

This book emerged from a desire to identify and invent analytics through which to compare racial formations, in distinction to comparative race scholarship that simply parallels instances of historical similarity across racial groups in the United States. Such a project entails not only articulating commonalities between communities of color but imagining alternative modes of coalition beyond prior models of racial or ethnic solidarity based on a notion of homogeneity or similarity. This project is necessitated by the changing configurations of race and nation in the wake of movements for decolonization and the social movements of the mid-twentieth century, which have revealed the limitations inherent in nationalist and identity-based forms of collectivity, even or perhaps especially when they are expressed in minority or cultural nationalisms. As we discuss in more detail later, the stakes for identifying new comparative models are immensely high, for the changing configurations of power in the era after the decolonizing movements and new social movements of the mid-twentieth century demand that we understand how particular

populations are rendered vulnerable to processes of death and devaluation over and against other populations, in ways that palimpsestically register older modalities of racialized death but also exceed them.

We have found that the greatest potential for producing such alternative comparative methods lies within formations that have emerged to name the shared comparative method of bourgeois and minority nationalisms: women of color feminism, and a related intellectual tradition, what Roderick A. Ferguson has called queer of color critique. We assert that much of what we now call “women of color feminism” can be seen as queer of color critique, insofar as these texts consistently situate sexuality as constitutive of race and gender. Further, not coincidentally and not unimportantly, lesbian practice and identity were central to many of the most foundational women of color feminists, including Audre Lorde, Cherríe Moraga, Barbara Smith, and the Combahee River Collective. We thus narrate queer of color critique as emerging from women of color feminism rather than deriving from a white Euro-American gay, lesbian, and queer theory tradition.

Women of color feminism and queer of color critique profoundly question nationalist and identitarian modes of political organization and craft alternative understandings of subjectivity, collectivity, and power. In situating women of color feminism and queer of color critique in this way, we read these formations as comparative analytics rather than descriptions of identity categories, and we highlight the comparative nature of women of color feminism and queer of color critique that has heretofore been under-examined. Women of color feminism and queer of color critique reveal the ways in which racialized communities are not homogeneous but instead have always policed and preserved the difference between those who are able to conform to categories of normativity, respectability, and value, and those who are forcibly excluded from such categories. As we argue, such a comparative method is immensely important in the current moment, as neoliberal modes of power rely on such valuations to subject the racialized poor to brutal violence *through* rhetorics of individual freedom and responsibility. As Lisa Cacho observes in her chapter in this book: “In a sense, a comparative analytic assumes that in the United States, human value, legally universalized as normative, is made legible in relation to the deviant, the non-American, the nonnormative, and the recalcitrant: the legally repudiated ‘others’ of U.S. value” (27). This comparative methodology allows us to see moments when certain racial *groups* could articulate a demand for

incorporation, albeit unevenly, over and against other racial groups as complexly interrelated to the processes by which subjects, within racial collectivities, are differentially incorporated or excluded from the class, gender, and sexual norms of respectability, morality, and propriety and thus placed on different sides of the dividing line between valued and devalued. For example, Helen Jun's chapter details the ways in which the black press in the nineteenth century cast African Americans as worthy of citizenship by contrasting them to the Chinese, in ways that emphasized gendered and classed values of uplift and respectability that render abject not only the Chinese but also "nonrespectable" African Americans as well.

In this introduction, we describe the dominant mode of comparison underlying modern Western thought and its implicatedness in the legitimation and erasure of racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence. We then delineate poststructuralist methods of comparison, on the one hand, and minority nationalist critiques of racialized violence, on the other, as two important but incomplete critiques of modern Western comparative methods. Finally, we situate women of color feminism and queer of color critique as providing an alternative comparative method that, in its deep critique of the racialized, gendered, and sexualized devaluation of human life, gives us a blueprint for coalition around contemporary struggles. We observe that because the dominant mode of comparison is an epistemological structure, the alternative comparative method of women of color feminism is rendered *illegible* within this dominant schema. We situate culture, defined expansively as being exemplified by works of cultural production, but also inhering in everyday practices of language and relationality, as the site where such alternative comparative modes are imagined and brought into being.

For a description of dominant Western epistemology, we turn to Lisa Lowe, who renders central the comparative method derived from Weberian sociology. Lowe describes Weber's comparative method as one that establishes an "ideal type" of social organization, which is represented by rationality within Western industrial society. Against this ideal, Weber and his social scientific descendants characterized other ("non-Western") modes of social organization as deviant, atavistic, irrational, violent, and so forth. In this way, Lowe notes, "Centering western industrial society as the normative *ideal type* against which 'difference' was conceived mediated a racial epistemology emerging out of an earlier conjunction of European colonialism and slavery in the 'new world'" (Lowe 2005, 410).

This notion of different societies with their own discrete cultures orders a particular spatial imaginary under modern nationalism. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson write:

The distinctiveness of societies, nations, and cultures is predicated on a seemingly unproblematic division of space, on the fact that they occupy “naturally” discontinuous spaces. The premise of discontinuity forms the starting point from which to theorize contact, conflict, and contradiction between cultures and societies. For example, the representations of the world as a collection of “countries,” as on most world maps, sees it as inherently fragmented space, divided by different colors into diverse national societies, each “rooted” in its proper place. (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 33–34)

In other words, the spatial imaginary that allows for the division of global space into nation-states situates each nation-state as discrete entities, differentiated by unique cultures, within an abstract and fragmentable world space. In this way, modern nation-state formation presumes the comparability of nation-states.

Poststructuralist theories of space, in particular Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, have provided important critiques of the normative spatial imaginary of Western bourgeois nationalism dependent on the notion of discrete, comparable spaces. While most famously elaborated in “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault’s discussion of heterotopia in *The Order of Things* explicitly relates this concept to the functions of classification and comparison. Foucault bases his theorization of heterotopia on a passage from Jorge Luis Borges that describes the classificatory principles of a Chinese encyclopedia’s entry on animals as “(a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) suckling pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water jug, (n) that from a long way off look like flies” (Foucault [1970] 1994, xv). Foucault describes this passage as a heterotopia, or a confounding of classification and comparison that goes far beyond mere juxtaposition. In describing heterotopia, he writes:

I mean the disorder in which fragments of a large number of possible orders glitter separately in the dimension, without law or geometry, of

the heteroclite; in such a state, things are “laid,” “placed,” “arranged” in sites so very different from one another that it is impossible to find a place of residence for them, to define a *common locus* beneath them all. Utopias afford consolation. . . . Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy ‘syntax’ in advance and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things (next to and also opposite one another) to “hold together.” (xvii–xviii)

Heterotopias thus are not exclusively literal spaces (as in Foucault’s famous examples of the cemetery, the mental hospital, etc.) but spatial imaginaries that mark epistemological or discursive failure, disjuncture, or dissonance. They emerge at the moment when the epistemological certainties that are required for comparison are undermined. Foucault notes that in this passage Borges does away with the *site* or “common locus” on which comparison is made. He does away with the “table”—both the actual examination table that serves as the common place that unifies the diverse objects that can be placed on it and the table as in a chart that regularizes the data that make it up—that is implied by a utopic mode of comparison. In other words, utopias are *ideal types* against which other kinds of spaces can be compared; they are also spaces of stability (like the table) that allow for comparison. Heterotopias, in contrast, make the basis for comparison impossible. To take this idea back to Gupta and Ferguson’s discussion of modern nation-states, we may observe that nationalism generates a utopic comparative method, under which a stable concept of the world, divided up into neatly discrete nation-states, enables the comparison of one nation-state to another.

As valuable as this critique of normative modes of spatial comparison is, however, it is ultimately undone by Foucault’s inability to name the material conditions of race that are the disavowed conditions of possibility for the very modes of Western comparison that he wants to undo. In Foucault’s exegesis of Borges, comparative incommensurabilities are situated in the Orient as the site of illogic and unreason, or as Foucault puts it, China as the “privileged *site of space* . . . at the other extremity of the earth we inhabit, a culture entirely devoted to the ordering of space, but one that does not

distribute the multiplicity of existing things into any of the categories that make it possible to name, speak, and think" ([1970] 1994, xix). Ultimately, Foucault's notion of heterotopia does not undermine Borges's casting of China as the ultimate other to the West; the West still operates as, in Lowe's words, an *ideal type* against which China can be seen as the mirror opposite. While Foucault reads Borges as imagining Chinese epistemology as internally heterotopic (i.e., rendering Chinese animals incomparable to each other), he takes for granted Borges's understanding of China and the West as stable and comparable social formations.

In contrast, minority nationalisms emerged as a part of the epistemological challenge to racist and colonial legacies of Western thought articulated by the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s in the United States. As Mike Murase notes in his essay about the student strikes at San Francisco State University in 1968 and 1969 that established the ethnic studies program on that campus, the protesting students were "part of a larger Third World movement representing the growing awareness of Third World people throughout the world of their *common experiences under colonial domination, within and without the continent of the United States*" (Ethnic Studies Committee 1974, 3; quoted in Murase 1976, 208, *our italics*). As Roderick A. Ferguson notes in his chapter in this book, C. L. R. James observed that ethnic studies emerged as a critique of the U.S. nation-state as an exemplar of Western civilization. James describes the discipline of African American studies in his chapter "Black Studies and the Contemporary Student" as an intervention into Western civilization as a racial project constituted through the intersecting histories of European slavery, imperialism, and colonization (C. L. R. James 1993, 397). Both minority nationalisms and women of color feminism and queer of color critique are legacies of these social movements, from which many of the theorists most associated with women of color feminism and queer of color critique migrated. As such, both formations pose the history of race in the United States within this more expansive genealogy.

Yet we must distinguish between women of color feminism and queer of color critique and the minority nationalist ideologies also produced out of these social movements.¹ These minority nationalisms advanced comparative analytics that reflected how race-based movements in the United States understood the nature of racial formation. In other words, the question of how to compare the various circumstances of minorities in the United

States was centrally part of the racial projects of antiracist movements among African Americans, Chicanos and Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. As we can see from the earlier passage from Murase, what became known as the internal colonial model provided the comparative analytic that linked the various nationalist movements in the United States. As the historian Ramon Gutiérrez notes, this model arose in the 1950s in the social sciences as a way to “explain the ‘development of underdevelopment’ in Africa, Asia, and Latin America” (Gutiérrez 1997, n.p., our italics). While Gutiérrez notes the ubiquity of internal colonial paradigms in the era of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, citing Harold Cruse, Kenneth Clark, Stokely Carmichael, and Charles Harris, he observes:

But it was Robert Blauner who best articulated the theory in relationship to American minorities, maintaining that while the United States was never a colonizer in the 19th Century European sense, it had nonetheless developed economically through the conquest and seizure of indigenous lands, the enslavement of Africans, and the usurpation of Mexican territory through the war. “Western colonialism,” wrote Blauner, “brought into existence the present-day patterns of racial stratification; in the United States, as elsewhere, it was a colonial experience that generated the *lineup of ethnic and racial divisions*.” (1997, n.p.)

To refer back to Murase’s chapter as an example of the internal colonial model, we see that he historicizes the migration of Asians to the United States as part of a larger narrative of white supremacy and racialized exploitation. He situates the fight for ethnic studies as a project of renarrating history so as to undermine internal colonialist ideologies that posit native peoples as “troublesome savages who impeded the fulfillment of the European settlers’ ‘divine right’ of Manifest Destiny,” African slaves as “primitive savages that had to be ‘domesticated,’” and Chicanos as “illegal” (Murase 1976, 206). Murase names the ways in which the colonial imaginary is a fundamentally comparative one, a “utopic” comparative method that situates Western civilization as an ideal type and scripts racialized groups as discrete and internally homogeneous types that are differently but equivalently backward, primitive, and eradicable. Against this colonialist history, Murase deploys an oppositional narrative that recalls native rights to the land on which they “lived for centuries in North America before the first

white ever set foot,” the cruelty and greed of “white men who hunted down 100 million Blacks in the interior of Africa to sell them as slaves,” and the usurpation of Mexican territory that absurdly made Chicanos “illegal” on the very lands they once owned (206).

This internal colonial model gave nationalists of color a broad narrative for how the United States produced racial divisions and inequalities. This model provided a comparative framework for understanding those divisions and inequalities at the same time as it furnished a blueprint for coalition. That is, the seizure of Indian lands, the enslavement of Africans, and the usurpation of Mexican territory are, in Murase’s account, different but *equivalent* violences enacted by the U.S. nation-state, to which he adds the exploitation of Asian immigrant labor. In this way, minority nationalism uses the exact comparative method of all other nationalisms, as described by Gupta and Ferguson: rather than nation-states being discrete and comparable, it is racial groups that are discrete and comparable in the minority nationalist imaginary. Coalition in this context would therefore mean a confederation of discrete formations.

Murase never considers some of the limitations of this mode of coalition. For example, he never attends to the ways in which these examples of racialized dispossession and abjection might depend, at different historical moments, on differentiated life chances and modes of incorporation for some racialized groups over and against others. Neither does he imagine that differences might exist *within* these groups along the lines of gender and sexuality, differences that women of color feminism and queer of color critique arose to name. In this way, in addition to lubricating ideologies of discreteness, the internal colonial model also helped to establish comparative analyses within ethnic studies as technologies of gender and sexuality. As the internal colonial model promoted comparative agendas based on narratives of underdevelopment, those narratives were oftentimes articulated as those of castration. Hence the lineup of ethnic and racial divisions was frequently figured as the castrated gender and sexual histories of straight men of color. From this position, hegemonic comparative analysis would help to constitute a fraternal politics across race, ethnicity, and nation aimed at heteropatriarchal retrieval.

Women of color feminism and queer of color critique developed an alternative mode of comparison in opposition to the comparative analytic of minority nationalisms that, while themselves critical of the racial vio-

lence underpinning modern power, ultimately reproduced its comparative method. In this way, women of color feminism and queer of color critique have something in common with poststructuralist challenges to normative comparative method, as represented by, for example, Foucault's notion of heterotopia. While the comparative method generated by women of color feminism and queer of color critique is heterotopic insofar as it troubles the assumptions of discreteness intrinsic to nationalist modes of comparison, we argue that because this method emerges to name the material conditions of racial and colonial violence, it reveals the particularities erased by Western epistemologies in ways that Foucault fails to do.

The comparative method of women of color feminism and queer of color critique is heterotopic insofar as it refuses to maintain that objects of comparison are static, unchanging, and empirically observable, and refuses to render illegible the shifting configurations of power that define such objects in the first place. Instead women of color feminism and queer of color critique were fundamentally organized around *difference*, the difference between and within racialized, gendered, sexualized collectivities. This deployment of difference has been misread as a form of cultural pluralism and, as Jodi Melamed reminds us in her chapter here, in many sites has been incorporated into a neoliberal multicultural project. However, the mobilization of difference by women of color feminism and queer of color critique was intended not to erase the differentials of power, value, and social death within and among groups, as in a multiculturalist model, but to highlight such differentials and to attempt to do the vexed work of forging a coalitional politics through these differences.

Such a heterotopic mode of comparison can be found in Cherríe Moraga's preface to *This Bridge Called My Back*:

I can't prepare myself a revolutionary packet that makes no sense when I leave the white suburbs of Watertown, Massachusetts and take the T-line to Black Roxbury.

Take Boston alone, I think to myself and the feminism my so-called sisters have constructed does nothing to help me make the trip from one end of town to another. Leaving Watertown, I board a bus and ride it quietly in my white flesh to Harvard Square, protected by the gold highlights my hair dares to take on, like an insult, in this miserable heat.

I transfer and go underground.

Julie told me the other day how they stopped her for walking through the suburbs. Can't tell if she's a man or a woman, only know that it's Black moving through that part of town. They won't spot her here, moving underground.

The train is abruptly stopped. A white man in jeans and tee shirt breaks into the car I'm in, throws a Black kid up against the door, handcuffs him and carries him away. The train moves on. The day before, a 14-year-old Black boy was shot in the head by a white cop. And, the summer is getting hotter.

I hear there are some women in this town plotting a *lesbian* revolution. What does this mean about the boy shot in the head is what I want to know. I am a lesbian. I want a movement that helps me make some sense of the trip from Watertown to Roxbury, from white to Black. I love women the entire way, beyond a doubt. (Moraga 1981, xiii)

Instead of Foucault's heterotopic *nowhere*, which he places in opposition to the empirically fixed and fixing table, Moraga gives us the heterotopic *somewhere* of the subway, in which the objects of comparison—herself, Julie, the boy on the train, the boy who was shot, lesbian separatists—have an unstable interrelation to each other, because they have changing meanings depending on context. These objects are not merely incongruous, as in Foucault's analysis, and they are not merely uncategorizable under a uniform set of criteria. Their relationality is constantly shifting, as Moraga notes when she contrasts Julie's hypervisibility within a white suburb to her invisibility on the subway and when she then juxtaposes Julie with herself and the boy on the train. Moraga's "unmolested" passage through the city, her "protected" status, is complexly determined by, and determining of, the surveillance and disciplining the boy undergoes, as well as the brutal state repression that ends the life of another racialized boy.

In contrast to Foucault's characterization of heterotopia, which is situated in the mysterious and exotic irrationality of China (with all its attendant Orientalist overtones), the illogic and unreason named by Moraga are the brutal residues of the deployment of "order": the space of the subway is the "underground" of the "law and order" repressive carceral state that, as Grace Hong has argued elsewhere, was a necessary part of Boston's transformation in the 1970s and 1980s into a "global city" organized around finance capital and technology (see Hong 2006, x–xi). Moraga's subway hetero-

topia is certainly rendered “impossible” and illegible, not because it is an Orientalist symbol of the exoticized other to Western logic but because the incommensurability of categories and subjects—between Moraga, the boy on the train, Julie, the fourteen-year-old shot by a cop—is the disavowed condition of possibility of a city based on capitalist extraction of profit from gendered and racialized labor, the privileging of whiteness as indexed by the creation and protection of suburbs, and the consequent uneven devaluation of racialized life. This is the definition of difference for women of color feminism and queer of color critique: not a multiculturalist celebration, not an excuse for presuming a commonality among all racialized peoples, but a clear-eyed appraisal of the dividing line between valued and devalued, which can cut within, as well as across, racial groupings. Difference, for Moraga, has serious, fundamentally deadly consequences, as the boy shot by the police reminds us. Such consequences underscore the urgency and importance of an alternative comparative analytic that would take into account such deadly differences between the valued and the devalued.

Moraga’s response to this uneven devaluation of racialized life is decidedly not the opposite reaction of *valuing* life, of seeking comfort in the pockets of safety where certain forms of racialized life escape such devaluation. She frames her ability to ride unmolested in the subway because she passes as white not as a relief but as an insult. In so doing, Moraga underscores the ways in which such a condition places great strains on coalitional politics. Certainly the minority nationalist rubric of a commonly experienced internal colonialism that binds all racialized peoples together falls apart under such strain. A new kind of politics is required, and for Moraga, seeking respite in one’s value, no matter how hard-won, is exactly the kind of politics that a women of color feminism must displace; this is exactly why she longs for a different “movement that helps her make sense of.” Put differently, Moraga frames the political project of women of color feminism and queer of color critique as a rejection of the ways in which bourgeois and minority nationalisms create idealized identities. Moraga’s alternative to these nationalisms, therefore, is *not* to establish “women of color” or “Chicana lesbian” as yet another idealized identity, an ideal type that replaces the ideal type of either the nation-state (citizen) or minority nationalism (“Chicano”). Rather, she seeks to undermine the logic of the ideal type entirely. Moraga consistently evades the logic of the ideal type, the idealized subject, by highlighting, rather than obfuscating, her protected and valued

status and rejecting that status as the foundation for her politics. An important aspect of the project of Moraga and Anzaldúa's book, then, is to invent a politics, out of something they call "writings by radical women of color," as a comparative analytic of difference. Further, for Moraga, such a politics requires a retheorization of what it means to be lesbian. She frames this entire episode with a rumination on the inadequacy of dominant practices of lesbian politics—that is, as "lesbian separatism"—for understanding the intersection of race, class, and gender. We might thus name Moraga's quest for a "movement that helps her make sense of" as the quest for a queer of color critique, as well as for a women of color feminism.

Lest we imagine that Moraga is unique in the way she defines difference as the line between valued and devalued, life and death, or that this preoccupation with crafting a different kind of politics began with the publication in 1981 of *This Bridge Called My Back*, we now turn to some earlier, equally classic texts of women of color feminism and queer of color critique. In the following section, we closely examine two chapters, one by Frances Beal and another by the Combahee River Collective. Beal, as a very early woman of color feminist theorist, tends to define the gendered racialization of black women as entirely abject and does not explicitly consider the relational privilege that certain racialized subjects accrue in relation to other racialized subjects. Moraga is much more attuned to relational racial and gender formation, and this has to do with the differences between the context of Beal's writing and Moraga's later historical moment. Yet we do believe that a connection can be made between Beal and Moraga and that a genealogy of theorizing exists between these two moments of women of color feminism. We situate the Combahee River Collective's "Black Feminist Statement" as a kind of bridge between the two. While Beal's chapter situates all black women as similarly exploited, because she situates this exploitation as not only racialized but gendered and sexualized, and because for her this exploitation is organized around the devaluing of black lives, Beal's solution is not to raise black women to the status of the new "ideal type" but to try to imagine a new form of relationality that destabilizes conventional roles. The Combahee River Collective further elaborates on the gendered and sexualized nature of racialized devaluation and highlights the ways in which the terms by which people are valued or devalued can cut within racial groups. As such, both of these texts refute the stability of racialized identities and imply that a different kind of comparative

model, one that does not take racial groups as discrete, comparable entities, is required.

Beal's essay "Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female" (1970) precisely addresses the ways in which race and gender are not essentialist or biological categories but processes of valuation and devaluation. While the essay's title seems to refer to an identity category or ontology ("to be black and female"), the text begins not with a description of black women as a group or an identity formation but with a discussion of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism as processes that create normative categories.

In keeping with its goal of destroying the black race's will to resist its subjection, capitalism found it necessary to create a situation where the black man found it impossible to find meaningful or productive employment. . . . The black woman likewise was manipulated by the system, economically exploited and physically assaulted. She could find work in the white man's kitchen, however, and sometimes became the sole breadwinner of the family. (Beal 1995, 146)

National culture in the United States, however, renders abject the very gender roles produced within black communities by an economic situation produced by capitalism. Capitalism constitutes black men and women as nonnormative and then punishes them for this deviance:

America has defined the roles to which each individual should subscribe. It has defined "manhood" in terms of its own interests and "femininity" likewise. Therefore, an individual who has a good job, makes a lot of money, and drives a Cadillac is a real "man" and conversely, an individual who is lacking in these "qualities" is less of a man. . . . The ideal model that is projected for a woman is to be surrounded by hypocritical homage and estranged from all real work, spending idle hours primping and preening, obsessed with conspicuous consumption, and limiting life's functions to simply a sex role. (Beal 1995, 146–47)

For Beal, capitalism is centrally structured around the construction of norms and values. These normative categories are racialized, gendered, classed, and sexualized at the same time. Those who do not fit these norms of respectability are dismissed and demonized and are thus subject to all manner of material and social marginalization. However, as Beal notes, black women's conditions belie these normative precepts: "It is idle dream-

ing to think of black women simply caring for their homes and children like the middle-class model. Most black women have to work to help house, feed, and clothe their families. . . . Black women were never afforded any such phony luxuries” (147). For Beal, the result of this disciplining of black women through the construction of hypocritical norms is their more efficient economic exploitation as well as their subjection to eugenicist sterilization campaigns.

As such, challenges to these relations of rule must happen at the level of norms. Beal asserts in an oft-quoted passage:

We must begin to understand that a revolution entails not only the willingness to lay our lives on the firing line and get killed. In some ways, this is an easy commitment to make. To die for the revolution is a one-shot deal; to live for the revolution means taking on the more difficult commitment of changing our day-to-day life patterns. This will mean changing the traditional routines that we have established as a result of living in a totally corrupting society. (154)

Linking this thought to her earlier discussion of the creation of racialized, gendered, and sexualized middle-class norms as the basis for this “totally corrupting” capitalist society, we may read her prescription for “changing the traditional routines” as a call to abandon the politics of respectability and thus to interrogate the desire to be valued, and therefore safe, within a system that punishes devaluation with death.

As Beal implies with her discussion of sterilization campaigns, these processes of valuation not only determine economic status or life chances but, at a more basic level, constitute the dividing line between life and death. The Combahee River Collective, a Boston-based black lesbian feminist organization that emerged in the 1970s, invokes a similar analysis that even more pointedly gestures to the necropolitical implications of the racialized and gendered processes of valuation. A pamphlet written and distributed in 1979 by the Combahee River Collective in response to the unsolved murders of twelve black women in the Boston area is titled “Why Did They Die?” The collective’s answer to this question gestures at the determination of valued and devalued as the dividing line between life and death. Because the twelve women were murdered in different ways and in different contexts, the murders were understood as unrelated and thus were rendered invisible within conventional meaning-making practices that be-

stow significance on deaths. The women were not the victims of a serial killer or even an industrial accident, and so these dead black women were not seen in aggregate. Their deaths were understood as random individual deaths, rather than societally determined ones. Indeed, the deaths were narrated not only as individual but as inevitable or even deserved: “The mother of a 15-year-old girl, one of the first two victims, says that when she reported the disappearance of the girl to the police they hesitated to file a report claiming that the girl had probably gone off with a pimp” (Combahee River Collective 1979, 41). Mobilizing racialized and gendered notions of black female sexual immorality that, as many scholars have noted, date back to the era of chattel slavery, the police articulate black female life as valueless and thus definitionally unprotectable.

As a corrective, the Combahee River Collective mobilizes an alternative meaning-making practice that identifies the causes of these deaths: “Our sisters died *because* they were women just as surely as they died because they were black” (1979, n.p.). In linking these deaths and insisting that race and gender are the names for the processes that ushered these women to their untimely deaths, the Combahee River Collective maintains that the twelve black women were killed because their lives were not valued and, in this way, were outright extinguished. While race and gender are the names they give to the processes by which these women are rendered alien to respectability and propriety, it is the deviant sexuality attributed to them that makes their deaths “acceptable.” In this way, the Combahee River Collective highlights the differences *within* black communities, challenging assumptions of racial uniformity, discreteness, and comparability.

In so doing, women of color feminism and queer of color critique situate *culture* as the site for the production of alternative modes of comparison and affiliation. Cherríe Moraga attests to the need for a movement that “helps her make sense of.” That is, Moraga does not articulate, for example, stopping police brutality or ensuring economic security for people of color as the organizing principles of the movement she wants, although assuredly these are struggles that such a movement may encompass. For Moraga, at base, the radical potential of such a movement comes in its ability to produce alternative meanings, alternative understandings about the nature of power. This intervention is one that lies in culture. Similarly, Frances Beal emphasizes the need to rethink “day-to-day life patterns” as a revolutionary practice. For Beal, revolution is not merely an economic or political trans-

formation but a transformation that happens at the level of subjectivity: “A people’s revolution that engages the participation of every member of society, man, woman, and child, brings about a certain transformation in the participants as a result of this participation. Once you have caught a glimpse of freedom or experienced a bit of self-determination, you can’t go back to old routines established under a racist, capitalist regime” (Beal 1995, 154). In the introduction to their pamphlet, the Combahee River Collective likewise describes their activism in the following terms: “A Boston Black Feminist group, the Combahee River Collective, *provided an analysis* of the murders that helped Third World women *understand* what was happening to them” (Combahee River Collective 1979, n.p., our italics). In Moraga’s words, the collective helped to “make sense of” these murders in their larger historical context. The project of women of color feminism and queer of color critique, in other words, is to create a language to describe what has been rendered unknowable through normative comparative method. Yet in creating this language, these women of color feminist text must emphasize what cannot be known, what escapes articulation: Moraga’s desire for a movement that has not yet come, Beal’s “glimpse of freedom,” or the Combahee River Collective’s description, in their foundational “Black Feminist Statement,” of “a *clear leap* into revolutionary action” that black feminist activism demands (Combahee River Collective 1981, 213). If, as Lowe argues, the dominant mode of comparison exemplified by Weberian social science depends on an empiricist mode that claims the knowable, we can see why an alternative comparative method must traffic in the unknowable and the devalued.

These earliest iterations of women of color feminism and queer of color critique offer us important optics for present-day mobilizations of power. In women of color feminism and queer of color critique, we find an analytic for understanding how the creation of categories of value and valuelessness underpins contemporary racialized necropolitical regulation. The decolonization movements that inspired striking Third World students in the 1960s and 1970s have necessitated changes in the operation of global capital.² Neocolonialism and globalization produce new racial formations and thus demand new methodologies for the study of race.³ This violent reorganization of the world economy exacerbates established modes of exploitation, creates new conditions of dispossession, and produces new displacements alongside new forms of immobility. As Roderick A. Ferguson reminds us in

his chapter in this book, the influx of Asian, Latino-Chicano, and African migrants into the United States since the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, for example, has demanded the recognition of the histories of colonialism, decolonization, war, and structural adjustment in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as part of understanding these migrants' racial formations. And again, the development of the "prison-industrial complex," which incarcerates African Americans en masse, cannot only be narrated in relationship to the long history of the U.S. nation-state's dispossession of African Americans but, as Ruth Gilmore has observed, must also be understood as one of the many effects of a global economic transition after World War II (Gilmore 1998–99).

In the contemporary era, ascriptions of value and valuelessness are unevenly detached from overt reference to race, yet their deployment provides for extreme racialized violence. In her chapter in this book, Jodi Melamed delineates the post–World War II era as a moment when "white supremacy entered a phase of permanent crisis" (87) occasioned by the vilification of racism and fascism as the ideological justification for war, and by the emergence of movements for decolonization. As a result, a new racial formation emerged, one that "organizes the hyperextraction of surplus value from racialized bodies and naturalizes a system of capital accumulation that grossly favors the global North over the global South" (83). Yet the same neoliberal formation mobilizes multicultural rhetoric "as the key to a post-racist world of freedom and opportunity" (78). It does so by "engender[ing] new racial subjects as it creates and distinguishes between *newly privileged and stigmatized* collectivities" (our italics) while "cod[ing] the wealth, mobility, and political power of neoliberalism's beneficiaries to be the just desserts of 'multicultural world citizens'" (83). Contemporary regimes of power naturalize brutal racialized, gendered, and sexualized violence, labor exploitation, and the rendering of subjects as redundant and disposable by creating new, nominally nonracialized categories of privilege and stigma, or, in other words, valuation and devaluation.

We can identify these processes as a novel deployment of comparison that creates new ideal types. In other words, while in an earlier era, categories such as race, gender, and sexuality stood as the dividing line between those who were protected from "premature death" and those who were not, today these categories are unevenly sutured to older categories of race, gender, and sexuality (Gilmore 2007, 28). Thus we see racialized, gendered,

and sexualized subjects accruing previously unimaginable access to capital and citizenship in formations such as a global Asian technological and professional class (Ong 2006), elite global South nationalist state managers and bureaucrats (Alexander 1994), and an African American middle class that exists as a conduit for state violence against, and disciplining of, the African American poor (Cohen 1999). Yet at the same time, such an organization of power enables *exacerbated* conditions of brutality, social and physical death, and violence—indeed, the relegation of billions of racialized, gendered, and sexualized lives to disposability and valuelessness—the world over. The unequaled worldwide increase in imprisoned populations and in practices of criminalization and incarceration is one, though by no means the only, haunting example of this exacerbated dismissal of lives (See Sudbury 2005; see also A. Davis 2003; Schneider and Amar 2003). Other examples of necropolitical practices and their effects include the utter abdication of state protection of black life in New Orleans in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, the largely unsolved “femicides” of hundreds of working-class Mexican women along the U.S.-Mexico border, particularly in the Ciudad Juárez region (see Fregoso 2003), and the emergence after 9/11 of the category “terrorist” as the name for those whose lives cannot be recognized as lives, a category that legitimates U.S. wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Older modes of struggle organized around the presumption of homogeneity within racial groupings fail to address these differences.

Yet we do have a “usable tradition” from which to create a new politics of struggle for our current moment. Insofar as theorists like Moraga, Beal, and the Combahee River Collective have already begun to identify and critique such a mode of governance and to theorize alternative understandings of the political, we submit that we can find in these writings, and in the models of comparison developed within them, inspiration for a politics for the present. Lisa Lowe encourages us to “consider a *genealogical* study that would *both* situate ‘difference’ within the modern apparatus of comparison *and* attempt to retrieve the fragments of mixture and convergence that are ‘lost’ through modern comparative procedures” (Lowe 2005, 412).

In that spirit, we the editors and contributors have collectively endeavored to articulate how racialized, gendered, and sexualized difference has been produced and understood through comparison, as well as to produce new analytics through which to apprehend coalitional possibilities, or in other words “strange affinities.” While some of the chapters in this book

(Ferguson, Hong, Keeling, Melamed) explicitly take up women of color feminism in its myriad incarnations, all offer relational analyses that unsettle received categories and modes of comparison in ways that share a kind of kinship, or a strange affinity, with the relational comparative analytic of women of color feminism and queer of color critique.

The chapters in part 1, “Alternative Identifications,” describe and sometimes even enact new modes of connection through the deployment of a relational comparative analytic. We begin with Lisa Cacho’s meditation on the difficulties in mourning the death of her cousin Brandon. Cacho’s chapter thematizes its own failure to articulate alternative modes of subjectification in the face of pathologizing definitions of racialized and gendered subjects by highlighting the impossibility of finding a language to valorize and memorialize the life of her young male cousin without replicating such pathologizing narratives. This impossibility, Cacho observes, lies in a long material history of racialized and gendered evaluation of Latino men’s lives, a history that undergirds a system of value in which her own position as an educated, upwardly mobile professional is valuable only *because* Brandon’s position is devalued. When Cacho, despite these seemingly insurmountable epistemological challenges, finds a way to value Brandon in his own terms, we see the creation of a new form of relationality and coalitional possibility. In a different context, Kara Keeling’s analysis of new-digital-media social movements similarly describes a different model of relationality. Keeling delineates the ways in which these digital-media social movements mobilize identity politics that radically disrupt a discrete and coherent notion of subjectivity. Keeling uses Gilles Deleuze’s theorization of “I = Another” as a description of subjectivity that refuses the normative identity politics of “I = I.” That is, rather than connecting through similarity (the “I” can be equivalent only to another “I”), the formulation “I = Another” can imagine a connection through difference. Keeling observes that the new-digital-media social movements find a way to forge such connections. Likewise, Jodi Melamed identifies two different deployments of identification in texts, both of which are characterized as women of color. Yet one, Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, uses a form of identification based on similarity (much like “I = I”) that underwrites neoliberal multiculturalism, while the other, June Jordan’s poem “Moving towards Home,” uses a form of identification organized around difference (“I = Another”) that challenges neoliberal multiculturalism.

Having seen these elaborations of new modes of connection, we move in part 2, “Undisciplined Knowledges,” to chapters that attend to the epistemological erasures of normative comparative models. Roderick A. Ferguson critiques the narrative trajectory of African American studies by examining the African migrant. Ferguson details the ways in which the discipline of normative African American studies implicitly creates an ideal type: the African American subject narrated through the usual historical trajectory of enslavement, emancipation, and civil rights struggle, against which the African migrant can only be seen as deviant. Centering the African migrant in African American studies, Ferguson argues, demands a complete reorganization of the foundational assumptions of the field. Ruby Tapia’s chapter shifts the focus to a certain kind of liberal feminism by detailing the ways in which feminist viewing pleasure relies on spectacularized racial violence. Quentin Tarantino’s *Kill Bill* films, Tapia observes, have been read as providing feminist agency to women who are subjects, as well as objects, of violence. However, this version of feminist agency is predicated on older modes of viewing that take for granted that racialized violence is pleasurable, and ultimately and not coincidentally valorizes the white woman as mother. Chandan Reddy takes on the ways in which the modern pro-gay-marriage movement likewise erases racialized histories when it uses analogy as a mode of comparison of race and sexuality. He does so by tracing the residues and incommensurabilities that haunt the use of the landmark antimiscegenation case *Loving v. Virginia* by the pro-gay-marriage movement. Finally, Sanda Lwin’s chapter takes on literary disciplinarity by examining the ways in which W. E. B. Du Bois’s attempt to narrate an international racial solidarity through the allegory of mixed-race union in his novel *Dark Princess* requires the disruption of the generic conventions of romance.

Part 3, “Unincorporated Territories, Interrupted Times,” moves from examinations of the contradictions of disciplinary norms to explorations of the ways in which alternative comparative modes require the reorganization of time and space. These chapters examine a figure or concept that troubles certainties of time, place, space, and nation. We begin with Victor Bascara’s chapter on the documentary film *Kelly Loves Tony*, which details a year in the life of two Mien refugee teenagers in the San Francisco Bay Area. By tracing the different ways in which the film treats Kelly, a straight-A student longing for upward mobility, and Tony, a high-school dropout with a criminal record who fights a deportation hearing, the film situates the refugee as

both confirming and disrupting the progressive temporality of U.S. modernity. Bascara's chapter underscores one of the implications of women of color feminism and queer of color critique: that taking the intersection of race, class, and gender seriously means understanding that differently gendered racialized immigrant subjects (Kelly, on the one hand, and Tony, on the other) can be considered different racial formations that can be subjected to comparison. Martha Chew Sánchez's chapter traces the figure of the Chinese as undermining the certainties of Mexican national identity, which has long been organized around erasing the complex histories of migration to Mexico. Chew Sánchez retrieves the presence of the Chinese in Mexico in fragments, out of such unlikely archives as a poem by her sister remembering her Chinese grandfather. Grace Hong traces the ways in which the comparative method of minority nationalism is undermined and reinvented through ambivalent or ironic treatments of nationalist sentiments in Chicana/o literary texts. Identifying the ways in which nationalism articulates itself as a proscribed form of mourning, Hong observes that the ironic or even outright humorous depictions of death seen in Oscar Zeta Acosta's novel *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* and Ana Castillo's *So Far from God* are aesthetic strategies that provide alternatives to nationalist affect. Bianet Castellanos attends to the ways in which Mayan migrant workers undermine the constitution of the urban as the ideal type, against which the rural migrant is rendered abject. Through their deployment of the word *chingar*, a Spanish word recast with indigenous connotations (both negative and positive) of bravery, autonomy, and aggressiveness, Mayan migrant workers narrate and negotiate their working conditions and establish the boundaries of their communities. Helen Jun's study of the black press explores the ways in which African American claims to citizenship relied on establishing African American respectability over and against the heathen Chinese. The book ends with Cynthia Tolentino's examination of a short story by the contemporary Puerto Rican writer Ana Lydia Vega. Tolentino situates the figure of the English governess in Vega's short story as an allegory for the ambiguity of Puerto Rico's status as unincorporated territory and observes that because gendered norms of respectability create a multiplicity of nonnormative subjects—from the liminal class position of the governess to the deviant sexuality of enslaved peoples—tenuous alliances between such subjects can be imagined, albeit briefly and contingently.

While these chapters demonstrate the complexity and variety of projects inspired by comparative race analytics, we hope that we do so in a way that does not institutionalize comparative race studies as yet another hegemonic discourse that suppresses the internally contradictory and heterogeneous nature of new social formations. In contrast, we suggest a comparative race project that centers these contradictions and heterogeneities as a political practice and intellectual methodology that is not definitive but instead serves as a basis for all of us to continue to endeavor collectively.

Notes

- 1 In defining women of color feminism in this way, we are distinguishing the formation from women who, from within nationalist movements and through a nationalist idiom, articulated their own interests and proved themselves agential subjects, a formation Emma Perez (1999) has called “feminism-in-nationalism.”
- 2 For an analysis of the effects of decolonization and Third World liberation movements on U.S.-based social movements, see Young 2006.
- 3 For a discussion of the changes in racial formation in the wake of the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, see Omi and Winant 1994, especially chap. 6, “The Great Transformation.” See also Melamed 2006.