

# preface

THIS SPECIAL ISSUE PROVOKES A CONVERSATION between decolonial and postcolonial feminisms by asking what they are, how they speak about each other, and how they can speak to each other. Read together, the articles engage and sometimes trouble the temporal and spatial distinctions drawn between decolonial and postcolonial approaches. Kiran Asher explores overlaps between decolonial and postcolonial thought by comparing the ideas of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui on representation. Aimee Carrillo Rowe also stages a dialogue between these approaches when interrogating her family's Chican@ settler history. Tiara R. Na'puti and Judy Rohrer offer an account of how recent scholarship from Hawai'i and Guåhan (Guam) has elaborated Indigenous epistemologies in settler contexts. Two articles excavate colonialism's relationship to science: Jennifer Hamilton, Banu Subramaniam, and Angela Willey explore how two instances of population genetic research illustrate the racialized knowledge systems that undergirded colonialism, while Sandra Harding points out how the colonization of Latin America contributed to the edifice of Western science. In a related vein, Breny Mendoza centers the material role of Abya Yala (the preferred term for Latin America) in not just Spanish colonialism but British colonial expansionism and eventually the eclipsing of China. Patricia A. Schechter reflects on her trajectory as a scholar and teacher of US women's history and the insights she has gained through

engaging decolonial scholarship. Amy Piedalue and Susmita Rishi argue for a more expansive understanding of postcolonial feminism's reach as they review recently published titles in the field. Although Anna Tsing and Paulla Ebron's review of feminist scholarship about the Anthropocene does not directly mention postcolonial or decolonial approaches, it nonetheless engages relevant scholarship on the environmental impact of settler modernization and capitalism. An art essay by Hyunji Kwon introduces the largely unrecognized paintings of former comfort woman Duk-kyung Kang (1929–1997) and focuses on the potential of Kang's work to challenge Japanese colonial hierarchies. Our featured poets in this issue are Emily Zhang, Megan Kaminski, and Raina J. León.

Both postcolonial and decolonial scholars have been committed to critiquing the material and epistemic legacies of colonialism. The distinctions that are frequently drawn between the two approaches, however, have been a source of disquiet to the editors of *Feminist Studies*, and they prompted our journal's call for papers in 2016. A common temporal marking that concerned us was the eclipsing of postcolonialism, which was increasingly becoming viewed as *passé*, and a setting up of decolonial feminism as always already better *in time*. Decolonial approaches sometimes depicted postcolonial feminism as being only about the past, despite postcolonial feminism's stated commitment to studying the continuing impact of colonial processes and its complex use of the prefix "post." Our concern was, as well, with misrepresentations of postcolonial feminist priorities. The depiction of postcolonial feminism as deconstructive, abstract, elite theory confined to the ambit of modern colonial knowledge systems overlooked the important quandaries that postcolonial feminism raised about how to represent marginalized people ethically and, indeed, how to understand the very desire to represent the marginalized—whether or not we claim belonging to them. Postcolonial feminists warned against an easy embrace of alterity, noting that the desire for positioning oneself *outside* colonialism could naively ignore the power of colonial discourses to frame colonialism's Other.

Another set of hopes for this special issue was to dwell on the spatial markings of decolonial and postcolonial feminisms: decolonial feminism is often associated with Indigenous scholars and those from the Americas, and postcolonial feminism with scholars from South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. These regional emphases, although not always as tidy as sometimes depicted, have produced distinct intellectual

priorities. We must heed decolonial feminism's insistence on engaging with the genocidal history of settler colonialism, the current manifestations of the violent dispossession of land, and its constitution of gendered racial capitalism the world over. (*Feminist Studies* will soon publish a special issue on Indigenous Feminisms). Yet, if postcolonial feminism is circumscribed geographically to only South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, we risk ignoring its powerful transcontinental mapping of imperial gender formations and its scrupulous attention to the ethics of representing indigeneity.

We open the issue with an article that reflects on how to represent indigeneity. Kiran Asher's "Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui on the Dilemmas of Representation in Postcolonial and Decolonial Feminisms" stages a conversation between two scholars, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, associated with postcolonial feminisms, and Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, associated with decolonial feminisms. Spivak and Rivera Cusicanqui critique not just Eurocentric scholarship, but scholarship produced by feminist migrant and diasporic scholars and national elites. Both "caution against a simple endorsement of the anti-Eurocentric authority of subaltern women or Indigenous communities." Both "prompt us — postcolonial and decolonial feminists alike — to reflect critically on our desires and methods to represent those outside Europe as we engage in anticolonial struggles." Asher points to a way forward. She interprets Chandra Talpade Mohanty, in her much-cited "Under Western Eyes" essay, as a postcolonial feminist whose intervention is not about the heterogeneity of identities but a critique of the universal "Third World woman" created by Eurocentric scholarship. She suggests that we — postcolonial and decolonial feminists — should resist unmediated recovery of a universal Third World woman who uniformly produces retrievable traditional knowledge. "It is imperative," Asher cautions, "to be cognizant of the pitfalls and problematics of representing this knowledge, that is, of the political economy of knowledge production in order to guard against simplistic claims about decolonial ontologies and postcolonial futures."

Aimee Carrillo Rowe in "Settler Xicana: Postcolonial and Decolonial Reflections on Incommensurability" excavates her own biography to "unsettle any easy identification" she has with her own heritage in two registers. First, she unsettles her desire, as a descendant of California Rancheros (granted land by the Spanish or Mexican government in the mid-nineteenth century), to claim land and blood as the basis

of Indigenous belonging as a Xicana, given the palimpsest of Spanish, Mexican, and US occupations of native land and given Chican@ ambivalence toward their own Indigenous ancestry. Second, she unsettles our desire to foreclose the complex and difficult conversation between post-colonial and decolonial feminism. Rowe argues,

Postcolonial theory productively exposes processes of empire, attuning us to the violence of the material and discursive forces through which colonization manifests itself. But this manifestation is also a process of Manifest Destiny, requiring us to also attend to decolonial theory to interrogate our relationships to settlement—even as colonized peoples. These incommensurate readings of my ancestry and, by extension, my role as inheritor and settler of these California lands lay bare the meaning of my own ancestry as both systematically subjected to racist colonization, land theft, and conquest—and as participating in the conquest and disappearance of Native peoples.

Tiara R. Na'puti and Judy Rohrer focus on settler violence in the Pacific, elaborating Indigenous epistemologies in Hawai'i and Guåhan. Their goal in connecting these two contexts is to examine how "Native Pacific scholar-activists weave postcolonial with Indigenous/decolonial approaches in order to build the strongest challenges possible to colonial structures." They describe recent scholarship in Pacific studies, noting how books by Noenoe Silva and Hokulani Aikau reveal resistance to the overthrow of the kingdom of Hawai'i as well as the specifics of the dispossession of the Kanaka Maoli people. They observe a postcolonial inflection in Aikau's work, noting how Mormon and Kanaka Maoli culture merge to create a hybrid form that rearticulates Indigenous identities. They also examine how the work of Vicente Diaz in a postcolonial studies vein "unsettles the commonplace ideas of conversion as a one-way process." The work of Teresia Teaiwa and Christine Taitano DeLisle tracks how processes of sexualization buttress settler colonialism. Laura Marie Torres Souder explains how women negotiate family, gender, missionization, pregnancy, and motherhood in the Pacific. Jon Kay Kamakawiwo'ole Osorio frames the engagement in the Pacific as a form of dismemberment. Na'puti and Rohrer thus bring to our attention the valuable contributions of Pacific studies to merging decolonial and postcolonial approaches.

Our art essay by Hyunji Kwon turns our attention to Japanese imperialism in Korea. Kwon presents the largely unrecognized art of former comfort woman Duk-kyung Kang, with a focus on how Kang's art challenges colonial hierarchies. The works Kwon analyzes are direct indictments of Japanese imperialism and the practice of military sexual slavery. But some pieces also take a complex stance, such as *Apology*, which features a Japanese soldier begging for mercy. Kwon explores how postcolonial aesthetics focuses on colonial relations by creating a direct visual engagement with empire, often through the appropriation and transformation of imperial cultural and material features.

The next two articles focus on the relationship between colonialism and science. Jennifer Hamilton, Banu Subramaniam, and Angela Willey in "What Indians and Indians Can Teach Us about Colonization: Feminist Science and Technology Studies, Epistemological Imperialism, and the Politics of Difference" bridge decolonial and postcolonial feminisms in two ways: First, they argue, epistemic violence and racialized science undergirded colonialisms, however diverse spatially and temporally. Second, the theory/practice binary is undone when material and epistemic violence are linked. Their essay takes up two current instantiations of population genetic research and places them alongside the misreading by Columbus in 1492 "to understand how the (Asian) Indian and the (American) Indian, originally conceived in the laboratories of science and colonialism, are reconstituted in contemporary projects on race, nation, and belonging." They sound a cautionary note in suggesting how postcolonial and decolonial challenges to scientific access to bodies of formerly colonized peoples produce yet another round of "colonial exploration, extraction, expansion, and experimentation." Feminist science studies become crucial to "understanding and dismantling" these processes.

Sandra Harding's essay outlines the historical trajectory of Latin American colonialism and its implications for science studies. She notes the contributions of decolonial scholarship in bringing to light social justice movements that have resisted global financial elites. She also values decolonial scholarship for formulating epistemological alternatives to a Western insistence on conceptual binaries. She focuses on the creative uses in decolonial theory of the notion of an "otherwise," used to signal a refusal of Northern binary categories of gender, sexuality, and race: "For example, 'otherwise' is articulated as alternative to both neoliberal and

Marxian understandings of democracy, anticolonialism, modernity, tradition, capitalism, ontology, epistemology, and positivism.”

Breny Mendoza continues the focus on Latin American history in “Colonial Connections,” which focuses on “the interconnectedness of our colonial histories and perhaps more importantly the unexpected historical connections and unforeseen patterns that emerge from this approach.” Mendoza centers the material role of Abya Yala (the preferred term for Latin America) in not just Spanish colonialism but British colonial expansionism and the diminishment of China. She calls for a recognition of Iberiantalism, akin to Orientalism, which inaugurates racialization with the Inquisition and expulsion of the Moors and Jews from Spain and then carries racial othering and gender differentiation across to Abya Yala through the conduit of Christianity. Mendoza compares Catholic Christianity, in the context of Iberian colonialism, and Protestant Christianity, in the context of British colonialism, and finds the difference not that substantial: religious fervor permeated both, and they frequently traded racial ideologies and systems of colonial control. Finally, although Mendoza concedes that the levels of othering and genocide was worse in Abya Yala than in Asia, the incompleteness of democracy in both originates with the ideological construction by colonial powers of the lesser capacity of the colonized to bear civil rights. She ends by noting, “These brief accounts of some of the intersections and divergences between Iberian and British colonialism and their gender implications are just the tip of the iceberg of a formidable research agenda that decolonial and postcolonial must pursue together in the future.”

In a more pedagogical vein, Patricia A. Schechter reflects on her trajectory as a scholar-teacher of US women’s history and the insights she has gained through engaging decolonial scholarship. In her account, if the postcolonial analyzes the “dispersed and uneven legacies of imperial rule,” the decolonial allows for the possibilities of recuperation and, specifically, “a set of diffuse, non-self-announcing practices of bodily, spiritual, and cultural recuperation rather than an officially oppositional ideology, as in a counternationalism.” She lauds how the term “decolonial” names a politic that “does not fit institutionalized, self-labeled anti-imperialism but that objects to and rejects subordinating entailments by a nation-state, especially racialization.” She is especially appreciative of

how decolonial approaches “point to the ways that everyday women do more than simply survive on someone else’s terms.”

Amy Piedalue and Susmita Rishi offer a review of recent books that widen our understanding of postcolonial feminism. Taking up for consideration works by Lila Abu-Lughod, Sarah Keenan, Lisa Lowe, and Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Piedalue and Rishi argue for the contemporary import of postcolonial feminist approaches and a more relational understanding of the term “global South.” They begin their review essay by recounting the signature contributions of postcolonial feminism, including its attention to race in structuring imperialism, to resistance struggles, and the politics of location. They then show how the notion of a global South is unsettled in the work of Abu-Lughod, who refuses to mine the South as a site of data recovery, and in the work that Lowe performs in connecting archives across continents. Piedalue and Rishi treat postcolonial feminism as a transnational elaboration of critical race feminism in their analysis of Moreton-Robinson’s work on white entitlement to land and Keenan’s geographically inflected reconceptualization of property. The texts they review demonstrate the continuing contemporary resonance of a postcolonial lens: they show how we understand “the central role of gender and sexuality in racialized imperialist projects; liberal modernity and colonial definitions of ‘the human’; and alternative approaches to capitalism that highlight hegemonic white property regimes.”

We close the issue with Anna Tsing and Paulla Ebron’s ruminative essay on the state of the field of literature on feminism and the Anthropocene, and specifically environmental racism. They are aware that work on social justice and environmental degradation often speak *past* each other, and so in this essay they choose works that show how they speak *to* each other. They argue that it is the logics of exclusion based on class, race, and gender in the United States post-1945 that have played a major role in creating the recent Anthropocene — a period marked by the “geologic signature of human-made radioactivity.” They focus a good deal on regimes of separation between safety and waste spaces and how these regimes mobilize race and gender. They call for weaving together nonhuman stories and human stories and highlighting those “forms of human violence and inequality that matter most to the livability of particular places.”

Our featured poets depart to varying degrees from the special issue theme, but still reflect a commitment to imagining a more racially just world. Raina J. León's work presents the possibilities of cross-racial empathy in the wake of violence against black men. Emily Zhang's poems convey both the immediacy and cadences of Southern speech, playfully upturning the trope of the Southern belle and questioning how we understand what is holy. Megan Kaminski's work expresses the sensibility of a generation that grew up under Obama, reflecting on this new century with a charged idealism that is at once playful and serious.

The goal of this special issue is to offer a venue for a dialogue between postcolonial and decolonial feminisms precisely because they appeared to speak past each other. Our conversations with Kiran Asher in the run-up to our call for papers were invaluable, as were her contributions at the 2016 National Women Studies Association Conference as part of the *Feminist Studies* panel on this theme. (We thank her also for co-organizing, with Priti Ramamurthy, roundtables at the Royal Geography Society Conference and at the National Women Studies Association Conference in 2017.) We recognized at the start that even proposing a dialogue between decolonial and postcolonial approaches might feel contentious, since the dramatic rise of decolonial studies has often hinged on a disappointment with, and sidelining of, postcolonial studies. But there were also intellectual incommensurabilities that fascinated us: for example, the emphasis on hybrid identity formation and migration in postcolonial literary studies was difficult to reconcile with the centrality of land and blood in narrations of Indigenous identity in decolonial studies. We were also intrigued by how the violence of colonialism was narrated differently in postcolonial and decolonial studies, even though the dispossession of land, the prioritization of extractive industries, gendered racialization, mass impoverishment, and imposition of language and education systems were all shared features of both settler and franchise colonialism. Our hope is to offer intellectual resources, through reviews of recent literature as well summaries of both approaches, to recognize how both these formations build on similar ground. We also wanted to revisit critical insights that continue to be relevant to critiquing colonial knowledge formation.

To an extent, the contents of this issue reveal how much of an overlap there exists between the two approaches. Several authors, such as Asher and Na'puti and Rohrer, feature the resonances between the



decolonial and postcolonial, while others such as Rowe point to useful gaps within each. Both Hamilton et al., and Piedalue and Rishi are at pains to unsettle the common temporal and spatial distinctions drawn between postcolonial and decolonial approaches. Acknowledging postcolonial feminist insights, Harding, Mendoza, and Schechter nonetheless prioritize the contributions of decolonial approaches. All authors in the issue agree that the troubling of colonial conceptual binaries and a critique of settler violence are shared salutary goals. To honor Indigenous feminisms' acute attunement to land, those of us who reside in settler colonies must recognize our own complicity as settlers, whether white, "Third World," migrant, or US women of color. The promise of this special issue is the possibility of rerouting "territories of thought" by developing South-South epistemologies — that is, decolonizing knowledge *practices* — that are cognizant of the strengths of both postcolonial and decolonial approaches to anticolonial knowledge formation and are prepared to do the tough work that lies ahead.

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