

Late Identity

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# Editors' Introduction

## *Late Identity*

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EVE TUCK AND K. WAYNE YANG

We would like to cultivate a habit for this journal in which we begin with gratitude, rather than tagging our acknowledgments on at the end. To begin with gratitude is to mark that the creation of this journal is relational—we are calling on our networks, forging new relationships, and pressing the boundaries of others in the labor of making this journal's presence in the world and in our fields.

Our managing editors, Sam Spady and LeKeisha Hughes, have beautifully engaged in the emerging ethical practices of this journal. We are working for our communications to be clear and consistent, and their efforts make this possible.

In this special issue, we invited members of our editorial board to talk with us about the theme of "late identity." Nirmala Erevelles (University of Alabama) and Dean Itsuji Saranillio (New York University) generously responded to this invitation. We also invited critical respondents—scholars who decidedly locate their work outside the field of critical ethnic studies—to think with us about the theme. They included Black studies and queer studies scholar Rinaldo Walcott (University of Toronto), historian of the Caribbean Melanie J. Newton (University of Toronto), and Indigenous studies scholar Kim TallBear (University of Alberta). The results of these insightful conversations are gathered together in Sam Spady's article, "Reflections on Late Identity."

As we noted in our last issue, we continue to be dazzled by the thorough reading and feedback provided by our reviewers. These engaged readers are using the space of their reviews to theorize the work of critical ethnic studies, the role of this journal, and the possible trajectories that the field might make in coming years. The reviews were patient but prodding, critical yet optimistic.

We are thankful for the many submissions, especially from “new” academic writers yet to publish in academic journals and activist intellectuals positioned “outside” the academic professions. We thank our networks for soliciting, referring, and encouraging these submissions.

And finally, the authors in this issue have crafted creative, courageous, and compelling works in response to our call for papers. They wrote directly into some of the most long-standing conundrums of critical ethnic studies and responded to questions and feedback with humility and even a bit of revelry.

This is the second issue of *Critical Ethnic Studies (CES)* under our editorship, and, while we are stunned by the amount of work it takes to make this journal, we are moved by how many yesses have been delivered to us. As writers who value refusal, we have learned much from the kind “no” that occasionally comes our way too.<sup>1</sup> Often the word “no” to our requests is really a “Not at this time,” but sometimes a “no” is actually a bristling against the project of critical ethnic studies. As we observed in our last issue, critical ethnic studies as a field is at an important juncture, in which it can either prove itself to be accountable to the departures from ethnic studies presented by Indigenous studies and Black studies or it can fall short. Critical ethnic studies is also regarded with suspicion by those who do not see it as different from ethnic studies more broadly, who have been erased by broad strokes painted by ethnic studies scholarship, or who have refused to be understood as “ethnic.” Critical ethnic studies is vulnerable to those same critiques of erasure if it promulgates studies that “1) inscribe “ethnicity” as a scene of negation and 2) confirm the human body as a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements.”<sup>2</sup>

In many ways, this is why we have dedicated this issue to interrogating the ubiquity of identity in critical ethnic studies. As editors reading the manuscripts submitted to *CES*, we gain a field-wide perspective of how identity is being deployed and what it tries to do and cannot contain. Identity is a concept inherited from ethnic studies, but it may be a concept upon which the departure of critical ethnic studies from ethnic studies might be made more clarion. Identity may be a pivot point for what makes *CES* critical.

#### LATE IDENTITY: WHAT WE ARE DOING IN THIS ISSUE

In questioning the ubiquity of identity, we are not holding identity up to a Marxist meter stick; that is, we are not measuring identity in terms of its political use-value for delivering solidarity toward a general strike or revolution.

We are not rehashing old arguments about how identity politics is about essentialism or about individual self-identification, or not enough about dismantling capitalism. There is too much good theory already debunking these arguments.<sup>3</sup> We are not asking our readers to add “identity” to a list of banned words. Rather, we ask why identity is put to work on projects that it cannot handle.

We acknowledge that “identity” is a word with many different definitions in practice within ethnic studies and other fields. We learned from the conversations with Kim TallBear, Melanie Newton, and Rinaldo Walcott that identity is often an ambiguous surrogate for (not) talking about race, it can signal a project of self-actualization, and it can replicate the colonizing, genetic lineage project of scientific racism still used to categorize Indigenous people. “Identity” can also refer to a sense of belonging, to communities or to place, while actually dodging the problems of claiming community and place. It is the ambiguity of “identity,” its imprecision, that enables it to circulate as a seemingly critical term, flexible enough to handle any difficult problem of difference. We also learned from the generous responses by Dean Itsuji Saranillio and Nirmala Erevelles that “identity” is a possessive term; identity easily becomes property.<sup>4</sup> In this neoliberal moment of late capitalism, flexibility has currency; identity becomes another mode of accumulation.<sup>5</sup> As a whole, this issue is less about the limits of identity than about refusing the hegemony of identity.

#### IDENTITY HAS A TIME BUT NOT A PLACE

Identity was once timely. Identity has been there for powerful political work at important historical junctures, such as the various movements in the 1960s and 1970s for Caribbean nationhoods, for North American power movements, for organizing of Third World imaginaries and transnational solidarities.<sup>6</sup> Its particular power in those moments may actually derive in part from its broad appeal to unmoor people from their geopolitical differences and its ability to substitute complex relationships with root-seeking affiliations. Identity travels well beyond its moments of political insurgence. It is a term that has time but not place.

Identity is a temporal project that postulates certain fixities for it to work. Although diverse, treatments of identity might be thought of as sharing a project of describing subject positions in history and within relations (of power). Such positions may be described as intersectional, with such trusted categories as race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, citizenship, ability, and so

forth. However, as soon as they are described, the very axes used to describe them are already in flux, already coming apart and reforming. The grids used to define the intersections for identity are already in ruins.

Intersectionality, although conceived by Kimberlé Crenshaw and other elegant writers to dispel the fixities of identity categories, ironically has become one of the main buttresses of identity in ethnic studies.<sup>7</sup> We say its usage is ironic because intersectionality theories are meant to highlight how experiences are not fixed but layered and in relation. Yet intersectionality, like identity, can be deployed in academic and activist theorizing in possessive and flattening ways—described later in this introduction as the chilling effect of identity in theorizing and analysis. In her careful critiques of intersectionality, Jasbir Puar describes how intersectionality is primarily trapped in the logic of identity: “Indeed, many of the cherished categories of the intersectional mantra [race, class, gender, sexuality] . . . are the products of modernist colonial agenda and regimes of epistemic violence, operative through a Western/Euro-American epistemological formation through which the notion of discrete identity has emerged.”<sup>8</sup> Intersectionality has become a central category of analysis for feminists in the academy to qualify the specific racial difference of “women of color,” such that exploring other frames gets rendered problematic, particularly for women of color feminists—who are always situated as the produced Other of intersectionality. For Puar, it is not that intersectionality does not disrupt essentialisms; it is that intersectionality can be produced as an essential framework that, in turn, produces new fixities.<sup>9</sup>

Puar is not discarding intersectionality but rather asking what productive analyses can emerge in treating it as a useful analytic rather than a fundamental framework. Intersectional identity is positioned on a grid that is already in motion, that is already in ruins. “Subject positioning on a grid is never self-coinciding; positioning does not precede movement but rather it is induced by it.”<sup>10</sup> Borrowing briefly from quantum physics, when we study a particle’s position we cannot fully apprehend its momentum, and when we examine its momentum, we lose certainty about its position. Intersectionality and movement resonate in this uncertainty principle. Identity is thus a statement on positionality only made possible when movement is mostly ignored.

Place is not the same as position. Place might seem to be taggable as another intersecting axis alongside race, class, gender, sexuality, and so on. Eve’s work with Marcia McKenzie has argued that social science can and must attend more meaningfully to place as part of these axes.<sup>11</sup> Place can inform

“identity” and is often claimed by identity. Unlike these other human categories, however, place is more-than-human. Place is in relation to humans and other living and nonliving things.

In many Indigenous cosmologies, place is inextricable from ontology.<sup>12</sup> Place is ancestor. Places are where wisdom sits.<sup>13</sup> This relationship might be shorthand as saying place is equivalent to identity. Indigenous relationship between place and ontology, however, is often metaphorically appropriated to describe non-Indigenous communities’ relationships to place because identifications are often preoccupied with place. Vine Deloria Jr. observed that together, power and place produce personality.<sup>14</sup> This is very different from saying that place is simply identity.

Settlers and migrants make new claims to place or superimpose old attachments onto “new” places, as evidenced in namings of Indigenous lands as, for example, “New” London and “Little” Tokyo. Place is claimed to invoke one’s sense of belonging or displacement. Settler emplacement, however, is not the same as Indigenous ontological place. We see this metaphorization in much place-based research that explores these connections to identity formation in settler and dislocated and relocated communities.<sup>15</sup>

“Identity” is a placeholding term, echoing what we learned in our earlier work about how terms like “resistance” and “justice” act as placeholders for complex desires and phenomena.<sup>16</sup> In fact, we teased ourselves at having arrived at a similar conclusion about identity. Yet something about how this term is a placeholder, or how it *holds place*, made us pause. Because identity is preoccupied with place, it comes to occupy place. Occupied place serves as an imagined origin point—a ground to stand on, launch from, defend. So too with identity. “If *who* we see is tied up with *where* we see through truthful, commonsensical narratives, then the placement of subaltern bodies deceptively hardens spatial binaries, in turn suggesting that some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some bodies are out of place.”<sup>17</sup> Identity not only holds onto place; it can also hold one’s place by making identity property. This critique is taken up brilliantly in articles by Alborz Ghandehari and Hari Ziyad in this issue.

What happens when we do not allow identity to hold place? Analyses that think about how positionings, or identities, are induced by movement rather than precede it do not make the same kinds of claims to place. Places are run to, run from, ensnaring, and at times liberating. So too with identities. By repositioning and making visible Black geographies, Katherine McKittrick considers geographic alternatives through which Black subjects are able to be located, in both the imaginative and the material.

Black geographies are located within and outside the boundaries of traditional spaces and places; they expose the limitations of transparent space through black social particularities and knowledges; they locate and speak back to the geographies of modernity, transatlantic slavery, and colonialism; they illustrate the ways in which the raced, classed, gendered, and sexual body is often an indicator of spatial options and the way in which geography can indicate racialized habitation patterns; they are places and spaces of social, economic, and political denial and resistance; they are fragmented, subjective, connective, invisible, visible, unacknowledged, and conspicuously positioned; they have been described as, among other things, rhizomorphic, a piece of the way, diasporic, blues terrains, spiritual, and Manichaeian.<sup>18</sup>

In the “diasporic sensibility” of Rinaldo Walcott, blackness is a “process of becoming,” in contrast to blackness as defined by specific, fixed locations that become narrated as “origin points” of blackness—such as Africa as origin point or even unfixed dislocations such as the Middle Passage as originary of blackness.<sup>19</sup>

Walcott writes from and against the intersectional position of Black Canadian.

To be clear, I want to theorize black Canadian as wholly outside of the biological and the nation. Black Canadian is for me syncretic, always in revision and in a process of becoming. It is constituted from multiple histories of uprootedness, migration, exchanges and political acts of defiance and self-(re)definition.<sup>20</sup>

For Walcott, blackness is neither nowhere nor definitively from somewhere. Black Canadian is now/here.

I am attempting to formulate an understanding of political acts that go beyond linear, narrow and rigid narratives of identity-narratives that are organized around origin as founded in Africa and thus constituting the cultural identity of black-skinned peoples. Such positions still carry great sway in contemporary discourse, but as Stuart Hall notes: “Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made within the discourse of history and culture” (1992A, 224). The discourse of blackness allows for understanding identity as those practices of identification used to revise and creolize who we are.<sup>21</sup>

We think critical ethnic studies can be responsive to such Black studies, queer studies, and Caribbean studies deconstructions of identity as framework. These deconstructions reveal some of the stakes of this work: Refusing the hegemony of identity is not about restricting the discussion in critical ethnic studies. It means refusing constructions that already ignore, exclude, and marginalize the critiques at work in Black studies.

#### IDENTITY CANNOT DO AS MUCH WORK AS IT IS ASKED TO DO

Melanie J. Newton responded to this special issue's theme of late identity with gusto. In her interview she revealed the highlights of what she calls "the identity talk" that she has with students. Newton discussed the broad scope of work that identity seems called on to do, "to talk about communities, individuals, processes, states, . . . reifying categories of being or categories of collectivity." Identity really cannot do as much as it is asked to do. Echoing with Puar's take on intersectionality, Newton's interview helped to expose the ways that "identity" is a substitute for the analysis that needs to be done. As Newton observed, "Despite the efforts of scholars to use it often to describe quite complex things, it circulates in ways that desimplify, and they collapse processes and states of being." In the paragraphs below, we try to excavate the "quite complex things" that identity cannot actually do.

*Identity cannot do the work of decolonial nation-building.* In talking with us, Newton notes that from a Caribbean studies perspective, C. L. R. James used "identity" in *The Black Jacobins* to describe the complex formation of political union in the Caribbean during the moment of decolonization and nation formation before 1940.<sup>22</sup> This meant the promulgation of a transgroup Black identity—a crucial strategy given the context of emerging, nonwhite, Caribbean nation-states from a racial caste system defined by hierarchized negations of blackness. In James's use, identity helped to generate anticolonial subjectivities, which then became the grounds for revolutionary politics—then and there, the identity-political facilitated new solidarities. This highly strategic use of identity (in a time and place) is a rare example of when and where identity works. Yet outside this time and place, identity has its problems and comes apart at the seams. These problems are inherent in projects of unity based on colonial racial categories to begin with, and in the reiteration of colonial relationships as the basis for national recognition.

The problem with identity as a unit of polity is made particularly evident for Indigenous peoples whose nationhoods continue to be refracted through

the prism of racial identity. In his critical treatment of the politics of recognition, Glen Sean Coulthard demonstrates how identity connects with colonial recognition, whereby tribes must identify as oppressed, politically subjugated groups—racial groups—in order to make a claim or have a political voice. But “there is no mutual dependency in terms of a need or desire for recognition. In these contexts, the ‘master’—that is, the colonial state and state society—does not require recognition from the previously self-determining communities upon which its territorial, economic, and social infrastructure is constituted.”<sup>23</sup> To lack a legitimized political identity, that is, one that is rooted in the logics of racial identification, means to have no political voice. Yet to claim voice through identity forecloses Indigenous sovereignty, subordinating it to recognition from the colonizing nation-state.

*Identity cannot challenge the terms of the nation-state.* Identity has become the commonsense basis for race and rights, for making claims vis-à-vis the nation-state. Identity takes the racially identified individual subject or racially identified community for granted as its starting point. Preoccupations with identity can naturalize a methodology that relies on categories of race to make its analyses, for which the units of analysis are persons/communities. Yet, as Tiffany Lethabo King and Ziyad argue in this issue, there is no race-based hierarchy that can possibly result in Black liberation. There is no race-based understanding of Indigeneity that can possibly result in Indigenous sovereignty. Lenape scholar Joanne Barker’s 2011 book, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity*, identifies the race-based discourses that produce Native identities and relations of belonging in the United States. She argues that these identities have become overdetermined by strict federal criteria for formal recognition and represent a political relationship that serves and maintains colonial and imperial relations of power. Barker traces how these discourses, legal terms, and social conditions then get taken up and rearticulated by tribes regarding membership and tribal governance. She links legal legitimacy (to self-govern) to the ability of tribes to depict themselves as culturally authentic, as required by the courts to be federally recognized in the first place.<sup>24</sup>

Take, for example, one of those race-based understandings, the codified “Indian Tribe,” which is thoroughly critiqued by Barker in the following lines.

The “Indian Tribe” is fundamentally a racialized construct of national narrations that continually rearticulate Native cultures and territorial rights in the service of U.S. colonial and imperial efforts at maintaining federal power over the terms of Native governance and territory. In doing so, it is

a legal category that participates fully in the reinvention of U.S. democracy and humanism out of histories of colonization and imperialism, specifically through the recognition and provision of Native legal status and rights on the grounds of Native authenticity.<sup>25</sup>

As Barker argues, race-based constructions of Indigeneity do little more than participate fully in the reinvention of U.S. democracy and humanism toward the maintenance of federal power over Indigenous peoples.

Finally, what we can conclude from the work of preparing this issue is that *identity cannot sustain the analytic work of critical ethnic studies*. If we think of analysis as considering data, an event, literature, or an archive in a systemized way, the limits of identity for analysis are apparent. Identity has scale problems—it has an individuating habit, and because of this scale problem, the forms of analysis it makes available are equivocations. In other words, identity begs for comparisons, but these comparisons become equivocations of unlike ontologies. Authors in this issue eschew comparative analyses for translation-based analyses—something we found to be surprising and exciting.

The colonized relationship between recognition, identity, and legitimized political voice also propagates errors in analysis through ethnic studies. Some of these errors include the ways that certain critiques of power are flattened into theories of identity. For example, critiques of settler colonialism are quickly mistaken for theories of Indigeneity; Afro-pessimisms are presumed to wholly describe blackness; critiques of intersectional violences are quickly thought of in terms of producing intersectional identities.

Further, identity has a chilling effect on analysis. It is a “leading idea” in the hegemonic sense, organizing under its umbrella a sweeping consensus for diverse projects and otherwise divergent politics. Hegemonic leading terms—such as “terrorism,” “freedom,” and “American”—are preemptive in that they serve to quiet dissent and silence deeper analysis. Similarly, the strategic value of identity was perhaps based on its easy uptake and propagation as a commonsense, conservative framework. “Identity” as a term dampens clarity and conversation; it soft-pedals meaning.

#### ARTICLES IN THIS ISSUE

The first three articles in this issue attend urgently to matters of translation, of fastening unfastenable parts together for a while, on moving across land and texts and time and lives. We are exhilarated by the reading of these

articles together, to think of them calling out to one another, echoing back with more.

Alborz Ghandehari's article, "Struggle and the Politics of Translation: Martin Luther King Jr., Omar Khayyam, and the Persian Translation of Intersectionality," presents compelling accounts of translation: Kimberlé Crenshaw's conceptualization of intersectionality into Persian and the work of eleventh-century Iranian poet Omar Khayyam into speeches by Martin Luther King Jr. Ghandehari argues that "the translation process, because of its vulnerabilities to imprecision and imperfection, complicates already constructed ethnic, racial, and national identities while at the same time decentering identity as a defining concept of social struggle and emphasizing intergroup linkages." This article, in its refusal of comparative projects in favor of translation, is an example of where the work of critical ethnic studies can go once it forgets the hegemony of identity. Ghandehari is clear to say that the argument of the article is not to romanticize translation, which has been substantially critiqued by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and others. Instead, Ghandehari posits that translation is a way to think about engagement across the unfamiliar in ways that are accountable to the origins and intentions of the work. The author closes with a discussion of felt knowledge, which resonates resoundingly with the following article's discussion of "feeling itself."

In "Resonance: Neutrinos and Black Life," Ashon Crawley posits blackness not as an identity but as a form of resistance to identity "in the service of feeling with and against others in the cause of undoing the violence of settler-colonial, anti-Black racial logic." Crawley's article begins with a meditation on "dark matter" in quantum physics—that which can be felt but not seen, heard, or touched. Crawley offers that *feeling itself* may be a preferred way of reading and being in the world. As a treatise on identity, Crawley's article does important work to remind us of the limits of how identity is conceived, perceived, and retrieved. Like Ghandehari, Crawley attends to the politics of translation, showing again how translation, instead of the comparative project of identity, may be a productive construct in critical ethnic studies. Drawing parallels to what is lost in translation with regard to vibration in the conversion of analog sounds to MP3, Crawley shows what is lost in the process of compression—for sound and for humans into identities. Describing the Hammond B-3 organ, an instrument that produces more vibrations and thus more whole and alive sound than typical electric organs, Crawley points toward the wisdom of *feeling itself* as a way to frame lived experience.

Simón Ventura Trujillo's article, "So That the Thieves Will Not Inherit the Earth': Writing and the Fugitive Translation of Indigenous Land Reclamation," may at first read as an unconventional contribution to this discussion on late identity. Indeed, identity itself is obliquely mentioned. The article advances a method of translation that "detours the totalizing, monolinear logic of secular time" in order to unsettle Chicano secular historicizing of La Alianza, a movement to reclaim land in New Mexico dispossessed in the Mexican-American War. The translation approach involves reading Reies López Tijerina's *Mi lucha por la tierra* (1978) "through and against" Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1994). Trujillo writes of this work:

Rather than assigning a primary or secondary relationship to the texts in historicist time, this article stages their convergence to unleash a bundled set of ruminations on land, language, and insurgency that unsettles the dialectic of Indigenous-settler identities within dominant racialized and gendered regimes of mestizaje in the Americas.

While Trujillo's discussion is not overtly concerned with identity proper, the focus on the conscription of citizenship to Hispano land grant heirs—mechanisms of dispossession through recognition, individuation, and refusal of state recognition—has significant ramifications for the identity theories that course through this issue. Indeed, as Trujillo observes, Silko's *Almanac* "deposes Indigenous politics from identity politics by abandoning revolutionary modalities premised on state recognition or capture." This refusal makes necessary other routes of land reclamation, routes that make "private property and settler sovereignty indefensible."

Together, these articles offer analytic methods more robust than identity frameworks and comparative methods.

The remaining articles attend with specificity to how identity works to make claims. The articles speak to the hold that identity has in the field of critical ethnic studies and related fields (Spady) and the problematic rhetorical power that identity claims offer for settlers attempting to demand Indigenous land through self-professed "Indigeneity" (Adam Gaudry and Darryl Leroux). Articles also consider the interventions made by Black (Ziyad, King) and Indigenous (King) refusals of identity and its attendant humanizing projects, and what those refusals generate for future thought and action.

Sam Spady's article, "Reflections on Late Identity: In Conversation with Melanie J. Newton, Nirmala Erevelles, Kim TallBear, Rinaldo Walcott, and

Dean Itsuji Saranillio,” juxtaposes our conversations with these scholars, who each reflect on the uses and misuses of identity. Responding from their backgrounds in Caribbean, Native, Black, queer, diasporic, disability, Asian American, and Pacific studies, these contributors describe their problems as well as their necessary engagements with identity as they unfold in the specific contexts of their work. Altogether, Spady’s article offers a spectrum of contingent relationships to identity’s logics and politics.

In “White Settler Revisionism and Making Métis Everywhere: The Evocation of Métissage in Quebec and Nova Scotia,” Adam Gaudry and Darryl Leroux analyze the identity claims of two “Métis” organizations as representative of attempts by white settlers to “indigenize” themselves. Such identity claims and “evocations,” as Gaudry and Leroux detail, are threaded together by colonial logics that undermine Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination. The colonial logics at play disregard Indigenous peoples and their defining of Indigeneity both now and in history, with high stakes for the future. Gaudry and Leroux contest the conventional thinking on Métis people as mixed-descent and mixed-race, and advance Chris Andersen’s defining of Red River Métis in terms of peoplehood. This understanding places Métis “mixedness” into historical context with the hybridity of other Indigenous peoples and objects to the ordering that perceives Métis people as less Indigenous than other Indigenous groups. Instead, Andersen argues that Métis people are best understood as Métis because of their self-conscious self-determination as apart from other Indigenous groups. Self-consciousness is an important dimension of the basis of Métis identity. “The major problem with using a mixed-race understanding of ‘Métis’ is that it finds ‘Métis’ everywhere,” Gaudry and Leroux argue, “and in so doing denies the more explicit peoplehood of the Métis Nation.” The authors analyze documents by two “Métis” groups and conclude that they retain a settler-colonial connection to French identity—a “founding Frenchness”—rather than to Indigeneity. Such settler-colonial self-understandings lead these upstart groups to believe themselves to be more Métis than (Red River) Métis, the only “authentic Indigenous people in ‘their’ territory.” Gaudry and Leroux’s article makes clear how, because “identity” is a placeholder term, it works in ways to occupy place.

“Playing ‘Outside’ in the Dark: Blackness in a Postwhite World” by Hari Ziyad is an exhortation against the continuation of the identity of whiteness and the racial structure built upon it. Ziyad argues that blackness can be—and already is—untethered from race, but whiteness keeps it tied. Whiteness is what keeps blackness outside human; yet blackness is not the

opposite of whiteness, as much as anti-Black structures might have us presume. Ziyad's article is a meditation with heat on the ways in which Black people are denied any sort of racial power under whiteness. The article reveals how blackness is kept inconsistent with humanity via whiteness. Putting the antiblackness of "humanizing" projects on display, the article makes apparent the false logics of embracing visibility and empathy-building projects as theories of change. Ziyad considers theories of beyond human (Sylvia Wynter), stepping outside the human (Donna Haraway), cyborg futurity (Joy James, João Costa Vargas), and blackness as a "prior ontology" (Fred Moten) to challenge the projects of humanizing blackness under whiteness.

Tiffany Lethabo King's article, "Humans Involved: Lurking in the Lines of Posthumanist Flight," takes readers through the refusals of nonidentitarian and posthuman "turns" that obscure racial violence. King engages the work of Native feminist scholars Audra Simpson, Eve Tuck, Jodi Byrd, and Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Black scholars Sylvia Wynter, Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, and Amber Jamilla Musser to mark the refusals and skepticisms that these authors bring to Western theory's abilities to work itself out of its own bad habits of exclusion, appropriation, and self-overrepresentation.<sup>26</sup> King takes seriously the notion that refusal is not just a no but makes possible new routes and questions by making evident what is made possible in refusals of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizomatics (by Byrd) and the spatialization of Western knowledge (by Smith).<sup>27</sup> King points to the productive moves inherent in Wynter's "beyond" and its implications for the human. From this, King puts on full display the ways that "poststructuralist traditions that attempt to transcend identity actually function as a ruse of subjectlessness," a subjectlessness that still "resuscitates normative subjects through the death of Black and Indigenous peoples." With this as the stage, King observes that "Black and Native people do not necessarily seek to inhabit the space of the human or identity as they currently exist." This is a place to look for alternatives to the nation-state necropolitics that prevent Indigenous and Black life from thriving.

#### THE TIME FOR IDENTITY IS LATE

Elizabeth Povinelli uses the phrase "late liberalism" to "indicate a period, or development, in 'liberalism' that stretches loosely between the late 1950s and the [20]00s" wherein multiculturalism develops as a "key mode of containing the radical otherwise."<sup>28</sup> Povinelli is extending and transgressing some critiques of late capitalism that say that modes of cultural production

are simultaneously signaling and resolving crises of capitalism in the later half of the twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> For Povinelli, the late stages of liberalism are peppered by crises—in which “anticolonial, Native, and radical social movements [shake] the legitimacy of paternalistic liberalism”—and by adaptations to that crisis.<sup>30</sup> Liberal multiculturalism and its language of diversity is one key adaptation in late capitalism.

We are calling this issue “Late Identity” because of how identity’s role in critical ethnic studies parallels late liberalism and late capitalism. The late stages in identity are typified by a doubling-down on “identity” as a key term in ethnic studies. This doubling-down is happening within a shifting higher education context in which liberal institutions are expanding their investments in diversity and multiculturalism. While ethnic studies critiques are continually being repackaged as ethnic peoples’ critiques, the university hires diversity workers to manage the critiques that emerge broadly under the rubric of ethnic studies. In other words, fields such as ethnic studies, Indigenous studies, Black studies, queer studies, and women’s and gender studies invite a critique of the business-as-usual approach of universities, and when that critique gets too animated, universities might deploy diversity workers to calm it while leaving unaddressed the conditions that hatched the critique.<sup>31</sup> For those of us who are university workers, we are also often remade by our university positions into *identity workers* because that is how our labor is organized: into departments, programs, and centers according to “who” we seem to be representing in gendered and racial categories. As Povinelli observes, “difference is one mechanism through which one mode of accumulation (profit) produces and naturalizes itself (as class ethnic gender sexual difference educational profession).”<sup>32</sup> Of course, our day jobs have an impact on our theorizing. The effort to operationalize our critiques of universities as predominantly white spaces, to not be erased, and to not be treated as hostile by our colleagues in the university shapes us to do a certain kind of intellectual work. “Identity” is a sanctioned way to refer to our intellectual projects in order to keep our real work simultaneously legible and out of view from colleagues who are disinclined to support our presence in the university in the first place.

We are reminded of Nick Mitchell’s work on the historical development of women’s studies and Black studies programs. As packets of diversity, these programs are sites “to which the university has turned in order to manage and negotiate the social upheavals consequent to the mass admission of black (and) women students in the late 1960s.”<sup>33</sup> An important reveal in Mitchell’s research is how the university simultaneously increased investments in

women's studies programs while divesting from Black studies programs.<sup>34</sup> Women's studies was presented and packaged as more "diverse" and "inclusive," above and against Black studies. Blackness served, once again, as the opposite to the liberal, now more diverse, human.

For those of us less ensnared by the university, the frameworks of identity have nonetheless propagated into legislative and scientific commonsense. Late identity's adaptations allow for scientific race, seemingly debunked at the end of the twentieth century, to be re-legitimized in the legal, political, and economic realms of the twenty-first century. This re-legitimization echoes Kim TallBear's work on DNA and genetic politics, which contests identity as the solution to the "problem" of Indigenous rights by making everyone's identity partly Indigenous.<sup>35</sup> It also interfaces with Dorothy Roberts's critique of the new biocitizen, another form of reemergence of racial science, this time packaged as genomics, for individuals to claim descendancy, and thus claim identity, and thus claim land/power/moral legitimacy.<sup>36</sup> We can think about the politics of DNA as theorized by TallBear and Roberts as part of the politics of late identity.

Hortense Spillers lays bare the lateness of identity in her critique of the new movement for "mixed-race identity," which celebrates the multiracial ancestry of America, especially the multiracial phenotype, and advocates for new census categories and media representation, not to mention a new American mixed-race racial telos. Spillers remarks that this movement is not new. Rather, "racial ambiguity is itself a new-world thematic—probably about seven centuries old by now," by which "'racial ambiguity' or *looking* that way, can be amplified and translated into a legitimate *political* interest" and increasingly "a *commercial* one."<sup>37</sup>

Identity works in different ways to deflect different conversations. It works by imprecision. Most treatments of identity will say that it is complex, but in practice identity can have a flattening effect on theory, methodology, and analyses. It seems, too often, that "identity" is a way to avoid the work of theorizing the conundrums of settler colonialism. Identity as a construct can invest in antiblackness, as shown in Ziyad's and King's articles. Identity can be used to undermine Indigenous sovereignty, as described in the article by Gaudry and Leroux.

In closing, we remind readers that it is not actually we who are announcing the late stages of identity. Identity's lateness has been diagnosed in the powerful and inspired interventions on identity for more than a decade.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Hortense Spillers predicted it three decades ago, when she laid bare the ruins of the "bizarre axiological ground" that lies beneath identity.

In order for me to speak a truer word concerning myself, I must strip down through layers of attenuated meanings, made an excess in time, over time, assigned by a particular historical order, and there await whatever marvels of my own inventiveness.<sup>39</sup>

This project of stripping away layers of markers where meaning is both attenuated and in excess is not just a debate over correct terminology. Spillers called not for a reinvention of the lexicon of classification but for a rejection of the very American grammar book that continually renames Black flesh whenever needed and, against it, redefines the lexicon of difference time and again. The terms of identity are “markers so loaded with mythical prepossession that there is no easy way for the agents buried beneath them to come clean.”<sup>40</sup> Such markers simply cannot do the work of analysis, because they are already doing too much work of antiblackness.

In refusing identity we make room for other concepts, other specificities and relationships that can bring about other kinds of resonances and futurities. Critical ethnic studies is at an important juncture where it can decide whether to double-down on identity, thereby reiterating itself back into the traditional ethnic studies methodologies that it has sought to distance itself from; or critical ethnic studies can be the crisis to identity, leaving it to its lateness.

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## NOTES

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1. Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue*, no. 9 (December 2007): 67–80; Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014); Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Unbecoming Claims: Pedagogies of Refusal in Qualitative Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 20, no. 6 (2014): 811–18.

2. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 66.

3. Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994), 392–401; Gloria E. Anzaldúa, "now let us shift . . . the path of *conocimiento* . . . inner works, public acts," in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (New York: Routledge, 2002), 540–78; Micheal Hames-García, *Identity Complex: Making the Case for Multiplicity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Jodi A. Byrd, *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011); Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

4. Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91.

5. Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Economies of Abandonment: Social Belonging and Endurance in Late Liberalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

6. See the conversation with Melanie Newton in Sam Spady, "Reflections on Late Identity," this issue.

7. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241–99; Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977), in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1997), 63–79; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

8. Jasbir K. Puar, "'I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess': Becoming-Intersectional in Assemblage Theory," *Philosophia* 2, no. 1 (2012): 54.

9. *Ibid.*, 52–53.

10. *Ibid.*, 50.

11. Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

12. Vine Deloria Jr. and Daniel R. Wildcat, *Power and Place: Indian Education in America* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum Resources, 2001); Lisa Brooks, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

13. Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996).

14. Vine Deloria Jr., “Power and Place Equal Personality,” in Deloria and Wildcat, *Power and Place*, 21–28.

15. For an extended discussion on this, see Kate McCoy, Eve Tuck, and Marcia McKenzie, eds., *Land Education: Rethinking Pedagogies of Place from Indigenous, Postcolonial, and Decolonizing Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

16. On resistance, see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, eds., *Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change* (New York: Routledge, 2014); on justice, see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, eds., “What Justice Wants,” special issue, *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 2 (2015).

17. Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xv.

18. *Ibid.*, 7.

19. Rinaldo Walcott, *Black Like Who? Writing Black Canada*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2003), 22, 103; see also Michelle M. Wright, *Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Boatema Boateng, “Women Out of Africa: Naming, Knowing, and the Conditions of Being,” *Cultural Studies & Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 4 (2016): 400–413, doi:10.1177/1532708616638859.

20. Walcott, *Black Like Who?*, 103.

21. *Ibid.*, 104, quoting Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” in *Ex-iles: Essays on Caribbean Cinema*, ed. Mbye B. Cham (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1992), 220–36.

22. C. L. R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963).

23. Glenn Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 450.

24. Joanne Barker, *Native Acts: Law, Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2011).

25. *Ibid.*, 40.

26. Because King’s article engages Eve Tuck’s work, Eve recused herself from her editorial role on it.

27. For more on refusal, see Simpson, “On Ethnographic Refusal”; Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus*; Tuck and Yang, “Unbecoming Claims.”

28. Elizabeth Povinelli, interview by Mat Coleman and Kathryn Yusoff, *Society and Space*, March 2014, <https://societyandspace.com/material/interviews/interview-with-elizabeth-povinelli-by-mat-coleman-and-kathryn-yusoff/>.

29. See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991).

30. Povinelli, interview by Coleman and Yusoff.

31. Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012).

32. Povinelli, interview by Coleman and Yusoff.

33. Nick Mitchell, University of California, Santa Cruz, Feminist Studies Faculty Page, accessed August 10, 2016, [http://feministstudies.ucsc.edu/faculty/singleton.php?singleton=true&cruz\\_id=nmitchel](http://feministstudies.ucsc.edu/faculty/singleton.php?singleton=true&cruz_id=nmitchel).

34. Nick Mitchell, "Curricular Objects: 'Women of Color,' Feminist Anti-Racisms, and the Consolidation of Women's Studies" (talk, UCSD Ethnic Studies Department Colloquium, University of California, San Diego, December 12, 2012).

35. Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

36. Dorothy E. Roberts, "Race and the New Biocitizen," in *What's the Use of Race: Modern Governance and the Biology of Difference*, ed. Ian Whitmarsh and David S. Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2010), 259–76.

37. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's, Too," *Trans-Scripts* 1, no. 1 (2011): 2, [http://sites.uci.edu/transcripts/files/2014/10/2011\\_01\\_02.pdf](http://sites.uci.edu/transcripts/files/2014/10/2011_01_02.pdf).

38. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe"; Walcott, *Black Like Who?*; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* 89 (2008): 1–15; Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y. Okamura, eds., *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008); Barker, *Native Acts*; Hames-García, *Identity Complex*; Byrd, *The Transit of Empire*; Puar, "I Would Rather Be a Cyborg than a Goddess"; Shona N. Jackson, *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); Bonita Lawrence, *Fractured Homeland: Federal Recognition and Algonquin Identity in Ontario* (Vancouver, B.C.: University of British Columbia Press, 2012); Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*; Alexander G. Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Human* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014); Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).

39. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65.

40. Ibid.