

## ISSUE NO. 5

## Love in the Time of Racism

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*We have all known the long loneliness and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.—Dorothy Day*

*Unless one lives and loves in the trenches, it is difficult to remember that the war against dehumanization is ceaseless.—Audre Lorde*

*There can be no love without justice.—bell hooks*

We offer this collaborative essay as scholars, activists, friends, chosen family, and managing editors (with co-founder and sister-friend Tamura A. Lomax) of ***The Feminist Wire*** (<http://thefeministwire.com/>), an anti-racist, anti-imperialist, feminist digital publication launched in 2011 that now has over a million visitors annually. Following bell hooks, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, and others, our work at *TFW* is guided by a deep, persistent commitment to love as praxis and pedagogy. Through both our collective, sometimes messy “behind the scenes” process *and* the work we publish, we attempt to embody this commitment—a necessary one, given that we are working at intense, highly visible, and contentious cultural intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and new media.

*The Feminist Wire* was founded by two Black feminist scholars, **Tamura A. Lomax** (<http://www.linkedin.com/pub/tamura-a-lomax/4b/567/942>) and **Hortense Spillers** (<http://as.vanderbilt.edu/english/bio/hortense-spillers>), who discerned a sense of deep crisis regarding the state of the U.S. nation and society at large, including cultural misperceptions about the achievements of feminist critique and practice, as well as the lack of critical attention given to feminist concerns within mass mediated spaces. ***TFW* is an intervention** (<http://thefeministwire.com/about-us/mission-vision/>) situated within, and in dialogue with, a larger matrix of anti-racist feminisms (e.g., **Crunk Feminist Collective** (<http://www.crunkfeministcollective.com/>), **Black Women’s Blueprint** (<http://www.blackwomensblueprint.org/>)), that seeks to blend mediation and technology to bring about transformative justice. Our work is guided by a love praxis that advances theory, criticism, cultural productions, and relationships in and with socially and economically just communities.

For us, “love praxis” refers to the concrete labor of cooperatively editing and publishing *TFW* and also to the affective and ethical work we do as members of a collective. Indeed, we understand our collective and voluntary labor performed within a context of neoliberalism and global capitalism—a context organized around individualization and consumption—as evidence of a type of radical love that builds, and does not obliterate, communities. That is, the way we work is grounded in a practical ethos of love. Every email, every phone conversation, and every face-to-face meeting is shaped by this ethos, and our interactions reproduce love over and over again. Some members of our team have described the experience of working collectively through love as “spiritual,” and unlike any other feminist community of which they’ve been a part.

Why love? And, what is love? In our view, which builds on our readings of scholarship in this area, love is a radical ethic and apparatus that is under-theorized as a tool of social transformation and world-remaking within feminisms and larger left social justice movements invested in the work of transformative justice. We have been contemplating love in theory and praxis for some time. Indeed, the following meditation on love, which informs the ways we have come to think about the political efficacy of love in our work, was offered by Darnell as part of the Harvard University Kennedy School’s inaugural Audre Lorde Human Rights Lecture Series:

*“Love is a movement. Actually, love is the movement. It is that which moves each of us toward one another. That is to say, it is the eradication of the distance that exists between us and the other. Indeed, the radical potential in love is its ability to destroy the walls, fortifications, edges, spaces, which work to separate us.”*

**Please see “What freedom feels like: on love, empathy, and pleasure in the age of neoliberalism” here** ([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOhnLInpvJc&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uOhnLInpvJc&feature=player_embedded)) . **A text version of the paper is available here**

([http://www.hks.harvard.edu/var/ezp\\_site/storage/fckeditor/file/pdfs/centers-programs/centers/carr/programs/SGHR/What%20Freedom%20Feels%20Like%20Final\\_Kennedyweb.pdf](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/var/ezp_site/storage/fckeditor/file/pdfs/centers-programs/centers/carr/programs/SGHR/What%20Freedom%20Feels%20Like%20Final_Kennedyweb.pdf)) .<sup>[1]</sup>

*TFW* is a collective of more than thirty differently-identified writers, cultural workers, activists, artists, and scholars of all ranks who hail from various locations around the world and who choose to write, edit, and publish in community. That they do so illustrates the power of love to connect bodies across difference via technology, and not to divide them. Each writer makes a commitment to say “yes” to a movement that propels us toward one another. We are frequently in contact—“in touch”—with each other through a dynamic, living network of affiliations and communications. We touch,

and are touched, daily by this network, this “virtual”/digital reminder that we love and are loved. In this way, our community is an affective space, sustaining and life-giving. It offers a bold contrast to **“feminism’s toxic twitter wars** (<http://www.thenation.com/article/178140/feminisms-toxic-twitter-wars>)” in which differences are played out via social media in highly contentious and damaging ways.

If we, as Audre Lorde brilliantly **writes** (<http://www.metahistory.org/guidelines/EroticUses.php>) in her classic essay, “The Uses of the Erotic,” “have been raised to fear the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings,” then love is the resounding ‘yes’ that beckons us toward connection, communion, and companionship. It is the ‘no’ to our fear of vulnerability and connection, the fear that provokes our need to anesthetize feeling, even if the conditions for our mutual survival are connected to such actions. Love makes possible our survival because it is a force of connection. And we need love in these times, in what we are deliberately and reflexively calling “the time of racism” to counter the notion that we are ‘post-racial.’

It is imperative to us that feminisms **continue to engage racism in all its forms** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2014/01/a-love-letter-to-mumia/>) and to understand that gender and sexual oppression are intimately interwoven with racial oppression and racialized state violence. Because, of course, the United States is far from post-racial. Just ask **Renisha McBride** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/11/illegible1-black-death-denied-media-mourning-and-mobilization/>) . Or **Marissa Alexander** (<http://justiceformarissa.blogspot.com/>) . Or the family of **Trayvon Martin** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/07/a-statement-on-the-reclamation-of-all-black-life-for-trayvon-marissa-jordan/>) . Or the families of **migrants left to die** (<http://www.nomoredeaths.org/>) in the Sonoran Desert or assaulted by **militarized U.S. border patrol agents** (<http://motherboard.vice.com/blog/its-official-america-is-militarizing-the-mexican-border>) . For **some feminisms** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2014/01/moving-on/>) to unfold as if race has receded as an issue is not only disingenuous; it perpetuates epistemic violence against people of color.

Building from our own “love praxis,” we aim in this essay to provide a template for a multi-modal feminist, anti-racist, queer digital and material praxis guided by an ethics of care and love, and ultimately empathic solidarity in the service of transformative justice. We write to encourage ongoing conversations on the uses of love in an age of new media technology and social networks—an age that is arguably represented by forms of cyber-mediated relations and representations that might easily **disrupt affective energies** (<http://www.npr.org/2012/10/18/163098594/in-constant-digital-contact-we-feel-alone-together>) . But we also write with acute awareness of the real costs in time, energy, and

well-being of relentless online engagement, especially that encouraged by neoliberal institutional formations, or what **Mimi Thi Nguyen**

(<http://threadandcircuits.wordpress.com/2013/09/09/against-efficiency-machines/>) calls “efficiency machines.”

In what follows, we document and link to multiple dimensions of *TFW*'s “love work,” including “**LoveMaps for Middle School** (<http://web.sbs.arizona.edu/college/news/ua-wins-grant-nurture-digital-activism-youth/>),” a digital media project using GIS technology to map social justice; a forum at *TFW* on “**Love as a Radical Act** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/09/love-as-a-radical-act/>)” that drew over 100,000 readers; and our ongoing feature “**Feminists We Love** (<http://thefeministwire.com/category/feminists-we-love/>).” These efforts infuse love, respect, and radical self-care (**the latter with varying degrees of success** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/11/tfw-takes-a-winter-break/>)) into all that we do. Before we focus on the specific projects, however, we'd like to talk about how we fell in love with each other in the first place.

### **Love, *TFW* Style**

Queer theorist **Miranda Joseph** (<http://www.u.arizona.edu/~mirandaj/Home.html>) (2002) has written on the limits of community understood in the romantic and naturalized sense; that is, on the ways that “community” as a concept does a certain kind of affective, political work while eliding more transformative change. Although we conceive of ourselves as a community at *TFW*, we do so relentlessly self-consciously and with deep, persistent attention to the work of community-making, that is, our daily and deliberate attempts to forge relationships as well as to acknowledge and celebrate our differences. As a “community” of scholars, activists, and writers committed to feminist work (<http://thefeministwire.com/about-us/writers/>), we must nonetheless continually navigate treacherous subjective spaces of political action and social media, including our own structural locations of race, gender, sexuality, disability, geography, class status, and embodiment.

Our pathways into *TFW* have been diverse.

Co-founder Tamura Lomax was a doctoral student at Vanderbilt University during the years that one of us (Monica) was teaching there; their paths crossed when Tamura enrolled in Monica's feminist theory seminar. When Tamura and Hortense Spillers founded *TFW*, they invited Monica to join the new Collective. Darnell came on board

after being invited by **Rich Blint** (<http://americanstudies.as.nyu.edu/object/richblint.html>), a former *TFW* Collective Member and close friend of Hortense, to write an essay, which led to him writing a few more before being invited to join the Collective. Other Collective members were invited to join our community at various points in time because of their scholarship and/or activism and/or cultural work, sometimes at the recommendation of current Collective members, other times because they published with us and we appreciated their voices.

In building the Collective over the past couple of years, we have aimed for diversity on all fronts: racial, ethnic, gender, sexual, age, ability, and geographic (although we are predominantly U.S.-based). We also wanted people from within and without academia, and from all ranks in the academy from undergraduates to adjuncts to full professors. We wanted critical theorists working alongside poets and artists, activists collaborating with novelists and scholars. We also aimed for access: a free submission process and a free site. Of course, this has translated into **significant “free” and invisible feminist labor** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/11/tfw-takes-a-winter-break/>) as we’ve endeavored to keep *TFW* going as an all-volunteer enterprise.

In this respect, our story is perhaps not unlike that of other feminist organizations that have built a diverse collective around a shared mission. But one thing that makes *TFW* especially unique, in our twenty-first century lived experiences, is that our relationships have been largely *virtual* and long-distance. They are mediated by various forms of technology: laptops, cell phones, circuits, land lines, desktops, airplanes, automobiles, trains, credit cards, electrical wires, cell towers, and more. *TFW* is an assemblage in both the **Deleuzian** (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/deleuze/>) sense and in the artistic sense. We are, quite literally, a community of found objects (and subjects).

Although some of us know each other in the flesh, so to speak, as students, teachers, mentors, collaborators, friends, and comrades in arms, others of us have never met “in person.” Our community is thus primarily a digital community, and both our “love” and the work of *TFW* happen online. Working online via email, WordPress, **Submittable** (<https://thefeministwire.submittable.com/submit>), and **social media** (<https://www.facebook.com/TheFeministWire>) means that we can be efficient, fast, responsive, and work on our own time, in whichever time zone we happen to live. Of course, when we are face-to-face, as several of us were in 2013 in **Washington, D.C.** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/09/tfw-in-d-c-and-chicago/>), **Cincinnati**

(<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/11/34th-annual-national-womens-studies-association-conference/>) , and several other locations, we revel in each other's embodied presence.



(<http://adareview.fembotcollective.org/files/2014/03/Photo1.png>)

*The authors at Busboys and Poets in Washington, D.C., September 2013*

But working virtually also poses some major challenges. Because we operate in the contentious sphere of cultural politics, with race, gender, and sexuality front and center *all the time*, we must work particularly diligently to prevent digital blow-ups, micro-aggressions, misunderstandings, unintended consequences, and the like. We move fast, too, some days sending up to twenty or thirty emails back and forth. In any given day, we download submissions, forward emails, copyedit, share, upload articles, respond to inquiries, publish or delete comments to the site, and navigate social media. There is great potential for error, for reproducing rather than addressing inequities, and for re-racializing already painfully racialized topics.

To offer just one example, in the wake of the George Zimmerman trial, in which Zimmerman was found **not guilty of murdering Trayvon Martin** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/07/no-justice-for-trayvon-white-women-in-the-jury-box/>) , calls were made on social media for White women to critique and respond to the verdict. As with **Quvenzhané Wallis** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/03/taunts-tweets-and-black-girl-genius/>) , some Black feminists felt that White feminists were missing in action. At *TFW*, we were already preparing **a forum on the trial** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/07/in-the-aftermath-of-the-trial/>) in anticipation of justice averted, with essays by Black and White feminists. But we did not immediately publish this forum, as we were winding up a forum on Assata Shakur, and thus were criticized for being absent.

A flurry of emails ensued as we navigated a racialized terrain, one shaped also by grief and outrage. Some emails relied on humor to mask discomfort, or reached for a kind of universal radicalism in the face of perceived (and perhaps actual) racial differences in response to Zimmerman's trial. Emotions ran high. Our editorial team found we needed to *explicitly* touch base with each other to clarify our own positioning. To name the awkward silences, the strange humor, the discomfort, the fears, and the hopes. To actively build—and rebuild—our connections. Although our conversations can sometimes be difficult, we've learned to embrace differences and contention rather than behave as if both are non-existent. And this ultimately sustains our love.

We have also learned that a naturalized sense of community, to again reference Miranda Joseph's (2002) analysis, neither reflects who we are nor serves our purposes. In our work, community is an achievement, a hard-earned production, a work in progress, thus sustaining Joseph's model. It is, in a deeply transformative sense, something to aspire to, but not to the detriment of our daily interactions. We have found, too, that sometimes it is better to be in community than to be right. That the whole is sometimes bigger than the parts. That to create a collective vision of feminism, especially one that is anti-racist and anti-imperialist, we need to step outside of our own privilege, our own "business as usual" mentality, our own intellectual and affective preoccupations.

At the end of the day (**and sometimes these are very long days** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/11/tfw-takes-a-winter-break/>)), this process of being-in-community rather than reifying "Community" requires love, empathy, and trust, the latter heavily contingent on the former. We have also learned that love is best exemplified and brought forth when it, in practice, illuminates aspects of love theorized as an ethic, politics, philosophy, tool, and/or way of being.

### **Theorizing Love**

Love is a complex concept to practice and theorize. Love is antithetical to the desire to regulate bodies and the knowledges they produce. Theorizing love, therefore, is a practice that must perform the intervention that love signifies; it resists, if not razes, the limitations and boundaries that tend to willfully separate bodies of knowledge and peoples. That is, approaches to critically investigating love must be interdisciplinary and without boundaries. This might easily cause others who are committed to masculinist approaches to knowledge production (i.e. without strong commitments to intradisciplinary dialogue; refusals to theorize affect beyond certain fields;

unwillingness to turn to other sites of knowledge production beyond academe for insight, etc.) to disregard the study of love as a legitimate undertaking.

Furthermore, theorizing love is a risky task precisely because of its radical political potential. Love is an affective dimension often stripped of meaning; it can be **de-radicalized** (<http://www.amazon.com/Love-Your-Enemies-Break-Happier/dp/1401928145>) and **commodified** (<http://www.businessinsider.com/microsoft-doing-well-2010-7>) to sustain global capitalism in our neoliberal age. To seriously consider love as a possible hermeneutic through which to view the world and its various human, animal, and geographic bodies is to participate in a type of feminist work of illuminating difference and, therefore, power differentials. After all, love might best be rendered an affective and effective *feminine/feminist* strategy, which is likely why theories of love continue to circulate within the interdisciplinary fields of gender and women's studies, queer theory, and the like.

Take, for example, the following description of “**The Love in Our Time – a Question for Feminism** (<http://www.genderexcel.org/node/220>)” (LiOT) conference held at Örebro University in 2010:

*LiOT was organized around the assumption that a new broad field of scholarship – Love Studies – has emerged and has been expanding since the early 1990s. Especially since the beginning of the twenty-first century, and in contrast to previous reluctance in most disciplines (except literature) to take love seriously as a subject of academic theory and research, growing attention to the topic of love can be seen in many different disciplines, among both feminist and non-feminist scholars. Increasingly, love is now addressed in its own right instead of being translated into other terms (such as labor, care, romance, etc.), and a growing number of research activities (publications, conferences, networks) can be notified.*

LiOT organizers noted anxieties present within disparate fields in terms of their embrace, or refusal to embrace, what the organizers named “Love Studies.” As the organizers stated, feminist and non-feminist writers, scholars, cultural workers, and activists have thoughtfully considered questions of love for some time. And yet they (and we) are careful about the construction of genealogies that invisibilize those, especially women of color and women who exist outside of the gaze of “First World feminists,” who have critically interrogated love in their works. Indeed, we strategically and deliberately place Audre Lorde’s timeless essay, “The Uses of the Erotic” (1981), and bell hooks’s work, *All About Love: New Visions*

(<http://www.harpercollins.com/browseinside/index.aspx?isbn13=9780060959470>) (2001), in a genealogy alongside the more recent contributions of scholars like **Lauren Berlant** (<http://punctumbooks.com/titles/desirelove/>) , **Laura Kipnis** (<http://knopfdoubleday.com/book/93173/against-love/>) , **Elizabeth Povinelli** (<http://elizabethpovinelli.com/>) , **Ann Swidler** (<http://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/T/bo3637950.html>) , and many others.

The burgeoning field, or subfield, of “Love Studies” is also an intellectual and political project that could be squarely placed within or contiguous with the interdisciplinary domain of “Affect Studies,” remarked upon in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth’s groundbreaking collection, *The Affect Theory Reader* (<https://www.dukeupress.edu/The-Affect-Theory-Reader/>) . Affect, which continues to be conceived as counter-rational as a result of Western philosophical dualist notions of the mind-body split, is an intriguing subject of study because of the ways in which affect is often conceptualized as a secondary or lower characteristic of being. In other words, the racialized, gendered, and ableist mind/body binary evidences *cognition* as a higher masculine White mode of being and *feeling* as a lower feminine non-White expression of being.

Given **the violence that such discourses enact** (<http://www.annvetkovich.com/>) upon non-White, non-male, differently-abled, non-cisgender, non-Western bodies, affect theory and love studies are sites of inquiry that hold great potential for anti-racist and anti-imperialist theory and praxis. Yet, the theoretical and writerly contributions offered by feminists within and without our Collective, and the reactions and comments of non-feminist interlocutors, compel us to *express* love as much as we theorize it.

### “LoveMaps for Middle School”: Digital activism and feminism-in-community

In 2013, *The Feminist Wire* partnered with the University of Arizona **Department of Gender and Women’s Studies** (<http://gws.arizona.edu/>) (GWS) and the UA **Women in Science and Engineering (WISE) Program** (<http://wise.web.arizona.edu/>) of the **Southwest Institute for Research on Women** (<http://sirow.arizona.edu/>) (SIROW) on a project called “LoveMaps for Middle School: Nurturing Digital Activism for Social Justice.” Funding for the grant was provided by the **HASTAC Digital Media and Learning Competition** (<http://www.hastac.org/blogs/monica-j-casper/2013/09/16/lovemaps-university-arizona>) , with support from the **MacArthur Foundation Digital Media and Learning Initiative** (<http://www.macfound.org/programs/learning/>) .

This project was inspired by a number of concerns. First, *TFW* is committed to expanding its focus from online publishing to include community activism, and actively seeks ways to partner on projects fostering girls' empowerment. Second, GWS and SIROW have a long history of **community activism** ([http://www.nea.org/assets/img/PubThoughtAndAction/A10\\_JosephSoto.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/img/PubThoughtAndAction/A10_JosephSoto.pdf)) and **collaboration** (<http://sirow.arizona.edu/border-immigration>), one that predates the current university administration's call for academic units to achieve “**100% student engagement** (<http://neversettle.arizona.edu/>)” which urges faculty to connect students to the community, broadly defined. Indeed, the field of gender and women's studies historically emerged *from* community engagement and activism. Third, along with the launch of our “**Elementary Feminisms** (<http://thefeministwire.com/category/elementary-feminisms/>)” feature, *TFW* is committed to encouraging feminist dialogue and praxis among K-12 students, recognizing that early learning and action carries tremendous potential to build a lifetime of social justice consciousness and activism.

Based on scholarly work of WISE personnel on digital literacy (**Papaleo 2013** ([http://arizona.openrepository.com/arizona/bitstream/10150/301554/1/azu\\_etd\\_12881\\_sip1\\_m.pdf](http://arizona.openrepository.com/arizona/bitstream/10150/301554/1/azu_etd_12881_sip1_m.pdf))), we focused our project on GIS (or geographic information systems) technology. We decided to “map” love and social justice, both conceptually and technologically. GIS technology is increasingly being used in social justice work, for example through mapping **sexual violence in Syria** (<https://womenundersiegesyria.crowdmap.com/>) or **hate speech in the U.S.** ([http://users.humboldt.edu/mstephens/hate/hate\\_map.html](http://users.humboldt.edu/mstephens/hate/hate_map.html)) As with other forms of activism, the focus is typically on something *negative* that is happening (e.g., rape, hate crimes, bombings). With this collaborative project, and building on our combined efforts to infuse love into *TFW's* work, we created a program that centered the *positive*.

Across two consecutive Saturdays in September 2013, **we welcomed Tucson-area middle-school students** (<http://uanews.org/story/ua-wins-grant-to-nurture-digital-activism-in-youth>), predominantly girls but also including some boys, to campus for a day-long workshop. The students represented area public schools from several distinct neighborhoods, and thus reflected class, racial, ethnic, and other differences—including **stratified experiences with and access to digital technology** (<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/04/opinion/sunday/internet-access-and-the-new-divide.html?pagewanted=all>). The curriculum focused on using the Internet safely and productively, creating and using GIS technology, interacting collaboratively with peers and mentors, translating civic engagement and social justice into digital media, understanding and responding to social problems, and engaging within feminist community.



(<http://adareview.fembotcollective.org/files/2014/03/Photo2.png>)

*Participants in Workshop 1 being instructed in GIS use by Nick Knutson*

Including both classroom instruction and hands-on GIS mapping at the **UA Women's Plaza of Honor** (<http://womensplaza.arizona.edu/>), located on campus, the middle-school students—guided by a team of adult instructors—created their own maps of the Plaza using handheld GIS devices and also marked the geographic location of many different women honored on the Plaza. These positions were then compiled into an overarching map of social justice, in this case the public recognition of women in Arizona history. Students subsequently reflected on the mapping exercise with visual and narrative exercises, and some of these were **posted** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/09/lovemaps-nurturing-digital-activism-for-social-justice/>) at *TFW*. Others are still in development, as is the overall map.

Analysis of the students' workshop evaluations demonstrated that almost all participants (94%) felt they learned “a lot” about GIS technologies, with most of the students in Workshop 2 (93%) stating they would likely use GIS/GPS technology in their future careers. A significant number of participants (69% in Workshop 1, 86% in Workshop 2) reported interest in contributing to blogs and online publishing venues.

We also heard from parents after the workshops, about how much their children had enjoyed being present and how much they had learned. For example, one mother wrote:

*I would like to thank you about the workshop and the opportunity ... My son was very interested in the topic, and I enjoyed listening to many things that he learned and/or discussed at the workshop. We had a nice conversation going back home and I love that somebody else talked with [him] about topics that we try to discuss ... I am sure he got new knowledge, feelings and some ideas that will stay with him*

*forever. An extra reward was seeing his work on the web site ... It make him very proud... Good luck in your next workshop and hope to see you around.*

Another mother emailed to say, “I just wanted to thank you. My daughter had an amazing time! She came home full of plans for grad school (yay)! I hope you will share further opportunities like this with us in the future. It’s great that you all are sharing your time with these kids and getting them inspired.”

And a father of two shared the following:

*“I wanted to send you a warm thanks for thinking to include [my children] in the LoveMaps workshop. They had a fabulous time, enjoyed what they learned about mapping, loved meeting the other kids, and as you could guess, were delighted with all the delicious food and treats! ... J seems especially interested in learning how to post his essay on a webpage, so I’ll be following up on that.”*

Future plans include additional workshops (branching “down” to elementary school and “up” to high school students) and development and marketing the LoveMaps app for widespread use.

Beyond calling the project “LoveMaps,” how did love praxis figure into this work? First, our impetus for the project stemmed from a deep commitment to, and love for, girls who experience persistent and damaging **structural vulnerabilities and discrimination** (<http://becauseiamagirl.ca/why-girls>) worldwide. Such love is both “professional” and “personal,” in that a key partner (and participant) in the LoveMaps workshop was Mason Casper-Milam, Monica’s 12-year old daughter and a member of the TFW Collective. Love also permeated the workshops themselves, from the course design, to our engagement with the children, to the ways we attempted to “model” feminist praxis. We explicitly shared with them what it means to be in the kind of community we aspire to, and how that might look different than some of the engagement on social media with which they’re familiar. And last, we channeled and slightly reframed **bell hooks** ([https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/168484.Feminism\\_is\\_for\\_Everybody](https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/168484.Feminism_is_for_Everybody)), conveying to the workshop participants that there can be no love without justice, and that there can also be no justice without love.

### “Love as a radical act”

Our “Love as a Radical Act” forum—a series of essays, stories, poems, and reviews—was published in September 2013, just before the twelve-year anniversary of 9/11 and a few

months after George Zimmerman was acquitted of the murder of 17-year old Trayvon Martin. Two of our collective members, Darnell and **Heidi R. Lewis** ([http://www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/dept/feministandgenderstudies/people/profile.dot?person=lewis\\_heidi\\_r](http://www.coloradocollege.edu/academics/dept/feministandgenderstudies/people/profile.dot?person=lewis_heidi_r)), had been engaged in a series of conversations on the need for counter-narratives in a time of what felt like national despair and righteous rage. The forum was a response to what they considered to be a dearth of publications on love's possibilities for transformative justice and communal healing.

The forum ultimately provided space to contributors who were interested in “articulating and re-conceptualizing the meaning and importance of love for self, for each other, and for community.” The collection of essays, poetry, love notes, blurbs, and visual art pieces posed questions about and uses of love, namely: How might love be conceived and used as a radical tool of transformative justice? How do we articulate the differences between love and non-love? How might love be conceptualized as an ethic, politics, and praxis?

The introduction, titled “The Liminal Space Between Love and Non-Love: An Introduction to the ‘Love as a Radical Act’ Forum,” briefly responded to some of the questions set forth in the Call for Submissions. We hoped the forum would move us and our readers from thinking to doing love in the world. Indeed, each contribution attempted to push us to think differently, if not anew, about our commitments to a type of love that escapes critical analysis. And it seemed no better time to analyze love than now, in our neoliberal present—a moment when the love of one's nation and oneself, for example, can become the impetus for the non-love of other nation states and other peoples.

As we prepared the Forum, Syrians were dying by chemical weapons while President Obama sought approval to commence a war-strike. And this was only one example of state violence; there are many. Love—of a nation ... of a people ... of national interests—can also produce war. Philosopher Slavoj Žižek warns us in *Living in the End Times* that “killing can be done out of love.” But at *TFW*, we are scholars, culture workers, visual artists, organizers, and writers who strive to maintain a feminist politics that is anti-imperialist. Thus, we name the type of love that produces war (and death, colonialism, lack, morbidity) as an antagonistic force that reserves and stalls justice. A radical love praxis means attending to uses of ‘love’ that are antithetical to social justice.

We gauge success by the impact that our work has in the world. We can assess the number of web views and shares, but the most important indicator of impact is the number and type of comments we receive from our readers. The feedback we received in response to the “Love as a Radical Act” forum was indicative of the need for more critical conversations on love within the public domain. One commenter noted, for example:

*Very interested in this conversation. Personal love — source of bounty, cruelty, and elements between the extremes — and the extension into the national, moving from the abstract other to the individual human being. An essential conversation. Irrational love and responsible love. The possessive and expansive, the sacred and indulgent. Naming one, enacting another. Emotion and the mind working together, and ignoring each other.*

We were particularly inspired by the ability of writers to summon the power of love to re-form our thinking in a moment of intense rage after the Zimmerman trial and to ready us for national mourning as the anniversary of 9/11 approached. We also recognized that we are in a privileged position, **as an online site of *critical media*** (<http://thefeministwire.com/about-us/mission-vision/>), to counteract the meta-narratives that flow through mainstream media.

While widely circulated and renowned media outlets like the *New York Times*, for example, publish stories on “contemporary relationships, marriage, dating, parenthood ... any subject that might reasonably fit under the heading ‘Modern Love,’” love can be theorized and written about beyond the quotidian categories of marriage and parenthood. We were, with the Forum, interested in publishing works that pushed us beyond notions of love as a condition of heteronormative marriage and contributions that required us to think anew about parenthood.

More importantly, the Forum helped to remind our Collective that *we* needed to return to and uplift the practice of love amongst ourselves. This forum and our subsequent conversations led ultimately to *TFW*’s hiatus in December 2013, during which we strategized ways to make our own work more sustainable, and also to model for other feminist projects what “sustainable feminism” might look like. That is, feminism practiced via love of self and other, and in ways not destructive to health, vitality, and community. This broader project is ongoing.

### **Feminists we love**

Our FWL—or **Feminists We Love** (<http://thefeministwire.com/category/feminists-we-love/>) — feature emerged from a conversation among Collective members Aishah Shahidah Simmons and Darnell, and eventually a handful of others, about the need to highlight love in our work, and to create space on the site for positive “love notes” to feminists doing transformative work. The series premiered on February 1, 2013, with Darnell’s interview of writer and editor Jamilah Lemieux. Since then, almost every Friday, we have featured a different “feminist we love,” sometimes as part of a forum, but most often as a stand-alone feature.



(<http://adareview.fembotcollective.org/files/2014/03/Photo3.png>)

*Jamilah Lemieux, FWL,  
February 1, 2013*

The feature’s name has a curious and fun origin story, in that we appropriated the idea from a decidedly non-feminist source, *Esquire Magazine*, which for many years has featured “**Women we Love** (<http://www.esquire.com/women/women-we-love/>).” Often, the women are profiled on the basis of sex appeal, and on the *Esquire* website one can “choose a woman” from a drop-down menu. We relished the idea of reappropriating this kind of non-feminist fetishizing of dominant beauty ideals with our own more subversive, political, feminist message of love and social transformation.

Aishah and Darnell wrote to the *TFW* Collective, describing the new feature and inviting input and suggestions for feminists to profile. Their note read, in part,

*“We anticipate that ‘Feminists We Love’ ... will create space for TFW to acknowledge and honor those feminists (and womanists)—the established, the less well-known, and the emergent—whose advocacy, scholarship, teaching, activism,*

*cultural work, social entrepreneurial ventures, poetry, visual art, and other modes of “doing” anti-sexist-racist-classist-imperialist-heteronormative-ableist work move the various communities of which they are part in the direction of a more just and equitable world ... We want to feature feminists whose work also amplifies any aspect of our mission ... The ways in which feminist politics are embodied and practiced are varied—by us as well as by those who read, support, and otherwise engage with us. As we know, feminisms are transformative in spaces beyond the walls of the academy.”*

The Collective was enthusiastic, immediately sharing ideas on a Google doc of people to profile. The feature was off and running, and remains one of the most popular pages on our site (as evidenced by visits and Facebook ‘likes’). Although we have enjoyed all of the FWL interviews, and we have many more fabulous profiles in the queue, we want to highlight just a few here that speak especially strongly to our mission to foster “digital love” and respect.



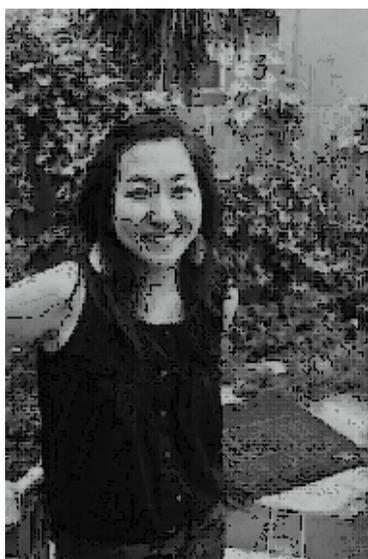
(<http://adareview.fembotcollective.org/files/2014/03/Photo4.png>)

*Yaba Blay, FWL, August 9, 2013*

For example, we were profoundly moved by **Salamishah Tillet** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/02/feminists-we-love-salamishah-tillet/>)’s disclosure of surviving sexual violence; her words emphasized our own mission to end silence about violence against women and girls. Tamura Lomax’s conversation with “hip-hop feminist” and culture critic **Joan Morgan** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/03/feminists-we-love-joan-morgan/>) WAS sassy, entertaining, and brilliant, and was the first to use Google Hangout to produce a video interview rather than just text. Monica’s interview with Tucson photographer **Liora K** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/04/feminists-we-love-liora-k/>) introduced a local visionary and fierce young feminist (and her work) to an international audience, while an interview with **Robin McRee Eaton** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/05/feminists-we-love-robin-mcree-eaton/>) introduced all of us to the first female railroad conductor in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Interviews with LGBTQ advocate **Van Bailey** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/03/feminists-we-love-van-bailey/>), cultural theorists and critical race scholars **Mark Anthony Neal** and **David Ikard** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/06/whats-not-to-love-mark-anthony-neal-and-david-ikard/>), sociologist **Michael Kimmel** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/07/fwlkimmel/>), and anti-violence, anti-sexism advocate **Jackson Katz** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/09/anti-sexist-activism/>) speak to the many ways that men engage in feminist theory and practice in a variety of venues. Feminism is not the sole province of women, nor should it be if we are all to survive. Perhaps now more than ever in these racist *and* misogynist times, we need our male allies working across lines of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, and geography, while simultaneously breaking down walls between academia and activism.

We've also featured some of our favorite sheroes and allies including Crunk Feminist Collective's **Brittney Cooper** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/05/feminists-we-love-brittney-cooper/>), self-defined "queer feminist anti-racist scholar-activist" **Stephanie Gilmore** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/04/feminists-we-love-stephanie-gilmore/>), renowned feminist cultural theorist **Michele Wallace** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/06/14571/>), scholar-activist and community organizer **Rosa Clemente** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/07/feminists-we-love-rosa-clemente/>), Black feminist intellectual powerhouse **Duchess Harris** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/07/fwlharris/>), feminist blogger and scholar **Mimi Thi Nguyen** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/08/feminists-we-love-mimi-thi-nguyen/>), girl child rights activist **Betty Makoni** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/10/feminists-we-love-betty-makoni/>), and disability rights activist **Mia Mingus** (<http://thefeministwire.com/2013/11/feminists-we-love-mia-mingus/>)



(<http://adareview.fembotcollective.org/files/2014/03/Photo5.png>)

*Mia Mingus, FWL, November 22,  
2013*

## Conclusions

In closing, we want to offer some thoughts about love that are not “final” but rather provocative and invitational, an opening to what we hope will be an ongoing conversation. Love—talking about it, doing it, theorizing it, enabling it—matters to us, in part because there is so much non-love.

For example, on any given day, our comments queue (like those of many of our **allies** (<http://www.feministfrequency.com/>) ) might contain a rape threat, or a death threat, or ugly words like “bitch,” “cunt,” and “whore.” The n-word makes an occasional vicious appearance. We do not publish the comments that fail to move a conversation forward, that aim to harm and silence, that violate our comments policy. But some of us read them, every single day. We file them away for future research on Internet hate and to remind ourselves why we do what we do. But filed away and unanswered, they nonetheless cut to the quick. Sometimes, it’s not easy to dismiss the haters. Our guts twist, and our breath quickens. More than ever, in these moments we need each other’s love and support in the form of community and institution-building, organizing and friendship.

Love is thus a balm and a pedagogy—an instructional approach to equitable relationality—that can be employed to counteract the force of lovelessness, as Paulo Friere noted in his classic **text** (<http://www2.webster.edu/~corbetre/philosophy/education/freire/freire-1.html>) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Love is a praxis that must be reiterated and received to be evidenced. Given our commitment at *TFW* to address and redress the impact of White racial supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, misogyny/trans-misogyny, homo- and trans-antagonism, ableism, and many other consequences and legacies of imperialism, we desire an end to the types of lovelessness that result in the subjugation of various bodies throughout the world.

Lovelessness is the epicenter of oppression, and from it emerges the various tremors and tsunamis that devastate our shared world, which move in the form of state-sanctioned violence, settler colonialism, bloated prison industries, rape culture, genocide, xenophobia, and so much else. And yet, we believe that love in the time of racism is a radical act that can lead to broader political/social formations and

solidarities where “difference” is not policed or expunged, but acknowledged and celebrated.

With love,

Darnell and Monica

—CITATION—

Moore, D., & Casper, M. (2014) Love in the time of racism. *Ada: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology, No.5*. doi:10.7264/N3QZ288S (<http://dx.doi.org/10.7264/N3QZ288S>)

This article has been openly peer reviewed at **Ada Review**

(<http://adareview.fembotcollective.org>) .



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**Footnotes** ( returns to text)

1. This lecture is made available on YouTube by the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government, which has chosen not to allow video embedding. The editors apologize for any inconvenience

◀ **PEER REVIEWED**

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winning *The Making of the Unborn Patient: A Social Anatomy of Fetal Surgery*. Her current research focuses on race and the biopolitics of infant mortality in the United States. She's also involved in collaborative research on social and biomedical consequences of traumatic brain injury across three populations: athletes, veterans, and domestic violence victims. She is a managing editor of *The Feminist Wire* and editor/publisher of *TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism*. More information can be found at [www.monicajcasper.com](http://www.monicajcasper.com) (<http://www.monicajcasper.com>).

## 2 THOUGHTS ON “LOVE IN THE TIME OF RACISM”

Pingback: [Love in a Time of Contingency: A Letter to Women's and Gender Studies | The Feminist Wire](#)

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Pingback: [The Fembot Toolkit |](#)



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*Ada*: A Journal of Gender, New Media, and Technology  
ISSN 2325-0496