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Living Stories of Migrancy: Exile, Unconditional Hospitality, and Transnational Citizenships

Guest Editors:

Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, Carol Lee, Hembadoon Iyortyer Oguanobi

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In Loving Memory of
Architect, Dr. Philip Zegetar Iyortyer,
Master of Architecture, McGill University, Montreal
(January 15, 1949 – December 20, 2020)

My father was a selfless human being, a loyal friend, wonderful father to four daughters, husband to Mercy Iyortyer, and a dedicated community leader. He touched and changed the lives of thousands in many communities.

Dr. Philip Zegetar Iyortyer was involved in building over 20,000 housing units, neighborhood primary and secondary schools, police stations, post offices, hospitals, fire stations, the Supreme Court Complex in Abuja, Nigeria amongst various other projects.

He is remembered here by his loving daughter, Hemba Iyortyer Oguanobi. This is my tribute to him, and a tribute to all the daughters and sons who have lost loved ones to COVID-19.

We are not alone in our pain, and we are all in this together. Our thoughts and prayers are with each other.

May time heal our broken hearts.

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Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, Carol Lee, Hembadoon Iyortyer Oguanobi
University of Ottawa
nngafook@uottawa.ca

We do not know what hospitality is.

Not yet.

Not yet, but will we ever know?

(Jacques Derrida, 2000, p. 56)

We find ourselves living as guests, editors, amidst a global pandemic. Since March 2020, here in Canada, at the edges of the Kichi Sipi tributaries, we three editors have taken refuge in isolation, physically distancing from one another and others. What we know, and several have known before us, is that not all are living the COVID-19 Pandemic together. If anything, the pandemic has amplified the systemic inequities, aggressions, and state sponsored violence that continue to exist for Black, Indigenous, migrant workers, immigrant, refugee, and stateless citizens. Indeed, several communities who self-identify as non-white, or outside of a settler colonial nation-state system and its respective forms of citizenship, continue to be at the front lines of the pandemic in terms of their labor, sacrifice, and communal infections. In many ways, as **Khan** stresses in her opening poem to this special issue, different communities continue to live under, and as, erasure. The capacity for certain privileged citizens, to travel, to migrate, to "pass" through different international, provincial, and even local ports, have been put temporarily on hold. Whereas, migrant agricultural laborers, and others have been separated from their families, laboring to provide essential services for the children, youth, and Elders entrusted with their indentured professional care. For others, even after our borders open up, they will continue to live in camps, or on the run, as refugees and stateless people fleeing state-sponsored violence in countries such as, but not limited to Burundi, Eretria, Central African Republic, Sudan, Democratic of Republic of Congo, Somalia, Myanmar, Syria, South Sudan, Afghanistan, Argentina, El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras. All of them seeking refuge, unconditional hospitality, within the refuges of other African countries, Europe, Mexico, United States and Canada.

Due to the high transmissibility of COVID-19, almost every activity that encourages human interaction has been suspended. Indeed, the impact of the 2020 Pandemic has been described as one of the greatest neoliberal economic crises since the Great Depression. In fact, countries have doubled down in response to a new variant of the COVID-19 virus in the United Kingdom, troubling its White Supremacist anti-migration policies like Brexit. Here, Carlson (2009) reminds us,

> The limit, and perhaps the dilemma, of hospitality politics is that so long as the new immigrants in Europe, or the United States, are treated as "foreign," they still risk being exoticized and represented as deviant, abnormal, pathological, and criminal. (p. 260)

In light of such anti-immigrant, -refugee, and stateless racialized grammars of exclusion, can we still call for the "righteousness" of unconditional hospitality? Even, as citizens, some of us continue to question our inability to become Canadian, American, Somalian, Japanese, Nigerian, and so on hyph-e-nations.

In her essay, **Jennifer Matsunaga** seeks to unsettle migrant-settler narratives in relation to Indigenous sovereignty. To do so, she deconstructs her lived experiences of belonging and shame as a Japanese-British Canadian. Starting from the premise that we have to know where we have been to know where we are going, this piece looks to the past and reconsiders the effects, and affects, of different experiences of intergenerational belongings. Whereas **Saba Alvi**, who self-identifies as South Asian and Muslim, draws on life writing research to understand how her parents, first generation Canadians, navigated different cultural and religious traditions in order to help their children "pass" as Canadians. **Mark Currie** retraces his historical routes/roots to his mother, a racialized South-African citizen, born during Apartheid. Whereas his father self-identifies as a white settler, born and raised in southern Ontario, Canada. In his essay, he troubles how his return to Cape Town, South Africa, provoked him to grapple with how he (re)(de)constructed himself in relation to the differing ways he has been, and is recognized, by others. **Janice Fournillier** revisits the discursive "English" imprints within her essay as an Afro-Caribbean woman and ethnographer. Drawing on Trinidadian Creole, she invites us to revisit her denied experiences of academic promotion. She experiments with writing to reread the pain and shame of being a "~~transnational citizen~~." Their stories of migrancy and citizenship, provoke us as readers to rethink and (re)frame representations of racialized and (trans)national identities as hyphenated "~~transnational citizens~~" becoming in relation to different erasures. Such first, second, third, and… generation migrant stories remain, for the most part, censored from the school curriculum, the media, and official historical and contemporary narratives of becoming a citizen. Their life writings, like **Lam's** poetry, provoke us to question the stereotypes, hurdles you have to overcome, slowing you down, and/or setting you back toward becoming, with "adjustments," the "right" kind of "~~transnational citizen~~."

This is a bilateral process, as **Nyein Mya** puts forth in her essay, in which immigrants must renegotiate their imagined perceptions and definitions of a "national" identity. For her, multiple understandings and definitions of being a "Canadian" exists within the grand narratives that constitute the making of a settler colonial, White Supremacist nation. And yet, the censoring of different identity formations, outside of the conditions of settler colonial hospitality, are carved into the very psychosocial, material, and discursive fabric and landscapes of nation-states such as, but not limited to, Australia, United Kingdom, United States, South Africa, and/or Canada. Upon our arrival to former settler colonies, Indigenous traditional territories, as foreigners aspiring for better lives, Fook Ng to John Cyril, back to John Cyril, **Ng-A-Fook**, or today living as Chan instead of **Chen**, on the shoulders of 15,000 rail workers, the Chinese head tax, and exclusionary immigration acts, while recognizing ongoing displacements of displacing historical "truths," ancestral territories, Indian Residential Schooling systems, broken treaties, and communities that call for us to recognize our irreconcilable differences as narratives of citizenship with hyphenated heritages. It reproduces, as **Hembadoon Iyortyer Oguanobi** makes clear, what hospitality "is not," where several highly educated migrants watch their hopes dissipate like a useless promise, alone, dejected, replaying rejection like a sad love song, only to realize what hospitality "is" within a settler colonial nation state.

In response to Chen's and Hembadoon poetic inquiries, **Brian Smith** seeks to disrupt his relationships to, and with, settler nation-states. To do so, he troubles the processes of "home-making" in relation to what he terms white settler possessive logics. Moreover, he calls on us to question settler proclamations of land acknowledgments as a move toward innocence as they seek to make new homes on the traditional territories of different Indigenous peoples. Here, **Keri Cheechoo and Patrick Cheechoo** remind us in their artistic, poetic, and theoretical inquires that the (im)mobility of their ancestors, and family-based territories, continue to challenge the very concept of "national citizenship" in relation to land, ownership, taxation, and borders seeking to reduce expansive regions travelled by their families to hunt, fish, trap, harvest and trade. As they remind us, these ancestral territories continue to supersede the colonial boundaries and colonial nation-state name places that imprint and accentuate their English and Francophone presence within a "Canadian" settler historical consciousness void of nation-to-nation and/or treaty conceptions of citizenship.

Each of the poems and essays in this collection have implications for how we might welcome transnational children and youth to our classroom communities. **Aparna Mishra Tarc** turns to Valeria Luiselli's fictional depictions of migrant children in her novel "Lost Children Archive." She calls on our adult attention to the border-crossing poetics of transnational migration, for us to sit with and reimagine a novel's capacity to create an intertextual window into the minds and lives of citizen children witnessing the state sponsored violence, perpetuated against undocumented child migrants lost to the articulations of a mediated adult world. Luiselli's novel, as she illustrates, conjures the historical, contemporary, and autobiographical memories and stories of migrant and displaced children. Her essay challenges the present absence of migrants within educational and popular discourses of childhood, migration, historical consciousness and the responsibilities of the adult communities. **Tasha Ausman**, also calls our attention toward becoming more mindful in relation to our praxis within the curricular landscape in secondary schools in Canada, particularly with growing attention to the mental health of students during the COVID-19 pandemic. She troubles the unconditional welcoming of school yoga programs. As a high school teacher, a curriculum scholar, who self-identifies as South Asian, Tasha rereads the cultural and historical appropriation of yoga in relation to its economic and educational commodification, particularly in White Supremacist ways that (mis)appropriate elements of its spirituality.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has reminded several humans of their precarious relations with the more-than-human world. And while some of us live in social isolation, lockdowns, and/or physically distance, the Kichi Sipi River and its "other" animate and inanimate inhabitants continue to flow with and against its currents, the communal migrations, and the changing seasons. Rocks, the oldest living beings as **Ashley Campbell-Ghazinour** observes, continue to witness changing landscapes, stories of our lives, and the places where we live and dwell. And yet, how are we listening to their ancestral origin stories, and in turn, how might such listening change the way we speak and/or act to all living beings, human and non-human. Such stories take place, as the sun offers its warmth to rocks, the sumac sings their seasonal blues, and the Earth in all its ridges, rivers, and eddies rests, to take a breath. **Carol Lee's** essay seeks to reconsider the implications of migratory movements in relation to the human and more-than-human other "hosts" residing in different seasonal habitats. How has the habitat now occupied by humans along the Kichi Sipi become inhospitable or hospitable for migrating birds, insects, fish, beavers, and so on. How have such more-than-human beings welcomed us to their habitus as

animal relatives and/or as settler colonial foreigners? Each of the stories, essays, and poems, call on us as readers to recognize, unlearn, learn, and in turn stamp our passports with, what **Noor El-Husseini** poetically elegizes as, "the shadows in white tombstones." This Special Issue then, this collection, promises to provoke readers to pay attention, to live, to witness beyond the absent-minded settler or nation-state citizen living at home or abroad. It calls on us to reconsider other humans and more-than-human beings existing in exile, as homelessness, censored, under erasure, where their stories are often locked away waiting, conditionally and unconditionally, for that long-forgotten iron key.

Before leaving you as invited guests, to this Special Issue, we would like to take a moment to thank our contributors. We know that for some, taking the time to focus and complete your writing and crafting poetic inquiries during a pandemic was not without some costs to your mental health and well-being, or valuable time taken away from caring for family members, relatives, loved ones, and friends who have been affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Some of us have been separated and/or even lost from family members living in other countries. For others, you continue to negotiate the historical and contemporary intergenerational traumas of systemic and individual anti-Black, -Indigenous, -Muslim, -immigrant, …-racisms. This issue then has afforded some of us a momentary space and opportunity to talk back to certain historical and contemporary migratory erasures, censorships, and exclusions. Finally, we would also like to thank Cecille DePass for her hospitality, understanding, and kindness while waiting patiently for this collection to come to fruition during such troubling times of global unease.

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