



Beti's Perspective: Using Critical Race Theory's Composite Counterstory to Interrupt Antiracism Projects in Vancouver, BC

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ABSTRACT *Building on research conducted in feminist organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia, on the unceded territories of the x̣ṃəθḳʷəỵəm (Musqueam), Sḳẉəẉú7mesh (Squamish), and səliḥwətəl (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, this paper explores the role, relationship, and responsibility of advocating for antiracism and social justice in the context of antiracism projects in feminist nonprofit organizations. In doing so this paper asks: What do antiracism projects look like in feminist organizations? And how are these projects informed or interrupted by racialized and Indigenous activists within these spaces? Using critical race theory's composite counterstory, this paper uses storytelling methodologies to understand how racialized settlers and Indigenous folks can collaborate and thrive – as they have been doing – on occupied unceded territories in Canada. Based on a series of interviews with racialized and Indigenous activists engaging in feminist nonprofit organizations, these stories shed light on contemporary realities of colonization, including collaboration within white settler systems.*

KEYWORDS white settler systems; antiracism; racialized; Indigenous; nonprofit organizations; feminist organizations; critical race theory; composite counterstory

Introduction

Growing up as a Brown girl in a white town on the outskirts of Victoria, British Columbia, I felt the discomfort of racism before I had words to explain it. I was the daughter of immigrant parents who experienced their own forms of exclusion and isolation and tried to protect me from these realities by passing me off as Mandy instead of Manjeet. But despite their best efforts, I saw how my difference led to others' discomfort. I might be excluded because my lunches "smelled too much," classmates would laugh or stare when I

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accidentally said a word in Punjabi instead of English, or they would ask “innocent” questions about whether the bronze nail polish I was wearing was the colour of my nails. It was clear I was different than “them.” Even from a young age I did not accept these realities as fact. I found myself at the front lines of feminist activism, whether it was starting protests in gym class, volunteering for women’s shelters, or asking inclusion questions of my classroom curriculum. I understood early that my inclusion in spaces would not be a given but something I had to demand. In high school, I observed that my exclusion was shaped differently than that of the WSÁNEĆ students of the nearby reserve, who were a large portion of my peers. Teachers taught “Indigenous issues” as though the issues were somehow separate from the students and the space we were in. This separation was reinforced through the segregation in our classes, which intensified our different realities at the same school. Although I did not comprehend it, I could see I was being amalgamated into the white settler side of the Indigenous/settler divide. Early in my feminist activism, my role became calling attention to the complicated relationship of antiracism in white settler feminist spaces. I learnt as evident, based on the segregation I observed as a young person but also through reading Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Audra Simpson, Bonita Lawrence and others, that a white/antiracist dichotomy was insufficient in understanding the exclusion of Indigenous women and Indigenous ways of knowing in feminist spaces. Living and working on stolen territories complicated this omission for me and other feminist activists.

Throughout my experience working in feminist nonprofit organizations in Vancouver, British Columbia, in the early 2000s, I could see that my racialized colleagues were experiencing the same institutional barriers I encountered in my own life. These commonalities in experience led me to believe that structural barriers were preventing our active and meaningful participation in the feminist nonprofit organizations in which we were working. The feminist organizations I chose to work for were always gender inclusive and intersectional in theory, but there would often be gaps in service delivery. These gaps were never anything I studied formally, but I witnessed many complex challenges that I later understood to be part of the NPIC – the nonprofit industrial complex (INCITE!, 2017).

I have experienced my fair share of microaggressions in organizations that mirror experiences I had growing up, from ignorant questions asked by my “innocent” colleagues, to requests from boards of directors to solve diversity problems, to witnessing the experiences of people of colour being tokenized, with expectations that these people perform as diligent Brown subjects across the organization. Watching these systemic processes unfold within organizations, I also noticed patterns of frequent turnover, with racialized staff leaving and little to no meaningful representation of or collaboration with Indigenous communities. I could see the pattern of primarily white feminist leaders trying to incorporate antiracism projects across the organization, but their intentions typically fell short of real institutional change, leaving them

perplexed. Still, their efforts were celebrated, and the organization remained unchanged for the next funding cycle.

These experiences motivated me to pursue doctoral research to explore antiracism in feminist nonprofit organizations in Vancouver. I sought to answer two questions: What are the experiences of racialized and Indigenous women in nonprofit organizations? How do racist, sexist, and colonial systems inform, create, and scaffold these experiences? Throughout my research, when I spoke to feminist activists, they told me about the ways that antiracism projects become siloed as the place for activists of colour and the one location in the organization to talk about race. White feminist organizations were actively working to hire racialized feminists to counteract their organizational whiteness. However, beyond hiring a few racialized bodies in entry-level roles, there was no commitment to changing the dynamics of the organization. As a result, the women of colour in these roles became tired, overwhelmed, and burnt out, as exemplified by the Centre for Community Organizations' graphic "The 'Problem' Woman of Colour in the Workplace" (COCO, 2018). I quickly came to realize from the women I interviewed – confirmed by ones I read, like Sara Ahmed (2012) – that "race" in these spaces was often coded, as it is in larger institutions, through words like equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Throughout this article I describe some of the nuances of working on antiracism projects within feminist organizations in Vancouver, BC. I start by describing my study and the participants, and explaining my choice of methodology: critical race theory composite counterstories. Next I think through some of the complicated dynamics of racialized settlers in white settler systems through a breakdown of the roles of multiculturalism and whiteness in a Canadian context, and specifically how these dynamics operate within feminist nonprofit organizations. Then I share Beti's perspective – Beti being a composite of several of the research participants created to show the complexity of race, racialization, and Indigeneity in women's organizations. I use Beti's stories to provide some insights on the experiences of racialized and Indigenous activists in feminist nonprofit organizations. These experiences shed light on some of the elements of systemic whiteness that reveal antiracist projects in feminist organizations as reproducing the status quo rather than creating fundamental change in the organizations and in the lives of the communities they serve.

Methodology

In answering my research questions, I chose to go straight to the source to ask racialized and Indigenous activists about their experiences in feminist nonprofit organizations. In 2015, I interviewed 14 self-identified racialized and Indigenous activists who also worked in nonprofit organizations that held an explicitly feminist mandate. The activist population I could draw from was limited: Vancouver is a relatively small city of just over 600,000 people; the

nonprofit sector is similarly small, and the activists tend to know each other. I knew, or knew of, all the activists I interviewed. These activists worked in women's, antiracist, arts, queer, environmental, and community activist spaces. As is true for many activists within these spaces, they often worked for a range of organizations and gravitated toward those that supported the communities they cared about. They shared their wealth of knowledge with me through rich interviews and stories. Throughout these interviews I could see that the many commonalities they shared included their experiences of isolation as racialized feminists in primarily white women's organizations, despite the organizations' objectives to create inclusive environments through a targeted approach of outreach to racialized and Indigenous women, exemplified through the projects the activists were hired to work on. I had known some of these activists for more than 10 years, so I was very familiar with their work and commitment to antiracism and social justice. They shared their successes, histories, and challenges with me. They shared the things that worried them and kept them up at night. They shared their dreams and goals for the future. I felt a great responsibility to share their important stories of systemic erasure and injustice. Although many of the activists I interviewed shared an interest in supporting antiracist initiatives in organizations to tangibly improve the lives of racialized women including through access, education, and resources, they approached this goal in many ways in many different organizations. For example, some of the activists I interviewed took an anticapitalist, anticolonial stance in working for justice for migrants. Others were working to make spaces more inclusive, for instance, to increase access and funding for racialized and Indigenous artists in arts communities. These differences and tensions in their approaches often led to different goals within the organizations they served; however, they were all interested in speaking to me about what they observed as systemic injustices in the organizations in which they worked. I suspect this landscape has changed dramatically since I conducted these interviews, based on the global antiracist activism such as #BlackLivesMatter and #SayHerName, but the tensions the activists identified about the systemic whiteness of nonprofit women's organizations persist.

Despite their varied experiences and histories, I knew the participants could be easily identified in a city with only a few racialized activists working in feminist organizations. To share their stories, I had to find creative solutions to protect their anonymity. Anonymity is crucial to their roles, given the small size of Vancouver's activist community at the time and the few racialized and Indigenous activists who worked within it. I wanted to uncover the challenging dynamics that exist in feminist organization, but I did not want to jeopardize the livelihoods of women doing this work. Again, this reality has shifted given dynamics that have changed since the interviews. Now, with social media much more prevalent and playing a role in movements such as Black Lives Matter, activists are much more public about the racism they experience in organizations. However, I continue wanting to maintain my participants'

anonymity so that activists can choose to call out these dynamics on their own terms and in their own ways.

My research was framed through critical race theory and methodologies (Crenshaw, 1991; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000) and the components that build counterstories (Cann & McCloskey, 2017; Griffin et al., 2014; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) that seek to shake the foundation of the mainstream stories more commonly told in feminist organizations. For me, feminist organizations conjured images of bra-burning women fighting patriarchy together, often unaware of the women left out of this collective effort. At the time of the interviews, organizations with an explicit feminist mandate were few in Vancouver, and they tended to revolve around white women's stories, while the experiences of Indigenous and racialized women were omitted or marginalized. My priority was to bring critical counterstories to the forefront and shed light on the ways that race, racism, and exclusion play out in feminist spaces. Aja Martinez (2014) shares that critical race counterstory "recognizes that the experiential and embodied knowledge of people of color is legitimate and critical to understanding racism that is often well disguised in the rhetoric of normalized structural values and practices" (p. 69). Critical race counterstory is a methodology that "rejects notions of 'neutral' research or 'objective' research and exposes research that silences and distorts epistemologies of people of color" (Martinez, 2020, p. 3). Counterstory is "both method and methodology" that "serves to expose, analyze and challenge majoritarian stories of racialized privilege and can help to strengthen traditions of social, political, and cultural survival, resistance and justice" (Martinez, 2020, p. 26). As Martinez (2020) explains, counterstory "differs from fictional storytelling by critically examining theoretical concepts and humanizing empirical data while also deriving material for counterstory's discourse, setting, and characters from sources" (p. 37). An interdisciplinary method, critical race counterstory is grounded in the lived experiences of marginalized communities and provides an important interruption of the white women's narratives that dominate feminist organizations.

Eve Tuck (2009), in her open letter about damage-centered research, asks researchers to consider the long-term implications of Indigenous and other marginalized communities constantly thinking of ourselves as damaged. I share her concerns, and I did not want racialized women to have to carry the burden of telling their individual stories of how they "didn't fit in" or "had difficulties" within the organizations. This simplistic notion misses the ways in which racism plays out systemically across white settler systems, institutionalizing experiences of marginality. Although the activists I interviewed had experiences in myriad organizations in a variety of social justice spaces, many of their experiences of racism overlapped. This is not a coincidence but a reminder that their experiences were fueled by racial injustice perpetuated by the systemic and pervasive nature of whiteness.

While considering the components of CRT counterstory and Tuck's (2009) warning about damage-centered narratives, I opted for a composite

counterstory (Birk, 2023, Griffin et al., 2014) to share the systemic stories my participants experienced. Daniella Ann Cook and Adrienne Dixson (2013) argue that composite counterstories are a significant expansion of counterstory methodology because they demonstrate the ways marginalized communities have a shared experience with racism and white supremacy (p. 1243). Martinez (2020) builds on Cook and Dixson's work by cautioning that composite characters can be read as stereotypical. But this is a misunderstanding, she asserts: the composite characters represent "more than just a single individual and are intentionally crafted as composites that primarily embody an ideology as informed by a *"trensa"* of personal experiences, the literatures, and hard data" (Martinez, 2020, p. 25). In my research, the composite counterstory allowed confidentiality while highlighting the systemic nature of the activists' stories and focusing on the white settler systems that perpetuate these realities. The composite counterstory allowed me to move the burden of exposing systemic exclusion from individual racialized and Indigenous women and reassign it to institutions. Collectivizing consciousness within this research was a strategic act. Most of the participants are economically vulnerable within organizations that use an underlying logic of white supremacy. In a small city like Vancouver, exposure could jeopardize my participants' capacity for employment.

In creating my composite, I approached my data by systematically pulling commonalities from the participants' stories. I used a line-by-line approach in coding my data to develop these themes. Allowing the data to speak to me, I was able to clearly identify the themes that answered my research questions. Many commonalities were immediately apparent in the ways in which the stories overlapped. Once I had a list of themes, I shared them with all my research participants to see if they felt I had captured their experiences in the feminist organizations in which they worked. They all agreed that the themes I had identified accurately represented the systemic failures of these spaces. These themes then became the starting point for my counterstories. In creating the composite character of Beti, I made an epistemological decision to no longer individualize the participants. As a result, I never quote directly from the interviews I conducted. It did not feel respectful to use my participants' words without providing them space to be contextualized and understood in relation to these words.

Beti speaks to the exclusion of racialized people in feminist nonprofit organizations. Rather than representing any one individual, Beti's power is her collective voice. The participants I interviewed brought a variety of migrant, immigrant, and Indigenous experiences to the unceded territories on which this research was conducted. At times these experiences also contradicted and came into tension with one another, particularly in relation to land, forced migration, and actions on unceded and unsundered territories. The women's stories and relationship to the land were incredibly diverse. Beti could never speak to all of this complexity and diversity. In the stories, she embodies a Brown racialized woman, not because that was the primary demographic I interviewed

but simply because it reflects my positionality and therefore the story I felt most comfortable narrating. Beti, in her experiences as a racialized woman, also carries experiences of Indigeneity in her home country. This is not an experience I share; however, others (e.g., Dei, 2011; Wane, 2013) have written about the experiences of racialized communities in Canada whose members identify as Indigenous in other spaces. I felt it was crucial that Beti hold this complexity and tension, in order to reflect the complexities of the stories that were shared. This unique position speaks to the nuances of holding multiple complicated identities at once. Beti is not Indigenous in a Canadian context but relates to a shared experience of Indigeneity, colonization, and the complexities of migration to Canada. The composite of Beti also highlights the complexity of experiences in institutions in a white settler society, which can see the Brown body as a figurehead for all things foreign. Beti stands as a metaphor for how those organizations often fail to differentiate racialized and Indigenous women and tokenize their singular “Brown body” and experience to signal having met the diversity requirements. Beti, as a composite, represents the multiple systemic and structural challenges racialized and Indigenous women face, both in the organizations where they work and in the systems they navigate in their daily lives – systems that inform how marginalized people experience the Canadian state. This is an experimental approach to the composite that serves not only to protect the identities of those I interviewed but to address this singularity that is the projection of the settler Canadian gaze, which does not see real people and who they are. A composite reflects the categories of race and ethnicity as they are understood through that gaze, which is also problematic because the categories function within the colonial systems the activists seek to disrupt.

A second character features prominently in my stories: Gora. In Punjabi Gora means white man. In these stories Gora is intended to be a figurehead for the system, representing systemic whiteness. In the case of mainstream feminist nonprofits, that representative is often embodied by a white woman, which is how I have written Gora. But this is a simplistic representation of the much more nuanced realities within these organizations. Gora’s purpose, like Beti’s, is to spotlight how systemic exclusion plays out in systems. The realities are always more complicated than I can share within the simplistic paradigm of these stories. Nevertheless, the stories allow me to shed light on complex dynamics and erasures that exist within white settler systems.

Understanding Canadian Multiculturalism Within the Colonial Order

Many theorists have taken up these erasures within a multitude of institutions and systems. For example, Ahmed (2012) and Tuck (2009) demonstrate how white settler systems co-opt knowledge and bodies for their own agendas. Similarly, these theorists have argued that white settler systems are insufficient in creating and maintaining change within institutions because of the ways they

co-opt and repackage knowledge to appear to be inclusionary. Other scholars have looked at the incomplete ways in which even critical studies rely on systems of whiteness to advance and operate, especially how settler colonialism operates on stolen Indigenous lands (Bell, 1992; Lorde, 1984; A. Simpson, 2014; L. B. Simpson, 2014) and through decolonization efforts (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Building on this literature, through my use of racialized and Indigenous perspectives, I wish to highlight the problematic approaches to antiracism work that impact the lives of racialized and Indigenous peoples. I also work to inform how racism and white supremacy operate in North America and around the world. Furthermore, this work seeks to recognize Canada's distinct colonial history and demands the decolonization and sovereignty that many Indigenous communities are fighting for. This struggle for sovereignty calls into question Canada as a whole and all the systems within it.

Most notably, Canada's construction as a multicultural state has deeply informed the treatment of racialized communities in relation to Indigenous people. In contrast to the United States and their melting pot approach, Canadian statehood has depended on its adoption of multicultural policy. In Canada, we deem racialized bodies as cultural groups distinct and "welcomed" by the state. Sunera Thobani (2007), building on Mackey (2002), Bannerji (2000) and Ahmed (2000), shows how Canada was built on these foundations:

Multiculturalism has sought to constitute people of colour as politically identifiable by their cultural backgrounds. With this move, race became reconfigured as culture and cultural identity became crystallized as political identity, with the core of the nation continuing to be defined as bilingual and bicultural (that is, white). (Thobani, 2007, p. 145)

As Thobani (2007) goes on to explain, Canadian multiculturalism was a way to neutralize antiracist thought that was emerging in other parts of the world, and it became a way for white Canadians to pin the social exclusion of racialized groups on their lack of linguistic integration.

Racialized people can hold an outsider/insider position as both immigrant settlers on unceded territories and as peoples who uphold Indigenous ideologies, ceremonies, and subject positions (Dei, 2011). These unique spaces of isolation, collaboration, and solidarity need to be explored. This call for collaboration does not diminish or ignore the complicated, heterogeneous histories that exist amongst racialized and Indigenous communities. Lawrence and Dua (2005) make a critical intervention in Canadian antiracism studies to suggest that racialized people in academia and activism are overlooking the ways in which they benefit from settler colonialism. Melissa Phung (2011) takes up these theorists when she asks "Are people of colour settlers too?" She argues that oversimplifying notions of settler and Indigenous leads to binary thinking that reduces complicated histories and relationships across the country.

As my research made clear, the experiences of racialized and Indigenous peoples are extremely different, and suggesting otherwise is deeply problematic. Similarly, I am aware of the dangers of essentializing the experiences of women of colour, because racialized women are not the same either. Women of colour, including those interviewed for this research, can and do identify in diverse ways, and their experiences of racialization vary based on the histories of colonization in their homelands and their personal and collective histories of immigration and diaspora. There are many limitations, not only in conflating the experiences of racialized and Indigenous women, but also in overlooking the differences that exist within those two groups. Despite these obstacles, my research provides an opportunity to think through structural challenges and experiences of systemic racism in organizations.

Beti's Perspective

Beti was hired by a feminist nonprofit to coordinate the organization's newest project, "Feminist Decolonization in the Anti-Violence Sector," a three-year project funded by Status of Women Canada. Beti didn't realize it at the time, but as the vague title suggests, the project and her position were a catch-all for "diversity." She was the only woman of colour working in the organization. She loved the work, but the pressure of having to represent all issues of difference – racialized, Indigenous, queer, disabled, and their many intersections – was taking a massive toll on her body. She was more stressed than she had been in years, but she excused it as being part and parcel of the work. She was glad to do the work but overwhelmed by the incredible diversity in urban Indigenous and racialized communities in Vancouver and in Canada more generally. Vancouver was not like the home she was twice removed from, through immigration and displacement, a home she had only connected to in theory and dreams. She understood her Indigenous roots back "home," but those too were muddied by the gloomy realities of colonization, genocide, and violence. She had realized much too late the disconnection to land, community, and experience in the use of the word Indigenous in her experiences with feminist organizations in Canada. Each Indigenous community was so different. Added to this, the complex history of residential schools, as well as poverty, addiction, and homelessness, dropped bodies off in this urban centre completely untethered from their homelands. This work felt impossible in a women's organization that existed primarily to serve survivors of domestic violence. The organization said they did everything, but they primarily worked with heterosexual, white, working-class women. However, the hot funding topic this month was "Indigenous," so they hired Beti in hopes that she would "fix" their whiteness problems. You know how the old saying goes: Build the mountain and they will come. Is that the saying? Beti had doubts. It did not make sense, but neither did what she was doing, so maybe she just didn't get it. She was grateful for the job, but she felt uncomfortable that it was taking

money away from Indigenous organizations run by and for Indigenous communities.

Increasingly frustrated by the situation, Beti decided to go to Gora and explain the challenges she was facing with her "clients." She marched into Gora's office with quiet determination, knowing it would be a challenge. However, she was sick of it. SICK of it. She felt her exasperation would take her farther this time than it had before.

"You can't tell women we offer ceremony," Beti blurted out, half her body in Gora's office and the other outside it. "We had an Indigenous Elder come in once to offer a ceremony – that doesn't mean we offer ceremony. I'm not sure how you expect me to explain that when women are here and they need ceremonies I can't offer."

Gora got her back up right away: "I don't understand. You said you did ceremony."

"I can do ceremonies within my own custom and traditions. However, ceremony is not an all-encompassing word. I can only offer certain things at certain times for certain people. I explained that to you when I interviewed. We have to invite local Elders. We have to consult with local communities."

Gora stared at Beti blankly, her silence penetrating. Beti felt invisible.

When Beti got back to her office, a woman was waiting. Squeezed in among the books, umbrellas, and extra office furniture, the woman clearly felt tense in the unwelcoming and impersonal environment. Her rain-soaked body dripped onto the ancient carpet beneath her. The smell of mould lingered in the office air. Beti welcomed the woman and offered her a cup of tea. Still agitated from her ride on the perpetually late number 3 bus, the woman happily accepted. The warmth of the tea comforted her from the inside out, and she was finally able to shake the last couple of days. Her shoulders loosened as she explained to Beti that she was having a hard time. She was displaced, felt discouraged, and had heard that Beti could offer a smudge. She needed that right now.

Beti smiled warmly, but her body tensed. Now came the hard part. She explained that before she could do anything else, she needed the woman to fill out some paperwork. Just standard stuff – name, address, and demographics to "count" her for the funders. Beti knew this "colonization through paper" would be met with resistance. On a previous trip to Gora's office, she had explained how this requirement was impossible. She could not ask Indigenous women to fill out this paperwork before she even knew them. This did not fit with cultural protocols.

Exhausted, the woman looked at Beti and said, "No, thanks." As she was about to get up, Beti stopped her.

"I get it," she said. "At least finish your tea."

They smiled hesitantly, avoiding each other's gaze. Fifteen minutes passed as they huddled in the office. They laughed uncomfortably, sharing pleasantries and helping each other get through the cold, wet day. Finally, Beti stood up, closed the office door, and lowered her voice to a whisper.

“Listen. I’m not supposed to do this. We stopped inviting Elders to offer smudges because of the new fire codes in the building. But I keep some sweetgrass over here by the window.”

Beti pushed aside stacks of books and a plant to reveal a window. She kept the sweetgrass hidden, partly because of the new rules, but mostly she was sick of the white folks in the office asking her to indulge them in the hipster smudging trend. She hated appropriating Indigenous practices. In fact, she felt uncomfortable with every aspect of this position, but she also felt like she was in too far now. An Elder in the community where she grew up had taught her the importance of smudging. Although Beti was a racialized settler, she had grown up in close contact with the Indigenous community, where outsiders were always welcome as long as they were willing to show up and help get things done. Beti had always been willing to do that work, but now she felt like a fraud. She had never imagined she would be the one to offer this ceremony in this context. Still, women were asking for her help and there was no one else – she was stuck amid the hard realities of colonial systems. She cracked the window and motioned for the woman to come over. Silently, they huddled in the corner and lit the sweetgrass out the window. The woman performed her cleanse furtively, half in and half out the window. She and Beti were both so used to a life half in and half out that it didn’t occur to them it could be any other way. Tears streamed down their faces as the sweetgrass smoke embraced them and they both finally let go.

The woman left the office and Beti never saw her again.

Barriers to engaging in meaningful and supportive activism with Indigenous women in organizations was a clear theme throughout this research, described by Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists. Indigenous activists also expressed frustration with systemic barriers to doing the work they were asked to do. Many said: “How can I do this work when I am not given the space, acknowledgement, or time to do it?” Most activists I interviewed described “breaking the rules” to meet their clients’ needs. In an impossible organizational system, it often felt like the only way. Like Beti in her choice to support her client within her limited capacity, the activists I interviewed negotiated difficult boundaries to support their communities. Beti did not offer local ceremonies because they were not hers to offer, but she could break the rules to create a safe space and provide the resources for someone to access what they needed. This experience was complicated by Beti’s position. Some bodies, based on hierarchies of race, experience more surveillance and harsher punishment than others. As a result, breaking the rules can have very different consequences. Some, including racialized activists with experiences like Beti’s, might find this kind of rule breaking a tense negotiation with management and funders about boundaries and building codes. These Western

expectations confront Indigenous ways of knowing and can lead to organizations dismissing feminist activists.

Beti is informed by the white settler narratives of Indigeneity that define her position and make up the organization. The organization assumes it can take a universal approach to difference and creates one small opening for all things “diverse.” Beti, and the activists I interviewed, were forced to perform within this role, because it was the only space offered them. Within the feminist organization, there was little acknowledgement that diversity, Indigeneity, and race meant different things based on where and how you are positioned and who you are positioned as. Beti was imprisoned by white settler expectations that structured organizational antiracism within the feminist organization she worked for. This limited her capacity to create change for the women she worked with. She created temporary solutions that only reinforced white settler narratives and expectations.

Beti still found ways to do her work through her own individual resistance and awareness of Indigenous knowledges, but without the support of those around her. Organizations create space for what are deemed as marginalized areas, but only within one scope and one way, through a pan-Indigenous lens. Beti strived to be an ally supporting women to find ceremony and healing in culturally specific ways. As a racialized settler, she sought the support of local Indigenous Elders, but her organization denied her request because it did not fit within its narrow Eurocentric scope.

The activists I interviewed, racialized and Indigenous, were aware of the tremendous burden this narrow scope perpetuated both for themselves and especially for the women accessing services. Organizations are clearly aware of systemic barriers such as funding constraints and the lack of participation of diverse people, as the need to account for multiply marginalized women is often reflected in organizational mandates, but very rarely are these needs translated into programmatic action. These barriers are always present, and many of them relate to attempting to provide culturally appropriate and relevant services in organizations that employ Eurocentric philosophies. Even when staff understand the challenges in providing these services – and even when staff are hired specifically to bridge this gap –they still encounter the realities of the NPIC (INCITE!, 2017) and rigid systems that are unable or unwilling to flex to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

Racialized and Indigenous Activists' Experiences Doing Feminist Organizing

The racialized and Indigenous activists I interviewed detailed the systemic barriers that resulted in them reproducing white settler systems in their work in feminist organizations. Beti, a composite created to illustrate the challenges they faced, managed a portfolio that included programs and policies of all things “marginalized” within her organization. As the only woman of colour

in the office, she had to carry the burden of her own experiences of racism and exclusion as she advocated for the women she served. Here Beti encountered the brick wall (Ahmed, 2012) of institutional diversity. Her role was intended to break down barriers but reproduced them. Women experience these barriers and attempt to navigate around them, but the institutions do not see these brick walls because they do not experience them. As a result, they assume the antiracism work is solving the barrier when in fact it is solidifying it, making it impossible to create systemic change. How can Beti solve a problem only she can see? This dilemma is complicated by Beti's unique positionality as a woman of colour with Indigenous roots in India who lives and works on the unceded territories of Coast Salish communities.

Understanding the NPIC within the Canadian Colonial Order

For Beti, as a racialized settler in Canada, creating a space where an Indigenous woman can smudge raises questions about the ways in which racialized and Indigenous communities coexist in white settler society. As is the case for Beti, one can identify as Indigenous, but if you are not Indigenous to the lands you are on, how does that complicate Indigenous identity? Identifying as Indigenous does not make Beti the appropriate person for all scenarios. An all-encompassing word like Indigenous needs to be met with appropriate local understandings of the complex meanings behind it. It is imperative to understand the very different histories and lived realities of Indigenous and racialized communities in Canada and other white settler states. Although colonized people live in white settler society (Razack, 2002) and may identify as Indigenous to their homelands, racialized communities can and do benefit from living on the occupied territories of Indigenous peoples (Jafri, 2007; Lawrence & Dua, 2005). Furthermore, Canada's ongoing context of settler colonialism creates an important landscape for understanding the unique experiences of diverse Indigenous communities, because the diversity is vast, and it cannot be understood with only one set of conclusions. Many scholars have explained the diversity of Indigenous experiences in structures such as education (Battiste, 1998; Denis, 2011), criminal justice, especially as it relates to Indigenous women (Hunt, 2014; Simpson, 2016), incarceration (Razack, 2015), and "participation" (Dhillon, 2017), among other arenas. State structures have embedded colonization and systemic racism in Canada. They have created Canada as a white nation and cemented violence and injustice throughout its laws (Dhillon, 2017; A. Simpson, 2014; Thobani, 2007).

Many authors (e.g., Dhillon, 2017; Razack, 2015; A. Simpson, 2014; Thobani, 2007) demonstrate how colonization plays out strategically in state recognition and intervention. The nonprofit funding dynamic is part of this process and perpetuates this very dynamic through mainstream nonprofits' interest in maintaining white settler colonization. These funding dynamics impose rules that create certain expectations about how things can be done. For

example, Beti was not able to invite an Indigenous Elder from the community to perform ceremony because of budget constraints. This subterfuge is evident in nonprofit organizations in the ways that project funding is created, allocated, and supervised. What types of projects get funded? Who is funded to conduct this work and what deliverables are required?

Organizing Feminist Social Justice on Unceded Territories

Exclusion is part of the systemic setup of colonization, intended or not. Beti's story of smudging and who is allowed to have access to it in organizations exemplifies the impacts of systemic racism in settler colonial contexts. Beti was supposed to create inclusion for Indigenous women but was not given the resources to do so effectively. Many feminist nonprofits do not actually want to fully include Indigenous people and ways of knowing; they have settled for the *perception* of inclusion. Committing to inclusion would require a drastic organizational restructuring, from funding sources, to the nonprofit board, to project delivery methods. Although some organizations now have started to consider this process, at the time, as the activists indicated, their presence in the organization provided the perception of inclusion. Ultimately, this is the way institutional whiteness is intended to work within the feminist organization – through the reinforcing structures of its operations (i.e., board of directors, funding bodies, staff). Similarly, Beti's body was supposed to do this work, but without the actual work of doing it. Beti could advocate for ceremony, but she did so against the invisible walls of race, class, tokenism, paternalism, and shallow intentions. She was expected to be the overarching representative of diversity. Racialized activists I interviewed said they were weary of oversimplifications of cultural communities and ideas and the expectation they would serve as the all-encompassing racialized mouthpiece. Some also expressed frustration with being expected to serve as a singular, pan-Indigenous token in a larger mainstream system that does not want to account for the tremendous diversity that exists among Indigenous communities.

Tokenism sets everyone up for failure, including the organizations. Although Beti knew there was injustice, having the time or mental energy to do something about it was difficult. And at the end of the day, the fact that Beti was working in the organization meant that, at least to a certain degree, she had been included, although not necessarily in the way she expected. Beti was as much in the system as she was outside of it (half in and half out). Her partial submission or complicity was related to the ways that systems are understood in Canada. The histories of Indigenous communities and the full context of the colonization they experience is wilful public denial. The government has embedded racist practices that govern Indigenous people to this day (e.g., the Indian Act, residential schools, foster care, inaction regarding missing and

murdered Indigenous women and girls). As a result, the interventions this system builds are inherently impotent.

Beti's organization wanted to serve Indigenous women but was unwilling to shift the power structures (and relinquish white supremacy) to manifest meaningful relationships. Organizations may not intend to exclude, but the NPIC (INCITE!, 2017) barriers prevent activists from doing the work they hope to do. Generations of activists like Beti have worked around barriers to re-emerge into visibility. But is it right to ask individuals to constantly navigate and recreate systems off their own backs? The work of engaging in Indigenous practices becomes a funding requirement, something that feels good, something that is reported to the funder, but is it making a difference? Are activists engaging in antiracist practices simply through a desire to be antiracist? Furthermore, can organizations say they are engaging Indigenous ways of knowing if they are not questioning the Eurocentric and colonial logics that permeate every aspect of knowing across the organization? The systems that are imposed on the nonprofit organizations Beti works for are a product not only of Eurocentric knowledge but also of the white settler systems that have built this ongoing legacy. These systems include the institutions Beti works in and navigates daily, such as the NPIC and the academy, as well as the gentrification of the city that surrounds her. To understand Beti's plight it is essential to question Eurocentric knowledge and dismantle white settler systems.

The Future of Feminist Organizing

The conflation of decolonization and diversity work that existed in Beti's organization showcases the ways in which race, racism, and Indigeneity are tokenized and maintained through one undifferentiated and othered person appointed through whiteness. The very fact that you can have a project titled "Feminist Decolonization in the Anti-violence Sector" that is funded for three years, as though this issue were something an organization could solve within that timeframe, shows the problematic systemic elements at play in performing diversity in feminist organizations. These systems are so entrenched in how we work it is hard to see another way of disrupting the modus operandi beyond the quiet ways in which activists are already defying expectations. There is no way these subversive and individual methods are enough to transform organizations.

As Beti sits amid the hardened realities of white settler systems, I am left with many questions about how to apply these complex understandings of race, racism, and identity in the context of feminist organizations. The fact remains that within the context of white settler systems (including feminist spaces), radical social justice cannot happen in the ways our feminist organizations promised – that is, creating radical antiracist actions that lead to transformative change. Throughout my research I have had to contend with the realization that

we need to grapple with the intentions themselves. What should we do with feminist good intentions that justify inaction in feminist spaces? How do we hold these bold intentions without letting the intention serve as the purpose, allowing the actions to fall drastically short? Feminist organizations are mimicking mainstream systems by wanting to be perceived as transformative but not actually doing the work to change. This is Beti's frustration. She is constrained within a system that can never materialize its promises, so she is stuck in a holding pattern.

Beti must also reckon with her own intentions. She is not perfect. She is well intentioned and wants to create change but is also replicating the problematics within organizations through her limited capacity and power to make change. What can be done about this? Several actions need to be taken, but this begins with a consciousness of how those who do this work are replicating the systems they seek to disrupt. Feminist organizers, including individual racialized and Indigenous activists, need to start this process by mapping and acknowledging their own role in the system, as well as how they might be complicit in upholding the system. This also requires analysis and understanding of how racialized and Indigenous peoples can and do collaborate on unceded territories. This is a complex and difficult task as it needs to consider tremendous difference and heterogeneity within racialized and Indigenous communities.

Beti spotlights the complicated relationship between racialized and Indigenous peoples on unceded territories. In white settler contexts, Brown people are also settlers – but differently than the mainstream white settler. These relationships are complex, but we must unpack the challenges that exist within this dynamic to explore how we do antiracism and feminist activism. Working in feminist nonprofit spaces is not enough to deliver social justice. We must unpack these dynamics and demand radical, transformative, feminist change.

Conclusion

Throughout this article, using Beti's experience of providing culturally relevant services, I have questioned the Eurocentric systems and knowledges at the center of feminist nonprofit organizations in Vancouver, Canada. Specifically, I have looked to answer the questions "What do antiracism projects look like in white settler feminist organizations?" and "How are these projects informed/interrupted by racialized and Indigenous activists doing diversity and inclusion work within these spaces?" I have unravelled Beti's story of organizing in feminist organizations to see what can be understood about white settler systems from her racialized experience. Doing so makes clear that many organizational limits prevent transformative social justice within these spaces. Often, the organization's dysconscious goal to center and maintain whiteness allows for only a superficial engagement with antiracism

activism. These limitations hinder Indigenous and racialized communities' access to services, even when the services and interventions are directly intended for them.

My research inquired into how organizations take up antiracism projects with a limited commitment to understanding what it means for white settler feminists, racialized settler feminists, and Indigenous feminists to organize through mainstream feminist organizations on unceded territories. Through understanding the oppression that exists in feminist and activist communities, it becomes clear that whiteness, white settler intentions, and mainstream ideologies deeply penetrate the ways in which we practice across these organizations. Despite our good intentions, we fail to provide the diversity and decolonizing expectations, projects, and promises we had hoped because of the complicated and multilayered elements at play within these spaces. Providing these must begin with a pause to deconstruct how white settler systems operate within feminist nonprofit organizations.

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