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Over the last twenty years, U.S. scholars have witnessed a proliferation of programmatic calls to abandon research that takes the nation-state as an unquestioned frame of analysis in favor of what have variously been called transnational, international, inter-American, transatlantic, black Atlantic, circum-Atlantic, Pacific rim, border, postnationalist, hemispheric, diasporic, cosmopolitan, and global frameworks. Often initiated from interdisciplines such as women's studies, American studies, African American studies, Chicano and Latino studies, and Asian American studies, these calls have also been taken up by traditional disciplines such as history and literary studies.¹ Some scholars have in turn revisited the genealogies of those traditional disciplines and have rediscovered earlier attempts to break out of the nation-state frame.²

This broad-based effort has been met by at least three critiques from Latin Americanist scholars. First, some have argued that Latin American nation-states still function as important frames of analysis given the erosion of state sovereignty in the global South by the forces of neoliberal globalization controlled to a large extent by the nation-states of the global North. That recent calls to set aside the nation-state frame altogether have usually been delivered from the U.S. academy to a generalized intellectual audience, as if the rest of the world ought to listen, reminds us that intellectual labor is not immune from globalization. Is the global North—particularly U.S.-based American studies—yet again attempting to dictate the terms of academic enterprise to Latin Americanist scholars in the South? Second, many have pointed out that the programmatic nature of these calls tends to finesse the acute difficulties of research meant to transcend the nation-state frame. For instance, such research requires access to far-flung archives, training in multiple languages, knowledge of multiple disciplinary traditions that themselves have various national genealogies, and (not the least difficulty) a great deal of research time. To what degree do the inequities in research funds available to scholars preclude the full participation of Latin Americans in this endeavor to transcend the nation-state frame? Does this endeavor reinscribe the very hierarchies of knowledge production it hopes to supersede? Third—and some U.S.-based scholars have joined in this

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point—these recent calls often fail to consider the many earlier waves of research that did not set the nation-state as its horizon. Latin Americanists do well to remind scholars from U.S.-focused fields who are anxious to rectify decades of “exceptionalism” in American studies that Latin American studies has long critiqued U.S. imperialism and has always had a substantive comparative component. But are the calls to transnationalism just belated calls to comparative studies, or something more?³

Where does this impasse leave us today? Issue 92 of *Social Text* addresses this question by taking seriously the hierarchies of power implicit in calls to transcend the nation-state frame while nevertheless responding to those calls. Our title draws on Emma Goldman's notion of traffic in her 1917 essay “The Traffic in Women” to foreground the inevitable complicities critical scholarship shares with the exploitative histories it seeks to examine, as well as the opportunities such histories present for critical work. In her essay, Goldman wrote: “What is really the cause of the trade in women? Not merely white women, but yellow and black women as well. Exploitation, of course; the merciless Moloch of capitalism that fattens on underpaid labor, thus driving thousands of women and girls into prostitution.”⁴ Goldman proceeded to decry xenophobic and anti-Semitic explanations for prostitution, in order to shift the early-twentieth-century debate over the sex trade from the moralistic, racist, and imperial-nationalist terms of U.S. reformers to a critique of international capitalism: “Those who sit in a glass house do wrong to throw stones about them,” she continued; “besides, the American glass house is rather thin, it will break easily, and the interior is anything but a gainly sight.”⁵ For Goldman, then, the material traffic in women is bound up with the reformers' interpretation of that traffic. The traffic itself is facilitated by the reformist account of it. In order to counter the reformers' hermeneutic, Goldman appeals to the agency of sex workers, whom she imagines as sharp critics questioning the very system within which they circulate: “With Mrs. Warren these girls feel, ‘Why waste your life working for a few shillings a week in a scullery, eighteen hours a day?’”⁶ For Goldman, “the traffic in women” thus names neither an immoral set of behaviors nor a particular instance of victimization. Rather, it names a gendered extraction of surplus value from sex represented as if it were a moral failing of particular women themselves, *as well as* an occasion to fashion new critiques of that extraction. Expanding on “the traffic in women” almost sixty years later, Gayle Rubin would argue that the phrase does not name the exchange of passive women by all-powerful men the world over, but rather the circulation of women within a diverse range of economic and political “sex/gender systems,” many of which are characterized by asymmetries of power and the extraction of surplus value. Drawing on structuralist anthropology and psychoanalysis,

she stressed that women practice a diverse range of economic and political actions that are not always simply instrumentalized by the systems within which they circulate.⁷ For both texts, then, “traffic” names circulation as a system of commodification facilitated by a hermeneutic *and* circulation as an occasion to sharply question, perhaps even to seize and refashion, that system itself.

“The Traffic in History” takes up the spirit of Goldman’s and Rubin’s doubly valent use of the term *traffic*, without suggesting a simple analogy between *history* and *women*. The essays gathered here address the first valence of *traffic* by reassessing the ways global labor, sexuality, slavery, and religion circulate as commodities within and across colonies, empires, and nation-states. They examine traffics in bodies, identities, and sexualities (O’Toole, Córdoba Plaza, Negrón-Muntaner/Martínez–San Miguel), in cultural images and poetry (Denning, Negrón-Muntaner/Martínez–San Miguel), and in religion (Moreton). The traffic in *history* further emphasizes that the methods of historical analysis themselves play a constitutive role in this system of circulation, particularly when nationalist hermeneutics obfuscate the interests of global capital with moralistic or racial-imperialist accounts of this circulation. Consequently, the essays in this issue challenge nationalist historiography by paying particular attention to how these traffics traverse—while also at times reinforcing—the geographic boundaries of the nation-state. They demonstrate how social formations exceed classically comparative models of national scholarship, as those social formations traverse oceans and continents (O’Toole, Córdoba Plaza, Negrón-Muntaner/Martínez–San Miguel, Gorbach, Moreton, Denning), shore up national formations (Moreton, Gorbach), and/or operate quite apart from national formations (O’Toole, Córdoba Plaza).

With an eye to the second meaning of Goldman’s and Rubin’s “traffic,” the essays attend to the ways circulation fails the systems meant to control it, generating adaptive racial diasporas (O’Toole), nonnormative sexed and gendered lives (Negrón-Muntaner/Martínez–San Miguel and Córdoba Plaza), colonial articulations of metropolitan practices (Gorbach), and affective modes of political imagination (Moreton, Denning). In addition, the essays themselves participate in the circulation of histories, attempting to seize and refashion the very histories they trace. All are connected to the Tepoztlán Institute for the Transnational History of the Americas, which was formed in 2003 to be a site of open, collaborative interaction among scholars from across the Americas. Four of the essays were first presented at the Tepoztlán Institute’s annual summer conferences (Denning, Moreton, Gorbach, and O’Toole), while two other essays (Negrón-Muntaner/Martínez–San Miguel and Córdoba Plaza) will be presented at the 2007 conference. In their lead essay, Pamela Voekel and

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Elliott Young, two of the founders of the Tepoztlán Institute, reflect on the intellectual and institutional promise of engaging in collaborative and transnational scholarship. They give an account of our ongoing efforts to organize a multinational intellectual encounter and unflinchingly consider the fraught possibilities of exchange among academics in the north and the south.⁸ As Voekel and Young show, this effort has been riddled with double binds, yet it has also been driven by a certain creative chaos.

We can add a further caveat to the traffic in transnational history in the spirit of Goldman and Rubin: postnationalist or transnationalist accounts of such traffic, as much as the subjects they study, risk becoming commodified by regimes of historical analysis and representation. The celebration of such accounts may lead to the fetishization of such historiography, making it appear magically before us as the commodity of choice, further exacerbating the uneven terms of intellectual exchange between the north and the south. Rather than being enthralled by such magic, we must keep in mind the inevitable limitations of its scope. It is a risk we embrace, even as we mark the erasures that will ensue.

In “From the Rivers of Guinea to the Valleys of Peru: Becoming a *Bran* Diaspora within Spanish Slavery,” Rachel O’Toole turns to the colonial period to remind us of traffics that preceded national enclosure. She examines the reconfiguration of *bran* subjectivity among African slaves in seventeenth-century Peru, tracing the “multiple and dynamic means of adaptation” that tied Spanish caste identities to reimagined regional identities from Guinea-Bissau. Rather than producing idealized, harmonious diasporic communities in Peru, these *brans* forged their lives through conflict as much as collaboration. A similar attention to the antagonistic conditions of possibility for identity formation characterizes Rosio Córdova Plaza’s “Sexuality and Gender in Transnational Spaces: Realignments in Rural Veracruz Families Due to International Migration,” translated here from Spanish by Trudy Balch. Córdova Plaza examines the migrations of Mexicans between a village in Veracruz and the southern United States, connecting the subnational regime of sexuality operating in an indigenous village to the supranational capitalist restructuring of the global economy. Rather than simply increasing the gender and sexual power of the women who remain in Mexico, the out-migration of men from this village at once increases the surveillance of women’s sexuality and provides occasions for nonnormative sexual expression.

Frances Negrón-Muntaner and Yolanda Martínez–San Miguel’s search for the title subject of Lourdes Casal’s famous poem “Para Ana Veldford” also leads them into a complex, international traffic in politics and sexuality. They trace the journey of a revolutionary exile whose own history of movement from Germany to California to Cuba to New York

at once follows the circuits of international communism and makes evident the limitations of its heteronormative sexual regimes. Their account of their search for Veltfort (as she actually spells her name), and their extensive interview with her, is an exemplary instance of critical literary and queer history.

If the previous essays demonstrate how social formations precede and transcend national and binational frameworks, Frida Gorbach's "Hysteria and History: A Meditation on Mexico," translated from Spanish by Eileen Brockbank, explores how national historiography is itself transnationally produced. In an essay that combines psychoanalytic and postcolonial theory, Gorbach examines the genealogy of the hysteric in Mexican medical history. She follows the hysteric—a marginal and peripheral figure—on its own circum-Atlantic voyage between European and Mexican psychology, reading it as an allegory for Mexican national historiography's own traffic. Gorbach gives us an example of how Mexico has shaped its twentieth-century historiography according to European paradigms of modernity, and of the postcolonial perils of such shaping.

Bethany Moreton's "The Soul of Neoliberalism" exposes the transnational circuits of Christian trade and aid, as she follows the impressive circulation of Wal-Mart's economic and evangelical mission between the United States and Central America. Focusing in particular on the "sanctification of service labor," she offers a provocation to critics who reject neoliberalism for its supposedly cold economic rationality: "There is a soul to neoliberalism, and a refusal to accord it respectful attention not only makes caricatures of its many sincere adherents but also leaves no terrain for engaging them." Nevertheless, Moreton deftly illustrates the complicity of Christian piety, surplus value extraction, and heteronormativity in Wal-Mart's neocolonial ethics of (social) investment.

Finally, Michael Denning's essay "Representing Global Labor" takes a step back from the global conception of labor to demonstrate how the political idea of "workers of the world as constituting an interconnected global labor force sharing a common situation" congealed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This idea was "a powerful imaginative construct," he argues, "even if it was in many ways a fiction." Through a comparative analysis of Sabastião Salgado's photographs and the World Bank's influential 1995 report *Workers in an Integrating World*, he then asks the question, "How do we understand the fading of this representation at a moment when a global labor force seems—to corporate employers and international financial institutions—more palpable than ever?" Denning's essay thus brings the issue to a close by directing our attention to the future of the political under globalization: "To the command of neoliberal globalization—'Workers of the world, compete'—we must answer with that

old slogan of the global justice movement: ‘Workers of the world, unite.’ But in doing so we need to put it in new words, new songs, new figures of that yet unimagined, unrepresented collectivity.” Taken together, the essays in this volume remind us that this “we” is itself always caught in both the complicities of the traffic in history and the possibilities of that traffic’s creative chaos.

Notes

1. For just a few examples, see Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Crossroads of Cultures: The Transnational Turn in American Studies,” *American Quarterly* 57 (2005): 17–57; Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Micol Siegel, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review*, no. 91 (2005): 62–90; Masao Miyoshi, *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996); Dana D. Nelson, “From Manitoba to Patagonia,” *American Literary History* 15 (2003): 367–94; Benjamin Lee, “Critical Internationalism,” *Public Culture* 7 (1995): 559–92; Jane C. Desmond and Virginia R. Domínguez, “Resituating American Studies in a Critical Internationalism,” *American Quarterly* 48 (1996): 483–97; Claudia Sadowski-Smith and Claire F. Fox, “Theorizing the Hemisphere: Inter-American Work at the Intersection of American, Canadian, and Latin American Studies,” *Comparative American Studies* 2 (2004): 5–38; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Evelyn Hu-DeHart, *Across the Pacific: Asian Americans and Globalization* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999); Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987); José David Saldívar, *The Dialectics of Our America: Genealogy, Cultural Critique, and Literary History* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991); Donald Pease, ed., *National Identities and Post-Nationalist Narratives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994); John Carlos Rowe, *Post-Nationalist American Studies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Jeffrey Belknap and Raúl Fernández, eds., *José Martí’s ‘Our America’: From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998); James Clifford, “Diasporas,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9 (1994): 203–338; Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 66 (2001): 45–73; Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins, eds., *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Robin D. G. Kelly, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883–1950,” *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 1045–77; Alys Eve Weinbaum and Brent Edwards, “On Critical Globality,” *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 31 (2000): 255–74.

2. Revisionary work on Herbert Eugene Bolton is just one example in history. See Bolton, “The Epic of Greater America,” *American Historical Review* 38 (1933): 448–74, and *History of the Americas: A Syllabus with Maps* (Boston: Ginn and Co., 1928); Lewis Hanke, ed., *Do the Americas Have a Common History? A*

Critique of the Bolton Theory (New York: Knopf, 1964). See also “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History,” ed. David Thelen, special issue, *Journal of American History* 86 (1999). Revisionary work on black internationalism is just one example in literature. See Brent Hayes Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

3. For some of these critiques, see Roger Bartra, *Blood, Ink, and Culture: Miseries and Splendors of the Post-Mexican Condition*, trans. Mark Alan Healey (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Mark T. Berger, *Under Northern Eyes: Latin American Studies and U.S. Hegemony in the Americas, 1898–1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000); Néstor García Canclini, *La globalización imaginada* (Buenos Aires: Paidós, 1999); Walter D. Mignolo, *The Idea of Latin America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005) and *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Albert Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Mabel Moraña, “The Boom of the Subaltern,” Hugo Achugar, “Local/Global Latin Americanisms: ‘Theoretical Babblings,’ apropos Roberto Fernández Retamar,” Nelly Richard, “Intersecting Latin America with Latin Americanism: Academic Knowledge, Theoretical Practice, and Cultural Criticism,” and Neil Larsen, “The Cultural Studies Movement and Latin America: An Overview,” all in *The Latin American Cultural Studies Reader*, ed. Ana Del Sarto, Alicia Ríos, and Abril Trigo (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

4. Emma Goldman, *The Traffic in Women and Other Essays on Feminism* (New York: Times Change, 1970), 20.

5. *Ibid.*, 29–30.

6. *Ibid.*, 20.

7. Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review, 1975), 157–210.

8. We have been participating in the Tepoztlán Institute’s conference since 2005 and have been members of the institute’s organizing collective since 2006.

