



ISSUE 1 • April 2007

# Critical Moments: A Dialogue Toward Survival and Transformation

*Amira Jarmakani and Donna Troka*

*Keynote panel address on March 29, 2003 at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia  
Panelists: Chela Sandoval, Susan Glisson, Layli Phillips and  
Patricia Mohammed*

---

## Introduction

*Our greatest disappointments and painful experiences – if we can make meaning out of them – can lead us toward becoming more of who we are. Or they can remain meaningless. The coatlique state can be a way station or it can be a way of life.*

-Gloria Anzaldúa

In January of 2002, in the midst of the overwhelming public focus on the events of September 11, five students of the Graduate Institute of the Liberal Arts at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia—Amira Jarmakani, Molly McGehee, Leigh Miller, Katherine Skinner and Donna Jean Troka—came together to plan a weekend called *Critical Moments*.

A critical moment, as we define it, is a moment of change – whether it is rupture or reassembly. It can be experienced as a time of birth and renewal, when people come

together, or as a time of death and loss, when they seem to become even more alienated from one another. Most importantly, it is a time of flux and movement, when things like war, segregation, genocide, disease, slavery, poverty, immigration and globalization impact on individuals and communities. Because such moments require strategies for coping, grieving, adjusting, remembering and reconciliation, we were interested in creating events that would bring people together to dialogue about finding a way to survive these moments of extreme flux and change.

The first phase of this project took place from March 28 to 30, 2003, and included an artist showcase, academic conference, keynote panel and closing brunch. Because the project was planned in the wake of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and convened in the weeks following direct US military action in Iraq, it arose out of a need to understand these events within the context of similarly destructive moments. We wanted to find out what we could learn by looking at 9/11 in a comparative context and we sought to act on our feelings of devastation by forging a space for creative transformation. In this way, *Critical Moments* came to engage the question of survival: How do we get through individual and collective moments of crisis? Ultimately, it also explores the possibility of transforming these moments of change, loss and destruction into generative movements toward personal growth and social justice.

*Critical Moments*, then, is not only a project, it is also a process. It is an ongoing method for survival that we continue to practise daily. Indeed, at the moment in which we write this introduction, just months after Hurricane Katrina has devastated New Orleans and the Gulf shores, just over a year after the death of activist visionary Gloria Anzaldúa, and in the midst of ongoing violent crisis in Iraq, Palestine and Afghanistan, the need for and purpose of this project remain clear. The continued state of destruction in Iraq and Palestine are examples of the types of “painful experiences” that Anzaldúa herself references in her work *Borderlands*. As we respond with our own feelings of pain, grief and loss, we struggle and pledge to remember and honour Anzaldúa’s insistence that we find a way to make meaning out of loss and crisis – to make this quest for meaning “a way of life” by which we learn to move forward, rather than “a way station” in which we become stalled and strangled by inaction, anger and sadness.

Though there were five of us involved in the planning and implementation of the conference phase of this project, it is no coincidence that the two of us have continued further with the project. We both came to this project not only with a sense of global and national crisis, but also from a place of recognition of the undeniable intersection of personal and communal pain. We came to this project mired in the grief that comes with the ending of intimate, meaningful relationships and with the feeling of having come unmoored from the systems of support and community to which we had grown accustomed. The immediacy and urgency of these most personal crises therefore overlapped and resonated with the larger sense of crisis which was, at that time, quickly becoming known simply as 9/11.

Therefore, for us, the juxtaposition of our stories of loss and pain with others’ (whether personal, local or global) provided us with strategies for survival. Tim O’Brien says

“stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can’t remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased. When there is nothing to remember except the story” (1990, 38). By using stories of colonialism in the Caribbean, stories of female leaders in the civil rights moment, and stories about the effects of desegregation on black children in the American south and through the method of radical storytelling itself, what Anzaldúa called “autohistoria teoría” or spoken word art performance activism, our panelists began to theorize strategies of survival and transformation. These stories hold the history of the *Critical Moments*, and they became our touchstone for these events – a place to begin to engage each other and move forward together.

Our own experiences, coupled with the stories we were hearing from those around us, highlighted the way in which individual and communal “*Critical Moments*” become inextricably imbricated in one another. Since we often relate to global moments by connecting them to the individual details of our own lives, our project has been concerned with honouring the fragile individuals and relationships that are bound up in the messy aftermath of larger events. We have been dedicated to understanding and exploring the relationship between individual and collective moments of crisis and loss.

Ultimately, though, our goal has been to understand how to first survive, and then move through these moments. In order to do so, we acknowledge the need for the *Critical Moments* project to confront and engage the evidence and aftermath of painful events and stories and to work to shape it into something new – to create and transform it into something useful, profound and beautiful.

In planning the conference phase of the project, we were keen to structure it in a manner that merged activist, artistic and academic ways of understanding and responding to what we have been calling *Critical Moments*. We wanted to create a space that enacted the type of theoretical paradigm that could step out of the mode of traditional academic conferences and engage a wider range of voices in sharing tools and strategies for survival. What we offer here is the result of our efforts to re-imagine and reinvent some of the structures that typify academic conferences. Rather than replicating the hierarchical framework of inviting one ‘expert’ keynote speaker, we organized a keynote panel that was characterized by crossover and dialogue.

Instead of asking the panelists to prepare lectures, we asked them to envision the keynote panel as a generative space in which they engaged in dialogue with one another about questions we had prepared. Because of the nature of the larger questions the *Critical Moments* project is asking – questions about survival and forward movement in the face of destruction and change – we felt strongly that the keynote panel should *demonstrate* the type of creative response we envisioned. Therefore, we knew that it had to be constructed and witnessed as a *process* rather than as a finished *product*. As bell hooks asserts, drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, “it is dialogue that is the true act of love between two subjects ... and there can be no revolution without love” (hooks and West 1991, 2-3).

In this spirit, we formatted the keynote panel as a conversation between four scholar/activists: Dr. Susan Glisson, director of the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation at the University of Mississippi, Dr. Patricia Mohammed, senior lecturer at the Centre for Gender and Development Studies, University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago, Dr. Layli Phillips, assistant professor of Women's Studies and African American Studies at Georgia State University, and Dr. Chela Sandoval, associate professor and Chair of Chicana and Chicano Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Each panelist brought not only her specific area of expertise, but also a general dedication to interdisciplinarity, dialogue and social justice work.

Each of these scholar/activists exchanges theories and paradigms for survival by telling stories about the work that they do. Susan Glisson shared stories of the lives of Ella Baker and Lucy Mason – two women, one black, the other white, respectively – who did the hard work of the civil rights movement without the recognition that “charismatic leaders” like Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks received. Through these stories, she teaches us that one may enter into a social justice movement in many ways and that the ultimate goal is to create what Ella Baker calls a “leadership” and not a “followship.” Patricia Mohammed tells the story of Caribbean nationalism and the way in which it has worked to flip the colonial script. With her project ‘Imaging the Caribbean’, she hopes to “rewrite 500 years of history – write a whole different text and a text that is so powerful it begins to make you have to think differently”. Much like Glisson’s work with the history of the civil rights movement, Mohammed aims to write “a liberating history” of colonialism in the Caribbean.

Layli Phillips tells the story of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* desegregation decision, and explains that after the “punctum” (a Sandovalian term) of desegregation, southern whites and blacks did not come to a perfect reconciliation, but instead both groups experienced a “reorganization” of their lives and communities. It is in this “reorganization” that Phillips sees “opportunity for change”. Moreover, as a result of such punctums, we find many “outputs”—some that maintain the violent status quo, and others that subvert and change it. This is the imperfect, but hopeful, outcome that maintains Phillips’ “march toward liberation”.

Lastly, Chela Sandoval reads the stories of the other panelists as “metahistorical forms”, which allow us to “move into more hopeful futures” and which can “create blueprints across time”. Sandoval suggests that these blueprints – or paradigms for creating change – can be shared through the method of SWAPA (Spoken Word Art Performance Activism), which is a way of exchanging “knowledge, dialogue and energy”. This process, she argues, not only transforms those participating (the panelists) but also those witnessing the exchange (the audience) and ultimately, we hope, those who read the transcripts of the discussion.

This current phase of the *Critical Moments* project represents our commitment, as well as the commitment of Chela Sandoval, Layli Phillips, Patricia Mohammed and Susan Glisson to continuing the process of *Critical Moments* by extending the conversation to a

wider audience. We present this once-begun dialogue as an example of the way in which engaging the “abundant waste”, or the stories of pain and loss that accompany moments of crisis, can ultimately be utilized to “make new growth possible” (hooks 2000, 80-1).

In working to create and document strategies for survival and tools for social transformation, we are honouring, and, we hope, *adding to* the work already begun by those activists, artists and scholars who have gone before us. We are joining a process that is not characterized by finished products or neat endings. Instead, it is, as Anzaldúa describes, a continuously forming and reconstituting entity. It is “a flawed thing – a clumsy, complex, groping blind thing – [which] is alive, infused with spirit” (1987, 67).

The unfinished product of the keynote conversation is the starting point for its next new phase of life. We offer it up, as flawed or clumsy as it might seem, with the hope that it can lead to productive and life-giving possibilities.

*January 2006*

*Amira Jarmakani - Atlanta, Georgia*

*Donna Jean Troka - Brooklyn, New York*

*Q.1. How do we get through Critical Moments? After traumatic experiences or destructive events, what is the process of reconstruction? What does remembering, reassembling, or putting back together look like? What are the paradigms and structures for that? What are the ways in which the work of social justice movements, and specifically the civil rights movement, is not over but a continuous process?*

**Chela Sandoval:** I loved the way in which Susan Glisson writes about civil rights and social justice in her article about “Women’s Leadership and Organizing”. She teaches us that we must all take responsibility as leaders in order to heal the world. In the past, the mythology of “charismatic leadership” has informed our movements for social change. Her argument is that this mythology of charismatic leadership creates a flawed paradigm for social change. In this paradigm the majority are encouraged to find comfort at the nadir of the group (nadir here is understood as that part of a sphere that lies just below a central defining consciousness). This paradigm assumes a consciousness at the zenith of the nadir, at the apex of the group. Let us consider a more progressive paradigm for collective action, for the radical work we are trying to accomplish at this conference. Let us say that our goal is to situate *all* of us here today, audience and keynoters alike, within a nadir that does not require a charismatic leader.

Layli Phillips pointed out to me earlier that a nadir occurs at the depths and extremes of any circular space. Many people are experimenting with the idea that a new form of leadership emerges from this very space. Glisson argues that we all need to take responsibility for leadership, and this means for speaking and active-witnessing. Gloria Anzaldúa believed that it is only through *autohistoria-teoría* that new forms of collectivity and leadership could emerge that would be capable of changing the world.

For Anzaldúa, *autohistoria-teoría* is transfigurative. It is a shamanistic method that depends upon the ability of performance to transform the storyteller and the witness into something or someone else. So I would like to begin today's keynote by saying that I would like all of us to take leadership at this conference by collectively inhabiting a progressive nadir. The method for doing this is to actively witness what is happening today. Begin by writing down interesting words, ideas, or concepts — words that strike you as moving — words you can take home with you. Words like nadir, for example, apex or *autohistoria-teoría* may enable you to make connections beyond what we now know. When you stand and deliver, sharing those connections with us, you transform from passive-witness members of the audience into active witnesses. As you speak you are transformed and transformer, leader, shaman. I am convinced that this kind of “shaman-witness ritual” is crucial to any methodology of emancipation. It is through this kind of spoken word art performance activism, or SWAPA ritual, that speakers and audience can be connected into a single community of activists.

**Susan Glisson:** From a personal standpoint it's sort of a catch 22. But I was actually drawn to studying the civil rights movement because of the sort of inspirational iconic images that we all have of the movement. You know, Martin Luther King at Lincoln's feet or Rosa Parks too tired to get out of her seat that day. These drew me into the movement, but at the same time that they drew me in, they distanced me from the kind of work that was done. Because first of all I can't speak like King. I don't have that gift of oratory that he did so I can't do that. I can't go out on Sweet Auburn, as I understood it, and call everybody to go to DC, which is what I thought he did when I first studied it. His charisma inspired me but at the same time didn't necessarily provide an outlet accessible to me to try to duplicate or follow him in producing the goals I shared with him. So that frustration led me to study the civil rights movement and try to find alternative ways of leadership that were accessible to me. Things like having a meeting and calling people and sending out letters is the boring stuff, but I can handle the boring stuff very well. It's the kind of unglamorous, unrewarded, often unseen mortar that builds this structure. We only see the bricks but the mortar keeps it all together.

I was able to find two wonderful women. The first one, whose name you may know more than the other, is Ella Baker. The second is Lucy Mason, a daughter of the First Families of Virginia and one of the first CIO organisers in the South. I wanted to study the ways that these two women in traditional male-dominated organisations created alternative ways for organising that were anti-authoritarian, anti-hierarchical, nurturing, and collective – that developed, as Ella Baker called it, a leadership and not a followship. I prefer not to refer to us as experts but rather as people who were able to enjoy a certain education and experience that may or may not be useful to you. It's so cool to read Dr Sandoval's work — it gave me the language to think about what I've been doing but not knowing what to call it. Your ideas of differential modes of thinking and dynamism finally provide a language to talk about this kind of work.

**Layli Phillips:** I wholeheartedly agree with Chela's reading of Susan's work. And it makes me really think about if we are going to have a society in which we each take up the reins of leadership, or what we have in the past thought of as leadership, in some way.

What is going to catapult us from our current state of apathy and inaction into that state of taking up that leadership? I always felt the critical thing is the development of critical consciousness. I find myself, with the tools of liberation psychology, thinking about what are the ways in which we can animate individuals to think about things critically and in ways that get them moving into changing society. But to do that requires not only to think how can we stimulate individual growth, but how can we create a supportive social environment, both in terms of the institutions of society and in terms of recreating them or rethinking them in ways that are supportive to critical consciousness on a mass scale. Not just on a scale of a few elite people who have been educated in these special institutions or who have happened to have had very unique political experiences, but on a much wider scale. I've also been thinking about changing the symbolic environment because so much of our society now, and the way consciousness is shaped and framed, is done through the symbolic media, through the mass media, through the symbols that circulate in our material culture. So in terms of thinking about how to shape consciousness I think, well, what specific actions can we take with regard to social institutions and to symbolic systems to alter the widespreadness of critical consciousness? I think that will segue into Dr Mohammed's work...

**Patricia Mohammed:** My passage through many incarnations of activism and academia – all of which have been so interspersed that it is hard to separate them – have led me to a point of trying to understand a way in which what we do in contemporary capitalism is a critical moment. We are always in a succession of critical moments, some of which are very long, others are sporadic events. This conference has forced me to make connections between parts of my own work, to see it as a set of Critical Moments which I also engage in, and attempt to locate, if you like, continuities in format, framework and methods. I have been labelled first and foremost a feminist scholar, which means different things in different contexts. In the Caribbean, where my work is most located, this is an attempt to validate a female voice.

In trying to think through how we as activists, feminists, and all other progressive people with progressive stances may begin to interact with that, how we change the ways in which we actually think, do, and act depends not just on activism per se, but how we change the basis of how knowledge is constructed, how we think about each other, and how the change we effect must be fundamentally vertical as well as horizontal.

In that sense, re-membering can never be the same and it should never be the same because culture never remains the same. It would be impossible for culture to remain static anyway. What is that whole we imagine? What is that thing we are holding on to? Is it an ideal vision that we seek? How are we doing that? How we proceed to do that happens in many different ways. What allows us to think progressively, to act on something progressive, to unify ourselves, while at the same time understand that those differences themselves create culture as we know it?

My work draws its insights from Caribbean feminist theory. The destabilisation of theory and the inter-disciplinarity of gender studies itself allows a way to rewrite knowledge and to find another way of viewing and seeing.

To return to the specific question again, does re-memering require making a whole? I do not agree, but it does require a vision of what that “whole” might constitute. The whole is in fact already in the process of being redefined in another way. Derek Walcott, in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech in 1992, “Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory”, says this much better than I can in relation to how community is being reconstructed in the Caribbean. He writes, “Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars.”



Walcott elides the white scars of European colonialization, which made the crack in tradition, and focuses on the ethnic groups now dominant. However, in reconstructing, it is impossible to deny or only exclude the colonial heritage, for this becomes, ironically, the glue which fits pieces together back again into another whole. I am interested in how we do this as we configure present thought: political, academic and activist.

Figure 1: Reconstructed Amerindian Vase, National Museum Tobago  
Photo: Patricia Mohammed

*Q.2. Given the ways in which your work addresses intersectionality of identities, how do differences affect the way in which different people experience the same critical moment? The idea is not to look at one axis of identity, but to think about how, for example, ability, race, gender, and class work together in very specific ways and affect people in very specific ways.*

**Susan Glisson:** Early on I chose to look at two women, one white and one African-American. I have to tell you, I was more drawn to Ella Baker because her work seemed more exciting to me. She was sort of the mother of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and she was instrumental in developing this really dynamic, organic, organising strategy that would incorporate a lot of people. Yet I knew I needed to complicate what I understood about her.

So I looked at Lucy Mason, who wrote letters, visited ministers, lobbied editors of newspapers and others one would call the power brokers of the community because she had the visibility of whiteness and a historic family lineage that’s important in Virginia. She was able to get into doors that, say, Ella Baker wouldn’t have been able to get into,



and yet her work initially seemed to me the more boring of the two. Until my advisor pointed out to me that that was more like what I do. Oh well, then, I thought, I can't really call it boring. What I learned is that each of us has a particular standpoint, a particular position, and it can be limiting, but we can also embrace the possibilities or the doors it opens up for us. So, for instance, at "Ole Miss" [University of Mississippi], it is probably more easy for me to talk to the chancellor than say someone who worked in the physical plant who might be African-American. And so in the living wage campaign we have there, it is incumbent upon those of us who do have that access to try and create that access for those who don't easily have it.

Ella Baker in turn used her invisibility. She encouraged the students she worked with to organise outside the gaze of the limelight. Her philosophy was: Don't call the newspaper when you are having your first meeting because the people in power will find you quickly enough. Get a chance to build trust, a chance to build a strong organisation so that when the power brokers display discrimination and backlash, you will be strong. You will be able to withstand the threat that comes with exposure.

So there were differences between Ella and Lucy in terms of visibility and invisibility, in terms of black and white, in terms of gender, but similarities in a collective, nurturing anti-authoritarianism. Both were outside the traditional balance of power. They weren't elected. Ella Baker was appointed director of the SCLC by Dr King, but he was never comfortable with her being in that position. So she had to figure out other ways to get to things.

If we had a longer explanation of the question, the two things I would add in terms of my experience in Mississippi are: 1) The ways in which people perceive the past, present, and the future are generational. Younger people – interestingly due to the successes of the civil rights movement – have this historical amnesia about what occurred. I mean, amazing things happened in Mississippi, but because you only get it for a few days in eighth grade in Mississippi History, young people don't have a clue about these rich traditions of organising in their own state. So these kids come to 'Ole Miss' and they certainly don't know who James Meredith is, much less Fannie Lou Hamer, Medger Evers, Unita Blackwell, Mae Bertha Carter, Victoria Gray Adams, and on and on.

The second thing is religion. Mississippi is 92 per cent Christian – that plays a role. We did a training workshop yesterday called cultural mapping. It involves asking questions in order to group yourselves in categories and find your commonalities. We asked the students to group themselves according to the religion they grew up in. I expected them to group themselves as Christian or another religion. They grouped themselves as Baptist, Methodist and Catholic...So you get a sense of the way they place themselves in that Protestant tradition in Mississippi, and that plays a critical role.

**Patricia Mohammed:** When I was given the list of questions I began thinking about them. I began to think how I, from the Caribbean, can begin to speak to some of these questions because I'm coming from a different space. I have another reality, though I travel a lot and experience this and other societies. My sense of what I know best, the

questions I ask myself, always come from that space. Within that space, which is a result of European colonisation in which Africans and East Indians were the greatest numbers of people brought in, what occurred is that these two groups were set in opposition to each other. In the context of colonialism, they were constructed as different – a difference of Africa from Asia. A difference of Europe was then set as a hierarchical construct against the other two. And I've been trying to, in a very epic way, to work out how these intersectionalities of identity can take place so that we no longer speak with a colonial script – so that we find another way of looking at the same thing. So that we can begin to think through this in an optimistic rather than a destructive way. In fact, what I sense we want to do is rewrite 500 years of history – write a whole different text and a text that is so powerful it begins to make you have to think differently of yourself and others.

I draw primarily, but not exclusively, from a body of work which I am engaged in at present, entitled *Imaging the Caribbean*. It is, in a nutshell, an attempt to reconfigure the past, going between image and text – but privileging the image, which is itself disputed terrain. I have been working on this area formally for the past eight years, but more realistically, I think all my life. I want to read you something from Chela's work, if I may, which will speak directly to this point. Referring to the foreword to *this bridge we call home*: “The authors of this book call for a science that can bring together the best wisdom of past indigenous spiritual traditions with current techno-digital knowledges, with the purpose of exploring and affirming the multi-dimensional places where body, mind, and spirit assemble, where spiritual work is seen as political work, where political work is seen as spiritual work, and where the erotics of love invest both” (25).

In a sense, I felt that what I had begun to do was embodied in this. I have begun to use image and symbols along with words because I think text alone is limited and the visual expands our appreciation and understanding far more than words alone can do. What I am trying to do is reconstruct the past to critically look at what has emerged as the script.



How can we look at the same thing and see similarities, rather than differences? To see the ways in which we are more alike than different, rather than recommitting to difference as part of recreating that whole. I look at the religious practices of voodoo in Haiti and Hinduism in Trinidad in particular, bringing together ideas of African religious and Asian spiritualism as

Figure 2: Rada Altar, Haiti  
Photo: Patricia Mohammed



Figure 3: The Ordinance of Baptism, circa 18<sup>th</sup> century  
University of the West Indies Mona Library

ongoing critical differentiations between peoples within, situated as different practices even though I have found many to be more similar than different, and still posed as counterpoint to Christianity. My interest stems perhaps from the point of view that these two are constituted as polar opposites within the construction of contemporary Caribbean identity, the Asian



Figure 4: Hindu ritual ceremony, Trinidad  
Photo: Patricia Mohammed

influence located far more in the southern Caribbean, but nonetheless informing new ideas of difference. In the colonial script they were viewed as paganism and superstition. Religion and religious beliefs are the critical spaces which are used to establish hierarchies, i.e. Christianity over African and Asian religions. Why should this have been so and why does it persist as a justification for rule or exploitation?

Such ideas about what has constructed otherness of peoples make a direct link to the end of Layli's first comment when she says, "...in terms of thinking about how to shape consciousness, I think what specific actions can we take with regard to social institutions and to symbol systems to alter the widespread ness of critical consciousness." I think to do this we need to work with those symbols and reconfigure them with different meanings, not of hierarchies of beliefs but as different ways in which people do the same things, i.e. appease their gods and attempt to achieve fulfilling lives.

I interpret inter-sectionality from the point of view of how events and Critical Moments of the past still challenge us to deal with present and future as they have left very debilitating legacies. For instance, the New World encounter was couched in the form of bringing civilisation to heathen peoples. These were the same sentiments used to conquer

the Aztecs and Incas in Mexico, as it was over the Amerindian and native populations of the Caribbean and elsewhere

The construction of African religions was one of superstition, backwardness, heathenism and fear. Fear was grounded in a very pragmatic feature – the fear of religious gatherings being used to foment revolution, the fear of its powers which are not understood and therefore suffused with unimagined ills, and the fear of its overt sexuality – one distinctive difference between African spiritualism and Christianity was the music and dancing, or drumming and catching of the spirit.

In any society with different groups, what becomes entrenched is stereotypes, which ensuing generations inherit. They do not end here, but are carried over in social policies, as for instance one group is given preference in educational opportunity over the other because it is felt that they are more intellectual peoples, and so on and so on. Thus my point made earlier that *Critical Moments*, even if sporadic, can have continuous effects creating other successive *Critical Moments* in societies.

**Layli Phillips:** We had different understandings of the term “critical moment”. Each of us has had our own idea about what this term means and, as Patricia mentioned, it isn’t only always thought of as a single event or a single point in time, but sometimes as an ongoing axis that organises cultural and political experiences.

I’d like to shift it back to the sort of momentary, event-like meaning and talk about the way I’ve understood and used the term. I’ve drawn a lot from Chela’s work. I think of a critical moment as what she calls a punctum, which is like a point in time when the normal order of things is disrupted in some way. If you think of a bubble bursting, suddenly the order of things that existed within that bubble is no more and suddenly there’s an opportunity, an intense and powerful opportunity, for change and for things to be reorganised. So I thought about that type of a moment and in my own work and in some of the papers that were circulated amongst us. I’ve done work on the critical moment of desegregation. In particular, I’ve looked at the *Brown vs the Board of Education* desegregation decision and at how basically African-Americans and those involved in the black march toward liberation were orienting and helping to create that particular moment, that particular critical moment or punctum, alongside or in opposition to the status quo that was maintaining a racist society.

I imagine this whole board as historical movement up to the punctum of desegregation and after it. So you have this set of activities, which I call the march towards liberation, and this is specifically for African-Americans who obviously were disenfranchised from mainstream American society from as far back as slavery. Things that would cause a gentle and persistent movement towards this punctum include the NAACP Legal Defense Fund’s gradual legal campaign; the government actually desegregating the military forces through Truman’s Executive Order 1099; the labor organisation Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. All of these gradual things are adding up to this march, toward this punctum, where it is a coming together of the two societies that were formally opposed. So, on this side of the board you can draw a really harsh line, which I call the repressive and violent

status quo, the racist status quo. And it was upheld by things such as *Plessy vs Ferguson*, lynching, or rape, fire hoses, George Wallace and the Dixiecrats, and the confederate flag and all those activities that kept this going.

But at a certain point, in the US Supreme Court, the two groups had a meeting and that meeting created a punctum. It created a moment in American history when things could be different afterwards – a reorganisation could take place. And interestingly enough, what happened afterwards wasn't the perfect reconciliation that we might have hoped for but, rather, partial reconciliation that altered the experience of both groups of people and recreated it in terms of a new punctum later.

There were after-effects of that punctum. For instance “school integration”. I put it in quotes because in a national sense it was mitigated by things like tracking within the schools, which kept the segregation ongoing within. So both groups have a partial victory for their side. And then, on the larger social level behind schools, you have this thing called “access” where blacks can participate but there are tacit sorts of repression that keep people out. For instance, in terms of the way school desegregation itself was operationalised, a critical event occurred right here when we were deciding how to reorganise society. The NAACP submitted an amicus brief to the Supreme Court from social scientists, both black and white, who were against desegregation, which made the statement that segregation hurts both black children and white children. It makes black children feel inferior because of the social pressure of racism. With white children it gives them an unfair sense of superiority and leads them to have an authoritarian personality.

That was the input, but the output in the Supreme Court statement when they did agree to end school segregation was that segregation only hurts black children – they failed to mention the part about the harm to white children. So that opened the door for operationalising school desegregation in a way that ended up dismantling predominantly black schools, including the principals, administrators and teachers of those schools, and putting black children in white schools, rather than sending white to black and black to white and mixing up both and sharing the personnel of both.

So you can see we had this punctum – this opportunity for change; we had some kind of change and reconciliation, but not perfect change. Depending on what happens in that moment of great chaos, it determines whether we live up to the reconciliation we might hope for, or whether we maintain our status quo.

*Q.3. bell hooks writes in Black Looks, “We’re always in the process of both remembering the past even as we create new ways to imagine and make the future.” What is the role of the past in remembering the future?*

**Patricia Mohammed:** When your work is involved in the excavation of the past, it is sometimes viewed as esoteric, irrelevant in the face of very dominant present crises. But I think we often forget how that past has created what we have now. It is that past that has brought us here – that past was not static and sometimes there were elements which were

not read with the lens we have now. It is such a rereading that will allow us different options to proceed if we want to listen to it. I think the question has no specific answer; in a sense that history itself and writing of history is always current and still given too many interpretations. We are always writing about the past in the present and therefore still dependent on the individual scholar or activist to place the importance of history in the present and challenge it to provide us with something that is valuable for the present.

When we do research in the social or physical sciences we investigate phenomena and read our data to see how this helps with the problem with which we are confronted – the challenge of history is finding the relevance of it for intervening in our present. To underscore this point, I think the past is important because it is prehistory as well as the continuous past that creates the symbols that we then build on, as for instance the symbols used in all religions and all practices which have reinforced gender inequality for millennia. These are the kinds of moments that we think back to which then force the point that Layli was making: in that particular moment of thought, how do we act? Because it comes back as a flash, as for example the way people often locate memory as the feeling they have in an event like “Where were you when President Kennedy died” — an attempt at locating universal emotions and strategies. It is the lesson learnt from that that we should draw on to shape the present and the future.

**Susan Glisson:** I think I would talk about two things that are going on in Mississippi and other parts of the South, especially where I am. The way that the past is used in two instances: one is in jurisprudence, which is the reopening and prosecution of old civil rights murder cases, and in the other, the memorialisation of civil rights activity, honouring civil rights heroes, creating monuments so that a reconciliation could be effected. I get calls every time a new case gets opened and it’s going to trial. Reporters will call and ask, “What do you say to the idea that perhaps that’s in the past and you should leave it there? Are we just reopening old wounds?”

My response is that there are certain values that society should come together and affirm. One of those values is that all life is important and this value is timeless. So if a life was taken in 1800 or 1902 or in 1963, on June 12, like Medger Evers was, that is an important marker and we should seek justice for the premature and criminal death of that person. And that is timeless. That is why there is no statute of limitations on murder because our society says it is wrong all the time across history, but we have to enter into history in order to recover that and to try to seek justice.

The second thing is in creating rituals of healing. October 1 of last year was the 40th anniversary of the integration of the University of Mississippi. Forty years ago there were marshals and national guardsmen, there was a full-scale riot, two people were killed, all because James Meredith wanted to go to school at the flagship university of his state. On October 1 of this past year we created a ceremonial — I don’t want to use the word reenactment — but we created a ritual in which the chancellor of the university apologised for the exclusion of African-Americans and others from the university and then had a dinner on the grounds, because we’re southern and we like to eat well together and that is a source of great joy. But we had a ceremonial walk through the Lyceum,

which is the main administrative building in front of the Circle where the riot occurred. Any pictures you've seen of 'Ole Miss' would be that site of the riot in front of the Circle. The Chancellor Khayat and James Meredith walked through the building, followed by Governor William Winter and Myrlie Evers, and by 2,500 black and white Mississippians to the other side, where we then dedicated a space for a civil rights memorial to conclude this year of remembrance. You can't have justice and you can't have reconciliation without going through the past.

**Chela Sandoval:** I'm interested in Layli Phillips' exposition of the 'punctum'. What she has done is provide a radical theoretical model for understanding history and social change. Theoretical models are very useful when they are translated into a visual mode as she has done today. I always understand theory best when I see it mapped visually. When we translate, when we recode from one medium to another, a new life is given to theory in a way that makes it somatic; our understanding becomes physical — and different. We felt this happening when Phillips gave us a theoretical model of the punctum, and then gave us its visual transcoding. We were able to better perceive how the punctum allows us to understand and map any critical moment, any great moment of social transformation. The model of the punctum, as Layli points out, allows us to plug in different kinds of critical moments in order to understand how they can create more liberatory presents and future times. In Layli's use of the punctum, therefore, we do not become caught in recovering lost times, lost histories: Rather we are actively-constructing and reconstructing these for the sake of the present and future.

Much scholarship devoted to ethnicity, gender and sexual difference is focused on recovery projects, recovering lost histories. Over the last century arguments have ensued over whether and when such historical projects constitute a liberatory activity. I am interested in what, following Hayden White, are called 'meta-historical' forms. That is, I am interested in the moral consequences of someone's structuration of historical and cultural epochs. Phillips and Mohammed use theoretical models that call up history in order to better understand the present and move into the future.

**Chela Sandoval:** I am my ancestral and cultural memories embodied — here, now. How to understand our contemporary historically-active being-ness, how to translate that, and how to speak this across all our differences is the method that we four active-witnesses are similarly seeking. We're all interested in creating blueprints that call up history, that recognise how history has carved our very bodies, souls, psyches, minds and speech forms — while at the same time generating a "present-speak" that can free us from our pasts in order to create nows and futures full of hope. Susan, you write about this in your work, when you tell us to not become so fixated and fascinated with our past historical figures, but instead see the way in which these figures are embodied in our beings and our presences right now.

**Susan Glisson:** Right and that's where it's useful history. Diane Nash in the SNCC reunion in 2000 talked about Adolf Hitler and Martin Luther King being the flip side of the same coin. I'm not sure I would go quite that far, but it's a powerful statement in a sense that these are charismatic figures who came to the attention of the public at Critical

Moments in their societies' lives. Hitler came to power, or to public notice, during the Weimar Republic, during a terrible time in Germany and people were looking for answers to explain the terrible time and how they were going to get past it. The answers Hitler gave were, Well, we need to blame the Jewish people and anybody else we want to. At the same time, King came along and people were looking for answers to deal with this critical moment of the post-Brown decision and how we were going to move forward and he provided answers that I would argue were positive. The problem is you get fixated on the individual so much so that you think that when the individual is gone you cannot do it yourself and that's limiting. History is supposed to be useable. The other wonderful way of giving voice to his argument is understanding that segregation is harmful to both blacks and whites and that message is too often not coming through on the other side. William Winter says of Medger Evers – he didn't just free black people, he freed white people too. We have to be able to uncover that in order to recover.

*Q.4. If we are unaware of each other's histories and cultures and Critical Moments, then how do we make connections horizontally across regions and cultures and nations? How do we start to build something that doesn't stay within our own little spectrum of concerns and ordeals, but instead reach out and be able to talk across different groups, different cultures, and different regions and start to understand some of the underlying problems?*

**Susan Glisson:** One of the differences that creates a kind of dynamic is technology or technologies. That seems to be one way to talk about...

**Chela Sandoval:** It's not going to be easy but we can do it, and we are doing it.

**Layli Phillips:** I would just like to elaborate. I also think Chela's work is extremely useful in thinking about this question in terms of when she talks in *Methodology of the Oppressed* about differential social movements and the idea that, rather than competitively trying to replace and supplant one another's movement strategies and perspectives on change, we can think of them as things which can harmonically coordinate with each other and all inform one another simultaneously. On a very organic level this model of operating, this model of movement, is already beginning to take place. I think our society, and global society, is beginning to recognise this form of movement, but hasn't really well articulated it in some sort of mass lingo as yet. But if you look at the various kinds of actors – and I mean collective actors – who are participating in global social movement in its many forms right now, we find what you might call strange bedfellows: people who would not have formally tried to organise together, and it's not in a classic formal coalition-type sense, but in a much more tactical, spontaneous improvisational kind of sense. In my belief, this is the emerging form of social movement that is going to break in those conversations that the question is asking about.

Already, we find as a result of some of these spiraling things that come off of desegregation we now have people of younger generations who are willing to talk to each other in a certain informal way that their parents' generation and their grandparents' generation never would have done. And it's already in some sense naturally creating



these conversations. I feel like it's occurring and there's no need to force it, but what we do have to do is recognise it and articulate it and help it along.

**Patricia Mohammed:** Just building off of what Layli said, I think of an opportunity of generational change. This conference, for instance, and the way it is set up and the kinds of questions that were asked is different already, and it's the kind of thing we want to see, I suppose. In a sense, we have to have a predisposition even when we reach out because we can look at others and still not see. We have done that in the past. I wonder where that predisposition comes from. I think one could call on postmodernism as already that space which has been provided to look at one's existence to try to get rid of the meta-narrative and think of all those many narratives which we were kept from or remained ignorant of. Again, this is part of what came out of feminism along with other social movements. That process of consciousness raising as it is taking place is very diffuse and we don't fully understand it.

The only way I can describe it is with an anecdote about how I personally have done it. I remember reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* many years ago, as a much younger scholar. It was a fictional story then, unrelated to real people and their lives. I reread it in 2001 after I had begun to study African religions and African images in the Caribbean and after I had visited Namibia to teach in different regions of the country for three summers. In 2000, I had carried out ethnographic research in a small traditional village of the Ovambo peoples in northern Namibia, near the Angolan border. This traditional village, with its thatched houses set in homesteads or *kraals*, was intersected with a modern highway and city springing up just alongside. Achebe's book could have been set in this terrain. The centre could not hold here again, the younger ones were leaving the traditional farming of goats and *mahangu* (a variety of grain) for the city, the traditional chief of the village had no clout again as chief to hold people together. I spoke to a woman who had grown up in polygamous households about the problems but also the possibilities which were available to them. The book now made sense to me. I came across almost the exact things that I read about in Achebe's book. It was being played before my eyes. Over a learning process of 20 years, I developed what I hoped was a capacity to be more perceptive about people and difference, to bring together things in a short time and to appreciate the reasons for this difference. What is the basis of perception and understanding – is it socialist, feminist, or consciousness raising, or progressive thinking and so on? How do we engage with that? I think that's the question we are all asking. I would like to think there's an optimism that we can begin to envision difference even without the actual experience of it.

**Chela Sandoval:** An example is this conference where the organisers have asked us to come together to have a dialogue, to think and speak off the top of our heads – and to take the vulnerability of this process and its outcomes as an example for how to build a new sense of self and community. This method of conferencing and keynoting represents the organisers' attempt to undo the relations of hierarchy and domination structured into the very ways knowledge and being are exchanged. It was scary for us to do this but fun – what it reminds me of is a SWAPA event. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote about SWAPA as *autohistoria-teoria*, a new way of speaking to ourselves and to one another that is

transformative, ‘shamanistic’. This idea is similar to Susan Glisson’s work when she argues that we need to reveal the “unconscious screens of our being” in order to make the kinds of changes necessary to create collectivities that can move us into hopeful futures. But how do we reveal, even to ourselves, the unconscious screens of our beings? SWAPA, or *autohistoria-teoría* and the shaman-witness ritual are techniques that comprise the formal method that will allow us to do that. SWAPA is a method of exchange that is about swapping energy, information, dialogue, and wisdom. The SWAPA approach creates collectivities that identify tactics and strategies for confronting the present. It is an immense social and political apparatus into which we are born, and within which we would like to intervene in order to bring about more humane forms of exchange. How do we make these interventions? We need to find new ways of thinking, talking, performing, exchanging, becoming. It was Foucault who said the greatest challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would be for us to question, given our histories, what we have now become. Such questioning will make us vulnerable both to ourselves and to one another. In this way, we learn about ourselves and about each other’s past histories as these are currently inscribed on our bodies and beings.

Answers to our questions may lie in the upsurge of spoken word art performance activism that is being produced everywhere today. Answers can be found in those moments of vulnerability when a speaker is willing to stand up and speak her or his truth knowing that this hard-won truth is changing even as it is spoken.

But SWAPA is not enough. It is not enough to hear someone doing rap, hip-hop, slam or SWAPA. The radically democratic form of SWAPA I am talking about must be accomplished within a committed progressive environment created by those who want to bring about social justice. Groups commit to three-minute intervals of SWAPA in what I call a shaman-witness ritual. Each person in the group actively-witnesses each SWAPA. Social movement groups that commit to this type of shaman-witness ritual develop a shared language. The SWAPA process is transformative – it teaches us about each other, enables us to create community inside of difference, and enables that community to make decisions about how to act next. That community is now prepared to create the forms of exchange necessary for identifying the tactics and strategies required for social justice. They are engaging in an overriding methodology of emancipation.

We need to create many cadres of people willing to do this kind of work; we need to create these languages of exchange and sharing. It’s not going to be easy because it takes developing skills on a micro level in order to make changes on the macro. There is a kind of rising up of skills involved in SWAPA that enables practitioners to make decisions about whether to act as integrationists, revolutionaries, nationalists, separatists or as what we now refer to as ‘differential’ actors.

What’s interesting to me about this keynote/panel is that each one of us is coming up with similar blueprints for action. I think that’s why we were invited here today. Each of us is trying to develop blueprints for how to be able to move into the future in ways that can help heal our ancestors as they live within us; heal our contemporary moments as we live them; and heal our connected communities.

**Patricia Mohammed:** But we need funds. We need to be able to have funds in the direction in which this kind of work can take you. There are lots of funds that go into other areas but not into this kind of work.

**Susan Glisson:** I guess I'll just add to that in terms of the improvisational nature, the dynamic nature, the organic nature that fuses what we're doing. We're five communities in Mississippi, three in the Mississippi Delta, one in the urban area of Jackson, and Oxford which is a smaller town of about 10,000 people and 20,000 students. We're doing something different in every community. I have no idea what's in order for each place. In Rome and Drew, which are two communities that border Parchman Penitentiary in the Delta, we would use more of what I would categorise as an Ella Baker model, which is to say, organise people around the use of the water. In Oxford, we are doing a Saul Alinsky model, the Industrial Areas Foundations, which is not the Ella Baker model. In fact, he organises people around their own self-interests rather than around the interests of the poor. The idea and the hope is that once people realise when they are talking to people they wouldn't normally talk to, their self-interests look remarkably similar to the self-interests of other people and organise in that way.

What we're trying in Clarksdale I wouldn't even say is a methodology. We're using oral history training with young people to have them hear from their elders, so that they can learn that in Clarksdale the civil rights movement was actually brought to that community by its young people and these young people now have no clue about the civil rights movement. In Jackson, the capital, we got some funds for a predominantly black school in a poverty-stricken area, and it has become a First Amendment School. The idea is that we expect kids to graduate and start voting when they're 18, but we don't train them to vote and it's serious business. So we use the principles of the First Amendment in that school to train students to get them more invested in school so they're more involved in decision-making. They now have their first school newspaper. This year they are writing a school constitution and the hope is that the renewal of this school will then help renew that neighbourhood in the sense that it's tied to that school. Very soon we will work in new communities that have significant civil rights history. We are part of a project that uses, amazingly enough, SWAPA sorts of techniques. They bring in arts folks, educators, and organisers and they work with all three entities in the community. They collect oral histories, they educate people about their histories, and the artists then work with local artisans to create some kind of performance out of that and that translates into unified issues around which the community organises. We'll use this module and see what works. What works in one place may not in another. But we are being open to the improvisational nature of it and creating a network of all these people to be supportive of each other so they don't feel like they are in isolation.

*Feedback question 1 from the audience:*

*I'm very interested in the last question on cross-pollinisation or political creolisation. I've been reading about George Padmore, and of course Padmore went on to be educated at Fisk University in the US and*

*participated a little bit in the early civil rights activity. What are some of the lessons you learned from what I guess the term that stuck around in the civil rights movement would be the 'outside agitator'. How does somebody from a different cultural background go into another cultural background and have something to contribute?*

**Layli Phillips:** An interesting example is one that Chela writes about in *Methodology of the Oppressed*. It's not a specific individual, but what she calls "the eccentric cohorts of black feminists and US third world feminists". The second wavers who were shuttling back and forth between the feminist movement, ethnic nationalist movements, lesbian and gay liberation movements and were cross-pollinating across all of those. There are a million individuals I could name that fall into that group but because of their location as women, as members of ethnic minority groups, often sexual orientation minorities, often other class groups and so on. They had connections to all those movements; movements at that time were not engaging in intersectionality with their members. They developed the theory and articulation of how to work among the groups simultaneously and they are a very valuable example in the general sense to what you were talking about.

**Patricia Mohammed:** It is interesting that George Padmore could have conceived the revolution which, within Africa, could not be imagined. To configure an idea of Pan-Africanism, one had to be outside of it because within Africa those differences were so constituted and closed, the metaphor of sameness could not be created. I can see how Padmore was able to do this – maybe this happens when you come from a small island that drives you out. A similar thing happened to Eric Williams, who was able to write *Capitalism and Slavery*. And to some extent, V.S. Naipaul. As maligned as he is, in a sense he left the colony and re-colonised himself in another way.

What all of these people are saying is that the concept of nation needs to be re-thought, and maybe it is precisely the limitedness of being small ourselves that allows some of us to think outside the box. So to answer your question, yes it is possible for someone from one background to go into another background and contribute. You bring another outsider lens that can be very useful and valuable to those inside and too wrapped up in the situation.

**Chela Sandoval:** Allow me one further example. Two weeks ago, Rachel Corrie, a 23-year-old white US peace activist and college student, tried to prevent the Israeli army from destroying homes on the Gaza Strip. This young woman called herself an 'internationalist'. In doing so, Corrie was redefining and reclaiming the idea of internationalism as a method for moving in between nations, of making connections between nations. Her politics can be witnessed in her remarkable emails, which are themselves examples of a SWAPA that is mobilising other international communities. These communities are different from globalising communities that are colonising and/or neo-colonising. Corrie's inter-nationalism transforms postmodern globalisation into a positively dissident mode of globalisation. In the name of this radical internationalism, this US citizen stood to protect a Palestinian house threatened by Israeli troops, and gave her life. We could say that Rachel Corrie was martyred to an internationalist form of

dissident globalisation, to the form of radical internationalisation we are talking about in today's keynote shaman-witness exchange. This sort of consciousness is developing in small, ever-growing groups all over the globe.

*Feedback question 2 from the audience:*

*I am interested in this idea of a “march toward liberation”. Two years ago you would perhaps have problems saying, “What are the critical moments?” “Where is the march?” So I think it's important for us to remember there are marches and that we make them. I think in that long march towards liberation from slavery to now, a lot of folks kept on going. They didn't know they were part of the march and we look back and write history and say that was a march. I think we shouldn't fool ourselves into thinking that we will always know.*

*Another thing is, we can't rest satisfied once we reach a critical moment and it seems things are going well. We can't sit down and just take a rest because it's never over. So you can't rest satisfied and you also can never give it up, right? And the last thing, it seems to me that we need to have is a patient urgency, you know, that we've got to build it and we're in for a really long haul and there are hundreds of years before us and hundred years after us and what we do now matters. You've got to learn to be patient and urgent and I don't know how to do that well all the time.*

**Layli Phillips:** In terms of the model having a certain amount of hindsight – 40/40 vision or artificiality. Along those lines I would agree with you that I would never essentialise this model as this frozen picture of how things take place. What I do find heuristically useful about a model like this or any model that I find appealing is that it can help me prospectively to think of what I want to do. For instance, I may perhaps be unaware that my actions are part of a movement. But at the same time if I'm aware there is this sort of march-like thing happening, I may turn up my vision extra-sharp to see who is around me, who are my allies and how we can work together. I might start somehow coalescing in ways that I wouldn't if I wasn't imagining the march was taking place and that helps the effort. So in that sense let's not freeze it but then let's not ever have models either.

*On the second point, about not resting,* I am thinking about conversations that I've had with Patricia and some of these women, particularly about feminism and passing the generational torch in various kinds of ways, for instance, thinking about longevity of movements in a generational kind of way. We all have a certain kind of energy in our teens and 20s, and another kind of energy in our 40s and 50s, and we can all contribute. We do pass torches on certain kinds of activities to keep them going – we can't always have our 100 per cent energy level going and that's okay. I think it is good to just be aware of that and then actively cultivate that ability to have that passage through movements and across different phases.

**Chela Sandoval:** I want to add this: we are in a new century following the great social movements of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, yet in the last couple of decades following this great punctum, the progressive left experienced feelings of disillusionment, even hopelessness. There are good reasons for these feelings. Transformations: postmodern globalisation, cultural and economic globalisation have shifted everything – perhaps consciousness above all else. But if nothing made sense for a while, sense can be made now insofar as we retool lessons from the past, and make them meaningful in relation to new contemporary planetary conditions. We need to appropriate older forms and use them in new ways. So, if the progressive left has undergone an era of disillusionment, loss, even hopelessness, it is understandable. But I agree with my colleagues that we have to conceive of this zenith of despair as part of a planetary process wherein new nadirs of human possibility and connection are possible.

*Feedback question 3 from the audience:*

*Can you all say more about the role of the past in re-membering the future?*

**Susan Glisson:** Here's an example that is complicated. At the University of Mississippi we have the Trent Lott leadership Institute and I work in the same building with this Institute and the building is called Vardaman Hall. I don't know if y'all know who James K. Vardaman was but he said the only thing an African American was good for, (and he didn't use that term), was manual labor, so I like to call my office the "Fannie Lou Hamer suite." I had to counteract some of that energy. When Lott got in trouble for praising Strom Thurmond, my initial thought was mercenary. I thought "Maybe he will give a bunch of money to do racial reconciliation work. Maybe his embarrassment will make him get money for this state to end racism." My second thought was when Lott just kept fumbling through all of those apologies I began to feel really sorry for this man. And I started thinking here's an opportunity for reconciliation, here's a guy who clearly isn't getting it and his handlers aren't getting it either and communicating it to him. Who do we need to hook him up with to get some transformative experiences in his life? I was excited when I thought he would go on tour of civil rights sites with John Lewis and then chagrined that he, in fact, had a scheduling conflict. So I'm not sure what you do with that. The University of Mississippi has this sort of challenge of having this thing called the Lott Institute and nobody wanting that kind of leadership and yet there's 13 million dollars in the bank so how are we going to spend it? Cornel West, who visited our campus during Black History Month, said that institutions have ambiguous legacies. The way we deal with that is to make sure that something called the Trent Lott Leadership Institute has, as part of its charter, discussions of race and democracy. So that is the conversation we are trying to have now on working with that Institute.

**Patricia Mohammed:** I'm thinking about one of the ways in which I look at deconstruction or excavation of the past. One of the problems with the colonial historiography is that it has depicted colonised subjects in a way which continues to entrench notions of inferiority and victimhood. My sense is that there have been sufficient people who have written, who are continuing to write in this vein, as one trajectory of history. But I would like to write a liberating history. All history is passion.

But I think to name something and to confront it in all its many sides, though painful, can be cathartic. Perhaps I don't fully understand how painful it is for other people who have gone through various experiences. For example, I am not Jewish so I may feel or interpret the Holocaust differently. Similarly, others have argued in our region that Indian indentureship was not supposed to be as bad as African slavery. It wasn't – in no way am I trying to compare two systems of enforced labour. But I am trying to go beyond who was most brutalised or victimised and bring us to another space in our present understanding of ourselves and what we now owe to each other as having all had bad experiences of one sort or another. To do this, I also have to not be blind about what happened in the past, but do so without flagging it as a stick to beat ourselves or others with.

**Chela Sandoval:** How to re-member the future? The great American Third World feminist Audre Lorde wrote in 1972 that sister outsiders “were never meant to survive”. But that doesn't mean outsiders aren't developing an understanding of social reality capable of bringing liberation to ourselves, to our people, to our communities, and to the larger society. When we speak, when we find vocabularies for sharing insights with one another, when we bring those recognitions and apparatuses outside our communities, we engage in a radical inter-nationalism. SWAPA, *autohistoria-teoria*, and the shaman-witness ritual are key techniques for re-membering the future.

*Feedback question 4 from the audience:*

*I belong to a group of artists and activists and we fuse the arts with our activism to workshop, but what we find difficult sometimes is engaging those communities and engaging those peoples whose issues we are organising around – some of the folks who are directly being oppressed and held down by these very issues we are organising around. We are finding it difficult sometimes to get them to buy into the fact that this is a real situation we are dealing with and looking outside of the box of their day to day and to see what are the institutional and systematic things that are put in place. Do you have any thoughts on how we can really reach out to these people and get some buy-in from them in terms of the issues that they are dealing with that they may not have the ability to analyse?*

**Chela Sandoval:** The answer to these questions is active witnessing – like we are doing right now. So that it's not only the most verbal, the most articulate, the ones who have been trained to speak, the ones who have *not* been relegated to silence who are speaking and defining. When everyone in the group participates, active-witnessing is easy to do. This active-witnessing component of the SWAPA experience is essential; it is what turns SWAPA into a shaman-witness ritual.

Let me give you another example. I asked you, audience as active-witnesses, to jot down one word, idea or concept that struck you as we spoke together today. This is an interesting exercise, even when you think your own word is not interesting. What we have to do to create critical exchange in communities. The energy has to move not just

within you, the performer, and within the performance itself, but it's got to move in the audience in a palpable way. My goal is to create active-witnesses. Indeed, when we become active-witnesses we become transformers, what Anzaldúa called "shaman". In the past we have witnessed in silence. We cannot relegate ourselves to silence again. We must find new ways to witness, and to speak. The keynote panelists have acted as active-witnesses/transformers/shaman for you here today, but when you witnessed for us now the roles reversed – you became the shaman and we changed in response to your perceptions. And that process, the SWAPA shaman-witness exchange is what creates a collective – a collective that speaks from the power of the nadir, and that generates a new shared language, not my language, but our language – together. The creation of such collectivities will require much love, commitment and hard work.