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Transnational Feminism

Amanda Ricci is an assistant professor in the Department of History at the Glendon Campus of York University. She is currently working on a book-length manuscript on the feminist movement in Montreal (1960-1990). Her next project, entitled “Global Citizens: Canadian Feminists at the World Conferences on Women, 1975-1985,” considers the ways in which Quebecers and Canadians imagined themselves to be part of a global community of women during the United Nations (UN) Decade for Women, 1975-1985.

Transnational feminism remains a challenging and highly fraught field of study. The questions are seemingly endless: How can we write histories that are attuned to, yet do not reify, hierarchies among women? Is a common, internationally minded feminist project possible or even desirable? What does a politics of solidarity look like across—as well as within—political systems, economies, and cultural contexts?

These are some, although by no means all, of the questions undergirding the conference *A Workshop in Transnational Feminism/Atelier sur le féminisme transnational*, which was held at the L.R. Wilson Institute at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, in May of 2018. The conference brought together an interdisciplinary group of scholars to discuss their research and the field of transnational feminism. Two papers from this conference are published in this special section of *Atlantis*.

To cite sociologist Marilyn Porter, broadly speaking, transnational feminism “refers to the coming together of non-governmental organizations to work across borders in coalitions and campaigns.” The term *transnational*, as opposed to *global*, “reflects a means of recognizing both the continued significance and particularity of nations *and* their transcendence by feminist movements” (Porter 2007, 44). By putting the state and grassroots social movements within the same analytical frame, transnational feminist analyses have the potential to shift nation-centric historiographies that make invisible the processes, frequently global in reach, behind inequalities among and between peoples. For Canadian social scientists, transnational feminist analyses can bring Indigenous, diasporic, and settler feminisms into conversation with one another, as well as situate the country’s social movements within the international political economy. The best ways to do so, however, are still in question.

There has been an explosion of scholarly work on transnational feminism since the 1990s, accompanying

the emergence of the field. Many within this initial cohort of academics who engaged in comparative and transnational analyses of women's activism also thoroughly deconstructed the category of "woman," pointing to the ways in which gender intersected with other social categories of difference, such as class, race, Indigeneity, nationality, sexuality, ability, and so on. As part of this broader intellectual project, a very loosely interconnected group of social scientists have simultaneously, and relentlessly, challenged white, middle-class narratives of feminism and imperial notions of "global sisterhood" (Fernandes 2013). After an initial lag, the field of Canadian history is catching up (Forestell 2005).

The two articles in this special section exemplify this trend. While the two papers rely on different types of sources and focus on different time periods, they will assist Canadian scholars in exploring the methods behind this type of research, in grappling with divergent activist priorities in feminist or women-dominated spaces, as well as in thinking about complicity with, and resistance to, white-supremacist national projects in the context of women's movements. We hope that gender studies specialists in and of other geographical areas will find the ideas and methodologies in these papers relevant for their own research.

References

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