

# UC Berkeley

## nineteen sixty nine: an ethnic studies journal

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Outro: A Healing Justice Retrospective

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## Outro: A Healing Justice Retrospective

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Tala Khanmalek

In my mind's eye there is a globe, a new star. Its tissue: the material formation of age-old experiences. After millions of years, the rocky planetesimals met again in my body, crossing paths in a fierce gravitational encounter. I know that in part, I attracted the debris. I gathered the scattered fragments of my mothers, my grandmothers, my great-grandmothers, of things wrecked whose faces I wanted to see. I looked into my own eyes and saw all for which there is no record but the rumor of hushed memories. I wasn't just me, and though I knew that in theory, I now felt the presence of many others in the flesh. My anatomy changed, literally. I spun out of time and space. A tumor I later named Lazuli for lapis, a precious stone from the lands of my ancestors, grew denser and denser until it began to reroute the workings of my brain at only two millimeters small. The core slowly became as hot as that of earth and fiery enough for a groundbreaking eruption. I don't know what healing justice means, but I do know that past wreckage must be re-membered and that there are ancient ways of swimming towards the forgotten ships at the very bottom of the ocean, an underwater topography that navigates the personal and the political on one intuitive map. Now that I've been "sick," I know that health isn't the opposite of illness. I know that disease is purposeful, and that my diagnosis has taught me more about the world than any book. I know that this tumor—that I can feel, that I have touched—isn't an abnormal growth. In fact, it makes perfect sense.

When I applied to be the next Executive Editor of *nineteen sixty nine* (NSN), I wanted to use the journal as a collaborative method of learning more about healing justice and exploring a theme that felt particularly important to Ethnic Studies. Although practitioners in the Bay Area had recently introduced me to the term, "healing justice" was already indispensable to every conversation no matter what the topic. Because of its prevalence, both in my life and off campus, I believed that the university had a responsibility to listen and offer another stage for sharing ideas. The second issue of NSN is a sincere effort at adding to a preexisting discussion in hopes of being a serviceable tool for ongoing interpretation.

Our goal was far from defining the theme, and actually, we intended to collect varying points of view that were not necessarily in fluent dialogue. Just as the enactment of healing justice differs from organization to organization, so too

does it shift between contributors; each piece (re)presents the theme anew. Like most journals, the format of NSN reads like an anthology, lending itself to an equal exchange that does not privilege one voice over another. Indeed, we chose to feature Aurora Levíns Morales, as a way of paying homage to her work and formally acknowledging the theme's forbears. It is with special honor and deep respect that we return to Morales' writings and continue to ask her questions. Alongside our attempt to level the playing field within the limits of an academic publication, we recognize and have had serious conversations about the untold stories we have yet again failed to account for from the ivory tower of academia. Is it possible to publish anything through an institution of higher education that is written by and speaks to those it has historically excluded? As current students, many of whom were not meant to be studying at UC Berkeley, we are continually grappling with the increasing privatization of public education and militarization of our schools as well as the (neo)colonization of knowledge to develop better ways of bridging the false dichotomy between university and community, theory and practice.

Unlike most journals however, we decided to include the "introduction" at the end and instead, start by giving thanks. Morales' "Milk Thistle," which nearly concludes her book *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of Puertorriquenas*, opens this issue on healing justice. One of the numerous medicinal plants found in the botánica, "milk thistle says take what you are and use it." In the spirit of Morales' call to use what we are, we envisioned the issue as a contemporary response to the remedial effects of milk thistle and by extension, the archive of Women of Color Feminisms. As I mention in our interview, both Morales and her mother are part and parcel of the seminal *This Bridge Called My Back*, which every contributor either directly refers to or somehow invokes. Why? What is it about the works—their content and form, their aesthetic—of Morales, Anzaldúa, Morraga, Lorde, that invites a critical as well as creative engagement with healing in a way that produces possibilities rather than foreclosures, that moves us towards justice rather than inclusion, that truly transforms? This isn't a totally rhetorical question, but one that remains to be fully considered and inquired about in diverse contexts.

As an Ethnic Studies journal informed by Women of Color Feminisms, especially Black and Indigenous Feminisms, it was essential for us to reflect the integrity of our mandate and ask for pieces of any genre *in relation to multiple*

*oppressions*, a phrase and analytic specific to that canon. In our call for submissions, we wrote:

Since we situate the journal in a particular history of resistance, we are interested in critical reflections about healing justice that are also situated in the experiences of multiple oppressions. Although we are not beginning with a definition, we are beginning with the premise that healing justice is political and centralizes the simultaneity of race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, etc.

That is to say, in no way does this issue align with the “New Age Movement” and if anything, can be read as a scathing critique of how it has co-opted and whitewashed concepts of healing particular to peoples of color. On the contrary, we sought contributions that challenge the appropriation and exploitation of our healing traditions as well as spiritualities. We sought contributions that examine social determinants of health, oppose the neutralization of Western science, and resist ableist notions of what it means to be well, whole, and recovered. Most importantly, we sought contributions that narrate healing justice and advance theories in the flesh. For the issue to be a pedagogical tool and travel beyond a database or its own textual borders, the pieces had to be medicinal in a multi-dimensional way, relevant to the complexities of our current struggles.

Although the call for submissions circulated outside of UC Berkeley and our review was “blind,” the editorial board selected pieces that were somehow connected to the Bay Area and to each other. The sheer number of serendipities was a pleasant surprise. To facilitate these organic connections, together with transdisciplinarity and the overlapping sub-themes in every piece, we decided not to divide them in sections. We also did not want to distinguish between genres; in our opinion, visual media or literary work should be regarded with as much scholastic rigor as an “article” and often conveys the same subject matter in ways far more intelligent. Most of the pieces are multi-genre, weaving qualitative research and narrative techniques akin to what Anzaldúa has referred to as *autohistoria-teoría*. Of course, it is not by chance that the theme of healing justice attracted work from people who are already linked and/or have footing in Northern California. After all, the Bay Area is home to landmark anti-oppression movements that have significantly impacted the world at large. As Alondra Nelson points out in her recently published book *Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination* (2012), anti-oppression movements that are normally not associated with healing justice have actually been some of the medical

industrial complex's most fervent critics and effectively taken public health into their own hands. According to the Black Panther Party (BPP) for example, the right to health equality and freedom from medical discrimination was foundational to their political philosophy. Following a long legacy of community-based African American health advocacy, the BPP sustained a successful and calculated politics of health *and* race throughout its prime. With its distinctive healing justice ancestry, the Bay Area continues to cultivate original and grassroots movements in the service of health activism. Today it remains home to ReCLAIM (Resisting Colonial Legacy And its Impact on Medicine), a collective midwifery practice that likens mainstream medicine to the prison industrial complex and explains that both are results of colonialism, Wild Seed Wellness, affordable massage therapy for queer and trans people of color, the Living Room Project, a communal space predominantly for queer and trans people of color to host anything from workshops to DJ'ed celebrations, and symposiums like UndocuNation that highlight undocuhealth and how immigration policies harmfully affect the health of undocumented youth.

Cara Page, co-founder of Black Women Birthing Resistance in Atlanta, Georgia and coordinator of Kindred (a southern healing justice collective), wrote an article after the 2010 United States Social Forum about healing justice as vital to our movements. The article, "Reflections from Detroit: Transforming Wellness and Wholeness," includes a list of basic healing justice principles that were developed there and an explanation of how centralizing healing justice radically redefines both the terms and the stakes of social justice overall. Still we ask, what is the role of healing in liberation? How have our ancestors survived global histories of slavery and colonialism? How do we survive inter-generational trauma and present-day symptoms of a malignant society built on their blood, a society so sickened by injustice that it continues to wage wars in the name of defense? We who have survived know that "national security" is a pathological application of immunity against "others," that the real disease is violent dehumanization to which no one is an exception, and that the antidote to oppression lies in how the personal is political, how my tumor is but one mirror of life, the beating heart.

During the 2011-2012 academic year I served as the Women of Color Initiatives Coordinator at UC Berkeley and helped organize the 27<sup>th</sup> Empowering Women of Color Conference. The theme was "A Holistic Approach: Justice, Access, and Healing." We kicked off the daylong conference with an epic event, a conversation between Angela Davis and Grace Lee Boggs entitled, "On Revolution." The conversation began with each

of their introductions to revolutionary struggle, moved on to reimagining work and finally, to the importance of food (particularly veganism) and what Boggs expressed as “growing our souls.” She argued that radicals must be courageous enough to talk about the soul in addition to the mind and body. “How we change the world,” she said, “*and* how we think about changing the world has to change.” If anything, their conversation on revolution was a profound signal to the role of healing justice in our liberation and the sea of wisdom in our very (im)materiality.

Blessings.