Presenting a paper on imperial feminisms at a recent conference panel on mediating inclusions and exclusions, I was struck by a comment from one of the few attendees at the session, a well-established White scholar. His question centred on why we, the panellists, had decided to talk about race as if it were a “real” category. His language was somewhat more sophisticated, but his basic argument was that in making race real, we were dangerously close to essentializing a category that is fluid and socially constructed. This is an argument often articulated against those who talk and teach race. My response to that comment was and is that race is real to me. It marks me just as gender does, but the confluence of race and gender interlocks in ways that shape every facet of my life, determining the choices I make, the paths I travel, and the roads I am prohibited from travelling.

Later that day, my co-panellist, also a White man, commented on the nature of the question we were asked on the panel. Having just observed questions that were directed at me in a consecutive panel, he noted that doing any kind of work on race seemed like a constant battle, that I was always being challenged and my views contested. Speaking of the earlier panel in which he had participated, he commented that the man asking the question was White like himself. Whereupon he remarked that such a question was possible because the questioner, like himself, could always opt in and out of the struggle. I cannot opt in and out of the struggle. In fact, the struggle is an ongoing challenge in which the task is one of explaining race, showing its intricacies, and suffering its consequences. Nevertheless, as Sherene Razack cautions us, none of us is innocent in the story of race. Rather, we all have privileges and penalties that accrue from our particular positioning in the raced and gendered hierarchies that contain and define us. This book, then, is part of that constant challenge in talking race, but it also reflects the privilege in being able to tell this story, for not everyone has the opportunity to do so.
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As always, any shortcomings are entirely due to me.