

Proposal for a Special Issue for *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* “Interstices: Women of Color Feminist Philosophy”

Kristie Dotson, Michigan State University
Donna-Dale Marciano, Trinity College

Narrative

The subtitle of this special issue, “Women of Color Feminist Philosophy,” announces the need for a special issue. Attention to the existence, paucity and/or persistence of “women of color feminist philosophy,” including attention to whether “women of color feminist philosophy” signifies a distinct body of scholarship, is warranted. As women of color feminist philosophers, specifically black feminist philosophers, we have had many conversations with other women of color feminist philosophers over the need for the kind of special issue we are proposing. And many of us are in agreement that a volume identifying, interrogating, *and* demonstrating women of color feminist philosophy is needed. The need arises not only from the often isolated existence plaguing women of color feminist philosophers, but also due to the paucity of available publishing outlets for work relying on women of color as primary philosophical touchstones.

To date, there has not been a sustained project aimed at identifying and interrogating women of color feminist philosophy. This is due in large part to the politics of naming itself. This topic begins at a point of controversy that is underscored by the use of “women of color.” As an identity marker, much less a modifier for a body of scholarship, it is unclear to whom “women of color” refers. One has to be careful to avoid importing an “unexamined chromatism” that, as Gayatri Spivak warns, places “whiteness” in the center of modes of identification, while simultaneously reducing that identification to absurdities (1999, 164-165). However, the warning that an uncritical deployment of “difference” is as dangerous as an uncritical proclamation of “similarity” (hooks 1990; Narayan 1997; Minh-Ha 1986) is also pertinent to the controversy with respect to “women of color.” A special issue is needed to test the waters around contentious identifications like “women of color,” especially given the popularity of the term in academic engagement. Also, it is simply a reality that there is a paucity of alternative identification markers for women who identify as “non-white” in academia, which is an arena where such an identification makes one an extreme minority without the support of other similarly situated women.

There are many who would deny such an identity marker and/or body of scholarship exists or should exist (Minh-Ha 1986). This special issue will serve as a platform to give voice to these concerns. However, there are many of us who accept the title and existence of women of color feminist philosophy, with varying degrees of enthusiasm; and still others who would abstain from such a debate and simply do their work either as women of color feminist philosophers or not. We believe that it is time for a special issue devoted to not only interrogating “women of color feminist philosophy” as an identification marker, but also simultaneously showcasing examples of women of color feminist philosophical engagement. As the editors of this volume, we will strive to illustrate issues within the politics of naming, even as we move on to provide a platform for specific projects currently being produced as women of color feminist philosophy.

The most recent book concerning women of color and philosophy, *Women of Color and Philosophy* (Blackwell 2000), edited by Naomi Zack, also struggles over the politics of naming. Rightly identifying a continuing need to consolidate women of color philosophical writing, Zack struggles with a title for the volume. Moving from “Women of Color Do Philosophy” to “Nonwhite Women Do Philosophy” to “Of Color Women Do Philosophy” and finally settling on “Women of Color and Philosophy,” Zack points to the difficulty of identifying work within professional philosophy that is being done by “nonwhite women.” While her collection includes a number of voices from women of color professional philosophers, it does not, nor does it intend to, present work that is specifically feminist. To date, there are no edited volumes or journal issues devoted specifically to women of color feminist philosophy.

There are at least two other factors besides the politics of naming that can account for a paucity of journal issues and edited volumes focusing specifically on women of color feminist philosophy. They result from

1) the contentious presence and understandings of “feminism” in women of color communities and 2) notoriously “anti-theory” and/or “anti-philosophy” impulses that runs through many women of color intellectual traditions. That a feminist identity is difficult to assume among women of color is hardly a new insight. Emergence of names like womanism, Africana womanism, black feminism, Latina feminism, Chicana feminisms indigenous feminism, etc. speak to the need to modify or outright change “feminist” identity to fit one’s own circumstances (Collins 2006; Walker 1983; Hooks 2000; Hudson-Weems 2006; Green 2007). Yet, even with significant challenges to assuming a feminist identity, women of color feminists continue to emerge.

The resistance to theory and philosophy, institutional or otherwise, among many women of color follows from a number of objections. Some object to the labor of theorizing itself, others to the presumptuous universality of the theories, and still others object to the authority and privilege given to theory and philosophy. These charges have been notoriously difficult to address primarily because the objections to theory and philosophy are not unreasonable. However, we believe, regarding the charge of resistance to theory and philosophy that the women of color feminist philosophy community is in the midst of a paradigm shift. This shift maps onto a generational change that is marked by emerging women of color feminist scholars gaining PhDs in philosophy in order to study women of color philosophers and philosophical orientations. It is only recently that such avenues of study have become possible within the discipline of philosophy. This change heralds a different relationship to theory and philosophy; where one’s primary interlocutors are other women of color philosophers, feminist and otherwise, instead of a select cadre of, often, white male scholars. There is a growing mass of younger women of color feminist professional philosophers who have a different attitude towards institutional philosophy and theory than women of color feminist philosophers who began their careers as early as twenty years ago. Many of us wrote dissertations with Gayatri Spivak, Maria Lugones, Linda Alcoff, Patricia Hill Collins, Ofelia Schutte, Uma Narayan, and Chela Sandoval, to name a few, as our primary philosophical touchstones. Both the possibility and reality of this kind of engagement marks a new landscape for philosophy that is not confined to a reliance on a “traditional” white male canon, which has been paradigmatic in previous decades. This shift in academic possibilities is creating new spaces for original work from women of color philosophers within the discipline of philosophy. We believe that these new possibilities mark a change in material circumstances that also signals a change in attitude in professional philosophy that is emblematic of other forms of academic philosophical engagement. As such, women of color feminist philosophy is in the midst of a transformation, which current projects by women of color feminist professional philosophers heralds. This change concerns the institutional opportunity to treat women of color as philosophers, not the existence of women of color philosophy (this has always existed). *A special issue on “women of color feminist philosophy” is needed to track the continual growth of this body of scholarship and also to evidence a paradigm shift in the form of institutional transformations.*

Our proposed volume on women of color feminist philosophy will aim to remain open to critiques of the topic, while insisting upon the existence of women of color feminist philosophy. This, in our estimation, is the current state of women of color feminist philosophy and we aim to display this reality. Now, a volume that is open to critique and demonstration requires a metaphor for consolidating all would-be contributions. In our work, Donna and I stress the fact that women of color feminist philosophy exists as interstitial philosophy. By navigating contested terrain, it is always already philosophy in the cracks. One can find our labor, as black feminist philosophers, between block political identities, like woman and black, for example, situated just inside and yet outside of rejections of theory and institutional philosophy, while simultaneously existing on the borderlands of feminist identity. This is our terrain; and we are in the process of making our homes there. We believe that though details vary significantly, our terrain contains similar challenges to the terrain navigated by many women of color feminist philosophers. To say the cracks within which women of color philosophers operate are composed of identity struggles, in the broadest sense, is accurate, but incomplete. Those identity struggles point to the shape of our labor, the character of our concerns, and the spaces for our engagement, which are equal parts contested and existing. So, in our estimation, it is precisely because the topic, “women of color feminist philosophy,” *is problematic* that it represents the interstitial nature of women of color feminist philosophical engagement. This is why we propose that this special issue be entitled, “Interstices: Women of Color Feminist Philosophy.”

Feminist Philosophers and Theorists Who Might Contribute and/or Review:

Our relationships with women of color feminist philosophers will prove invaluable to the completion of this project. Maria Lugones has agreed to participate with this special issue were it accepted. We have corresponded with Ofelia Schutte, Mariana Ortega, Uma Narayan, Falguni Sheth, Denise James, and Elena Ruiz-Aho concerning this special issue proposal and they have all expressed their support. Falguni Sheth, Denise James, and Elena Ruiz-Aho all expressed a desire to submit papers to be considered for the special issue. We believe that between our contacts and an open call for papers we will marshal strong peer-reviewed submissions and reviewer support from women of color feminist philosophers across the academy and outside of it.

Names of Possible Writers and/or Reviewers:

[Redacted text block]

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Note: the names of prospective contributors and reviewers have been redacted for reasons of confidentiality.

***Hypatia Special Issue:
Interstices: Women of Color Feminist Philosophy***

Call for Papers

Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy seeks papers for a special issue on women of color feminist philosophy. We welcome feminist philosophical scholarship with the aim of interrogating and/or demonstrating work created within the terrain of these three terms- women of color, feminist, philosophy. As the profession of philosophy has witnessed a small emergence of women of color who are pursuing academic degrees in philosophy as well as those who find philosophy useful in the service of other types of research and activism, women of color feminist philosophers still struggle to negotiate political and/or academic spaces often acknowledged as “interstitial” or “liminal.” And, yet, when one considers that within the past decade that younger (i.e. newer) feminist scholars now have access to successful and now classic works of a handful of senior feminist philosophers of color, one can instantly recognize that we are at a threshold of expanding the purview of what it means to philosophize as a woman of color feminist philosopher. This latter circumstance points to a significant transformation. We are at a juncture that deserves celebration as well as serious contemplation on the presence or lack thereof of women of color feminist philosophical work. To this end, we encourage new essays that explore the promises of scholarship as well as problems of objectives and/or methodologies pertaining to women of color feminist philosophy.

By women of color feminist philosophy, we mean intellectual work done by feminists who take women of color as their primary philosophical touchstones and/or scholarly focus. As such, we invite papers on a wide range of topics. We look forward to new insights concerning the identity and/or existence of “women of color” feminist philosophical scholarship as well as whether and what philosophy and philosophical tools aid or prohibit pursuing and addressing women of color feminist work. We also encourage essays on the process of including women of color’s voices into their own academic work. In particular, we hope that this issue will stimulate articulation of the diverse truths inherent to the diversity of women included in the moniker women of color, as it is understood within and against the American context or post-racial, post-feminist sensibilities. To this end, we encourage contributors to explore integrating resources from their particular racial, ethnic, and/or cultural background with an attention to the hazards or victories of such an exploration. We are open to essays ranging from ethical and social political explorations to metaphysical and epistemological concerns.

Deadline for submission: *To be determined*

Papers should be no more than 8000 words, inclusive of notes and bibliography, prepared for anonymous review, and accompanied by an abstract of no more than 200 words. In addition to articles, we invite submissions for our Musings section. These should not exceed 3,000 words, including footnotes and references, and unless they are invited contributions, they will be subject to external review. For details please see *Hypatia’s* submission guidelines, http://depts.washington.edu/hypatia/submission_guidelines.html

Please submit your paper to: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/hypa>. When you submit, make sure to select “Interstices” as your manuscript type, and also send an email to the guest editor(s) indicating the title of the paper you have submitted:

Kristie Dotson: dotsonk@msu.edu; Donna-Dale Marcano: Donna.Marcano@trincoll.edu

Editor Qualifications

Kristie Dotson is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy and a core faculty member in both African American and African Studies and the Center for Gender in a Global Context at Michigan State University. Her main areas of engagement are US Black Feminist Philosophy, Transnational Black Feminist Philosophy, Women of Color Feminist Philosophy (particularly work that focus's on knowledge and ignorance), and Epistemology. Her work can be divided into two research streams: 1) outlining and interrogating testimonial oppression and 2) active reconstruction of black feminist philosophical orientations. Recent publications include, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing" (*Hypatia*), which draws upon various sources, including black feminist writings, to offer a concept useful for identifying varying manifestations of silencing, and "Black Feminist Me" (*Diogenes*), which stages a dialogue between anti-theory black feminist orientations and her own black feminist engagement with philosophy. She is working on a book manuscript entitled, *Creating Our Own Fire: Identifying Black Feminist Philosophical Orientations*, in which she strives to give philosophical context to black women's intellectual engagement in the US. Her book proposal for this monograph was successfully funded in Spring 2011 for \$24,292 through the *MSU Humanities and Arts Research Program for Scholarship Development* (HARP Grant). In writing this book length treatment of black feminist philosophical orientations, she has developed ever-deeper knowledge of women of color philosophical orientations more generally.

Donna-Dale Marcano is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at Trinity College. She also teaches courses in the Human Rights and Women, Gender, and Sexuality programs. Marcano is co-editor of the book *Convergences: Black Feminism and Continental Philosophy*. She has also published essays on Julia Kristeva, Jean-Paul Sartre, bell hooks, black feminist philosophy and race and moral liberalism. She is currently working on exploring and articulating the possibilities for and challenges to a black feminist philosophy. Additionally, she works with a diverse group of women of color in Hartford and plans to teach a course which will engage non-traditional aged and non-matriculated women of color with global and urban feminist philosophy.

Our Interest in this Special Issue

We are both passionate about the need for a special issue of *Hypatia* on women of color feminist philosophy. We are committed to publishing excellent scholarship that will help identify, what we take to be, a paradigm shift in women of color attitudes about philosophy. But also, we see this special issue as survival work. The fact of the matter is women of color feminist doing philosophical work, especially in a professional philosophy context, are part of a fragmented community. In inquiring after names for women of color feminist philosophers who might be interested in participating in this special issue, we found that few senior women of color feminist philosophers were capable of giving us more than a handful of names and they were almost all extraordinarily famous women of color philosophers. The fact that our knowledge of "up and coming" women of color feminist philosophers seemed unique was disheartening, especially when one considers that the top keys to success in academia are mentoring and strong collaborative relationships.

As early-career women of color feminist professional philosophy scholars ourselves, we are well aware that there are a growing number of women of color feminist professional scholars who are being excluded and ignored. We face rejections as women of color feminist *professional* philosophers within Women's Studies communities, while we are simultaneously overlooked within professional philosophy communities. The disregard for professional philosophy circulating within Women's Studies communities is well known. However, too often women of color feminist professional philosophers are collapsed together with women of color professional philosophers with no particular feminist orientation. We are different populations. It was also disheartening to research possible reviewers and contributors only to realize that women of color feminist professional philosophers often did not distinguish between women of color *feminist* professional philosophers and women of color professional philosophers as such, especially when asked about women of color from different racial, ethnic, or geographical identities than their own.

This pervasive oversight often translates into very brutal experiences with peer-review processes for women of color feminist philosophers.

Knowing *Hypatia's* commitment to feminist philosophy *and* its concern over the peer-review process for women of color feminist philosophers; *Hypatia* is an ideal journal for our special issue. We hope to 1) model a peer-review process that is women of color feminist philosophy-friendly by addressing oversights created by not attending to significant differences among women of color feminist philosophers, while 2) expanding the definition of women of color philosopher, used more generally, to also include women of color feminist professional philosophers. Though these two tasks may sound daunting, we insist that they are absolutely achievable: And where else to achieve these ends but with *Hypatia*, a journal that originated with "women of color issues (interpreted broadly to include lesbians and third world women)...at the forefront of the main editorial mind set?" (Ofelia Schutte, email correspondence, 3/24/11).

This volume will illustrate the ongoing presence of women of color feminist philosophy, as well as track the current paradigm shift marked by the work being produced by some women of color feminist professional philosophers. We are confident that through our combined contacts and an open call for papers we will receive a number of quality submissions that will engage the idea of women of color feminist philosophy and/or stand as a manifestation of women of color feminist philosophy. We hope that this special issue will provide a platform for dialogues, new and reoccurring, on women of color feminist philosophical engagement, while working to dispel the isolation within which many of us labor.

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