



M Archive

AFTER
THE
END
OF THE
WORLD

ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS

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*After the End of
the World*

ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS

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to the purveyors of our
bright black future

AFTER AND WITH

Pedagogies of Crossing
by M. Jacqui Alexander

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A NOTE

She had to feel what it was like to survive above ground while really living underground by fire. She had to come as close to the ground as I did, learning to depend upon the damp rain smell of earth to clean her insides, jar her senses and to bring her to the heart of the oath I had sworn never to betray: all life is shared with those at the bottom of the Ocean. . . . This learning would take at least the span of one life, and only the Soul could decide what would be left over for a different time, a different place.

—Kitsimba describing Jacqui's work in

M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing*

M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (2005) is an ancestrally cogenerated text. This means that in addition to the interventions this text makes in the ways we imagine transnational feminist accountability, movements from within the university industrial complex, layers of time and space in quantitative research, postnationalist Caribbean sexualities, radical feminist of color memory, and the labor economics of spirit work, to name a few of the enduring interventions this text has made over the past decade, the book itself also works to create textual possibilities for inquiry beyond individual scholarly authority.

Kitsimba, a persistent ancestor who challenges Alexander's academic interpretations of her historical plantation resistance existence, chooses to school Alexander and to speak to her and through her, wryly resenting the employees who get credit for being Alexander's so-called research assistants. Unpaid in one sense, overpaid in others, I have also been a research assistant of M. Jacqui Alexander's. Along with Moya Bailey and Julia Roxanne Wallace, I had the honor of assisting Alexander while she was a visiting chair at Spelman College (at the same time that I was engaged in a dissertation research fellowship at Emory University). Alexander taught two courses—"Migrations of the Sacred" and "Black and Immigrant Women in the Land of Dollars"—crafted a digital migration story-sharing process between her Atlanta students and her Toronto students, and organized a two-day symposium called *Africa in the Americas: Movement, Light, Sound and Water*. Much of our time was spent troubleshooting technology, observing Alexander as she taught, and sitting on Alexander's living-room floor listening to the story of the migration of the *obi* oracle from West Africa through the New World. Soon after this time, Alexander left the academy to build a center for indigenous knowledge in Tobago.

In *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Alexander clarifies the middle passage of the transatlantic slave trade as an act of violence that continues to impact the entire planet through the indivisibility of the water, wind, earth, and fire that surround and constitute our world. She also suggests that the crossing was not only a geographic transfer of millions of people but also a movement of energies and elements into a relationship that persists, a material and conceptual relationship we navigate with the potential and compelled crossings we make in each moment. Periodically, then, in my text you will be confronted with the periodic table of elements, interacting with the organization of this text based on the impact, difference, and transformative potential of the material traces of this moment. At the end of the book a list of texts other than *Pedagogies of Crossing* that have had a chemical impact on this work are included for your continued engagement.

Honoring *Pedagogies of Crossing* as an ancestrally cowritten text and an ancestor to this book, *M Archive: After the End of the World* imagines another form, speculative documentary, which is not *not* ancestrally cowritten but is also written in collaboration with the survivors, the far-into-the-future witnesses to the realities we are making possible or impossible with our present apocalypse. This book centers Black life, Black feminist metaphysics, and the theoretical imperative of attending to Black bodies in a way that doesn't seek to prove that Black people are human but instead calls preexisting definitions of the human into question. It depicts a species at the edge of its integrity, on the verge or in the practice of transforming into something beyond the luxuries and limitations of what some call "the human." Will the future witnesses of this crossing know themselves as human? This book offers a possibility of being beyond the human and an invitation into the blackness of what we cannot know from here.

In other words, this speculative documentary work is written from and with the perspective of a researcher, a post-scientist sorting artifacts after the end of the world. This is you beyond you. After and with the consequences of fracking past peak oil. After and with the defunding of the humanities. After and with the removal of people of color from the cities they built. After and with Audre Lorde. After and with Toni Cade Bambara. After and with Barbara Christian. After and with Nellie McKay. After and with June Jordan. After and with Cheryl Y. Greene. After and with Gloria Naylor. After and with Jayne Cortez. After and with Lucille Clifton. After and with Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. After and with the Combahee River Collective. After and with clean water. After and with handwriting. After and with a multitude of small and large present apocalypses. After the end of the world as we know it. After the ways we have been knowing the world.

M is for Mary and Maryam and Moses and make-believe. *M* is for McKenzie. *M* is for miracle and mayhem and mass incarceration. *M* is for migrant and microcosmic and major. *M* is for magic and metas-

tasization. *M* is for muscle and memory and mitochondria. *M* is for minor and malevolence and manna. *M* is for maternal and mule and music. *M* is for meal and minute and mandrill. *M* is for mammal and makeup and mercury. *M* is for must be and maybe and much.

Consider this text an experiment, an index, an oracle, an archive. Let this text be as alive as you are alive. Might be enough.

it's hard to say what the people did. because as usual there was no "the people" there were only people. but all the people thought they were part of "a people" which was rightly "the people" even when they weren't sure anyone else had survived.

so different people did different things. but, for a time at least, they all thought they were the only people left alive, and so they documented what happened with them as if it were the whole record. that's the historiographical problem.

which is not to say the remaining survivors were ignorant or proud or separatist or that they *wanted* to be the only people. but a major part of their sense of the situation depended on their understanding that everyone else was dead. according to the radio waves that we can still find floating around here sometimes, some of them did reach out and state their locations to see if there was anyone else checking. but we don't actually have evidence of signal reading.

i like to think there were some readers though. descendants of those ancients who kept their computers on listening for responses from so-called extraterrestrials. there had to be some good listeners left alive.¹

NOTES

All notes in the text refer to M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005).

PRELUDE

- 1 **communities (not sameness)** "Remembering," 283.

FROM THE LAB NOTEBOOKS OF THE LAST EXPERIMENTS

- 1 **But all things were not equal** "Anatomy of a Mobilization," 168.
- 2 **Being everywhere was the only way** "Pedagogies of the Sacred," 289.
- 3 **heart of engaged action** "Remembering," 279.
- 4 **Are there not fissures of class, skin color, shades of yellow and brown, within our respective nation/communities?** "Remembering," 273.
- 5 **No one knows the mysteries at the bottom of the ocean** "Pedagogies of the Sacred," 289.
- 6 **all life is shared with those at the bottom of the Ocean** "Pedagogies of the Sacred," 314.
- 7 **male becoming female, female becoming male** "Pedagogies of the Sacred," 289.
- 8 **"How would you know why the stone is there, whether you need to remove it, bury it, or ignore it?"** "Pedagogies of the Sacred," 311.
- 9 **When things suffer premature death, they never concede to being put to rest** "Anatomy of a Mobilization," 151.
- 10 **Who are we as women of color at this moment of history?** "Remembering," 266.
- 11 **What is the threat that certain memory poses?** "Pedagogies of the Sacred," 294.
- 12 **Loved differently?** "Remembering," 275.