“‘Idle No More’ and ‘Redwashing’: Transnational Indigenous Solidarity and Anti-Solidarity”

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In Edward Said’s seminal text Orientalism, post-colonial and cultural studies scholars have been able to understand how European colonial powers, and the scholars and cultural figures who were integral to the European colonial project, divided the world into “east” and “west.” The former region was seen to be inhabited by colonized subjects that European elites viewed as “uncivilized,” while they saw themselves as “civilized” in their region. Yet history reveals that the east/west binary cannot be so clearly delineated. There are pockets of the east in the west and pockets of the west in the east. Within the United States and Europe, colonized subjects have existed such as indigenous or Native peoples in the United States and Canada and they have witnessed genocide and continued dispossession in the name of being “uncivilized” or “barbaric.” Steven Salaita’s scholarship on the similar discourses that bind American and Israeli settler-colonialism must also be noted here. Additionally, in Palestine, we have witnessed the emergence of a Palestinian Authority, or indigenous colonial elite as a subcontractor of the Israeli occupation. Here we can turn to Frantz Fanon’s conception of “black skin” and “white masks” as well as his discussions of how colonial violence turns inward for colonized societies. Thus, even within the geographic contours of east and west, the existence of colonized and colonizing subjects are evident in both regions. Therefore, transnational American studies must account for the role of imperial elites in the United States in shaping of the trajectory of their colonizing counterparts as well as the colonized in Palestine, while simultaneously understanding the politics of solidarity and anti-solidarity between colonized populations in Canada and the United States on one hand and Palestine on the other. In my paper, I will examine the advent of solidarity between indigenous peoples in North America and Palestine, as well as the anti-solidarity that has emerged as a result of “redwashing.” How does the emergence of Palestinian solidarity with the “Idle No More Movement” as well as the Joy Harjo controversy with her institutional affiliation at Tel Aviv University allow us to analyze the mechanisms behind indigenous solidarity across geographic boundaries and the reality of colonial co-optation of indigenous elites? Through interviews with activists in the Idle No More Movement struggle as well as drawing upon my own personal experience with activism and advocacy amidst the Joy Harjo campaign, I will address these questions. While the legacy of Orientalism remains foundational for the field of transnational American studies, we must interrogate our conceptions of east/west, colonizer/colonized, and solidarity/anti-solidarity through the prism of Native/Palestinian indigenous political consciousness coupled with Zionism’s colonial co-optation of indigeneity.