

AN INTRODUCTION: “INDIGENOUS FEMINISMS: WHY TRANSNATIONAL? WHY NOW?”

As we wrap up and gather thoughts on the “Transnational Indigenous Feminisms” dossier, I am acutely aware, here sitting on the land of the Quinnipiac people of the Turtle Island, otherwise known as New Haven, Connecticut, more than ever, of the critical crossroads we are at concerning Indigenous peoples and promises that transnational Indigenous feminisms hold. Merely weeks from the conclusion of the fifteenth session of the United National Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII), arguably the most significant and largest global political platform for world Indigenous peoples, we have witnessed a turn in measures and processes, proposed and presented with what appears to be very little consultation with the Indigenous peoples on many of the critical matters concerning Indigenous peoples.

Ironically, it is precisely all the extraordinary dynamic exchanges, all the transnational feminist work —whether called such or not— among the Indigenous activists, scholars, artists (of all genders, generations, and directions) that have made the UNPFII sessions, since 2002, tremendously fertile soil for furthering Indigenous, transnational, and feminist dialogues and projects. For fifteen years, since its opening session in 2002, the UNPFII has brought together, yearly, the largest Indigenous gathering of elders, leaders, activists, scholars, writers, artists, and allies in the United Nations for two weeks —with an attendance of over 2,000 from all over the world. The forum has provided an extraordinary incubator and nurtured many Indigenous, feminist collaborations. As an attendee in the UNPFII since 2004, I have witnessed and learned many connections and reconnections among Indigenous feminist activists and scholars that have led to projects and programs.

In many ways, we can consider the genesis of this dossier as one by-product of the connections out of the UNPFII work. Inspired by the many projects that seem to have sprung off, we called for submissions that consider, explore, and examine/re-examine the transnational feminist articulations from the Fourth

World, Indigenous perspectives. Indeed, we sought to showcase the complex web of the Indigenous feminist collaborations and struggles that defy the imperial, (neo) colonial, and neoliberal politics and boundaries of nation-states —projects that have proliferated, in no small part thanks to the UNPFII platform. Implicit in Coro J-A Juanena’s analysis and overview of Indigenous women in the global feminist movement, “Mujeres Indígenas, feminismo y condición postcolonial”, is the transnational (global) Indigenous women’s networking through international organizations such as the UNPFII.

By Indigenous feminism, as the essays included in this dossier make clear, we highlight the anti-(hetero-)patriarchal, anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-white supremacist practices by women, men, and/with their communities, termed variously as “Indigenous”, “Aboriginal”, “First-Nation”, “Indian”, or “Native”, along with their allies, from the North to the South, from the East to the West. These practices, among the oldest in the human community, are rooted in a cosmology, a way of life that deems all beings as relations. It is evidenced in the Lakota greeting/saying “mitakuye oyasin” (“all our relations” or “we are all related”) or in the Mohawk thanksgiving address. One could perhaps argue that any earnest Indigenous project is necessarily feminist, whether termed such or not. In this dossier, Ingrid Washinawatok’s reflections on work towards peace are words from the depth of the “mitakuye oyasin” worldview and so are those found in Myrian Sanchez’s “Espiritualidad Indígena y participación femenina”.

At the same time, we are fully cognizant that the term “Indigenous feminism” is not unchallenged. Those for whom feminism is associated with the mainstream women’s movement of the West consider the mere association of “feminism” with “Indigenous” could be regarded as troubling, as the sweeping statement of the sexist and patriarchal oppression of women and girls does not always reflect Indigenous women’s and Indigenous peoples’ conditions. In this dossier, we present a sampling slice both of theorizing and of description of practices of transnational Indigenous feminism. We do not purport to represent projects in all four directions, an American Indian notion denoting the world. The gathering of some ten voices in this dossier, many identified as Indigenous (Hsieh, Juanena, Sánchez, and Washinawatok El-Issa), presents a re-thinking, re-angling, and expanding of the transnational feminist discourses from and through the Indigenous perspective.

Indigenous feminist work has almost always been transnational, translational, and boundary crossing. It was global long before “global” and “trans-national” became buzzwords —and turned into academic currency. Arguably one key transnational Indigenous feminist project that spans a good part of the second half of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, was adopted by the UN General Assembly on September 13, 2007. A document of three decades plus in the making, the declaration would not have

been without Indigenous peoples' transnational and feminist networking. Transnational Indigenous feminism is also evidenced in another exemplary collective effort called the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers (2004-).

In this dossier, Ingrid Washinawatok El-Issa's work —fiercely Indigenous, feminist, and transnational— is underscored through a reprint of her widely read speech, reflecting on work towards peace and in Sandra Alvarez's essay "Their Shadows Still Walk with Us': Mapping a Decolonial Cartography of Struggle with Ingrid Washinawatok El-Issa". Among the most connected globally of her generation of young Indigenous leaders, Washinawatok El-Issa held many leadership positions. None perhaps captures her transnational Indigenous feminist work better than her position as Chair of the Committee on the UN International Decade of World Indigenous Peoples. As such, her four decades of life (1957-1999), all too brief, present one best portraiture for Indigenous women's global leadership for Indigenous peoples —connecting Indigenous peoples from the global South and the global North, indeed, for peace, justice, and sovereignty. Her legacy is multifold, not the least of which is the eventual opening of the UNPFII, a mere three years after her violent death, kidnapped and killed by the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia (FARC).

Given the context of the legacy work that underlines this dossier and the critical juncture of the UNPFII, it is high time that we captured, narrated, and theorized the transnational Indigenous feminist projects —significantly counted as part of the twenty-five Indigenous *and* feminist projects towards healing the Indigenous communities and the world, as identified by Linda Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research & Indigenous Peoples*. This particular dossier of *Lectora* is but one such project, one such step. While in the span of 100+ pages we might not have achieved a full contour of the shapes and forms of transnational feminism from the Fourth World, we have caught a glimpse of the narratives and some of the Indigenous feminist border-crossing projects and their possibilities. Jo-Anne Lee's piece, as an example, tells the decolonizing possibilities for social justice in her recounting of the non-white settler and Indigenous relations in Canada.

This dossier, a gesture to push, widen, and indigenize the inquiry of feminism transnationally, begs for more telling. There, indeed, needs to be more telling of the transnational collaborative projects with Indigenous women and their communities against gender violence, against corporate exploitation, against mindless destruction of the ancestral grounds of the Indigenous lands. (Idle No More comes to mind). There also needs to be further telling that reflects all genders from the four directions. As a first step, we know the subject of this dossier needs to be sustained and there needs to be an ongoing exchange about some of the most powerful projects that are at once Indigenous, feminist, and transnational, as it has implication on the humanity as a whole. What concerns

the Indigenous peoples concerns the whole humanity. How might we learn from transnational Indigenous feminism? I firmly believe there are more lessons to be gleaned for us to re-think and re-frame feminist/womanist/humanist projects, theoretical and otherwise.

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