

## **Inter(r)uptions: Reimagining Dialogue, Justice, and Healing**

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## **Inter(r)uptions: Reimagining Dialogue, Justice, and Healing**

**Anjana Raghavan**

### **Introduction**

In her introduction to *Muddying the Waters* Richa Nagar (2014: n.p) advocates for ‘muddying theories and genres so that we can continue to embrace risks of solidarities that might fail and of translations that might refuse to speak adequately’. This piece, more than anything else, is about failure, risk, and inadequacy. It is written, in part, as a critical-contemplative reflection on my own theory-praxis of decolonial, queer feminism and in part, a vigilant reimagination of dialogue as both feminist method and engagement. It is, in so many ways, also about unravelling the solipsistic and political intertwinings of ‘research’ as an academic endeavour, and being fully cognizant of both. Transdisciplinary feminism, as it applies both to this chapter, and in my own practice, is about the disruption of the fortress-model of disciplinarity. I therefore write in resistance of an intransigent disciplinarity, and in favour of a trans[ient]disciplinarity, which is simultaneously expansive, as it is specifically located. This chapter is also offered as an act of ‘theorizing’ (Raghavan, 2019), that is, a full acceptance of theory as embodied practice; theory as an active manifestation of the deeply intermeshed life-worlds of the structural, personal, affective, and political.

The impetus to write about dialogue comes from the uneasy, yet necessary relationship that I have with it, in personal, scholarly, and political spaces. We inhabit worlds where dialogue is dangerous and despotic to oppressed peoples everywhere. The demand for dialogue, most often expressed as a desire for exchange and understanding, masks the dynamic of

domination, and yet, inevitably, dialogue remains a powerful form of engagement across multiple realms of inhabitation. As a university lecturer, it also remains key to my own privileged and risky modes of embodied living and working.

This chapter is not intended as a systematic review of dialogic processes as theory and research, or even as an examination of its limits and possibilities, though I do a little bit of both. I want, instead, and in keeping with the framing of this collection, to provide an intervention into, or more appropriately, an *interruption of* my own practice, using it as an opening into the larger modalities of dialogue as it operates in transdisciplinary feminist, queer and decolonial theory-praxis. It is worth noting that I consider decoloniality, and queerness, to be prerequisites for transdisciplinary feminist practice and knowledge production. Thus, the calls for building decolonial, queer practices in this chapter should be seen as integral to transdisciplinary feminist work. I maintain no fixity between theory, positionality, politics and method, understanding them all to be part of an “intermeshed” (Lugones, 2003: 223) process. I also centre justice, radical vulnerability, and embodied love with Black-decolonial-queer feminist practices. Contextually, much of this piece is set within the fortresses of higher education and academia. The implications and critiques that emerge – and which are the heart of radical, justice-based praxis – will demand that we act to resist and erode that elite specificity of location.

Conventional ‘sections’ do not really work well for interruptions, and so I imagine this chapter, partly inspired by Lama Rod Owens’ (2016) teachings, as three interrupting mo(ve)ments (indicative of their emergence-transience). The first interruption is an ongoing conversation with my work on cosmopolitanism as it is the dialogic space that I identified and worked with, for all kinds of reasons, both problematic, and hopeful. Cosmopolitanism,

as both philosophy and identity, is entwined with dialogic imaginaries that range from colonial-racist, to radically anticolonial-liberatory. It was in the possibility of such multiplicity that I framed ‘corporeal cosmopolitanism’ (Raghavan, 2017) as one imagination of radical dialogic futurity. I therefore begin with a deep reflection (through my own work) on the complex relationship between the *desire* for dialogue and the denial of domination that it so often conceals. This reflection moves, as feminist work so often does, between my own positionalities, blank-spots, and denials on the one hand, and the larger matrices of privilege-oppression and marginalization that we (and our work) inhabit, on the other.

The second interruption discusses and investigates some of the modalities of dialogue as trope, method, theory, intervention and ‘solution’. I consider critical-contemporary work on dialogue which combines a keen critique of oppressor-violence in dialogic processes with a compassionate desire for radical connectedness. I bring these critical discussions of dialogue-in-practice into conversation with Édouard Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* (1997) as a deeply self-aware, and vigilant way of framing the genuine yearning for relationality that might live within the desire for dialogue. This yearning for relationality lived (and lives) at the heart of my own work, but it did so with far less criticality, and self-reflection when I began, and so this second interruption is also about *embodying* personal accountability, and the necessity of transformative justice in our selves-worlds.

The third, and final interruption is perhaps the one that I am most apprehensive of, because it is the one where I presently locate myself. This interruption is about how to *responsibly* feed our desire for connection and ‘large’ solidarities, and I draw on the teachings of spiritual-feminists and activist-teachers like Lata Mani, Gloria Anzaldua, Zen Guru Thich Nhat Hanh, Rev. angel Kyodo williams, and Lama Rod Owens in this endeavour. Truly inhabiting

interconnectedness and deep dialogicity requires enormous energy, heart, and honest accountability. Those of us who have inhabited oppressor privileges and modalities will have to hold space for rage, silence, and trauma, and also heal from our internalized violence. Those of us who continue to be oppressed and violated will need to create our own spaces, and languages to speak, love, and heal. We will have to reject every guise in which oppressor-modes of being approach us, whether they be capitalism, colourism, individualism, or amnesia. This final interruption tries to imagine radical futurities which honour the real yearning for relationality through radical love and spiritual-justice work, both of which are made possible only through an abiding commitment to justice by dismantling coloniality, anti-Blackness, casteism, heterosexism, imperialism, patriarchy and misogyny.

### **First Interruption: Privilege and Accountability**

My doctoral work and book on corporeal cosmopolitanism, *Towards Corporeal Cosmopolitanism : Performing Decolonial Solidarities*, was invested in ‘naming and reclaiming emotional and bodily practices ... into the realm of the political ... through a critical dialogic engagement with ... contemporary visions of cosmopolitanism, liberal Euromerican and Kant- inspired strains, as well as radical, decolonial strains’ (Raghavan, 2017: 4) of cosmopolitan thought and visions. The book was an early attempt to bring a vastly (sometimes unwieldy), diverse set of voices and imaginaries into dialogue with one another, underpinned by a genuine, if sometimes naïve commitment to interdependence. However, if, as David Harvey (2009: 50) argues, ‘there is actually not much difference between cosmopolitanism and liberalism, and even neoliberalism’, because all Universalist prescriptions are problematic, then, *why cosmopolitanism?* For me, the inspiration came mostly from decolonial, feminist, queer and spiritual understandings and imaginings of

cosmopolitanism (historical, contemporary and futuristic), which resisted liberal, and neoliberal appropriations of cosmopolitan imaginings. Indeed, an important part of my work was to 'break the unspoken ownership of liberal narratives over cosmopolitan imaginaries' (Raghavan, 2017: 194). I wanted a dialogic cosmopolitanism that was committed to embodiment, queer-feminism, and decoloniality. I based my theoretical articulations on decolonial, Black, brown, and queer feminist scholarship, and drew on radical practices of global Southern queer solidarities in Southern India, and Indo-Caribbean feminist literature, to articulate the existing practices and imagined possibilities of corporeal cosmopolitanism (see Gayatri Reddy, Brinda Mehta, A. Revathi, Kalpana Ram, Gautam Bhan, Arvind Narrain, Shalini Puri).

But there is a further problem of what Harvey terms the over-flourishing of 'adjectival cosmopolitanisms' (of which my work is a part), which can very easily descend into a kind of meaningless abstraction. I respond to this critique with Harvey's own formulation of 'cosmopolitics'. That is to say, I consider corporeal cosmopolitanism to be a deeply political-material practice. We also do not have *enough* queer-feminist-decolonial adjectives in academic spaces, so a little flourishing is no bad thing.

Recognising as critical scholars like Harvey (2009), Paul Gilroy (2014), Pnina Werbner (2008), Gyan Prakash (2014), Walter D. Mignolo (2000) and others do, that we cannot relinquish vast, planetary imaginaries of resistance and transformation, I chose to work with decolonial, feminist criticality and resistance within the discourses and practices of critical cosmopolitanism (Mignolo, 2000). As I reflect on my work in the present moment, I am struck by the keenness, this strong *desire* for dialogue I nurtured and, indeed, heard echoed, in most cosmopolitanisms I read about (never more fervently than in Euromerican liberal

narratives). Some of the interlocutors in my dialogues were: Kantian cosmopolitanism ([Kant](#) 1917), Heldian cosmopolitanism ([Held](#) 2005), ‘enforced cosmopolitanism’ ([Beck](#) 2006), ‘critical cosmopolitanism’ ([Delanty](#) 2009), among other Euromerican liberal cosmopolitanisms. I investigate my desire for dialogue here, embodying the composite lens of what Chela Sandoval (2000, n.p.) terms ‘differential consciousness’, that is, a complex, contradictory and multiplicitous subjectivity that is vigilant, resistant, and loving. Although I began my foray into cosmopolitanism with justifiable postcolonial- feminist anger and frustration, I also felt a genuine willingness to be ‘altered by the words spoken’ (Keating, 2013: n.p.) as I deepened my engagement with the literature. I hold that compassion is an important element of critique, and so I found it difficult but ultimately generative when a majority of my largely Indian, male supervisory committee told me to read better, and not shoot my mouth off about liberal cosmopolitan scholarship.

So far, so good. This is the appropriate trajectory of rigorous, reflexive scholarship in which we are all careful about ‘identity politics’, and generous, even though we have every reason to hold Euromerican political philosophy suspect. It is also the precise modality which perpetuates my-our inability to be fully conversant with my-our occupation of what Lugones terms the “oppressor/being oppressed ↔ resisting” complex. Lugones (2003: 7) uses the expression I-we in her writing, to signify the relationality and fluidity between self and collective. I use my-our as a combination of Lugones’ usage and Gloria Anzaldúa’s use of ‘autohistoria’ and her insistence that writing only works if it accesses the world through self, troubling the self-world boundary. I use the terms oppressor- oppressed in structural senses, while noting that these can also be literal and visceral. In all cases, I hold these dynamics to be corporeal, epistemological, and cultural-political. While my-our capacity to engage with certain forms of dominant scholarship is not devoid of a sincere generosity, it can often be the

deliberate obfuscation and denial of crucial accountabilities and acknowledgements of our own oppressor modalities.

I offer three instances, in my own practice, of how these oppressor-modes functioned. In the first instance, my capacity to engage critically-yet-generously with liberal, Euromerican political philosophy was complicated by a deeply internalized epistemic colonialism. This internalization would *not* permit me to do otherwise, and simply let me begin my thesis from chapter three (thanks to Dr. Rahul Rao, for drawing my attention to this), which is where the decolonial-corporeal cosmopolitanism actually begins to manifest. The second instance was the ways in which I responded to the desperate, gendered fear of being unable to be ‘intelligible’ and to prove expertise with ‘the’ literature – so much so that I was advised not to engage with Habermas because I would get in trouble for not treating his work with enough nuance. In other words, if I could not execute *perfect* jumps through the hoops of white, Euromerican, male scholarship, nobody would care about chapters three, four and five. Rather than resist this demand to evidence fluency in Master-tropes I felt compelled, instead, to excel at them, executing a complex form of compliance, where the price of legitimacy was the performance of a colonial-epistemic ventriloquism.

These two instances illustrate the (my) internalization of dominator tropes. A third instance illuminates the obfuscation or denial of the direct forms of privilege I wielded: those of both caste, and class. *Savarna* (dominant/dominator castes) identity-narratives exercise enormous power within South Asian socio-cultural-political contexts in a complex combination of ritual, cultural, corporeal and material discourses of pollution/purity and superiority/inferiority. They also collude with internalized colonialism *and* the resultant desire for colonial-white approval. In this context, my admittance into postcoloniality



permitted a relatively uncomplicated commitment to resisting whiteness and Euromerican-centrism, while my relationship of dominance to oppressed-victimized caste and class communities remained largely unexamined. Ironically, it is only in the years that I have taught in predominantly white settings in the global North, often forced into situations ranging from uncomfortable, to hostile, to racist, that I have fully encountered the implications of both internalised casteism and anti-Blackness (which are not the same, but also not unrelated) as systemically built into *savarna*, South-Asian bodies and imaginaries (Patel, 2016). Alison Jones writes of white identified peoples seeking knowledge from people-of-colours where ‘the very act of “being taught” becomes, most significantly, not an act of logic or an accumulation of information or even a call to action, but an experience of redemption’ (Jones, 1999: 313). This desire for a kind of performative absolution, where the act of ‘empathetic knowing’ and ‘confessing ignorance’ (313) become proxies both for justice and for a full recognition of oppressor privilege and all the work that dismantling it entails.

This is a sleight of hand and denial of what whiteness does/ performs: it shifts the focus onto oppressed peoples when the real work lies within itself. As I continued to throw myself into frightening, and heartbreaking ‘dialogues’ with whiteness, it became apparent to me that I was, in part, performing my own proxy. I was displacing my *own* redemptive desires in particular relation to caste on to my harmful engagements with white supremacy and racism. I was engaging with whiteness for absolution from my caste privilege. Lugones (2003:14) writes that ‘perceiving oneself as an oppressor is harder to sustain morally than deception. There is often a lapse, a forgetting, a not recognising oneself in a description, that reveals to those who perceive multiply that the oppressor is in self-deception, split, fragmented’. As a postcolonial, caste and class elite subject, interpellated with psychic and bodily wounds of

misogynistic, sizeist, and queerphobic violences, I was not unfamiliar with the co-habitations of privilege and marginality. But intersectionality only means that oppressions are connected; knowing some does not entail knowing others. I recognise my own *savarna* self-deceptions *in and through* my recognition of the self-deception that whiteness performs vis-à-vis me as a brown, queer, ‘third world’ woman. I understand this to be the kind of poly-self subjectivity that seeing multiply produces. This vulnerable accountability between ourselves, our worlds and our ‘others’, is also at the heart of decolonising white and/or elite and *savarna* feminist practice.

The other facet of this complex self-knowledge as oppressor-oppressed is that, once recognised, and fully acknowledged, it opens up the capacity for the responsible and compassionate act of what Leela Fernandes (2003:92) calls ‘active witnessing’, that is, to be a witness who will be present, fully involved and articulate in the struggle for justice. ‘Differential consciousness’ has enabled me to engage in dialogues with white-identified peoples and groups with love. It has taught me to be silent and *actively* witness the rage, anger and grief of Black peoples, indigenous peoples, disabled peoples, whose oppressions are different (and sometimes untranslatable) to mine, while simultaneously identifying and dismantling my own privileges and blank spots. I have learnt the value and necessity of my own anger, and pain; that engagement and non-engagement are equally difficult, equally valid choices. It is work that is always ongoing. It is why I am still writing about dialogue, working across disciplines, and feminism. The next interruption will speak to the larger context and politics of dialogicity, and why it might be necessary to reject dominant forms of dialogue, if we are truly invested in relationality.

### **Second Interruption: Vigilance and Refusal**

Deriving from the Greek *dialogos*, meaning thinking together (Simpson, 2008), dialogue as intrinsically *good*, and virtuous, is an assumption that flows from long histories rooted in the Greco Platonic and Socratic traditions. However, as Burbules (2001: n.p.) points out, dialogue's 'different forms express deeper assumptions about the nature of knowledge ... inquiry ... communication, the roles of teacher and learner, and mutual ethical obligations thereof'. Thus, even before we make the critical move to consider contemporary implications, power-dynamics, and structures of dialogic interaction, we must already account for the epistemic specificity, and Eurocentricity, of how we *imagine* dialogue as sharing, equal, empowering etc. Burbules (2001: [n.p.](#)) points out how philosophical traditions like Zen Buddhism prefer 'relying... upon the indirect effect of riddles, paradoxical statements, and questions (koans) that precisely cannot be answered'. The complex, and rich philosophical traditions hailing from different cultures in East Asia, South Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the 'Middle- East' (which I understand to be a problematic term) have a plethora of approaches to dialogue, exchange, sharing, and learning (Eze, 2008; Janz, 1997; Patton and Black, 2015; Nasr and Leaman, 2004). However, none of these understandings really find a place in dominant Enlightenment-based understandings of dialogue which, right up to contemporary liberal-political understandings of dialogue, are bound by forms of didactic dualism and the desperate need for conclusive certainty. Many knowledges and wisdom that come to us from different cultures and traditions (even within 'Europe') are not committed to these strictures of certainty. Indeed, many of them invite us to eschew binaristic certainty, in favour of a more expansive mode of being. While it is true that some *European* (in terms of geographical location) philosophical traditions drew considerably on several other philosophical systems, though often with no acknowledgement, it is equally true that the

mainstream ways we learn about 'Europe' (as a political and ideological centre of power) is anything but dialogic.

I want to bring into conversation some critical-contemporary discussions of dialogue in the field of education where we are witnessing a colonization of the vocabulary of free speech, critique, safety, and rigorous scholarship. Sanctioning fundamentalist revisionist history in school curricula, explicit transphobia, explicit racism, the systematic shutting down of scholarly critique of anti-immigration policies, anti-Blackness and Islamophobia have all become part of acceptable educational practice, in the guise of 'diverse' viewpoints, one of the cornerstones of dialogic exchange. This wholly disembodied deployment of 'diverse' viewpoints masks how elite, white, enabled, *savarna*, cis-hetero-male (I use all of these tropes as dominator-logics, which can be internalised by individuals and communities) bodies sanction the annihilation of poor, Black, disabled, Dalit, queer, female bodies. It also animates a dangerous form of hypercapitalist, adversarial dialogicity that requires no consideration of ethics or justice. In the interests of space, I discuss two relatively contemporary pieces on dialogue in education, from a critical whiteness perspective, and a radical Black perspective. I chose these two pieces for their nuanced understandings of the damage that dialogue can, and does wreak, while at the same time refusing to abandon it. It is this tension between both a deep *suspicion/fear of*, and a *yearning for* certain forms of dialogic engagement that I want to unpack as an important part of decolonial-queer-feminist praxis.

Alison Jones in *The Limits of Cross-Cultural Dialogue* (1999) explores the violence that whiteness perpetrates on indigenous peoples and people-of-colours in its demand for dialogue, knowledge and exchange. Identifying her own positionality as *pakeha* (white), she

powerfully illuminates white dominator-discourses as they operate in an experimental teaching process. Maori and Pacific islander students and white students studied the same course (taught by Jones and her Maori colleague Kuni Jenkins) in separate groups. The separation was met with great enthusiasm by the Maori and Pacific Islander students, and considerable hostility by white students. Jones examines white resistance to the rejection of dialogue by people-of-colours and what it means for liberation visions to exclude dialogues.

As Kelsey Blackwell (2018: ~~n.p.XXX~~) points out in her insightful piece on why people of colour need their own spaces, ‘the values of whiteness are the water in which we all swim. No one is immune. Those values dictate who speaks, how loud, when, the words we use, what we don’t say, what is ignored, who is validated and who is not’. The ways in which spaces, modes of speech and voices are regulated and legitimised are fundamentally governed by systems of domination and, as Jones (1999: 307) points out ‘most important in educational dialogue is not the *speaking voice* but the *voice heard*’. This critique runs through the work of much postcolonial, Black and decolonial feminist work. ~~This It~~ places emphasis both on the act of listening and on the “*voice heard*” indicating that the question of whether the subaltern can speak is itself already mired in an imperial-colonial episteme. People of colours are labelled perennially ‘hysterical’ in all of our articulations and are thus rendered mute, either through illegibility, erasure or sheer exhaustion. Jones’ piece draws out the important dynamic of domination that is inherent in the demand for dialogue by dominant groups and the important ways in which *that* kind of dialogue differs very differently from the kinds of speaking and listening that took place in the Maori and Pacific Islander group (Jones is also careful about not conflating/romanticizing the two identities). The dominant group’s aggressive desire for knowledge and understanding is, she shows, a fundamentally exploitative and narcissistic one. It bypasses the difficult, critical work of unpacking and

actively giving-up privilege, and instead uses the labour of people-of-colours to provide 'authentic' knowledge which is then used as a proxy for the work that whiteness must do.

Jones' (1999) work is an important reminder that dominant groups must perform their own labour, and learn to embrace the inevitability of failure, loss, and unease. In a radical reformulation of dialogic engagement with specific reference to race, Zeus Leonardo and Ronald Porter (2010) offer a 'Fanonian Theory of "safety" in race dialogue'. For Leonardo and Porter, when it comes to talking about race, *there is no safety* for people of colour. The safe space of race dialogue is reserved exclusively for white people to 'avoid publicly "looking racist"' (Leonardo and Porter, 2010: 139). They build on Frantz Fanon's theory of transformative violence that becomes *necessary* for decolonization, because of the overwhelming cruelty of colonial violence. In this, Leonardo and Porter offer a nuanced, and powerful account of Fanon's (often misunderstood) writings on violence as resistance. Their call is for a 'humanizing form of violence' (2010: 140) which includes non-violent civil-disobedience action as a form of active resistance: 'King's tactic of non-violence was, in content but not in form, an act of violence aimed at liberating both the oppressed and the oppressor' (2010: 144).

Fanon's insistence on revolutionary violence was premised upon the totalising quality of colonial dehumanization. Not only did it invest colonizers with total, annihilating power, it also internalized an intense sense of fear and self-loathing amongst colonised, enslaved Black peoples. It is to break the vicious grip of this singular and hegemonic understanding of violence, that Fanon speaks of a transformative, humanizing violence. As Lewis Gordon (2010: 208) points out with specific reference to Black peoples, racism 'locks a group of beings below the self-other dialectic, which means in relation to them there is neither self nor

other; there is no-self, no-other'. This is where we begin to discern the true magnitude of how dominant groups perpetrate violence through dialogue. In a situation where 'ontological equality' (Mignolo, 2000) does not exist, the notion of liberal or constitutional equality is a travesty. The demand that people of colours participate in 'dialogues' about race where the biggest threat to whiteness is its own exposure (a fact well known to people of colours) but the threat to people of colours is bodily, psychic, emotional and spiritual violence, is an act of malevolence. Leonardo and Porter (2010: 150) point out that the repeated desire of people of colours to get through to white people might be terribly naïve on the one hand, but it also demonstrates a 'humanizing desire and commitment to the other' despite its risks. Such a humanizing violence is an insurgent, resistant act of dialogue where whiteness learns to hold the anger, grief and silence of people of colours. An act of justice where the classroom is a space that *risks* chance, and transformation, to work *through* pain and hostility through a process of full accountability in what I earlier referred to as 'active witnessing' (Fernandes 2003: 92).

Both Jones' and Leonardo and Porter's pieces are striking in their commitment to transformative justice which I see as integral to the practice of transdisciplinary feminism. As I discussed in the first interruption above, I have had to begin the journey of looking deeply into, and dismantling, my occupation of caste and class privileges, as well as recognising the deep connections between internalised whiteness and anti-Blackness, while also holding space for and speaking the anger and grief I hold in the face of racism, misogyny and queer-phobia *and* honouring my deep yearning for connection, love, and relationality. This second interruption is a call for honest accountability which highlights that the neat time-space continuums of elite, liberal dialogues are simply not adequate to the task. It requires, instead, the kind of journeying that Glissant (1997: 20) terms errantry: 'one who is errant (who is no

longer traveller, discoverer or conqueror) strives to know the totality of the world yet already knows he will never accomplish this – and knows that is precisely where the threatened beauty of the world resides'. Errant thinking is relational thinking; it is unstable, and uncertain, it recognises the violence of categories like knowledge and understanding (remembering that they are tools of imperial and colonial conquest). Relationality is 'latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible' (1997: 32), and lives in the dawn of connected histories and the 'accumulation of sediment' rather than in 'lightning flashes' (1997: 33). For Glissant, relationality *is* an experience, not a knowledge, one which is deeply connected to the inheritance of the abyss, that is the memory of the Middle Passage. If we begin to deeply listen to these 'impossible memories' (Glissant, 1997: 72) embedded in 'catastrophic time' (Drabinski, 2010: 303), we recognise that the absence of bodies *fundamentally* alters the experience of loss, language, and mourning. How can dialogue function in such a space? How can dialogue demand the articulation of what is held in ancestral, body-and-spirit memory? It cannot.

It is for this reason that Glissant (1997: 190) invokes the 'right to opacity', distance and inarticulability. Opacity weaves and enables relation, it allows us to hold things without having to possess them, to not reduce, or generalise. Opacity is crucial to multiple seeing, and differential consciousness and, as such, opens the way to a much more liberatory, spacious, and loving way to experience relationality. It frees us from the trap of an annihilating sameness, a diktat to *comprehend*, and consume one another into a frightening integration, or an amputating tolerance. Invoking this right is also an important resistance to whiteness and eurocentric ways of knowing that are often locked in a deadly certainty. We must be subsequently vigilant of how this filters into, and shapes euromerican iterations of feminist knowledge and practice, and the ways in which white feminism continues to silence women



of colours everywhere. This second interruption has dwelt on some of the dangers of dialogue while trying to unearth its longing for connection. Nurturing this longing responsibly means that we *must* be vigilant and do the hard work of self-world transformation. The third, and final interruption will try to open up some paths towards such transformation and healing for our-selves, worlds, our practices of politics, and decolonial-queer feminism.

### **Third Interruption: Radical Healing**

This third interruption is the newest one in my journey. It is a tentative map, but one without a ‘mandate for conquest’ (Alexander, 2005: 246). The mapping work of this interruption might be imagined as a relationality of ocean and shore: both always shifting, moving, fluid and changing, the ocean being capable of both great gentleness, and uncontrollable inevitability, in the way that she transforms her shores. This mapping is not governed by a linear sense of direction, space, or time. It requires a crustacean-like sensibility; sideways movements of incredible speed, leaving tiny imprints and trails on the sand that will not always be visible, but also long stretches of incredible, immovable stillness and an amphibious capacity to dwell between terrains. To depart from dominator logics requires a fundamental shift from, and transformation of, the very categories that we operate in and through. Because, as bell hooks (2013: 32) says, ‘indoctrination into dominator thinking in a culture governed by the dictate of imperialist white supremacist patriarchy is a process that affects all of us to greater and lesser degrees’, we must constantly find paths that are

Deleuzian *-lines of flight* zigzagging in non-linear ways from dominator logics. This is also directly applicable for those bearing structural-cultural-emotional privileges, as Rev. angel Kyodo williams explains, referring to the “mind of whiteness” (2016, n.p.) that awareness of this mind cannot come from *inside* it. A larger form of witnessing must be practiced. As

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Audre Lorde (1984) rightly insisted: the master's house cannot be dismantled using the master's tools. Thus, what are currently considered as 'valid' forms of knowing, method, theory, and justice must all be dismantled from their separated epistemes. This is what Lugones (2003: 134) identifies as 'split separation' as distinct from 'curdle separation' where 'split separation' is a kind of disconnecting separation which annihilates multiplicity but curdling is a process of separation that fundamentally cannot occur without connectedness. Curdling is a state where differences can and do exist within the framework of interconnectedness. It is worth recalling Anzaldua's (2009:106) words here: 'nothing is separate. It all filters through from one world to another, from one mode of consciousness to another'. It is to enable this 'curdling', that I draw on a transdisciplinary combination of both activist-scholarship of feminists-of-colours writing in-out of the academy as well as the spiritual wisdom of activist-teachers-of-colours who are increasingly bringing healing to wounded peoples.

I return briefly to Glissant's (1997) formulation of the inheritance of 'abyss memory'.

Without erasing the specificity of the trauma of enslavement and the Middle Passage, I want to explore the context of trauma in what Zen Master teacher Thich Nhat Hanh (2010 [n.p.](#)) refers to as the 'inheritance of suffering'. Rev. angel Kyodo Williams, and Lama Rod Owens are both radical, Black, queer, Buddhist teachers and practitioners who centre justice, activism and love in their paths. Thich Nhat Hanh's teachings of the practice of Buddhism are embedded in the desire for transformative justice and the Buddhist teaching of *metta* or loving-kindness. One of his central focuses is the body, and Thich Nhat Hanh (2010 [n.p.](#)) stresses the importance of 'returning to the body', identifying it as the site where trauma inheres. One of the abiding problems with the dominant tropes of dialogue is that while it is happy to acknowledge non-verbal or body-based *elements* of dialogue, it does not recognise

the body as a primary *site* of suffering, resistance, and transformation. However, as Anzaldua (2015: 105) writes, ‘the unconscious and the physical body do not distinguish between what is really happening and what is imagined or envisioned’. It is this *embodied* wisdom and capacity to connect to different planes of selfhood and consciousness that makes our bodies both sites of enormous vulnerability, as well as liberation. Thich Nhat Hanh (2010) thus advocates deep contemplation of the body as a microcosm of interconnectedness, what he refers to as ‘interbeing’. The body, he suggests, is connected to, and animated by, the entire cosmos. The connection of our bodies to ancestral memory is an especially important part of realising connectedness, identity, and our sense of being-in-the-world. Colonial, genocidal violence is a systematic amputation of these connections and, in the context of catastrophic loss, where there is neither memory, record nor recoverable names, the body becomes the most crucial medium of ancestral connection. Lama Rod Owens (2016: n.p.), in his teachings, envisions ‘intersectionality as lineage’, where lineage refers not to a narrow understanding of blood lineage alone but to acknowledging all of our multiplicitous ancestors, teachers, guides, and kin. Inhabiting our lineages in an internally dialogical, conversant way, is critical to being able to connect across differences without being flattened into a violent sameness. In this context, anger emerges as an important emotion-resistance for oppressed peoples across denominations.

Audre Lorde’s (1993) extraordinary reflections on anger have offered Black women first and foremost, but also people-of-colours and other oppressed communities, great strength and power. She identifies the role of anger as a call to attention, as the recognition of and revolution against injustice and as the animating voice of peoples crushed into silence by oppressor logics. Indeed, as Leonardo and Porter (2010: 151) write, the anger of people-of-colours is not ‘a distancing move [but] an attempt to engage, to be vulnerable to and

recognized by the other'. Lugones (2003: 116) speaks of a 'generous anger' that occurs between peers or different groups of oppressed peoples who need to be heard and understood in response to the centuries of distortion they have borne. This is a transformative and generative anger, necessary between loved ones, and those working together towards justice, as so many feminists of colours have written about so eloquently. In this context, I want to briefly dwell on the call for vigilance around the connections of anger to hate (which is dominator-logic), and the resultant 'manipulative effects' (Lugones, 2003: 105) of anger. Lorde's (1993:152) warning is that 'in the long run, strength that is bred by anger alone ... focus(es) not on what lies ahead ... but what lies behind ... what created it, hatred. And hatred is a deathwish for the hatred, not a lifewish for anything else'. Attentiveness to connections between anger and hatred are important because 'we learn *how to hate* in our hatred of injustice' (Alexander, 2005: 323). The important point, then, is that deployment of anger as a mode of relationality in the desire for justice is different, in crucial ways, from the anger that is produced by hate. But it is not always easy to know or enact the distinction which is why the work of healing becomes even more crucial for oppressed peoples.

Related to this question of healing, Black feminist Barbara Holmes (2002: 40) asks this complex question: 'Can we institute a pedagogy for ... oppressors?', a question that she herself answers in the affirmative. Rev. angel Kyodo williams (2016, n.p.), in her discussion of love in capitalist-individualist global Northern framings, notes that whiteness has no access to love other than as private, personal and secret commodity, observing that 'people don't know how to apply love in the great spheres of society'. If we extend the ways in which Fanon, hooks and other scholars-of-colours describe the totalising effects of colonial-imperial complexes, it might help us begin to navigate the idea that oppression is tied to dominator *logics* rather than identities. Furthermore, that dismantling these logics though primarily in

the service of oppressed peoples will also serve to liberate those who have historically enacted dominance-violence (willams, Owens et al. 2016), particularly if we understand the perpetration of violence to be a part of the complex of oppressor-oppressed suffering and the cycles of hate. This will need intensive contemplation and bodily inhabitation by all of us who embody and perpetrate dominator logics; it is work that must be done by us, and us alone, in spaces that we create for such work.

For those of us who are enabled by some privileges, and/or lovingly seek, and/or are required to undertake dialogic engagement, it is still necessary to be conscious of certain dangers. *Sometimes* extraordinary love, courage, and compassion may move oppressed peoples to engage with their oppressors. This is a precious gift, not a duty, nor something to be expected (Blackwell, 2018). This gift must be learned from with the respect and loving humility it so richly deserves. If the internalization and perpetration of dominance within ourselves is not realised as amputation, deep wounding and imprisonment, but we appear to be invested in the ‘other’s’ liberation, then *we are still perpetrating violence*. The work of deep relationality is the work of justice is the work of love is the work of spirit. It requires, above all else, ‘being at the frontlines of your own liberation’ (Owens 2016 [n.p.](#)). Decolonial-Black-queer-feminisms and spiritual activism are both practised and realised in the belief that there is no world-transformation without self-transformation and, more pertinently, that there *is no boundary that separates the two*. This third interruption has tried to draw on some of this wisdom, to give us pathways into transforming our potentially superficial desire for (dominator) dialogue into a committed desire for relationality, justice and love.

## Conclusion

I bring this piece to its pause (because the work has no end), with some reflections on reclaiming slowness and silence as an oblique but necessary addendum to the recuperation of dialogue as radical relationality. Although invested in unravelling binaristic modes of inhabitation, my primary ethical commitments are to justice and to prioritise care for those most wounded. Transdisciplinary, decolonial feminist theory and praxis, in my understanding, inheres most meaningfully and powerfully, in its capacity to resist the subtle, sophisticated modalities of dominator logics, as well as centre processes of healing. These words that follow, are ~~his is~~ in honour of those deepest wounds in need of healing. Maria Lugones' *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes*, quotes a poem by Inez Hernandez Tovar (2003:67):

And we will take our time

To make our time

Count

Clocks

Do not intimidate us

Her words resonate deeply with some of the practices that I have learnt about and practice to heal from my own traumas of abuse and hatred (both internalized and externally inflicted), in spiritual-professional-political realms. Buddhist and hindu conceptions of emptiness, or *shunyata* is described by Thich Nhat Hanh (2010, n.p.) as 'emptiness of a separate existence, but at the same time, totally full of the cosmos'. Just as we must reclaim the right to honour anger, and resist its conflation with hate, there is also, I believe, similar work to be done in relation to stillness, and silence. The words that have been cut out of the tongues of oppressed

peoples, and enforced silence, is a dominator-silence. The permanent demand made upon people-of-colours, women, Dalit, queer, poor, disabled people to speak, defend, explain and justify is also an infliction of violence. Although resistant speech is essential to justice, sound that emerges from *healing* silence takes ‘exquisite shape as it travels across the threshold into that which we recognise as a note, a word, a sound’ (Mani, 2011: 79). The right to stillness, and pause, to inhabit mystery, our bodies and that which is extra-lingual, is as important to spiritual and material well-being as the right to agitation and speech. Systematically refuse to plant your seeds in violent, toxic soil. Leave when you must. Remember to not always be alone; your *sanghas* (community-kin) nourish you – make space to commune with them. *May all beings be nourished in relations of love, justice and accountability to each other and the cosmos.*

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