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Introduction

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Introduction

At the time of this writing, several states in the US have further restricted access to abortion through fetal heartbeat laws—Louisiana, Kentucky, Mississippi, Georgia, and Ohio—and Alabama has passed a law, signed by Governor Kay Ivey on May 16, 2019, banning abortions at every stage of pregnancy and criminalizing the procedure for doctors (except in the case of medical emergency). The state of Indiana has recently placed a near total ban on second trimester abortions. The new sets of laws restricting access to reproductive choice in the US is alarming. We at *Frontiers* endorse the National Women’s Studies Statement in Support of Reproductive Justice. *“We strongly condemn the current attacks on reproductive choice and add our voice to the chorus of opposition. Autonomy over our bodies, including our reproductive choices, is fundamental. NWSA members have upheld this principle in our scholarship and practice for over four decades. We reiterate it today in these urgent times.”*

We acknowledge these pressing matters but also dedicate this issue to pursuing new conversations in feminist studies that surround the fat body, partake in discussions of the aftermath of overwhelming trauma, and help us comprehend how power shapes our responses to white supremacy and reproduction. The scholarship and artwork in this issue asks us to rethink how we understand these issues, their methods and histories, and their application in the field of feminist studies.

Tala Khanmalek’s essay “Making Generations: Gender, Reproduction, and the Afterlife of Slavery in Gayl Jones’s *Corregidora*” begins our issue by tracing the complicated legal system of nineteenth-century Brazil and looking at the 1871 Free Womb Law in Gayl Jones’s novel *Corregidora*. Khanmalek suggests that “making generations”—to continue life under precarious conditions, is an attempt to counteract rather than perpetuate control over reproduction, redressing past injuries while unsettling assumptions in the history of the

hemispheric Americas. Even as the law abolished hereditary slavery and allowed enslaved women to claim maternal custody, Khanmalek asks her readers to trouble its “womb-based logic” effectively holding freeborn children in bondage by way of their mother’s status. In this provocative tracing of the 1871 law, Khanmalek reinterprets ‘making generations’ as a way of counteracting the legal forces that perpetuate “Old man Corregidora,” the grandmother’s slave master and father to both grandmother and mother in the novel. As Khanmalek focuses on the intergenerational trauma of the grandmother, her daughter, and granddaughter, “making generations” must be seen as a corrective to the deletion of the history of Brazilian slavery, where the problem of erasure in the novel makes so urgent the need for the reader to bear witness to the intergenerational trauma experienced by the women in the story.

Our second article is from Lina Chhun, the recipient of the 2017 NWSA Graduate Student Essay Award. Her article “Walking with the Ghost: Affective Archives in the Afterlife of the Cambodian Holocaust” begins with a meditation on the silence of her mother, whose testimony evokes the specter of the Cambodian genocide. Chhun, as the scholar-daughter, undertakes the project of listening to the fragments and storied afterlives of violence in the testimonies of both her mother and father, where she attends to the silence and unspoken narratives of trauma. Thinking with Toni Morrison’s re-memory, Chhun reads the psychosomatic hauntings of her parents as corporeal memory, where flashbacks and the pieces of stories are gathered, sometimes pieced together, in ways that challenge Western trauma research. For Chhun, Morrison reminds us that silence cannot be seen as “cultural non-compliance,” as medical authorities have argued, but instead prompts us to remember that silence does not always equal absence, especially for subjects relegated as the racialized and gendered Other. Chhun shifts from an understanding of trauma narratives as psychosomatic pathology to one that is an archive of memory and emotion, where the history of genocide and its aftermath can be documented, and perhaps in this radical recognition of the body in pain, some healing can begin.

Mary Maxfield’s “Harmed or Harmful: The Discourse of Trigger Warnings, Trauma, and Shelter” traces trigger warnings to trauma historically, where she notes that the warnings originate in feminist Web forums and anti-violence activism. In the existing debates around trigger warnings, Maxfield finds that any references to past feminist practices and current psychotherapeutic recommendations are rarely considered at length and are often invoked superficially. She asks the reader to reconsider claims across the safe space debate by exploring common arguments about trigger warnings in the context of historical and contemporary theorizations of trauma. Beginning the narrative

of trigger warnings in the history of the domestic violence shelter movement and theories of trauma and psychotherapeutic recommendations in medical research, Maxfield examines the claims that trigger warnings are currently “spreading”; explores whether they are indeed necessary for or antithetical to any kind of healing; and unpacks the argument that they create a generation of victims or—conversely—represent a solution to victimization for a marginalized group of trauma subjects.

Aída Hurtado’s “Critical Race Theory and Questioning Whiteness” offers a psychological study of college age women and their responses to white privilege. Although participants were unaware of the existence of their white privilege until they were exposed to an analysis of white supremacy in college courses, Hurtado finds that the lack of early exposure to the consequences of white privilege hampered the participants’ future actions to counter white supremacy. Introducing the concept of the Trickster Treaty—a contract that helps maintain domination and invents new rhetorical schemes that leave race, class, and gender privileges intact—Hurtado meditates on the technologies of the Trickster as master rhetorician of white supremacy. In her results Hurtado found that once students gained an analysis of white supremacy and despite articulating strong critiques of whiteness, the study revealed very real limits in students’ attempts at renouncing white privilege. Few students were able to address the institutions responsible for inequality, and many participants were challenged about next steps in social justice work, lacking an action plan to move forward either as allies with individual students of color or in the learning of skills toward coalition building with communities of color.

Jennifer Ann Russum’s essay “Sewing Entrepreneurs and the Myth of the Spheres” focuses on women’s use of “handmade” labor to earn income. Specifically, Russum looks at two middle-class women’s experiences, from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and two contemporary middle-class women’s use of social media to establish businesses. This essay will evoke memories for many readers: our grandmothers and mothers sewing—as new immigrants in the garment industry, taking in sewing to earn extra income, or mending and making clothing and quilts for family. Russum’s essay reminds us that women’s sewing is intimate and breaks a private-public divide, and her discussion of two contemporary women’s use of social media to highlight dual roles of businesswoman and mother is interesting and gives pause. If social media are key to building women’s businesses, which women are social media willing to embrace? Who is the face of female entrepreneur and mother? That the two featured women are both from Utah, married to men, and have children provides interesting questions about how “gendered norms are reinforced on-

line.” We encourage readers to think about how access, biases, and social media impact who becomes a recognized female entrepreneur, historically and co-temporally.

Mathilde Cohen and Hannah Ryan’s article “From Human Dairies to Milk Riders: A Visual History of Milk Banking in New York City, 1918–2018” documents the practices of giving, selling, exchanging, and transporting human milk. Cohen and Ryan argue that there is a long and often unknown history of milk collection, where the medicalization and disciplining of women’s breast milk happens as doctors share the belief that the practice of breastfeeding could be transformed into a safer, disembodied “product” that can be prescribed for profit. What is exemplary is the researchers’ careful methods, where they acknowledge the labor of countless women in their interviews, making milk donors more visible through a critique of their working conditions, their erasure from the visual record, and the various forms of gender, race, and class inequities characterizing milk banking. Cohen and Ryan argue that breast milk, as a commodity, is also a symbol of the invisible labor of the women who work both to produce milk and to express it.

This issue concludes with the roundtable “Not Tragically Fat!”—a conversation across four essays about what it means and feels like to grow up fat and live as a fat woman in a society that continually lets you know you do not fit. Collectively the essays by Susan Bordo, Cheryl Renee Hopson, Shawna Felkins, and MaryAnn Kozlowski evocatively describe affects and effects of fat shaming, critique social and health discourse, remember girlhood selves, and embrace loving their fat bodies. We encourage readers to read and then re-read the essays in order to hear the profundity of the narratives, and we hope this roundtable yields further conversation in *Frontiers* and feminist studies about fatness, embodiment, race, sexuality and coloniality.

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