

**Proposal for a Special Issue for *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy***  
**Conjure Feminism: Tracing the Genealogy of a Black Women's Intellectual Tradition**

**Guest Editors:** Kinitra Brooks (University of Texas—San Antonio) Kameelah L. Martin (College of Charleston) and LaKisha Simmons (University of Michigan)

We propose a special issue on “Conjure Feminism” featuring African diasporic feminist scholarship that explores the long history of black women’s active construction and maintaining of a generative cosmological framework that centers spirit work as that sacred space where the the physical and spiritual worlds meet. Current academic discourses focused on “black death” and Afro-pessimism have been in productive and yet uneasy tension with the foundational work of black feminists and critical philosophies of race. Theorists of Afro-pessimism, for example, have claimed the work of Hortense Spillers as their own despite her multiple protestations to the contrary. Spillers recognized the potential in conjuring early in her career as her 1985 edited volume, *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition*, articulates how black women writers act as conjure women in their own unique ways. We choose to read Spillers’ work as generative, for we are “claiming the monstrosity” of the Conjure woman, “a female with the potential to ‘name.’” In particular, we are using Conjure Feminism to “rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment” even as we thrive against a “culture” that “imposes...blindness.” This special issue intervenes in these debates by centering Africana women’s cosmologies.

Conjure feminism privileges diasporic women’s knowledge and folkloric practices of spirit work evolving from the U.S, Caribbean, Latin America, and West Africa specifically. Its cosmological framework provides Black folx the fluidity necessary for survival and thriving while constantly shifting in a world that will kill you. Mainstream Black folx have long claimed the wisdom of their familial matriarchs--particularly those in the U.S. South and the Global South--yet have always felt the necessity to add and many times replace this knowledge with more learned and ultimately Western intellectual pursuits. We seek to examine the intellectualism of those who first inspired our more noted intellectuals. Previous black feminist scholars such as Barbara Smith, Paule Marshall, Trudier Harris, and bell hooks have centered the importance of the kitchen and particularly the kitchen table. We believe Conjure Feminism builds upon these previous metaphors to include the importance of the backyard and the garden in particular. Interweaving the intellectual traditions of Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983) and Katherine McKittrick’s “Plantation Futures” we are focused on articulating how the botanical knowledge of our grandmothers not only served the practicalities of food but also the world-shifting potential of working the roots.

Conjure Feminism highlights how Black women of the circum-Atlantic world have long been root workers--pulling from ancestral traditions of the African diaspora--but we posit that rootworking is more than an occupation, or even a calling. It is an episteme grounded in the cosmologies of our African past. We seek to establish the parameters of this tradition by invoking the power of nommo, or the spoken word. By naming its thinkers and methods, we conjure resistance against the dis-ease and myopia of institutions that have long sought to discredit and denigrate other ways of knowing and being in the world. Through articulating Conjure Feminism, we call into being a theoretical lens through which one recognizes the Divine Feminine and the natural world as consorts; and it is from this immaculate coupling that black women pull their intuition, second sight, incantations and rituals that allow them to thrive in a world hostile against their mere existence. Implicit in this act of naming is also differentiating what Conjure Feminism is *not*; usurping power away from hegemonic bodies that trivialize conjure as superstition and old wives' tales. Its adherents include Tituba, Zora Neale Hurston, Marie Laveau, Nanny of the Maroons, Yaa Asantewaa; women who we see as not only activists but philosophers and intellectual matriarchs of Conjure Feminism. We must interrogate why these women were not considered philosophers in the traditional mode while simultaneously placing them in that very regard.

Conjure Feminism functions through the articulation and communal understanding of a series of ethical demands that have been willfully ignored by previous intellectual traditions that privilege race OR gender but fail to account for the interlocking of both. Conjure Feminism shifts previously problematic centering to propel a system of ethics that is crucial for this particular moment in critical race and gender studies. While there are diverse interpretations of the tradition and its functionality, Conjure Feminism prioritizes the individual and communal awareness and ontological potential of the following foundational precepts:

1. There are Consequences for Your Actions
2. Death is not an ending but a transition
3. One is Beholden to The Ancestors as well as future generations.
4. Spirit Work is necessary for our physical, emotional, and psychological health.

**There are Consequences for your Actions:** This system of ethics demands a reimagining of what is right or wrong. Morality both shifts and remains steadfast within the communal space. What stands firm is that that there are material, communal, and spiritual consequences--retaliation, even--for one's actions that cause harm. This is an ethical system in which ontological shifts such as being cursed and/or outcast from the communal space both as an individual and as a family.

**Death is not an ending but a transition:** Indeed, the black conjure feminist does not see death as an ending and builds upon Bonnie Berthold's insistence that "the dead are not dead." Conjure Feminism operates off of a hyper-awareness of the conflation of time as the past, present, and future coexists together. There exists an active privileging of the work done in the interstices of time. Cornelia Walker Bailey uses "Dayclean" a Gullah/Geechee term which refers to that specific moment when night turns to day. It is a generative time that we seize upon to renew our hope as well as complete the practicalities of keeping the systems that keep families running, or what Patricia Hill Collins refers to as motherwork. It is at Dayclean that we become new spiritually, mentally, and otherwise.

**One is beholden to The Ancestors as well as future generations:** There is a sustained rejection of the linearity of time for time is conflated and cyclical. As Nana Peasant proclaims in *Daughters of the Dust*, "The Ancestor and the Womb are one and the same." Individualism is not discouraged but communalism is privileged as there is an intertwining interest in the pragmatism of both the quotidian as well as the circular demands of "Black Time."

**Spirit Work is necessary for our physical, emotional, and psychological health:** Kameelah Martin defines spirit work as "ritual practices of African derived religious practices involved in the New World: obeah, Vodou, Lucumí, espiritismo, conjure and hoodoo, Candomblé, voodoo, and others" as well as "communication with supernatural entities." The spiritual framework of Conjuring is not associated with any specific religion but are connected as a fluid set of spiritual practices grounded in the veneration of and communication with the dead, as seen through The Ancestors.

**Call for Papers:**  
**Conjure Feminism: Tracing the Genealogy of a Black Women's Intellectual Tradition**

We are excited to announce a call for papers for a special issue of *Hypatia* on “Conjure Feminism,” African diasporic feminist scholarship that explores the long history of black women’s active construction and maintaining of a generative cosmological framework that centers spirit work as that sacred space where the the physical and spiritual worlds meet. Conjure feminism privileges diasporic women’s knowledge and folkloric practices of spirit work, inclusive of U.S., Caribbean, and South American, as well as West & Central African spiritual traditions in which women of African descent engage. Its cosmological framework provides Black folx the fluidity necessary for survival and thriving while constantly shifting in a world that will kill you. Mainstream Black folx have long claimed the wisdom of their familial matriarchs--particularly those in the U.S. South and the Global South--yet have always felt the necessity to add and many times replace this knowledge with more learned and ultimately Western intellectual pursuits.

Through articulating Conjure Feminism, we call into being a theoretical lens through which one recognizes the Divine Feminine and the natural world as consorts; and it is from this immaculate coupling that black women pull their intuition, second sight, incantations and rituals that allow them to thrive in a world hostile against their mere existence. Conjure Feminism’s adherents include Tituba, Zora Neale Hurston, Marie Laveau, Nanny of the Maroons, Yaa Asantewaa; women who we see as not only activists but philosophers and intellectual matriarchs of Conjure Feminism. We must interrogate why these women were not considered philosophers in the traditional mode while simultaneously placing them in that very regard.

We invite work by scholars across the disciplines (African Diaspora Studies, critical philosophies of race, Religious Studies, Anthropology/Ethnography, Afro-Latin American Studies, Folklore, History, Food Studies, Medical Humanities, and/or Women’s and Gender Studies as examples) to consider these questions as they relate to black women’s spiritual work, #blackgirlmagic, histories of black performance, black feminist and womanist literatures and media, black grandmothers, radical black midwives and doulas (in the past or present day), and black homemaking and homesteading. Papers that explore ideas of “Conjure Feminism” as an African diasporic phenomenon/philosophy and are located in North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and Europe are encouraged. Each submission to this special issue should consider at least one of the following in constructing their theoretical frameworks: black

women's world making; theorizations of life, death, afterlife or ancestors; womanist theologies and spiritualities; black feminist ethics; ontologies of black womanhood; black feminist philosophies; black women's epistemological traditions.

Possible topics may include:

- Histories of Conjuring as resistance to oppression
- Black Conjure Feminist Foremothers
- Black Women as Life Sustaining: For example, the histories of black midwives, black women and folk medicine, radical black doulas, black motherhood.
- Black Feminist Art and Performance: For example, artists that work at the intersections of past, present and future and consider African diasporic memory, landscape and earth, the transatlantic slave trade.
- Transatlantic Understandings of Conjuring: For example, cross-national and transnational belonging, female orisha/loa as a source/site of conjure feminism.
- Black Feminist Interventions in Afro-Pessimism: For example, black feminists' musings on notions of "death" and social death, black feminist understandings of fertility, black feminist (re)readings of classic texts caught up in the debates.
- Black Women, Gardening and Food Studies: For example, the organization or inheritance of black mothers'/grandmothers' gardens, tending to the earth, food as African diasporic memory, histories of folk medicine, herbal remedies.

### **Submission deadline: December 1, 2018**

Manuscripts intended for review as articles should be 7,000 to 10,000 words, excluding 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 4,000 words, including footnotes and references. All submissions will be subject to external review. For details please see *Hypatia*'s [submission guidelines](#).

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

**List of Potential Reviewers:**

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