

White Folx at the Borders: Trauma-Informed Preparations for Intercultural Biblical Encounters

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Abstract

Brian Blount's 2019 Society of Biblical Literature Presidential Address calls for the full integration of interpretational practices that promote intercultural dialogue and a multiplicity of textual meanings. This article explores the place of white folx in such intercultural interpretational practices. Using the lens of postcolonial and queer trauma theories, the following examines some of the cautions and considerations needed for white folx engaging in intercultural border encounters. It explores how trauma-informed preparations raise awareness about white privilege, violence, and positionalities, while addressing the tendency of white folx to co-opt and overidentify with traditionally marginalized interpretations. The work of fostering just intercultural encounters requires not only a shift in interpretational methodologies, but transformation of institutional practices and within the broader academy.

Key Words

White supremacy, Trauma theory, Queer interpretation, Witnessing, 1 Peter

[Brian Blount's presidential address](#) calls for a long-needed shift towards recognizing the multifaceted meaning potentials of biblical texts. Blount destabilizes and de-centers the reified belief in the supremacy of European historical, literary scientific interpretational methods. In doing so, space opens for a multiplicity of textual interpretations and exchanges that embrace cultural influence and difference. This shifts the role of the interpreter from a quest for the singular, absolute meaning of a text, to allowing interpretations to dialogue, rather than compete, with others. Blount rightly shares how embracing the intercultural meaning potentials of a text holds promise to transform not only scholarship, but the academy and the way we live.

Blount describes intercultural Bible readings as filled with creativity and originality, like "the holy chaos of an ensemble dance troupe" where each member's singular movements hold significance (Blount 2019, 15). This interpretative process is "collaborative and intrusive" (Blount 2019, 16). Blount envisions interpretational encounters where "we are willing to move beyond our own boundaries and trespass the boundaries of others, and allow trespass of our own boundaries" (Blount 2019, 16) While these encounters move the interpretative process out of scholarly isolation and naval gazing, as a white, queer woman I approach the notion of trespassing with caution.

My hesitation arises first, because white folx will view this as an invitation to further trespass, exploit, and tokenize the interpretations of non-white folx. “Woke” white folx are often eager to seize upon the scholarship of their colleagues of color, to claim empathy and understanding, and then use the scholarship as a tool to mask rather than dismantle the white supremacist logic underlying the academy. Second, in a world where boundaries of black and brown bodies are frequently violated by the police, where transphobic hate, anti-Asian violence, and systemic racism tears at the borders of communities, interpretational boundary crossing and trespassing, even with the best intentions, embodies the inequities and power differentials playing out on our streets. Blount rightly points out how scholarly interpretational practices are linked to the social and political. As such, we must examine the impact of scholarly border crossings on real individual and collective bodies.

These concerns are not meant to dissuade the interpretational practices proposed by Blount. Instead, they necessitate that biblical folx, particularly white biblical folx, do the self-reflective and community-conscious work before running towards others’ borders. This work requires not only interrogating one’s personal experience with white privilege and supremacist logic, but also an acknowledgment of the legacies of collective trauma and exploitation that exist at the borders of interpretations, communities, and bodies. Thus, a collective search for meaning potentials involves examination of how traumas, past, future, and ongoing, shape and inform these interactions.

The following seeks to use a trauma-informed lens to approach meaning potential. Specifically, it is an examination of how trauma-informed interpretational preparations can raise awareness of and address the potential for harm and transformation that exists in border encounters. This is not to say every interpretation or encounter is rooted in trauma, but rather that an awareness of traumas and the systemic inequities connected to them is one method for creating more ethical border encounters. This work is particularly directed to white folx, who are often too eager to cross borders without paying attention to the dynamics created by the traumas they have and continue to perpetuate.

Reframing Trauma

Trauma-informed preparations for border encounters require the interpreter to bring a keen awareness of how violence and traumas past, present, and ongoing shape the experience of exegeting in the company of another. It requires intersectional engagement with the power dynamics found between interpreters, specifically their ability to perpetuate violence and trauma against one another and their broader communities of accountability on personal, collective, and systemic levels. To facilitate such an engagement begins with a de-colonization and expansion in the very understanding of trauma within biblical scholarship. Mirroring Blount’s call for diversifying beyond “impartial” historical and literary methods (2019, 8), removing Euro-American psychoanalytic literary trauma theory as the central understanding

of trauma for biblical scholarship allows the field to embrace global lived realities and perspectives on trauma more fully.

The popularity of psychoanalytic literary trauma theories in biblical studies has resulted in a narrow definition of trauma that focuses on event-based, individual experiences such those arising from natural disasters, sexual assault, or accidents (Craps 2012, 1–43). This conceptualization is typified by the work of literary trauma theorist, Cathy Caruth, who building on Freud, envisions trauma “as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (Caruth 1996, 3). Trauma results in a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world” (Caruth 1996, 4). As such, trauma lies not so much as the event itself, but in the ways in which the victim experiences the event “too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known” resulting in the inability to process or assimilate it into conscious thought (Caruth 1996, 4). Uncontrollable repetitions of the event coupled with gaps in memory renders the victim powerless and passive. By constructing this image of trauma and its victims, scholars become limited in both the scope of their understanding of trauma and the impacts on intercultural interpretational engagements.¹

Postcolonial trauma theorists have stretched understandings of trauma in ways that could benefit trauma-informed interpretational encounters. Theorists have asserted that understandings of trauma require a shift from examination of the individual to the broader impacts on collective experiences. Jay Rajiva explains that the contemporary traumatic realities emerging from “collective violence, environmental disaster, migration and diaspora, colonization, rape culture or systemic poverty,” require us to “vault trauma out of solipsism – one’s personal trauma only – into a wider community spread across lines of space, culture, and history” (2017, 2). Such realities require trauma of past and present to be viewed not “merely as an occurrence – an event or series of events with bounded, measurable effects, – but as an ongoing cultural phenomenon that demands radical adjustments to how one lives in and moves through the world” (Rajiva 2017, 2). Acknowledging the ways that contemporary and historical traumas overlap, layer, and collide opens space to see the ways trauma shapes individuals and communities for generations. In turn, “an inclusive and culturally sensitive trauma theory can assist in raising awareness of injustice both past and present and opening up the possibility of a more just global future” (Craps 2012, 127).

This awareness expands beyond event-based traumas to require interpreters gain awareness of many forms that trauma embodies on macro and micro levels. Particularly important to this work is recognizing what Maria Root identifies as

¹ Tod Linafelt’s *Surviving Lamentation: Catastrophe, Lament, and the Protest in the Afterlife of a Biblical Book* (2000) and David Garber’s “Traumatizing Ezekiel Psychoanalytic Approaches to the Biblical Prophet” (2004) are representative of the shift towards integrating literary criticism with more traditional psychoanalytic approaches. Early examinations of New Testament texts from this theoretical perspective include Shelly Rambo’s theological reading of the Gospel of John in *Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining* (2010), and Adele Reinhartz’s “Incarnation and Covenant: The Fourth Gospel through the Lens of Trauma” (2015).

insidious trauma (1992²). Insidious traumas arise from the effects of colonialism, racism, economic domination, and displacement, as well as from the offshoots of conflict. It most often affects minoritized groups within society. Traumatization arises from “cumulative micro-aggressions: each of which is too small to be a traumatic stressor, but together they can build to create an intense traumatic impact” (Craps 2012, 26). Such experiences of trauma and oppression also interact with multigenerational traumas that are passed down by communities. These forms of trauma are regularly overlooked. Thus, the act of decolonizing trauma readings requires that all of these forms are afforded attention and analysis which allows lived realities and the powers that influence them to dialogue in the face of trauma. It acknowledges the systemic and embodied aspects of trauma. In doing so, it opens space to consider the multiplicity of responses that arise depending on individual and community social location. Finally, it brings attention to the complex reality of compounding traumas in which an individual and/or community “may experience simultaneously multiple traumas, and that these are not necessarily equally weighted” (Ward 2015, 1). As such, experiences of trauma are not imaged in isolation but rather as relational, dynamic, political, and interconnected. Expanding the definition of trauma adds a complexity to interpretations developed at-and-across cultural borders, challenging not only the notion of singular “correct” interpretation, but generating any interpretation in isolation.

For white interpreters, this shift entails doing their own work to understand their role perpetuating the insidious traumas that penetrate our societies. It calls attention to the ways in which their scholarship and daily actions in the academy and beyond contribute to perpetuating violence. It asks that they address these actions before approaching others’ borders or seeking to form relationships across them. Concretely, before even approaching a text, this involves examining the methodological frameworks through which one interprets texts and the scholarly voices upon whom one most readily relies. As womanist New Testament scholar Angela Parker explains, the majority of her academic training “was trying to prepare [her] to be a White male biblical scholar” (2021, 19). This is true of a majority of the academy. The reification of white male scholarship as authoritative and objective has produced a history of trauma that, as Parker asserts, “stifled [her] breath” and did not allow her to represent her “fully authentic, God-ordained self” (2021, 19). For white biblical folx, the preparation for border encounters must include acknowledgements of the violence that white supremacy has caused to our academic discipline and methodologies, as well as in houses of worship and on the streets. We cannot claim to take seriously the call to address white supremacy through our interpretations and border encounters, if we do not first acknowledge the ways in which this logic undergirds our very interpretational practices.

² Root also provides foundational work on vicarious trauma in this piece.

Witnessing and Meaning Potential

Trauma-informed preparations for border engagements invite a deeper awareness about the relationality of those coming into contact with one another. It calls for a dynamic relationship where there is a constant awareness of the power differentials involved in border encounters and crossings. It challenges unethical border crossing and exploitative gazes. Trauma-informed searches for Blount's "meaning potentials" require a keen understanding of what it means to witness to others' interpretations and the traumas they may contain, challenge, or perpetuate. For, as Kali Tal explains,

Bearing witness is an aggressive act. It is born out of a refusal to bow to outside pressure to revise or to repress experience, a decision to embrace conflict rather than conformity, to endure a lifetime of anger and pain rather than to submit to a seductive pull of revision and repression. Its goal is change. (1996, 17)

To actively prepare to witness to another's interpretation and the potential hauntings of trauma within it, moves the encounter beyond empathizing with one's fellow interpreter. Empathy, especially for white folx, opens up possibilities of over-identification with others in such a way that white tears and guilt mask the trauma of Othered communities. For while, on theoretical levels, empathy claims to erect ethical barriers that prevent "unchecked identification, vicarious experience, and surrogate victimage," clear strategies for preventing over-identification with and/or co-option of traumas are not often concretely delineated and enacted in lived encounters. In addition, as Ann Kaplan highlights, "'empty' empathy" occurs when instances of trauma and suffering are presented "without any context or background knowledge" (Kaplan 2005, 93). According to Kaplan, such empathy leads more to sentimentality and sensationalism than action (Kaplan 2005, 94). This leads to whitewashing systemic injustices by focusing only on an individual's experience.

Thus, the concept of witnessing may be more beneficial to border encounters. According to Kaplan, witnessing inherently "implies a larger ethical framework" that publicly responds to trauma (Kaplan 2005, 122). Witnessing is political and prompts "an ethical response that will perhaps transform the way someone views the world, or thinks about justice" (Kaplan 2005, 123). Witnessing, like empathy, requires attention to affect and critical embodied reflection. But, as Donna McCormack suggests building on Judith Butler, the aim of witnessing is not one-way identification with the victimized Other, but rather exploration of the reciprocal ways in which the multisensory acts of witnessing cause us to be undone by and become responsible to one another and the broader society (2014, 33–38). Witnessing also draws greater attention not only to the victim's experience of trauma, but also the realities of perpetrators, perpetrating systems, and bystanders. This allows for a more holistic examination of contexts surrounding interpretations and the ways systemic inequities shape them. I believe this can encourage us to, as Judith Butler puts it, "re-create social and political conditions on more sustaining

grounds” that stretch us beyond our comfort zones (Butler 2004, 17–18). Witnessing requires that those in dominant positionalities attend to that which challenges or confounds us, including “being open to narration that decenters our supremacy” (Butler 2004, 18). Only then can we name and address “the things that restrain us from thinking and acting radically and well about global options” (Butler 2004, 18).

Witnessing also necessitates intentionally preparing for border encounters. Intentionality requires something deeper than being fully present to or aware of another’s interpretation. It entails something more political. Intentionality begins with the acknowledgement of the witness’s relationship to those they are engaging. The familiarity or obtuseness of the other’s context shapes how one approaches them as well as what prior knowledge or experience they employ when engaging interpretations. It also requires exploring who one most closely identifies with in the text and contexts within which interpretations emerge, whether victim, perpetrator, bystander, etc., some combination of them, or none of them, since attractions and/or repulsions shape the reception of the information communicated, as well as its future interpretation, transmission, and engagement. All too often, white folk identify with the victims within texts and interpretations. Trauma-informed encounters ask interpreters to step back, critically explore their positionalities, and the erasures of power that occur within them.

Intentionality also requires that individuals and communities identify and name their agenda(s) for coming together in the search for and exchange of meaning potentials. If they do not acknowledge and interrogate their underlying agendas or assumptions in this process, there is a good chance that biases will go unacknowledged and unaddressed. In the case of trauma, Jill Bennett explains, there can be a certain “*allure* of trauma discourse” in which experiences of trauma and the Other become objects of cultural fascination, even envy, for those witnessing to them (2005, 5). As with identifying one’s positionality, acknowledging one’s drives and desires is not meant as a moral judgement, but rather as a tool for being more fully intentional and aware of how one perceives and processes the violence, trauma, and inequities brought out in interpretations. It also can help to determine whether or not, or in what capacity, one should be acting as a witness in a particular instance. It challenges practices in which white interpreters either tokenize and exploit interpretations from scholars of color or over-identify with them. Witnessing challenges whitewashing and universalizing experiences, especially of trauma, in favor of intersectional awareness. This can take the form of desiring to see concepts like motherhood, sexual orientation, and relationality as not culturally conditioned. It can also mean trying to claim the interpretational practices of others. For example, every year I have white female students want to claim to be womanists rather than white feminists, not seeing the violence of this act. They feel an affinity to the tenets of womanism without interrogating the power of their Whiteness and lavender existence.

Raising awareness of intention expands beyond interrogating personal or communal desires, to naming the broader agendas shaping, witnessing to others and textual interpretations on theoretical and systemic levels. Academic, political, cultural, and religious systems have agendas around the interpretations they engage. They use their power to in/validate certain interpretations and the traumas connected to them while framing public representations of textual meaning. Even trauma theory has agendas imbedded within it. For example, Wendy Brown notes that when it comes to engaging trauma, there is a propensity to “make a fetish of breaking silence” (2005, 84). Euro-American trauma theory perpetuates such a desire through the traumas it engages. While there are clearly benefits to breaking silence around violence and trauma, it can also be dangerous. For underlying desires for exposing trauma can lead to requiring or strongly urging disclosure regardless of whether those involved want to share or feel safe in sharing the accounts of their trauma. Thus, even when traumas are approached from a posture of providing assistance, broader systemic agendas and cultural assumptions require examination.

Related to acknowledging and assessing agendas is the need to identify the outcomes that one seeks from the experience of witnessing to others’ interpretations and experiences. Is there a desire for transformation for the witness or witnessing community or is the desired outcome to become more informed? Does the witness also want some sort of change to be produced from their interpretation? If so, what role does the witness play in enacting change? Because the desired outcomes may be numerous, it is important for witnesses to name their personal goals. This allows dialogue partners to gain awareness of how their position may be trying to engender certain outcomes regardless of whether they are publicly stated and/or shared by all involved. The aim is to promote greater self- and communal-intentionality that also values dialogue among all participants to understand their desires as well and promote more reciprocal forms of witnessing. Through these various elements of intentionality, the traditional image of an objective (male) witness as “an enabler of testimony, full of knowledge, in control and confident in his task” is challenged (McCormack 2014, 23). Instead, witnessing is understood to be culturally conditioned, personally and politically motivated, and requiring dialogue to address the power dynamics and desires influencing the experience. Ideally, this pushes border encounters beyond surface level acknowledgments of interpretations from those in differing positionalities to seeking genuine dialogue and transformation. The shift from singular “correct” interpretations to dialogical interpretative practices holds the potential for new interpretations to arise at and across borders.

Preparing for Border Encounters: The Petrine Household Code

Trauma-informed preparations for border encounters invite and necessitate dialogue between meaning potentials of a text. The following explores how attention to positionality, witnessing, and intent inform my initial steps of the interpretative process for the Petrine household code (1 Pet 2:13–3:7). The aim is

not to generate a definitive interpretation of the text, but rather to demonstrate how trauma-informed methods can prepare one to engage others in a dialogue around this text and its oppressive interpretative histories.

I approach the text as a white, queer feminist with a particular interest in how race and relationality shape understandings of the text. A trauma-informed approach to my interpretational process necessitates a consideration of not only how this text has perpetuated, and continues to perpetuate, violence, but also what traumas are often overlooked or erased from the interpretation process. This work necessitates a critical examination of my interpretational frameworks, particularly those originating from my white feminist and queer positionalities.

As a white feminist, my attention is drawn to how women are portrayed in the text and how feminist scholarship engages these women through gendered and racial lenses. The Petrine household code clearly brings attention to the constricted lives of women, especially wives and female slaves. Yet white feminist interpretations of the text do not always bring these multiple experiences of women into conversation. An intersectional, trauma-informed approach requires critical reflection on who is left out by seemingly comprehensive interpretations and analysis of traumas. Many feminist interpretations focus solely on the plight of women addressed in 1 Pet 3:1–6, glossing over the women addressed in 2:18–25.³ Though they have given varying rationales for this approach, only some acknowledge them. For example, Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald justify treating women and slaves in isolation due to the ways in which the social realities of slaves and wives differ (2006, 95–117).⁴ From their perspective, it is important to treat each population separately in order to best address their unique lived realities. Others solely focus on women and the broader community without more than a passing acknowledgment of slaves or the interconnectedness of those who identify as both women and slaves. Jeannine Brown’s “Silent Wives, Verbal Believers: Ethical and Hermeneutical Considerations of 1 Peter 3:1–6 and Its Context” (2004) is an example of this sort of erasure. Brown highlights the similarities of the exhortations addressed to wives in 1 Peter 3:1–6 and to the broader community in 1 Peter 3:14–16 (Brown 2004, 395–7), but she incisively challenges interpretations that equate the two groups’ experiences or those that try to lift up women as models for the community,⁵ instead showing the ways the text silences women of

³ Jennifer Glancy’s work on slavery stands as one of the only beacons for promoting an intersectional approach to the issues facing early Christian female slaves. Glancy also brings her work into dialogue with contemporary engagements with slavery (2011).

⁴ Jennifer Bird agrees with this position, seeing the need to keep the two groups separated in order to do justice to the experience of each group (2013, 26–27 n. 80). Similarly, Caryn Reeder highlights the parallels between the treatment of wives and slaves in the text, but ultimately deems them two different groups to be treated in isolation and chooses to focus on the conflicting calls for submission and equality for the wives of 1 Peter (2015, 523–4). While these perspectives point to a desire to not gloss over particularities of each group’s lived experiences, they simultaneously do a disservice to addressing the complexity of these lived realities and identities.

⁵ Joel B. Green provides an example of this line of thinking. Green highlights both slaves and wives as “parade examples of the lives of all Christians in a world of hostility and abuse,” viewing

unbelieving husbands. But this exploration of relationality of groups within the community and its ethical ramifications for contemporary Christian communities leaves out acknowledgement of slaves' experiences. While slaves are clearly not a focus for Brown's treatment, omitting any passing acknowledgement of them inadvertently perpetuates erasure of certain populations from consideration when developing communal ethics.

Naming the omissions of sustained feminist engagement with the plight of female slaves unearths erasure and violence done by interpretative practices. It also calls for critical engagement with interpretations that challenge these erasures. Clarice Martin's critique of the lack of intersectional engagement by African American interpretations of the text stands out as a challenge to those who often overlook the multiple oppressions within the text related to gender and race (1991, 225–31). Martin asks, "Why is the African American interpretative tradition marked by a forceful critique and rejection of a literalist interpretation of the slave regulation in the *Haustafeln*, but not marked by an equally passionate critique and rejection of a literalist interpretation regarding the subordination of women to men in the *Haustafeln*?" (1991, 225). Martin calls for an examination of how the traumas of slaves and wives intersect and continue to live on today. She insists that we place different oppressive practices and violence in conversation, not to equate them but to unearth potential points of connection and/or conversation.⁶ For example, both the submission of slaves and wives are sought to protect the overarching socio-political system rooted in kyriarchal hierarchies. Thus, it is important to look at how systemic traumas weave together and collaborate to protect the present status quo. For, too often, we compartmentalize traumas so that we only examine issues of race or gender, individual or collective trauma, event-based or insidious trauma, in isolation, rather than in their intersecting and compounding realities. While this allows for specificity and cleaner subjects of analysis, it does not represent the lived reality of many.

A trauma-informed preparation for border encounters also requires an examination of how my cisgender, queer positionality shapes my interpretative process. Queer approaches to 1 Peter focus on the affinity of queer folx with the strangers and exiles identified in the text. These border dwellers lack full subjecthood and protection from dominant society. Cast-out or left to reside on the fringes of family, society, and religion, many queer folx know the trials, traumas, and dangers of being labeled an outsider, an exile, a queer. But as queer cultures become increasingly integrated and capitalized upon within societies, there is a

subordination as "occupying responsibly one's place in society" to work for the greater good (2007, 91–94). In doing so, the power dynamics and oppression shaping the lived realities of these groups are downplayed significantly.

⁶ Patricia Clark's assertion that while ancient writers addressed wives and slaves in distinct ways (e.g., Livy, *History of Rome* 34.7.13–14), there was "enough cross-over in the underlying concepts of subservience and obedience" of wives and slaves within the Greco-Roman household to allow for rhetorical interplay between conceptualizations of slavery and marriage (1998, 117–8).

need to revisit and expand queer positionalities and affinities within the Petrine Haustafeln. For some queer folx, especially white queer folx, who have achieved respectability within society, their experiences are much more akin to those in dominant rather than subordinate positionalities. The text calls for a critical examination of one's positionalit(ies) within society. For as Robin Hawley Gorsline asserts, "In queer life, the author of a text such as this is most likely to be a straight gay man who does not want to lose his professional or corporate status, his second home on Fire Island, and his entrée into the best (straight and gay) social circles" (2006, 732). This challenges queer white readers to not use the text to immediately claim victimized, subordinated status, but to "use this text to claim some ancestors, while at the same time eschewing the assimilationist-sounding tactics of its author." In doing so, queer positionality in border encounters around this text remain diverse and require the naming of power and a desire to challenge readings that perpetuate the status quo.

As a queer, white woman a trauma-informed approach to the text asks not only to read, but to witness to the work of Martin, Hawley Gorsline, and others. In doing so, it asks me to refocus my own interpretation of the text by not falling into the trap of identifying as solely the (white female) victim of the text. But rather to see the multiple erasures of women's experiences in the text. It asks me to identify the ways in which my queer identity also does not place me solely in a space of victimhood, since the levels of queer respectability, especially those gained by well-educated, socioeconomically privileged, white queers, allow space to oppress.

It asks my preparation to be informed by my communities of accountability, both those inside and outside my identity demographics. It also creates space to further the interpretational conversation beyond engaging written scholarship. By bringing intentionality to the process of witnessing to other's interpretations while crafting my own, I am better prepared to engage in dialogue whether through textual or embodied conversation. This aids in the long process of building trust at the borders to discuss the erasures caused by interpretations, the lack of intersectional analysis, and the continued perpetuation of racist, sexist, heteronormative norms even when critiquing the text. It opens up space for conversation and caution. To seek potential spaces and partners to engage in cross-cultural engagements around the text, but also to acknowledge when distance is needed for safety and survival. It is an ongoing process that seeks to see interpretations and texts as living. The aim of encounters with others and their interpretations is not to formulate a "perfect" permanent interpretation, but an ever-evolving dialogue.

Justice and Border Encounters

Blount envisions border encounters and crossings as more than an academic venture. They carry potential for broader dialogue, coalition building, and liberative work. This requires that we not only seek informed intercultural encounters in

interpretations, but to expand efforts beyond crafting “woke” words on a page and toward engaging in actual embodied actions. Trauma-informed engagements with others hold space to consider new realities. These realities do not seek to return to life as it was before the encounter with others. This creates space to reconsider the aims of culturally responsive engagements. As Blount suggests, intercultural readings seek to disrupt the present interpretive structure of the academy. They envision a new distribution and understanding of power where all voices hold equal significance and “multiplicity reigns” (Blount 2019, 15).

Transforming the system carries social and political ramifications inviting us to consider how intercultural perspectives call us to address inequities and violence. Queer trauma theorist Donna McCormack highlights the potential of such a shift. McCormack points out that traditionally “healing requires a reintegration into the very family, community, nation and other social structures that are responsible for the originary violence” (2014, 19). For individuals, particularly minoritized queer folk who are regularly ostracized and pathologized, reintegration into the old system only opens them up to further violence and trauma. Thus, McCormack expands the focus from solely the victim to incorporate multiplicity through the community. She asks us to image healing as a process by which the community transforms on collective and systemic levels to aid in preventing further trauma. This reshapes encounters on personal and systemic levels into a process meant “to imagine and cultivate modes of being with others that are different, less violent and a little queerer” (McCormack 2014, 19). Such strivings help sharpen the ethical and liberative considerations surrounding interpretative work and its impacts on communities. It calls for consideration that not only expands beyond ivory towers but decenters these racist, heteronormative, privileged spaces as the sole mediators of textual interpretation.

Just as the meaning potentials of texts require intersectional analysis of the power dynamics and systemic injustices surrounding the ability to generate meaning potential, these interpretations also shine a light on the institutions within which they develop. The interpretational process asks not only how the text condones and has been used to perpetuate injustice. It asks how the very institutions within which they develop continue to perpetuate systems of injustice today. For example, within institutions there is a push to diversify faculty and administration. Predominately white faculty and institutions are clamoring to hire a broad range of scholars of color. Yet the institutions are grounded in white supremacist logic and organizational structures. They seek the faculty of color to fit into the white mold of the institution, leaving them to survive these toxic workplaces with no support system. These faculty are left to serve on an inordinate number of committees, code switch their way through meetings and collegial relationships, and worry about tenure likelihoods, all while being the face of the institution at the cost of their health, creativity, and scholarship. In addition, the role of independent scholars, adjuncts, and practitioners in these border crossings requires further attention, as the

policies and prejudices of the academy often leave their voices surrounded by an impenetrable border, labeling them as “less than.” To facilitate border encounters in scholarship necessitates an examination of how institutions address, erase, or negotiate borders within their own walls, not just within scholarship.

Blount’s call for increased border encounters holds promise for scholarship and society. These encounters offer opportunities for co-learning, co-creation, and transformation. But they also require caution, reflection, and remembrance, particularly on the part of white folx. It requires those involved to acknowledge the legacies of harm and trauma coursing under and through these encounters. In doing so, there is potential to name and disrupt cycles of violence in their interpretational and institutional practices to not only bring about more just scholarship, as well as more just institutions and societies.

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