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**Complicities, Connections, & Struggles:
Critical Transnational Feminist Analysis
of Settler Colonialism**

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Complicities, Connections, & Struggles: Critical Transnational Feminist Analysis of Settler Colonialism

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Patrick Hunter, "Harvest Moon" (12"x16" Acrylic on canvas 2011). <http://patrickhunter.ca>

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As we set out to write our Call for Papers for this issue, we, the editors, were not certain about where to begin or head. We knew that we wanted Issue 4 of *Feral Feminisms* to engage with questions of the anti-colonial and/or decolonial and anti-racist scholarship of diasporic people of colour living in white settler-colonial nation-states. However, we wanted to engage with these questions in a language that did not homogenize all bodies of colour, that was careful about respecting the different histories and presents of Black bodies, and that showed a critical understanding of the different histories and presents and different bodies and different power relations that organize our bodies here along multiple axes of race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, religion, citizenship, language, and countries of birth. This was a difficult task and one at which we very successfully failed. The failure was not just ours, though. It was the failure of our political imaginations and theoretical conceptualizations, which are not that of any one individual. This was the failure of language, of the terms and bodies from which we began. It was the failure of our anti-racist and anti-colonial politics. One thing we learned through writing the Call for Papers is that what we learn in graduate school is less about our research in terms of content or how we learn to frame our questions. It is more important to begin to engage with the limits of our knowledge and of learning how to live within those limits. Our failure and recognition of power and limits were many. There was a lot we did or did not do in terms of ethical or critical engagements with violent erasures.

Editing one issue of a journal does not make anybody expert. We have so many questions in response to the ones that arose from this issue. We wrote this editorial in the form of three questions that we had and our responses (that is, more questions) to them. These questions and responses came out from the conversations we three have been having over the period of the last year when we set out to write our Call For Papers. We are presenting this issue and this editorial with an acknowledgement of our limits and with the hope that our shortcomings will be critiqued and eventually forgiven. It is not an easy task to write anything within the context of intense violence marked by ongoing Indigenous land dispossession, manifestations of new and old forms of slavery and Black death, Islamophobia, the deaths of over 500 children once again in Palestine last summer, ordinary white settler citizens' ongoing violence, the abandonment and killing of Black and other racialized bodies, dehumanized and mutilated refugee bodies, death and disappearance of Indigenous women, occupations of lands of people of colour, drone strikes charring bodies of colour, environmental degradation and exploitation. We set out to engage with these violences and fell short of a critical engagement, and sometimes that was because of what we could not see or understand beyond knowing that we are complicit in keeping these systems of violence ongoing. However, what we do know is that these violences highlight the need for more critical engagement with race in local, transnational and intersectional ways. We also thought that something has to be said so that even a journal issue guest edited by graduate students of colour, with Indigenous and Black scholars and artists and other scholars and artists, has the potential to act as an intervention. And interventions are always partial. We understood this even when we began thinking about the name of this journal. We understand the name of this journal to be specifically anti-Black but we also hoped that it will be changed eventually. Our hope is also that this issue will raise more questions and encourage more conversations about race, anti-Blackness and Indigeneity in the future.



What brought us to the question of anti-colonial and decolonization politics of diasporic people of colour living in white settler colonies in this issue and in our scholarship and activism?

Ghaida: I'm hesitant in answering this question because my "motivation" wavers. Writing editorials feels like saying "I was here too... This whole time, I was here too behind these pages that other brilliant people wrote. I chose them, I read them, I asked them to change things... I hid behind them, but I was there too, and yet, now, I don't know what to say, I don't know if I should say it, I don't know why I got into this in the first place." I was tempted to write this editorial as a list of 100 questions, but hiding behind these questions seemed evasive in the face of a deeper question: "How do I write when I have nothing brilliant to say?" While part of me feels like turning back because these conversations are complicated and contentious and I'm a young scholar who is predisposed to saying all the wrong things... I feel like there is more at stake by not having these conversations. I'll start with why I feel pulled by this conversation, why I want to invite it and why I deem that, although my experiences, thoughts, or knowledge are not singular or special in any way, engaging in these questions seems necessary to me at this point in time. I teach and learn in most of my waking hours and I still believe that the work that we do as scholars—as tainted and constrained as it can be and often is—is meant to matter, when it either fails or succeeds, or when, more often than not, it both fails and succeeds. The title of co-editor that I have taken up refers mostly to my role in deeming the questions and themes laid out in this issue and the people engaging in them important enough to be featured in conversation. My awareness and politicization concerning settler colonialism and violence targeting Indigenous peoples more broadly is perhaps more recent than some. Living on someone else's land was always my experience here as a racialized immigrant, but not until pretty late in my life did I start to know of this land as Indigenous land. I grew up in a very white neighborhood in Québec and we weren't taught much in school about Indigeneity, colonization, settler colonialism, or even race, for that matter. My politicization around violence against Indigenous people came in tandem with my politicization on other issues such as sex, gender, class, and race. These were still pretty basic understandings—not until two years ago, in the context of a graduate seminar, did I become aware of dynamics that placed Indigenous people and people of colour in any type of relationship. It forced me to rethink dynamics beyond me/whiteness, Indigenous peoples/whiteness, all the while still being aware of the settler-colonial white-supremacist context in which I live. I am still very much wrapped in the complexity of this shift. And while this story isn't about me or my journey, I think it's important not to erase this point-of-entry because it has been formative of the motivation behind this issue. To a large extent, too, after reading Lawrence and Dua (2005) and Sharma and Wright's (2009) articles, now widely used as academic entry points into this conversation, I've felt that there is little space to engage critically with these texts. In the academic context, I have experienced fixations over the terms "settler of colour" and pre-formulated and deep-seated arguments in favour of one text or the other. I hear people who whole-heartedly agree and whole-heartedly disagree and very little honest conversation that leaves room for complexity or for asking what possibilities these conversations are opening and closing. My role as a co-organizer for the "Decolonizing Anti-Racism" Social and Political Thought conference at York University in 2014 added to this questioning. For instance, how can we hold both complicity and common grounds as two presences that sometimes cancel each other out, sometimes fuel alliances, and other times are used to uphold each other? How are white settlers using current discourses to further marginalize and oppress racialized people by acting as gatekeepers or "good confessional settlers"? How is recognition of complicity acting as a substitute for,



technique, or absolved of something beyond recognition? How are the politics of language signifying “good and bad politics” and limiting when and how we speak of what needs to be spoken about? How do some “critical” subjects gain currency and value and what does it mean when critical theory aligns with state policies? What makes this subject so contentious that never in my years in academia have I seen more heated debates than on the question of people of colour being settlers (and how is this fixation perhaps taking away from a larger project that was intended by the introduction of this idea in the first place)? Most importantly, how do we move beyond self-reflection and acknowledgement towards that something more that is needed? I hoped that this issue might bring some answers to these questions or more importantly open up discussions that are complex and un-easy (if not unsafe) to answer. In this way, my hesitation for engaging is my motivation to engage.

Nishant: After the 2014 Social and Political Thought graduate conference at York University, Ghaida approached me to be part of the project. Apart from the excitement to work with Ghaida and Shaista on what sounded like an exciting and a much-needed project, the impetus to join was also to bring in a critical engagement with race into the analysis of settler colonialism. For the last few years I have tried to engage, both in the academy and outside, as to what it means to be a racialized, brown, queer, upper-caste South Asian person on stolen lands. As non-Indigenous, non-Black, and non-white persons in the white-settler state, our presence here is often ambiguous, contested, and contradictory. As we discuss below, not all people of colour are situated similarly and homogeneously in the settler state. Furthermore, these complexities and contradictions need to be worked out and race needs to be understood more rigorously within the mechanics of white-settler colonialism.

I am not saying scholarship and activism on and against settler colonialism has effaced questions of race. Rather, I want to say the questions have not been taken up as urgently by people of colour. For Indigenous scholars, activists, and artists, the materialities and struggles against settler colonialism and white supremacy are different and we need to recognize those differences. Within the academy, and often outside, white people have taken a monopoly on questions of settler colonialism. I think the recent rise in settler-colonial studies is a testament to that. White scholars and activists are given much more credibility for doing this work than even Indigenous scholars. We know that community organizing and resistance led by Indigenous women and two-spirit folks continually goes unrecognized, whereas academic and “solidarity” work by white folks gets valorized and celebrated. The domination of settler-colonial studies by white academics and activists erases Indigenous scholarship and the scholarship of people of colour and Black people that challenges settler colonialism and white supremacy through other disciplines. Indigenous scholarship is not settler-colonial studies, even though Indigenous scholars may work within it. As people of colour, we need to find ways to engage more with Indigenous and Native studies rather than with settler-colonial studies. For me working on this issue is a way of seeking new ways of theorizing race within settler colonialism, even if a bit over-ambitiously.

Shaista: My academic and political investments are in theorizing ways of building solidarity between Muslims, other racialized peoples, and the Indigenous peoples of Canada. After 9/11, the heightened sense of racial injury I experienced as a Muslim woman was the foundation of my activist and academic work. As I navigated various spaces between the U.S. and Canada, I was constantly angered about how brown bodies were racially profiled in predominantly non-Muslim (mostly white) public (and private) spaces. I was angry at the racism directed against me, at my body, and at the bodies of those who looked like me. Furthermore, I was willing to live up to the



stereotype of the angry Muslim to defend myself against anyone who thought that I needed any kind of saving from my “culture.” My Master’s thesis was a study of the post-9/11 *Anti-terrorism Act* of Canada in which I examined how racial violences against Muslims have been legally sanctioned and actively participated in by ordinary Canadian citizens. Later in my Doctoral studies I began to read up on Canadian settler-colonial histories and the contemporary routinized exercise of colonial violence against Indigenous peoples of North America. It was then that I began to understand how this labeling of Muslim bodies as terrorists was the legacy of a white-supremacist settler-colonial governmentality that continues to label Indigenous peoples of this land as terrorists and then targets them for disappearance and death. As I reflected on colonial violence, my politics became guided by the question of who are these other bodies being targeted and whose lands I now live on. How could I live on this land, on which my presence was facilitated through the very colonial and racist institution of citizenship, and talk about violence directed at my body and at my people, without situating that violence and my work for social justice within the history of a nation-state literally founded on the dead bodies or presumed to be always-already dead and erased nations of Indigenous peoples? Of course these questions too are very partial, and constituted through several other erasures of bodies and histories. I have come to realize that I am not even sure anymore of the kinds of questions I should be asking in my scholarship. Indigenous feminist scholarship has been central to how I came to critically think about Canada as a white settler colonial space and make connections between questions of Indigenous sovereignty and Western imperial and colonial projects outside of North America. I first came to think about these connections through works of scholars such as Lee Maracle (Sto:Lo), Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux), Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw) and Zainab Amadahy (Black and Cherokee) and so many others. Indigenous feminist scholarship is asking us to reframe our (immigrant and settler) demands for social justice in ways that I did not consider before engaging with their scholarship. I credit them and their words for demanding from all of us not only critical anti-colonial and anti-racist scholarship-organizing related to our present/presence here but also a reframing of futures that have less violence, wars, genocides and more humanity, peace, justice and compassion.

How do we understand our complicity in white-settler colonialism and in other systems of domination? Why is this question of complicity important for us as people of colour (PoC)?

Shaista: Talking about the complicity of people of colour in white-settler colonialism usually traces along the same coordinates as white people’s complicity. Discussions of complicity more or less turn into questions of the settlerhood and settlerness of people of colour. In various activist and academic spaces here in Toronto, I have seen the question of complicity often being addressed by determining which person of colour has what privileges and to what extent one is a settler. Some common scenarios include:

- 1) Acknowledging settler privilege through a ritualistic performance of confessions (long live Freud’s couch) where people of colour and white people go through the laundry list of their privileges, recounting the ways in which they are complicit in white-settler colonialism in Canada: heterosexuality, Canadian citizenship, socio-economic privileges, cisgender, etc.
- 2) Usually a white man or a man of colour (in PoC-only spaces) challenges those people of colour identifying as settlers. He/They ask the most dreaded question: “Is a refugee a



settler?” and then consumes the next two hours of the meeting by specifying how refugees are not settlers, how only migrants with certain privileges are settlers, how the point of confessions is not to go back home, who has home, who can leave, etc. Soon, it's 10pm and we all want to leave and go home to watch Netflix. We are so burnt out that we lose the significance of the context and work that had first called us together.

3) White people (usually tearfully) admit to their settlerness but at the expense of their whiteness. These confessions do the work of placing people of colour on an equal footing with white people, while suspending the violence of whiteness and white supremacy. It then becomes the responsibility of people of colour to call out these white people on racial erasures and on their colonial histories and presents, which are different from colonized pasts and racialized presents of people of colour. Soon, once again, it is 10pm...

The scenarios above illustrate situations that people of colour have often been in in various activist (and academic) spaces that engage with discussions on white-settler colonialism, Indigenous sovereignty, and our place here. Discussions of complicity, for us, have often been framed in the language of our settlerness (by us and even by white settlers). However, the term “settler of colour” is taken up more enthusiastically than ever before by the generation of mostly graduate students and activists who are taking up questions of our place on this land and rejecting the settler state's invitation to become docile and grateful immigrants. However, sometimes we frame it as a progress narrative where the activism of our parents and grandparents here in 1970s to late 1990s is understood as simply a fight for inclusion while we, the generation born in 1980s and 1990s, are better, more radical, more critical, more anti-colonial. While the critiques we have are needed, the more important questions to ask is what have been the shifts in white settler governmentality to allow us to imagine ourselves as settlers of colour in this moment (rather than as immigrants only)?

What happens when complicity with the white settler state is framed through the term “settler of colour”? Is such recognition of ourselves necessarily more political? In the late 2000s, I wrote a letter to a Marxist theory journal asking the question, “Where are the Settlers of Colour?” The immense circulation of that letter definitely pointed to the fact that we people of colour are asking questions about our complicity, about our place in keeping colonial violence ongoing while at the same time fighting racial injustices against our bodies. However, since then, I have often feared that in an era of the neoliberal state's (empty and apolitical) apologies and (irrelevant) recognition of its “past” (but never the present), naming bodies of colour as settlers and then debating who is not really a settler in the same way as I am, has done nothing for letting us think about how deep, complicated and transnational the question of our complicity is in not only white settler colonialism but also in white supremacy. Words become empty (and therefore dangerous) when the failure of our political imagination does not allow us to consider the multiplicity of violence(s) and complexities of resistance narratives and strategies.

Complicity, I believe, is like the nine-headed hydra with its heads all raised at the same time. As somebody really struggling with thinking about complicity in more historical ways as well, I am not asking you to let go of the term “settler of colour” if this is indeed how you identify. But I am asking that we all think more critically about the question of complicity more broadly as well, and as something beyond the confessions saved for our meetings. In her book, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, Caribbean feminist scholar, Jacqui Alexander (2006) writes, “neither complicity (usually cathected onto someone else) nor vigilance (usually reserved for ourselves) is given to any of us *before* the fact of our living” (272, emphasis in original). As people often coming from post-



colonies, with broken connections with our histories, it is then important to consider how is it that we live and in this living what have we forgotten or even forgotten what we have forgotten? If we begin to remember, how much more complexity will our reading of our place here require?

Certainly, as is shown by that letter I mentioned and perhaps even what I am writing here, I have forgotten a lot. But even thinking about how I am living this complicity requires me to ask whether my analysis of complicity as a Pakistani Muslim woman should begin here or does it begin back in the city of my birth, Karachi, where there are forsaken areas marked by police violence? Where there are areas known as the Harlem of Karachi (officially known as Lyari) where intense violence happens because of anti-Blackness and areas where class-privileged, brown-skinned Pakistanis like myself would never go? And these are the “far flung” areas where the domestic servants working in our homes come from. These areas exist in my city and yet they are a different world to us class-privileged, born-with-foreign-passports Pakistanis. Should my mappings of complicity begin with accounting for my last name and the caste privileges, which cemented my right to different passports and promised an easier entry and place in the diaspora (Soundarajan and Varatharaja 2015)? Some of these questions are a call to expand the limits, forms, and histories of our understanding of my complicity. So perhaps we need to expand on the kinds of projects to which we can ethically commit. Let us have discussions about the connections which have always existed and through which we exist, so that I/we do not continue to set up fences around what we find ourselves complicit in.

As I said before, I write this as somebody whose work is reflective of several forgettings and failures (of political imagination). Having little understanding of the complexity of systems of oppression that have constituted Canada, my letter in that journal made sense only through some prominent erasures of not only the ways in which people of colour are deployed by the white settler state to work for it, but also of Black bodies upon whose labour the white nation-state is hinged. Along with complicity and settler of colour, I think we also need to be careful about who we refer to by “people of colour”. Over the last few years, I have been carefully thinking about what terms such as “people of colour” do for our politics and fight for freedoms and liberations. I am less willing to be arrogant enough to suggest that we do away with a term of politicized non-belonging adopted by Black women and immigrant women in North America who often came together to fight for life and freedoms against the white settler state. But this term also keeps demanding from us an examination of the heterogeneity of bodies, histories and power relations that constitute it. As Alexander discusses in relation to the category “women of color”:

We are not born women of color. We become women of color. In order to become women of color, we would need to become fluent in each others’ histories, to resist and unlearn an impulse to claim first oppression, most-devastating oppression, one-of-a-kind oppression, defying comparison oppression. We would have to unlearn an impulse that allows mythologies about each other to replace *knowing* about one another. We would need to cultivate a way of knowing in which we direct our social, cultural, psychic, and spiritually marked attention on each other. (269, emphasis in original)

This unlearning of colonial and racist readings of Others and cultivating ways of ethically beginning to know the Other, to acknowledge and recognize the Other in ways that is outside of liberal forms of recognition practiced by the white settler state is perhaps one of the more important challenges for all those of us who see ourselves as people of color. Recently, I have been noticing the term non-Black people of colour in circulation. It is a term to tell brown-skinned people of colour that we are not the same as Black people, that our histories are different and that we cannot talk about complicity as settlers here without simultaneously thinking about



our complicity in anti-Blackness since the white settler state is also the plantation state. For me, this term has also prompted questions about how am I taking up questions about violence against my body.

If our task as theorists-activists is to constantly think about what concepts do for us, for our fights, rather than what we can do for the concepts then perhaps thinking about adding modifiers to the term PoC is very much needed. These same erasures also made my article on Muslim feminist activism in *The Feminist Wire* possible. Encouraging my fellow (brown) Muslims to seek alternative and creative ways of confronting and challenging Islamophobia and not asking the white settler state for justice, I asked fellow-Muslims to begin with an understanding that Islamophobia is also a white settler colonial state project. However, in one paragraph, I stated that Muslims arrived in North America in 19th century while “forgetting” that hundreds of thousands of Black Muslims were brought to these lands chained and caged on slave ships. In Canada itself, Black Muslim bodies remain incarcerated in housing projects that often have a direct pipeline to prisons. Rather, I should say, from plantations to prisons. Police brutality against Somali Muslims and other Black bodies here is no secret, even if (structurally) ignored in our (non-Black) resistance narratives. So then, how does talking about settlerness and settlements make any sense through these erasures of Black Muslims and Blackness? What does it mean to think of Muslim bodies as only and always Brown? Where and how do we engage with anti-Blackness in diaspora and in the very constitution of white settler colonialism? If the term settler of colour signifies an acknowledgement of our place in the workings of white settler colonialism, then do we also use/invent new terms for talking about my anti-Blackness as a Brown Muslims? How can we talk about Islamophobia here without letting go of it as simultaneously a white settler project that is also anti-black? My own anti-Blackness comes from not only the dinner table conversations I heard every day growing up, but also from my lack of knowledge of histories and from the very limited understanding of what Muslim bodies should look like.

All of this is to say that I am less excited by the question of whether or not people of colour are indeed settlers, and that nothing terrifies me more than being confronted with the “Is a refugee a settler?” question. Such dangerously rhetorical questions are meant to flatten structures of oppression and our histories into mere categories on questionnaires. Also, in these cases, settler becomes about a degree of privilege, translated into degrees of settlerness. If I own any property here, am I more of a settler than those who do not? Is an immigrant of colour who has been here for only two years less complicit than a “Pakistani-Canadian” born here? The discussions which often frame the coordinates of complicity become just as exhausting as the scenarios with which I opened my response.

Lastly, I want to say that some of us came here from post-colonies where we received a colonial education that instilled in us all the skills required for upholding white supremacy. Unlearning what we were taught in schools means beginning to recognize each other as Alexander tells us. Unlearning also means thinking about our place in these systems of domination and subordination and to talk about our complicity and understand that surely our complicity has taken many forms and it has preceded our bodies and last few decades of presence here. Maybe those of us in academia can begin with who are we reading? Are we following certain “trends”? The question is not only one of whose bodies we are standing on, but also whose bodies and scholarship we continue to exploit in order to present ourselves in solidarity with Indigenous and Black people here. Or, in order to get the next publication out.

Ghaida: Mostly here I’m interested in when acknowledgement or recognition of complicity results in catharsis. I’m sure there’s more to it than that, yet it seems like recognition holds the



most value in the circles I move in. “You forgot to mention you’re a settler”—that’s how it happens sometimes. How do we move beyond this? Can we have conversations where complicity isn’t formulaic, or abstract, but rather based in the ways we think, act, and live...and how do these ways we think, act, and live need to change in the concrete?

Nishant: When talking about racialized complicities, the conversation usually starts, and often ends, at the term “settler of colour.” As someone who got politicized around settler colonialism by reading Bonita Lawrence and Ena Dua’s (2005) critique of anti-racist organizing, I do take the term “settler of colour” seriously. I think it is critical and it does—and has the potential to do—a lot of anti-colonial political work. I do, however, understand the limitations of the term. Obviously not all people of colour are complicit in the settler colonial project. First, we need to understand that racialized peoples are differently situated than white settlers. Secondly, race, caste, gender, class, sexuality, ability, religion, migration status and histories all determine people’s positioning in the settler state.

The term “settler of colour” has been more than formative in developing a personal understanding of my own privilege and complicities, as well as my academic and political work, in the settler state. However, I am moving away from the homogenization of all people of colour as settlers of colour. As Tiffany King’s piece says in this issue, we need to create new grammars to understand these complicated processes. I think we need to go beyond the term and find new ways of understanding racialized complicities and privileges. Complicity cannot be theorised in isolation. Complicity in one structure does not erase complicities in others. Rather, they are always enabled by, and enable other structures of complicity. How were people theorizing these complicities before the phrase became cool and sexy? How did people understand their positions in the settler colonial state? How are we as people of colour committed to decolonization of Indigenous nations and lands? How do we understand complicities through and within other structures of racial violences like anti-black racism, Islamophobia, exclusionary citizenship? As South Asian (Indian from India, to be precise), how do I engage with my complicities in structures of brahmanical supremacy, which maintains interlocking systems of violences through caste, Indigeneity, religion, nation and occupations? If we think of structures of violences and oppressions, intersectionally and transnationally, As Dhamoon argues in her essay in this collection, then complicity is not limited to just one structure. We need to look at these questions historically and contemporarily, as well as thinking about the future.

That said I also don’t buy a complete rejection of the phrase. We can’t just say all people of colour are not settlers of colour and hence the term is not valid. That rejection has created binaries, and produced toxicities and frictions. We know through our experiences how working through our complicities is difficult. Firstly, geographies of settler colonialism and white supremacy have ensured that Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour don’t have many spaces to interact and come together. Further it has created frictions and tensions between these communities that are often hard to unsettle. This is not to say that these communities have had not interacted before, lived together, and fought together. What I am trying to say is that there are models of these intimacies, proximities, and alliances to build on contemporarily. And the debates around the term “settler of colour” make this work even more difficult. The resistance to the term in academia as well as in activist spaces has closed off many spaces instead of creating new(er) ones. We need to work with frictions but not make them so toxic that the analysis and work stops. While I understand the critique of performative self-identification as settler, I am also wary of not naming the complicities. What happens when we do not name? What gets invisibilized when we stop explicitly naming and identifying our presence as non-Indigenous peoples on these lands? This is the tricky thing about identity politics or ally identity politics. But



naming itself is a very limiting political act as it may not be critically intersectional. Yet it still does something...

I think coming to an understanding that Indigenous, Black and racialized peoples have colonial and racial pasts, presents, and futures, albeit in different, complex, and varying ways is the common ground for alliances and solidarity. But often anti-racist and anti-colonial work stops there. We need to analyze the complexity, contradictions, and complicities in these global, yet localized, processes. We also need to bring an analysis of heteropatriarchy and capitalism to the work of organizing and theorizing together. This, too, is discursive and it is difficult to go beyond these words. In activist, academic, and artist works, including in my own work, I have seen how we are limited by words and theorizing concepts. We have very few models available to demonstrate ways of organizing together and often the differences in power between our communities prevent us from imagining new and alternative relationships of solidarity. I think the words fail because we remain too obsessed with being politically correct, too insecure in drawing inter-connections and solidarities with other communities and too scared of taking risks and experiencing failure. My understanding is informed by my own experiences of academic and activist failures. We need to let go of ourselves, and make ourselves vulnerable—going beyond political fights and ego—and we need to be more willing to ask what is really at stake when we are aligned with the settler state. I don't necessarily agree with the idea that non-Indigenous peoples can be Indigenous and decolonized if they are in solidarity with struggles of Indigenous self-determination. For me it's not about Indigenousization or decolonization of the self (although the latter is crucial work that everyone needs to strive for). I believe we need to develop our understanding that Indigenous lands first need to be decolonized before we ourselves can claim to be decolonized. We need creative and ethical ways to develop relationships of solidarity with Indigenous nations in order to effectively support struggles for Indigenous sovereignty across Turtle Island.

What is our relation to transnational feminisms? What connections do we see between transnational feminist analyses and questions of settler colonialism, Indigenous sovereignty, and race? What are the limitations of transnational feminist frameworks within settler colonial contexts?

Ghaida: The choice of using “transnational feminisms” in the call out title for this issue has had mixed results. On the one hand, I think that a fair amount of submissions did engage with this approach, though not always explicitly. On the other hand, I think perhaps it was a deterrent—it closed off conversations and left out some submissions that would have otherwise been submitted. People may have thought, “oh that's not what I'm working on,” or “that's not what I'm doing” even though their work might very much be relevant to the conversations we are seeking to generate. There was admittedly a very small response by Indigenous people for this issue, and while I cannot claim the reasons for that, a part of it might have been that transnational feminism might not seem so relevant when settler-colonialism is only recently being discussed in academic circles and that transnational feminism has been mobilized by some to dismiss calls for nationhood and sovereignty, or in general hasn't really engaged with settler-colonialism studies and Native studies. At the same time, we did make that choice for specific reasons, perhaps with the hope that it might help converse about some of the questions we were raising, such as what kinds of alliances are possible, and what kinds of complicities are involved in these relationships (that not only include individual people and their own places individually, but also take place between countries and between histories of colonization). And those questions are still very



much relevant. For example, how are policies that infringe on Indigenous peoples' self-determination, the securitization of Canadian state borders, and imperialism abroad working in tandem? These conversations are where we meet. This approach perhaps helps us move our understandings of complicity and alliances beyond rhetoric, focusing on the ways we use where we are situated in the world, how we got there, and how we are pulled by structures that are larger than us to collaborate in dismantling these structures, even if that means dismantling parts of ourselves.

Nishant: While there are many definitions for transnational feminism available, there are three fundamental aspects which stand out for me and which make transnational feminism a crucial lens for the work we hope to do. First, transnational feminisms is defined by a deep and critical commitment to anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, and feminist frameworks. Consequently, it focuses on intersectional, interlocking, overlapping, cross-cultural analysis of gender, race, class, sexuality, and nationality. Second, transnational feminisms emphasizes questions of the geopolitics of epistemology, knowledge production, and the role of the intellectual and the academy. Third, it offers a commitment to rupture and destabilize the geopolitical boundaries of nation-states and the academy, bringing "here and there" together into one frame.

There is a marked absence of meaningful acknowledgment, engagement, and theorization of settler colonialism within transnational feminisms. There are two ways in which transnational feminist analysis has not taken into account questions of settler colonialism. First, in theorizing gender through intersecting processes of colonialism and capitalism, there is no room for Indigenous women in the analysis. For instance, Mohanram (1999) in her sharp critique of Mohanty's now-classic essay "Under Western Eyes" has shown how Mohanty symptomatically reproduces the third world woman as homogenous across histories and geographies, a frame which Mohanty herself critiques. Further, Mohanram argued, there is no space for the struggles of Native American women in Mohanty's analysis. To her credit, Mohanty (2003) acknowledged this limitation in her revised essay "Under Western Eyes' Revisited" and argued that Indigenous women's struggles do not follow a post-colonial trajectory and cannot be addressed easily under the categories such as "western" and "third world." Alexander and Mohanty further elaborate: "If to talk about space is to talk also about geography then to talk about geography is to talk about land, and the fierce contestations over land that are at the centre of both neoimperial and colonial land appropriation" (Alexander and Mohanty 2010, 39). It is hence urgent to theorize white settler colonization as it continues to be: "an important dimension of the spatialization of power at this very moment in history" (39). However, indigeneity and gender still remain under-theorized by transnational feminists. The second shortcoming is the theorization of nations and nation-states. There is often an impulse amongst transnational feminists to reject all forms of nations and nationalisms. Obviously, this doesn't sit well with Indigenous feminists who have struggled for generations against the colonization of their nations and lands. Given that transnational feminist scholarships primarily come out of white settler states, these shortcomings are critical and need to be further interrogated.

There were obvious limitations in our analyses that are reflected in the CFP and the majority of the submissions we received. Given that we extended our deadlines to get submissions from Indigenous and Black authors and artists, there is obviously something missing in a transnational feminist analysis. Maybe it is our positioning as transnational diasporic people of colour that allows us to engage with transnational feminist scholarship; without this positioning, other folks may not feel as connected to or passionate about transnational feminisms. There are more obvious links between transnational feminisms and



Black feminisms; however, as pointed to above, the same cannot be argued for Indigenous feminisms.

In spite of these shortcomings, I think there is room to think about a transnational feminist analysis of settler colonialism which offers us to think transnationally and intersectionally, as Rita Dhamoon's paper demonstrates. It allows us to think about race and colonialism in local and global contexts, and it helps us centre gender in the conversation. Further, it enables a critical theorization of migration in both local and global contexts. I think bringing transnational feminist analysis to an understanding of settler colonialism in this political moment lets us draw connections between the destruction of lands, waters, and recourses by settler economies in Indigenous economies to the exploitation of racialized and migrant labour within these economies. It helps us make sense of the settler security state that deports people of colour, targets Indigenous sovereignties and incarcerates, and often kills, Indigenous, Black and people of colour at higher rates than white settlers. It allows for an understanding of gender and white heteropatriarchies that affect, in very different ways, Indigenous, Black and racialized communities, and targets women, trans and queer bodies specifically.

There is clearly still much work to be done before transnational feminist analyses can effectively critique settler colonialism and engage with the work of Indigenous feminists. To begin with, the national in the transnational will need to be further decolonized before transnational feminisms can ethically engage with ongoing projects of colonialism in Indigenous nations. However, I believe that transnational feminisms has an important role to play in challenging settler colonialism and can be used to work in solidarity with the decolonization of Indigenous nations.

Shaista: What accounts for the transnational part of feminist politics? Who does transnational feminist politics? Chickasaw scholar, Chadwick Allen (2012) writes that the "transnational" is the "old and ongoing story of story" (2). The story that began before Christopher Columbus set out to look for India. It's the story of present that began before our forgetting of what we have forgotten. I do not know what it means to situate my work in transnational feminist studies as a field of study in Canada, but I hope that the connections I am making between the "Old World" and the "New World" in my scholarship are transnational, in that they follow links that are beyond the boundaries of the nation-states, temporalities and violences.

But the question of who is seen as doing transnational studies is an important one. Is some theorizing always already transnational? For instance, are calls to end the heteropatriarchal white settler plantation police nation-state not calls for other means of connecting and knowing? For Indigenous and Black feminists, (white settler, genocidal, plantation) nation-states have never been the place of hope, and every feminist engagement has eventually been about ending it. Can we acknowledge that Black feminist writers theorizing the slave body and slave ships are already doing transnational feminist work? As Black scholars remind us, Blackness is always transnational, always larger and bigger than the borders of nation-states. What can we name as more fluid, vibrant, and transnational than the Atlantic and the Black bodies buried deep in its' heart? So some fields of study and their projects become limited to the local while in actuality the bodies they centre and the ontological and epistemological questions they ask are always already transnational, anti-racist and anti-colonial in scope. For those of us who work with the question of violence against Indigenous, Black and other bodies of colour, we are required to pay attention to the fact that these violences are intimately connected across spaces and times. As I said above in my response to the previous question, for some of us, the question of complicity here as people living on stolen land, requires



that we look into our histories and that we pay attention to all bodies who continue to demand that we ethically engage with violences. Paying attention to such questions moves us across continents, from past into present and back into the past and so forth. It asks us to trace the contradictions of the Empire which places us as both victims of violence but also as perpetrators of violence. As Lisa Lowe (2015) reminds us in her groundbreaking work on the intimacies of the four continents of Asia, Europe, Africa and Americas, “There is an ethics and politics in struggling to comprehend the particular *loss* of the intimacies of four continents, to engage slavery, genocide, indenture, and liberalism as a conjunction, as an actively acknowledged loss within the present” (207, emphasis in original).

I want to end by thinking about the question of violence against Indigenous women and women of colour as an example of a question that is always already transnational. The response of the state and mainstream feminist movement to violence against non-Black women of colour, always seen as immigrants regardless of whether or not we were born in Canada, becomes about our culture only. We become marked by our seemingly backward and monolithic culture as women who must be saved from our “death by culture” (Narayan, 1997) by the benevolent state and its machinery of Non-governmental organizations that often do little than take a “band-aid” approach to addressing violence against our bodies. Violence then becomes about the heteropatriarchal private sphere where only brown men beat up us women of colour. Equally importantly, as several anti-racist feminist Canadian women of colour scholars such as Sunera Thobani, Sherene Razack and Yasmin Jiwani, among others, have shown, such markings by culture also aid in the invasion of Muslim countries so that even drone strikes and charred bodies of colour can be defended as a feminist project of saving brown women from brown men (even as brown women literally lie dead under the rubble). And this narrative continues as women of colour refugees and immigrants continue to be deported to their “countries of origin” where some become targeted for (more) violence. Bill S-7, The Zero Tolerance for Barbaric Cultural Practices Act, is not just about Muslim bodies within the Canadian borders or at its borders. Its work is transnational. Similarly, looking into murders of Black women demands looking into police brutality that upholds the Master/Slave relations of power into the present moment. Looking into Black women’s deaths brings to fore intimacies of the four continents and the intimacies of the Old World and the New World. At what point does one begin or end their analysis on violence against Black women? I do not know. This work is transnational. Indigenous women on the other hand are seen as a dying race and their deaths (at the hands of the white state and its ordinary white settler citizen subjects) needs to continue if Indigenous sovereignty has to be suspended and superseded by the white settler colonial sovereignty of Canada. Their disappearance and deaths continue with impunity as the government (regardless of which party is in power) has continued with its sham inquiries into murders and disappearances of Indigenous women. Deaths of both become necessary albeit for very different purposes. One “set” of deaths is integral for the settler colonial governmentality to safeguard its national colonial sovereignty and the other guarantees access to imperial and colonial capitalist gains outside of the nation-state’s boundaries. Such critical readings of violence against women here are therefore always transnational. It was also this critical understanding of transnational which informed our Call for Papers for this issue. While not all of the pieces use the framework of transnational feminist studies per se, each submission engages with the transnational by challenging the borders of the white settler nation-state and engaging with bodies that were either never supposed to be here or at least not as (fully) human bodies in white settler spaces.

I understand that transnational feminism in academia comes out of particular historical moments in the US and Canadian academy. We, people of colour, are deeply indebted to the field of feminist studies that challenged the monolithic reading of “Third World Women,” paid



attention to the question of power, and conceptualized new forms of transnational solidarities and collaborations. My point is not that transnational feminist studies as a sub-field is not important. I heartily agree with my co-editors on their take on transnational feminism, and greatly appreciate Rita Dhamoon's call for transnationalism and intersectionality to be brought into conversation with white settler colonialism. What I have been thinking about is that we think critically about who gets to say that they are doing transnational studies. Also, as contributors and editors in this issue have stated, how and where are the Indigenous bodies placed in transnational studies? Does our scholarship continue to adhere to the vertical hierarchy of the white settler always above the Indigenous while claiming to read for horizontal and asymmetrical relations of power among the differently colonized and racialized?

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