or how you think about your work in this moment? How do you think about your next projects in this moment and where you’re going from here?

TNF: My book just came out, so I feel like, “oooh new project, I’m terrified, can I just chill for a bit?” But I am working on some things. What my project about Black Germans’ emphasis on liberation and freedom struggles in the eighties and nineties did is that it made me consider Black European experiences more broadly. The Black Lives Matter movement has too,

especially thinking about the global protests that took place over the summer of 2020, the toppling of statues, this reckoning that Black Lives Matter activists in Europe are trying to push for governments to recognize their colonial legacies. These activists also are well aware of the racial order that's still in play in Europe and how it has impacted Black and People of Color communities. These developments have been fascinating. I think for the next project I'd like to work on a book about Black Europe in the twentieth century and how we see earlier precedents of Black Lives Matter. The demands for citizenship, for belonging, for recognition, and what were the different strategies and tactics that Black European and Black diasporic communities were engaging with in the twentieth century? I think it's important to do that in light of what's going on right now. We see a racial order still in place; we see the reemergence of white supremacy across the globe. In terms of the German context, it feels like a super whiteness that is complicated by the normalization of an Aryan identity that is so entrenched in the country. But it's also important to think about how there are fruitful moments of resistance, survival, and joy. And I think in the new project, it's important for me to shift my focus and examine earlier instances of Black liberation and Black freedom struggles that take on different forms but are certainly a part of this longer legacy of advocating for rights and challenging racist structures and systems.

I'm teaching a Black Lives Matter course this semester, spring 2021, with a colleague at the University of Cologne in Germany, and I'll use the course to figure out how I will potentially structure this book. I have designed it as a Black Europe course with a few case studies in which we expand what Black Europe can constitute, looking at Cuba, Costa Rica, and Haiti, and thinking about what constitutes Black Europe more broadly, in essence challenging the boundaries of Black Europe. Examining the colonies in relation to the metropolises offers a way to reimagine the borders of continental Europe and to decenter whiteness. It's useful for me to teach this class because it's helping me intellectually figure out how to structure what a project like this would look like. It is also a useful pedagogical approach.

KLG: My book is also just out, but as you all know, a book comes out, but it's kind of been done for you, perhaps for some time. For a while this project really felt to me like one of those doors that swings in both directions, closing a certain kind of chapter in the work that I've been doing and opening toward a new one, but always dipping back into that past. I know for a fact, close reading textual analysis, that's my happy place. I like being in the intimacies of the text. But since finishing *A Regarded Self*, I've been wanting to pull some of the thicker threads that are woven into the manuscript. So the three-ish projects that I've been working on now all involve new ways of writing and

thinking for me, and they're all interdisciplinary, and they're all actually archival. So I'm here like a student too, I'm taking notes. Thank you for that.

The first project is "For the Love of Revolution: René Depestre and the Poetics of a Radical Life," which is a look at the story of the Haitian militant communist erotic poet and novelist, René Depestre, tracing his intellectual and political evolution and his movements across Western Europe, South America, East Asia, and the Caribbean, against the backdrop of the twentieth-century Cold War Black Atlantic. So thinking through him and his story, how race interrupted various efforts around imagined or desired radical political community.

And then related is a second project, which I'm calling "Blackness in French." Right now it's really just a collection of loosely connected essays that look at how different instances of highly mediatized transatlantic Black womanhood have complicated understandings of national identity in France and the Americas in relation to one another. So, both historically starting from an eighteenth-century Haitian opera singer, Minette, to the contemporary moment and thinking about things that are happening currently for Black women in France who, strikingly and troublingly, have been at the forefront of attacks on desires to bring race into a conversation in France, and tracing that history.

The last is that I've also been collaborating on this film project documentary series about Black performing women's political utopias, and the working title is "Black Diva Saves the World." This is a project that moves from the 1930s to the present to look at the costs of celebrity Black girl magic during particular highly charged moments of political conflict around race and racism in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. So all to say I'm kind of on the move in the Black Atlantic, but still anchored very much in France's putatively former American empire, while exploring a wider network of connections, and we'll see how all this goes. But the work that you've done. Sam, actually, Annette, Tiffany, Robin, and these kinds of conversations are really just crucial to the next steps I'm trying to take intellectually. So if I haven't said it enough, thank you.

RM: I am working on two projects. My book came out last year, and I've had some time to sit with it, but I've been talking about it a lot. And one of the things that I often try to say when I have these conversations is that the book was really traumatic for me. There's a lot of trauma in the book, both my own and the women I write about. I was actually supposed to have another chapter in this book. So the new project is picking up that chapter. I'm doing two things—I'm doing a book looking at how Black womanhood is constructed in France's Black colonies between 1685 up to 1804, starting with

François Berneier's discussion about the races, which he begins by talking about the races and then moves into some weird nonsense about women. Instead of looking at Médéric Moreau de St. Mery's work on Saint Domingue, looking at his concubine and their child, I'll work on Black women's stories until I am dead.

But the project that I have sort of pivoted to right now is working on Suzanne Simone Baptiste, Toussaint Louverture's wife, and looking at that via a letter that appears in a London newspaper in 1804 suggesting that she has been tortured by Napoleon, that Napoleon has her tortured. And so, it is a difficult letter, it is a difficult story. But it is one where Suzanne enters the historical documents in this really interesting way. And so, I spent this past summer in Agen, looking at where she spends the last ten years of her life before she died. I think Suzanne seems to be talking right now, and I'm just letting her talk and going where I think she wants me to go. So, I'm working on a project that is part history, part biography, part illustration, and part graphic history of Suzanne's life. If it works, it is going to be great. If not, it's going to be a big disaster.

JBM: For my second book project, I think it's important to talk a bit about how I found it. I always have my mentees asking, "How do you get your second book project? Is it a sequel from your first one?" As someone who was not a US citizen through graduate school, I couldn't apply for the Fulbright and all of those funding sources. So by the time I cobbled together funding to be in Cameroon for a year, I looked around and saw that sometimes there were floods in the archives, and they were hanging sheets of paper on clothing lines to dry, and so on. And I thought, I'm writing a book about a secessionist movement and the origins of it, and when there's civil war, which is unraveling right now as we speak, they attack monuments and national spaces. So the archives are ripe for the picking. So I spent a good nine months photographing everything and anything I could in the archives because I wasn't sure when I could next be there or if something would happen.

So, five years later, I had a research assistant who started working through all of it. And I looked through his research, and I said, "Why do I have things about the Bahá'í faith here?" And he said, "I don't know. You're the one who took all of these pictures." And I started looking through the sources, and I realized there was this rich history of the Bahá'í faith in Cameroon and particularly the English-speaking areas. You had whole towns that were known as being the Bahá'í towns. And I thought, "How is this possible? Where are they coming from?" And I realized the person that expanded the Bahá'í faith in West Africa was from Uganda. And I thought, "where's he coming from?" So I started to trace things around, and so this is how I

came together with a transnational history project looking at the Bahá'í faith as a case study for transnational history, and how that frames and develops ideas about a global Blackness from the 1950s to the 1980s. It's connecting across the African continent, connecting Uganda to Cameroon to Ghana and South Africa, rather than only focusing on one region of the continent, but also making global connections. Because once I started to look at Cameroonians, Ugandans, and those from Ghana who were helping to expand the Bahá'í faith in the fifties, sixties, and seventies, I realized they're going to spaces and regions of the world that I never thought they would be—they're in the South Pacific, and in many of the areas that they are, they're the first Black person. And I got really fascinated in terms of the connections they were making with those in the indigenous diaspora communities and how these individuals of African descent worldwide were exerting their own ideas about a transnational global Black identity. So that's really where that project came from, from just being paranoid that I could never get funding to do research, and photocopying and taking notes on anything and everything I could put my hands on.

KMM: I don't yet know what my book next project will be even though my book came out in 2019, but as I mentioned, I am really interested in Felicia Santizo, an Afro-Panamanian communist feminist who was an instrumental pedagogue in Panama and in literacy activism in Colón, the primarily Afro-Panamanian and West Indian community in the northern coast of Panama. I've been intrigued by how she was also connected with the Women's International Democratic Federation and other socialist and communist feminists in Latin America and in Europe in these years. So, I'll just put that potential next project out there, but I also wanted to reinforce my sincere thanks. I've learned so much from this conversation. It was really a pleasure and honor to be here, thank you.

AKJG: I'll just jump in here and say, so I'm working on two book projects. The one that's going most quickly is a book project about enslaved children in the French Atlantic. I'm not a historian, so it's not a history project. I'm a literary person. Close reading is my bread and butter, so I'm looking at narratives, primarily letters but also musical compositions and short stories written by enslaved children in their own hands. For some, I have just a signature, for others I have one letter, for others I have a hundred letters. But there are six children at the center of this story, and I want to think about what it means to work with that range of narrative and voice and to think about what it means to take childhood seriously as an experience, as a category for analysis, and thinking about those broader ideas about freedom during the age of revolution.

The third book project is French Caribbean feminism, and I keep saying French Caribbean deliberately, to think about the multiple geographies that composite naming indexes. If somebody else does that book before me, then that's great. I just really want to read it. But if that doesn't come up by then, that's it. So, I'm thinking about that project, beginning from 1848 with the abolition of slavery in Martinique and Guadeloupe and moving on to the present day.

And then I do want to end by saying, and I'm going to ask everyone to please bear with me, I'm going to open a little parentheses and hope that I get through without my voice cracking. I don't know what everyone else's experience has been with Zoom bombing in the past, but I've only had this experience once before. And when it happened, I didn't say anything. I just took it into myself and swallowed and assimilated that violence that was put out into the space and the only place it had to go was in. And that was a mistake. And so, I'm not going to push past it today and just kind of go on with business as usual. I want to acknowledge what happened. I want to acknowledge the violence and the fragility that I feel I have experienced, what it felt like to hear that voice talking over Kaiama, what it felt like to navigate back and forth between this generative conversation and being in community and reading the comments.

I don't have sort of a nice neat theoretical takeaway wrapped up in a bow. But what I do have are really sincere thanks for everyone on the panel and in the comments who just kind of flooded the space with all of that positivity and voices that drowned out some of that violence. I have been waking up every day for the last four years trying to push past kinds of violence. And I've been trying to push past the numbers of people who have died, who did not have to die. And I'm not pushing past anymore. So at the very least, I want to acknowledge and just wanted to say my thanks, express my thanks to everyone for, for being here, for being present, and for being in community in a time when, when that feels so very needed. So, thank you all.

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