

Decolonizing Feminism

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Chapter 10

Decolonizing Feminist Freedom: Indigenous Relationalities

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In this chapter I argue that decolonizing feminist theory requires that we foreground Indigenous struggles for freedom from settler colonization, and hence that we foreground relations to land and to sovereignty in our theories.¹ Attending to Indigenous feminist ontology, epistemology, ethics, and politics can transform Western secular feminist theory, including our understandings of the self, and our politics of freedom. Foregrounding Indigenous women's critical interventions into feminist theory requires that we expand feminist models of intersectionality to include the dimension of relationship to land and sovereignty, and the dimension of secularity/spirituality/religiosity. This in turn requires that we challenge binaries of essentialism/anti-essentialism, secular/religious, and colonizer/colonized. Understanding the specificity of Indigenous relation to land requires understanding the philosophy and practice of Indigenous relationalities. And that means challenging Western secular ontologies, epistemologies, and understandings of freedom.

I begin by taking up Aileen Moreton-Robinson's argument for an Australian Indigenous women's standpoint theory, from the perspective of a white secular settler feminist. I consider the implications of Indigenous relational ontology, epistemology, and axiology, and respond to the challenges these concepts pose for Western secular feminist philosophy and political theory, arguing that these concepts point to a radically relational understanding of freedom.

Finally, I argue that feminist critiques of essentialism often rely on particular, provincial, Western secular conceptions of what freedom is. Thus they *misread* Indigenous relationality and Indigenous relational freedom. I argue that this misreading, and the reliance on this conception of freedom, leads to misreadings of Indigenous political struggles: of feminist

struggles within Indigenous communities and of Indigenous struggles for sovereignty.

I argue that Indigenous philosophy offers a conception of relational freedom that includes heterogeneity and change while maintaining rootedness in relation to land. Indigenous philosophy calls all of us to open up to a radically relational theory and practice of freedom, reframing questions of individual freedom and politics of sovereignty within a theory and politics of relationality.

As a settler feminist theorist, I am engaging here in a politics of listening. Many contemporary Indigenous thinkers have called for a shift in Indigenous politics, from a politics of seeking recognition to a politics of resurgence. Rather than waiting for recognition from settler colonial states, a politics of resurgence involves asserting Indigenous forms of sovereignty; revaluing and renewing Indigenous knowledge, law, philosophies, and practices; and building Indigenous communities and political solidarity.²

I would argue that in response, settler colonial academics, activists, governments, and societies need to work on a politics of listening: to engage in a politics of self-transformation through listening, to become capable of a politics of mutual recognition. Linda Tuhiwai Smith quotes Gayatri Spivak: "For me, the question 'Who should speak?' is less crucial than 'Who will listen?'"³

Here we can learn from Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, an artist, educator, and elder of the Ngangikurungkur tribe in Nauiyu (Northern Territory, Australia). She writes that the name of her tribe, *Ngangikurungkur*, means "Deep Water Sounds" or "Sounds of the Deep." And in her language, the practice of tapping into the deep spring within us is called *Dadirri*: this is a practice of "inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness." This practice of listening—*Dadirri*—she writes "is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. *Dadirri* recognises the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like what you call 'contemplation.'" And she adds: "It's not 'Aboriginal spirituality.' Everybody's got it. It's just that they haven't found it."⁴

In our practices of listening, we need to beware of the dangers not only of ignorance and denial but also of romanticism of the Other, and of appropriating and instrumentalizing Indigenous knowledge and philosophy. While it is crucial that settler colonials learn from this knowledge, we need to remember that for Indigenous peoples, "what is more important than what alternatives Indigenous peoples offer the world is what alternatives Indigenous peoples offer each other."⁵

A note on terminology and scope: in this paper, I generally use the term *Indigenous* but also follow Indigenous scholars' uses of the terms *Native*,

Aboriginal, and *Indian* to refer to First Nations peoples, philosophies, and practices. While all of these terms are problematic generalizations, I follow Indigenous scholars' usages of the terms and their own generalizations about indigeneity. I am drawing on a range of scholarship in Indigenous studies, including work by philosophers, political theorists, and cultural and social theorists in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the United States.⁶ While the name *Indigenous* is taken on by diverse groups with diverse practices, and while any generalizations are subject to controversy and contestation, these scholars argue that relationality is a distinctive and generalizable Indigenous philosophy. I return to these questions later in the chapter.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONALITY AND INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S STANDPOINT: CHALLENGES TO SECULAR FEMINISMS

Aileen Moreton-Robinson argues that Indigenous women's standpoint theory can both draw from and extend feminist standpoint theory. "Indigenous and feminist scholars share an understanding that their respective production of knowledge is a site of constant struggle against normative dominant patriarchal frameworks."⁷ An Indigenous women's standpoint is produced through inheritance and achieved through struggle:

It is constituted by our sovereignty and constitutive of the interconnectedness of our ontology (our way of being); our epistemology (our way of knowing) and our axiology (our way of doing). It generates its problematics through Indigenous women's knowledges and experiences, acknowledging that intersecting oppressions will situate us in different power relations and affect our different individual experiences under social, political, historical and material conditions that we share either consciously or unconsciously. These conditions and the sets of complex relations that discursively shape us in the everyday are also complicated by our respective cultural, sexual, racialised, abled and class differences. Thus our cultural and social positioning informs how, when, where and why we conduct research as well as our disciplinary knowledges and training as Indigenous women academics. Our lives are always shaped by the omnipresence of patriarchal white sovereignty and its continual denial of our sovereignty. In our everyday existence we deploy a "tactical subjectivity with the capacity to recentre depending upon the kinds of oppression to be confronted" within and outside our communities.⁸

While Moreton-Robinson draws from the standpoint theories of feminists of color, in particular Patricia Hill-Collins's theory of subjugated knowledges, she argues that feminist standpoint theories are typically predicated on a body/earth split and do not address their privileged relationship to the

nation's sovereignty. Moreton-Robinson draws on the work of Karen Martin, Shawn Wilson, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, and others, to argue that the constitutive elements of Indigenous social research paradigms in New Zealand, Canada, and Australia are a specific ontology, epistemology, and axiology (ways of being, knowing, and doing) "rooted in our embodied connection to our respective countries, all living entities and our ancestors; our sovereignty" conceptualized as "relationality."⁹ Thus the three tenets of Indigenous women's standpoint theory are:

Ontology (Way of Being): "Indigenous women's ontology is derived from our relations to country." According to Moreton-Robinson, in Australia, Indigenous people's belonging can be traced to the origin time when ancestral creator beings created the land and all living things tied to particular tracts of land. The creator beings metamorphosed as stones and other aspects of the natural world including humans, changing form and gender; thus all beings share a common life force. "The ontological relationship occurs through the inter-substantiation of ancestral creator beings, humans and country; it is a form of embodiment based on blood line to country. As such Indigenous women's bodies signify our sovereignty."¹⁰

Epistemology (Way of Knowing): "As an Indigenous woman my ontological relation to country informs my epistemology. My coming to know and knowing is constituted through what I have termed relationality. One is connected by descent, country, place and shared experiences where one experiences *the self as part of others and others as part of the self* [my italics]; this is learnt through reciprocity, obligation, shared experiences, co-existence, co-operation and social memory." According to Indigenous epistemology, "I am worth no more or no less than other living things: the world I inhabit has been created by ancestral creator beings and it is organic and alive with spirits and signs which inform my way of knowing. Thus respect and caution frame my approach to knowledge production; the more that I know the less that I know because *there are other forms of knowledge that exist beyond us as humans* [my italics]. One cannot know everything and everything cannot be known."¹¹

Moreton-Robinson writes that Indigenous women's ways of knowing are informed by shared knowledge and experiences, conscious and unconscious, shaped by social positioning, and achieved through struggle. "Such a standpoint does not deny the diversity of Indigenous women's individual concrete experiences. Rather it is where our shared knowledges and experiences within hierarchical relations of ruling and power converge and are operationalised."¹²

Axiology (way of doing): "Indigenous women's ways of doing things within the academy are informed by our ontology and epistemology and are an extension of our communal responsibilities and sovereignties. . . . We do things on the basis of our relationality."¹³

Moreton-Robinson argues that Indigenous women's standpoint differs from feminist standpoint theories in two ways. Feminist standpoint

theorists, she writes, "do not address their privileged relationship to the nation's sovereignty." And feminist standpoint theories are typically "predicated on a body/earth split, discursively positioning women as female humans above other non-human living things."¹⁴ I shall address each of these claims in turn.

In response to the charge that they do not address their privileged relationship to the nation's sovereignty, feminist standpoint theorists might point out that many of them have criticized patriarchal and racialized understandings of the individual and private property; of the nature/culture division; and of nationalism, capitalism, and imperialism, and have developed complex theories of relationality and interconnectedness. But decolonizing feminism would require that we frame all of these critiques within an explicit analysis of the legacy and continuing politics of colonization: Western concepts of the individual, rights, and sovereignty have all been predicated on the assumption of property rights entrenched through the theory and practice of colonization.¹⁵ For instance, John Locke's understanding of rights to property, and to the self as property, was developed in part through an explicit justification of the invasion and theft of land in the Americas, on the grounds that the settlers earned these rights by mixing their labor with the land in a way that was productive, whereas the original peoples were savages who did not. (He was, of course, mistaken on every point.)¹⁶

Moreover, decolonizing feminism would involve thematizing questions of sovereignty. Many Indigenous theorists argue that the legitimacy of nation-state sovereignty is rarely questioned by political theorists, who fail to question its history and future: to acknowledge that settler states are founded not just on liberal and democratic principles but on genocide, and to question the assumption that nation-states will persist into the future.¹⁷

This requires, as Moreton-Robinson has argued in *Talkin' Up to the White Woman*, acknowledgement and reflection on settler colonial women's privilege and agency in the oppression of Aboriginal women. Larissa Behrendt has argued that the white women's movement in Australia has failed Aboriginal women. White women gained the right to vote in all federal and state elections in 1903, but Aboriginal women were not recognized as citizens and did not have voting rights until 1967. Moreover, "issues high on the political agenda for Aboriginal women are not issues of concern for white women."¹⁸ Such issues include sovereignty rights, land claims, protection and communication of culture, protection of women's sacred sites, maintaining social relations in their communities, the high levels of incarceration and abuse of Indigenous adults and children, destructive government intervention into communities and removal of essential infrastructure, and the continuing practice of removal of children from families and communities. Obviously any feminist movement that claims to represent women would have to prioritize these and other issues of priority to Aboriginal women. It would also

not assume the right to intervene in Aboriginal communities on behalf of Aboriginal women, or to include Aboriginal women in universalizing claims about women's issues.¹⁹

It is also, however, important to question the unity of the category of "settlers," and the unity of a privileged relation to the nation's sovereignty, when we foreground relations to land. An intersectional analysis of settler states will recognize multiple waves of immigration of settlers who are very differently positioned on the land. So, we need to recognize the different positions of governments, corporations, property owners (and there are obviously various types of property ownership and power), renters, squatters, privileged cosmopolitans, mestizas, refugees, asylum seekers, homeless peoples, slaves and descendants of slaves, racialized groups, groups identified as white, groups that have struggled to be classified as white, oppressed and displaced nations within states, peasant farmers, landless workers, formerly colonized peoples, citizens of formerly colonized and still racialized "Third World" states, along with diverse Indigenous peoples, who occupy very different positions in systems of ownership of and responsibility for land. In Australia many of the original settlers were convicts: desperately poor people charged with petty crimes in Britain and sent to a prison colony on an island on the other side of the world, as an alternative to execution. Many new prospective settlers are asylum seekers detained in prison camps on a barren island off the coast of Australia. Such an analysis complicates any simple binary of colonizers and colonized, settlers and Indigenous peoples. Yet we need to recognize the *specificity* of the history and continuing colonization of Indigenous peoples, of Indigenous relations to land, and of Indigenous struggles for decolonization.

Moreton-Robinson's second argument is that in contrast to non-Indigenous feminist standpoint theory, "Indigenous research paradigms are founded on a construction of humanness that is predicated on the body's connectedness to our respective countries, human ancestors, creative beings and all living things."²⁰ For Indigenous peoples, relation to land includes all of these relationships.

Feminist theorists have analyzed the complex relations between constructions of gender, racialized femininity, and "nature," the mind-body split, and the links between patriarchal and racist domination and the domination of nature. Ecofeminists have long argued for ethical relations with the nonhuman world, and a growing number of Western feminist philosophers are working on animal ethics and interspecies ethics.²¹ Still, feminist theories do tend to be human focused. In Indigenous relational ontologies there is no primacy of humans as agents or ends, or as knowers. Indigenous *relation to land* refers to the relationality of all beings and the specific connection of each being to specific areas of country.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONAL ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY

A central and powerful concept in some Indigenous metaphysics is the understanding of breath. Anne Waters writes:

In Diné (Navajo) thought, for example, because the breath of life (air) is constantly being exchanged in the universe, from the cosmos and to the earth, breath plays a central role in complementary metaphysical thought. . . . smoke, as manifesting aspects of breath, operates as the medium for air to reach the sky, the cosmos, as do words when spoken or sung. The exchange of breath is important because all things in the universe are related through air, and all are made of the same basic elements. Just as we take in air to breathe, so also we let out breath, giving back to that from which we take. . . . spirit (energy) infuses everything.²²

Waters argues that the centrality of the breath that passes through skin and connects rather than separates expresses an Indigenous nonbinary metaphysics, focused on connections rather than on separate and opposed entities and individuals. The breath (energy, spirit) circulates among all elements in the universe.²³

Some Western feminist theorists have drawn on such worldviews to theorize feminist process metaphysics.²⁴ And some have theorized the relational human self in ways that echo the Indigenous conception of connecting breath. Against the assumption that the self is essentially separate and bounded, that it is simply self-evident that the body is a container that separates us from others and from the world, Catherine Keller argues that the human skin is a permeable boundary: "Our skin does not separate—it connects us to the world through a wondrous network of sensory awareness. . . . Through my senses I go into the world, and the world comes into me."²⁵

The focus on breath in Indigenous ontology is also central to Indigenous theories of knowledge. As Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann tells us:

To know me is to breathe with me.

She connects this understanding of knowledge with the practice of deep listening:

To breathe with me is to listen deeply.

To listen deeply is to connect.

Knowledge, then, could be described as a practice of *being with* and *knowing with*—very different from the subject-object model of knowledge, which

involves a distanced subject who learns by testing objects, asking sceptical questions, and manipulating variables. Research is done *with*, not *on*, other beings in relationships. Relational knowing involves a practice of attentiveness and attunement, listening, watching and waiting for signs, attending with all the senses over long periods of time, remembering, and reflecting. And knowledge is conveyed through narrative, in the form of stories, rather than through the assertion of truth claims. As Thomas King writes: "The truth about stories is that that's all we are."²⁶

In Indigenous philosophy, "knowing with" means that knowledge is not universal but is dispersed among diverse knowers. Even more radically, knowledge is not restricted to humans, because humans are not the only ones who know. Moreton-Robinson, along with many other Indigenous thinkers, argues that in Indigenous thought humans do not assume their knowledge to be primary or superior to the knowledge of rocks, trees, animals, spirits, and ancestors. Thus, relational knowing means not prioritizing human knowledge: listening to the knowledge of rivers and trees, recognizing those other beings as co-knowers, collaborators, and sometimes recognizing their knowledge as primary, and superior to ours. For some Indigenous thinkers, it is self-evident that stones have the most knowledge, because they have been there for the longest time.

That means that any view that assumes that humans take primacy as knowers *fails* to situate the knower in a web of relations with all beings. And any knowledge of the world or any part of it that does not include these relations is incomplete and inadequate knowledge. But it's worse than inadequate. This kind of knowledge is directly linked to the relations of domination that characterize colonization. The arrogance of assuming that humans are the only ones who know, and the failure to listen to the knowledge of animals, and of rivers and trees, lead to the understanding of the land as property, to the perception of land and all elements of the earth as raw material to be transformed into commodities. José Medina has argued that blindness to social relationality is an epistemic vice.²⁷ I think that if we take Indigenous relational epistemology seriously, then we will see that blindness to the radical cosmic relationality of an entirely animate world is an epistemic vice of even greater magnitude.

The idea that knowledge is dispersed among multiple knowers in an entirely animate universe is of course very difficult for Western secular academics to comprehend, let alone accept. What does it mean to say that a stone or a river has knowledge? The impulse is to see these ideas as primitive and prescientific, or, if we are more generous, romantic and beautiful but not real: not accurate representations of reality. It may be possible to see this as "Indigenous knowledge," but it's much more difficult to accept it as *knowledge*.

But this may be changing. For example, in the science of forest ecology, in the past twenty years there has been "a burst of careful scientific research occurring worldwide that is uncovering all manner of ways that

trees communicate with each other above and below ground."²⁸ Forest ecologist Suzanne Simard has found that trees in forests communicate with each other through what she terms the *wood wide web*, and argues that "mother trees recognize and talk with their kin, shaping future generations." Thus trees are being seen as active and knowing agents. Moreover, they are being seen as social beings. Simard writes: "These discoveries have transformed our understanding of trees from competitive crusaders of the self to members of a connected, relating, communicating system."²⁹ In *The Hidden Life of Trees*, Peter Wohlleben describes the ways in which trees know how to interact with each other and with other beings in the natural world. With Wohlleben, Tim Flannery writes that trees are clearly sharing information, and that they appear to be in relations of care for each other.³⁰ It appears that Western science is just discovering what Indigenous scientists have known for many thousands of years. In the words of Murrumbidgee Walubara Yindjiji: "When you look at a tree, you see a tree. When I look at a tree, I see the tree and all of its friends."³¹

Some scientists are now pursuing connections between Indigenous knowledges and Western science, and processes of sharing knowledge.³²

But the idea that trees are knowers is of course controversial. Can communication among trees be recognized as knowledge? Or is this "knowledge" really just an automatic response to stimuli? (Of course, some scientists believe that human knowledge too can be explained mechanistically.) As feminist epistemologist Elizabeth Potter has written, empirical facts can be open to diverse and competing interpretations that explain the findings equally well. The choice of explanatory frames is influenced, in part, by our politics.³³ In this case, our understandings of the relationships among trees are influenced by the political and ethical commitments that shape very different worldviews, or systems of knowledge. Is the communication of trees a form of knowledge among sentient beings, or is it just a mechanistic processing of electronic impulses? Are trees competitors in a universe of selfish individuals, or social beings in relations of not only power but also cooperation and love? I am suggesting that feminist theorists, especially those of us with commitments to relational ethics and relational knowledge, have very good ethical and political reasons to take Indigenous scientific knowledge seriously, and to pursue collaborations between Indigenous and Western science.

As the example of the knowledge of trees indicates, expanding our understanding of *who knows* requires expanding our understanding of *what knowledge is*. Does knowledge require consciousness and reflection? Is knowledge necessarily universal or are there diverse knowledges? Feminist standpoint theorists do recognize diverse knowledges among human knowers, who are situated in diverse positions and relations of power, producing dominant and subjugated knowledges. Can Western feminist theorists recognize the diverse knowledges of trees and even rocks?

These questions of knowledge raise questions of relativism and universalism. Is the knowledge of trees (and the Indigenous knowledge of that knowledge) something all of us could and should learn? Or should these knowledges be recognized as specific and local knowledges? Indigenous theorists argue that both are true. There are knowledges that are not meant for all of us. And there are specific knowledges that can transform universals. Many Indigenous peoples recognize diverse knowledges, connected to responsibilities for specific areas of land, and to specific roles and kin relations.³⁴ Recognizing the diversity of knowledge would in itself transform our general knowledge, and our understandings of objectivity and universality. A decolonized feminist theory of knowledge would need not only to recognize some Indigenous knowledge as “Indigenous knowledge” but to recognize it as *knowledge*—and, in many cases, as *better* knowledge. As Moreton-Robinson argues, Indigenous knowledge, learned through thousands of years of study, can provide a basis for what Sandra Harding calls “strong objectivity.”³⁵

Decolonizing feminist knowledge would require practices of self-transformation to enable a fusion of horizons. It would also require transforming our practices of knowledge. And this is where Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous axiology meet, in the practices of knowledge.

INDIGENOUS RELATIONAL AXIOLOGY: PRACTICES OF KNOWLEDGE

The relationship between knowledge and doing in Indigenous philosophy presents a further challenge to Western secular feminists. Many Indigenous theorists argue that Indigenous knowledges are misused by non-Indigenous researchers. Anishnabe scholar Deborah McGregor identifies “the fundamental dichotomy at the heart of current controversy in the field of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) in Canada: namely, the vast and ongoing separation between the academic “experts” who study TEK and TEK issues, and the Aboriginal people who actually live according to TEK teachings.”³⁶ As McGregor points out, Indigenous knowledge is inseparable from doing. Knowledge is meant to be *lived*. Anishnabe philosopher Winona Laduke describes the Aboriginal concept of “Minobimaatisiwin,” meaning “the good life” or *lifeway*.³⁷ “From an Aboriginal perspective, if you are not living the good life, then you are not doing TEK.”³⁸

At a minimum, this means not using Indigenous people and knowledge as objects of research and not stealing Indigenous knowledge for profit. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that “research” is a dirty word among Indigenous peoples, who have been researched to death. Pharmaceutical corporations routinely steal Indigenous knowledge of plants to produce medicines, cosmetics,

and “natural” supplements. Vandana Shiva has written and worked extensively against the practice of biopiracy: the corporate theft of seeds, water, and other forms of natural life, and the Indigenous knowledges of these forms of life.³⁹

Here, I shall focus on only one aspect of the practice of knowledge as an ethical practice, and will consider its implications for conceptions of freedom. Indigenous philosophies criticize not only the assumption that knowledge is necessarily universalizable but also the assumption that knowledge is best practiced through (individualized) sceptical critique. Brian Yazzie Burkhart argues that in many Indigenous philosophies there is *a limit to what should be questioned*. Unlike modern Western philosophy and science, which depend on unending question-asking and testing, Indigenous philosophy is based on patient observation and contemplation. To formulate questions to test the earth, “to see if it conformed best to this pattern or that” is “to not really observe, to not really listen.”⁴⁰ Knowledge involves listening, both to everything around us and to the stories that have been passed down to us. Knowledge then is relational.

Thus while it involves contemplation, this knowledge is also different from the ancient Greek contemplation of an objective world separate from the subject. “Unlike Thales and Plato, American Indian philosophers see the act of displacing oneself from the world in order to do philosophy not only as unnecessary but as highly problematic, since in doing so one is only guessing whether what one is striving after is really knowledge at all and whether the questions one has formulated are even really questions.”⁴¹ This means that there are things that should not be questioned, and questions that should not be asked. An example of such a question is the response that Western people will often give to a certain Indigenous account of creation.

In this account, the earth rests on the back of a turtle. The Western response to this account is simply the question, “What holds the turtle?” One elder storyteller responded to this question by saying simply, “Well, then there must be turtles all the way down.” The storyteller had no patience with this way of thinking. It seemed to her that asking such a question was like asking for proof that she had a mother or for proof that plants grow in the earth and nourish the people—questions, in her mind, that only someone extremely confused would ask.⁴²

The “turtles all the way down” story seems to be common to many Indigenous as well as East Indian cultures (it was encountered by Jesuits in India in the sixteenth century) and has been used in both Indian and Western philosophy to illustrate the problem of infinite regress. In the Western stories the turtle view of the world is typically attributed to an “Oriental,” or an old woman. In response, the Western man of knowledge scoffs, pointing out that

such a view is incoherent. But what if it's the Western man of knowledge who doesn't get it? What if the story of the earth resting on the back of a turtle, who stands on the backs of more turtles, is a different form of knowledge: a story of interdependence and responsibility, in a nonmechanistic, animate universe held together not by truth claims but by stories, not by inanimate materials but by active agents?

The response to such a story is not to question its truth claims, but to appreciate the connectedness of all of creation, and the responsibilities entailed by that interdependence. Is it an accurate representation of the mechanics of the universe? No. But it does seem to have guided Indigenous communities to develop very detailed and accurate knowledge of land, water, and weather patterns, and plant and animal life, along with ways of cultivating and sustaining country. If the point of knowledge is to appreciate our place in the universe and to guide our actions, to guide us in our interactions with each other and with the world, then this kind of knowledge has served very well.

Western models of knowledge derived through sceptical questioning and critique are linked to a very specific understanding of *freedom*: the subject is free from ties to the object, and is free to test and manipulate the object. Freedom allows, even requires, that we criticize, question, and test; these are the actions of the free thinker. We typically regard the absence of this capacity to engage in sceptical critique as an absence of individual freedom. But what if Indigenous knowledge is linked to a *different conception of freedom*: if the self is part of others and others are part of the self, then knowledge is developed with others, in our intimate relations with others, and freedom is situated in these relations. We are not free to subject others to interrogation or manipulation, because our freedom is relational freedom: we are free only in and through our relations with others, including all creatures in an animate universe.⁴³

Of course Indigenous knowledge and knowledge practices include capacities for critique, and provide a basis for very strong political critiques of colonization. But these are not distanced and sceptical critiques. These are critiques of domination from within a relational perspective: critiques of distorted and broken relations, and critiques of colonizers' contempt for relations.⁴⁴

The practices of knowledge oriented toward stories rather than truth claims, toward deep listening and *being with* rather than distanced observation, testing, and sceptical questioning, are rooted in Indigenous spirituality. As the image of breath as spirit suggests, Indigenous relationality includes more than the natural world. It also includes relations to ancestors and spirits, and can, as Moreton-Robinson notes, include relations to creator gods. This means that ancestors and spirits must also be recognized as knowers, and human knowledge will be practiced in relation with these knowers. In

this animate and enspirited world, relations to all elements of creation are sacralized, and the spirits of ancestors who have passed on are still present. So we come to the difficult question of the relation between the secular and the spiritual. What is the status of forms of knowledge that McPherson and Rabb describe as "higher states of consciousness," such as the vision quest in North American communities and the dreaming in Australian Aboriginal communities? How can Western secular feminist philosophy respond to the belief that sustaining relations in a sacralized world means considering when questioning is appropriate?

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes:

The arguments of different Indigenous peoples based on spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape and to stones, rocks, insects and other things, seen and unseen, have been difficult arguments for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept. . . . Concepts of spirituality which Christianity attempted to destroy, then to appropriate, and then to claim, are critical sites of resistance for Indigenous peoples. The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest contrast and mark of difference between Indigenous peoples and the West. It is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control. . . . yet.⁴⁵

The spiritualities central to Indigenous ontology and epistemology present a challenge for secular Western feminism. But a practice of decolonizing feminism requires that we ask just how secular Western feminist theory actually is. The modern Western faith in the primacy of the individual is bound up with a Christian heritage: this is a culture organized around the idea that a human individual (and only a human individual) is the incarnation of a transcendent and omniscient God on earth. From this perspective, the Western feminist faith in women's individual rights and autonomy, and in a conception of individual freedom characterized by a capacity for distanced questioning, in a quest for universal truths, appears somewhat less than secular.

For Vine Deloria Jr., Christianity is the foundation of Western secular thought. In *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, he argued that the Christian belief that the (white) human being is not a part of nature but a transcendent species has been central to the domination of Indigenous peoples. The Christian faith in the hierarchical ordering of beings justified and organized, through missions in support of settler states, the domination of Indigenous people classed as lesser beings. Moreover, Deloria argues that Christian proselytizing is rooted in the disconnection of truth from land: whereas Indigenous knowledge is relative to particular land areas and the inhabitants of those lands, the claim to a single universal truth that should be recognized by all, and the attempt to convert all to that truth, has been central to Christian missions and imperialist regimes.⁴⁶

Talal Asad argues that while it is certainly connected to Christianity, liberal secularism has its own distinctive myths—or is in itself a myth—distinct from Christianity.⁴⁷ Deloria and Asad agree, however, that the faith in the primacy of the individual and in the individualist model of distanced and sceptical critique without limits is central to this myth. And both argue that from nonsecular perspectives, this kind of critique can be seen and experienced as a transgression of relationship. Here I want to emphasize that the Western secular understanding of individual *freedom* involves a very particular myth: that the individual has not only the right but also the duty to question and criticize without limits. Ironically, this is a certainty that we tend to accept without question. It is rooted in the secular myth that question-asking will lead us to the Truth, which is in turn linked to a particular conception of progress.

While we may believe that we can sever the practice of sceptical questioning from its roots in seeking the Truth, from an Indigenous perspective, this practice becomes not only destructive but irrational: we keep asking questions without knowing why we are doing it, in the name of a freedom that is practically meaningless.

RELATIONAL INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

None of this should be taken to imply that Indigenous knowledges do not include individual questioning and independent thought and action. Dennis McPherson and Douglas Rabb write that individual autonomy and independent thought are highly valued and nurtured in Indigenous communities.⁴⁸ In contrast to European and settler societies in which child-rearing and education require the imposition of rules and structure, and many years of direct instruction, Indigenous child rearing has traditionally avoided any kind of coercion or punishment. McPherson and Rabb draw a striking contrast between Kantian and Indigenous understandings of the development of autonomy. While both Kantian and Indigenous models value autonomy, for Kant, children learn to be autonomous only by undergoing a long period of heteronomy: children learn to impose laws upon themselves only by learning to obey the laws imposed by parents and teachers. In contrast, Indigenous children are considered to be autonomous persons from a very young age. They are not constantly watched and controlled; they are free to explore their environments, and are expected to be independent and to take responsibility for their actions and choices. From the Indigenous perspective, the Kantian model is contradictory: what kind of strange society expects people to learn to be autonomous by being controlled?⁴⁹

According to McPherson and Rabb, Indigenous children are taught, but they are taught not through direct instruction (which is considered a

disrespectful imposition) but through narratives and rituals, through examples set by elders, and through the direct experience of a way of life. This philosophy of education is described by McPherson and Rabb as a narrative ethic: parents and elders teach by telling stories that provide the child with frameworks that help the individual to think about and decide on actions. V.F. Cordova argues that Indigenous child rearing involves pointing out choices, and letting children make their own decisions and experience consequences, so that they learn to accept responsibility. The full status of human is attained when the child comes to recognize that his actions have consequences for all his relations. Thus, autonomy requires “self-initiative combined with a high degree of self-sufficiency,” but it also requires “an enhanced perception of the needs and emotions of others as well as a keen perception of where the child was in the world (a sense of place).”⁵⁰ This child-rearing practice is consistent with the ethic that guides interactions among adults: “An Aboriginal person does not tell another Aboriginal what to do. The act of directly interfering in someone’s life is considered rude. . . . This is not to say that people never interfere, but when they do, it is in an indirect way designed not to offend.”⁵¹

Some Indigenous theorists have argued that these practices reflect an “ethic of noninterference.”⁵² Shay Welch argues that it is “a full-throated version of noninterference.”⁵³ But all of these theorists stress that this ethic is situated in the context of a strong communal ethic and a practice of supportive guidance. So this is a conception of noninterference very different from the one described by Hobbes and Isaiah Berlin, who imagined an atomistic individual whose freedom was demarcated in the circumscribed space within which he was unconstrained by others. And it is very different from the image of the primitive Indian wild and alone on the empty frontier, unconstrained by rules or laws. This is a conception of noninterference that presupposes a radically relational self as part of others and others as part of the self.

This means that Indigenous practices of question-asking have not been rooted in a conception of individual freedom that demands that each individual contributes to a quest for universal truth, or that each individual must find her own Truth, or that each individual is free to test and experiment without limits and without connections or responsibilities to what is being tested.

Instead, practices of question asking are rooted in a sense of responsibility to a community, to a land and its inhabitants. And they are rooted in a philosophy of relationality, which emphasizes an experience of being with, rather than in authority, which provokes critique of authority. They are rooted, then, in a conception and practice of freedom in relationship. This is a practice of freedom not based in fear or defense against authority and constraint, not characterized by lonely atomism, and not expressed in the imaginary of doing whatever you want, or unending questioning. This is a freedom and autonomy grounded in the security that you are never alone, and the knowledge that

your power comes from all your relations, to whom you are always responsible. And this understanding of individual freedom has arguably been more conducive to democratic governance than the Western conception of freedom as noninterference, which sits in conflict with conceptions of freedom as participation in democracy.

Elsewhere I argue that the Western liberal conception of individual freedom as noninterference was developed through a *misreading* of Indigenous freedom. Here I shall argue that feminist critiques of essentialism in Indigenous thought often rely on particular provincial conceptions of what freedom is. Thus they *misread* Indigenous relationality and Indigenous relational freedom. And I argue that this misreading leads to misreadings of Indigenous political struggles: of feminist struggles within Indigenous communities and of Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. I argue that understanding these struggles requires an understanding of the distinctiveness of Indigenous relational freedom.

QUESTIONS OF ESSENTIALISM: MISREADINGS OF INDIGENOUS RELATIONALITY

Indigenous theorists are frequently told that their invocation of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge, and arguments for Indigenous nationalism and sovereignty, are essentialist. Indigenous researchers do address a number of questions about essentialism. The term *Indigenism* is used to identify vastly different and diverse peoples, and Indigenous researchers certainly do not agree about what kinds of generalizations can be made about Indigenous people. Many argue that no such generalizations can be made. Moreover, essentialized categories have been used by colonizers to classify Indigenous peoples in ways that have been divisive and destructive.⁵⁴ Indigenous peoples are forced to provide evidence of authentic Indigenous identity to substantiate land claims and intellectual property claims. Such policies have served to fragment and divide communities and perpetuate racialized discourses as to who counts as a “real Indian” or “real Aboriginal.”

Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes that while claiming essential Indigenous characteristics is often strategic, in struggles for Indigenous rights, there is also a spiritual conception of essence that is important to Indigenous worldviews:

In these views, the essence of a person has a genealogy which can be traced back to an earth parent, usually glossed as an Earth Mother.

A human person does not stand alone, but shares with other animate and in the Western sense, “inanimate” beings, a relationship based on a shared “essence” of life. The significance of place, of land, of landscape, of other things

in the universe, in defining the very essence of a people, makes for a very different rendering of the term essentialism as used by Indigenous peoples.⁵⁵

Are these spiritual conceptions of an essence of a people and a shared essence of life even thinkable for Western secular feminism? What would it mean for a decolonized feminism to seriously engage with these ideas?

Here I want to focus on the more practical implications of the claim that relationality, rooted in connection to land, is a distinctive Indigenous worldview. Is this an essentialist claim? Again, the term *essentialism* is used to refer to a diverse array of issues.

Universality

First of all, the argument for the existence of a distinctive Indigenous worldview—connection to land and relationality—does not entail that all Indigenous people embrace this worldview. It is an argument not for universality but for *specificity*: this worldview is specific to many Indigenous peoples. The extent to which a particular worldview is generalizable across diverse Indigenous groups and diverse individuals is of course open to question. At this point we know that the worldview of relationality has been identified by many Indigenous philosophers, researchers, and activists as a distinctive Indigenous worldview.

Exclusivity

Against claims that the identification of indigeneity with relation to land excludes urban dwellers, many Indigenous theorists and activists argue that the experience of relation to land is actually just as strong among urban groups as it is among those living on country. Urban centers have typically been built on Indigenous land, and many urban Indigenous communities continue to cultivate and to sustain the lands on which they live. Renya Ramirez draws on her ethnography of urban Indigenous communities to argue that travelling back and forth between city and country actually strengthens connection to country for urban Indians. She argues that Indigenous people in diverse geographical areas are oriented around “hubs” that organize their relations and roles in community.⁵⁶

Authenticity, Unity of Self, and Tradition

Many Indigenous people identify as Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, and embrace liberal modernity and capitalism. To what extent do they subscribe to an “Indigenous worldview”? In fact, modern individuals generally embrace

heterogeneous perspectives and worldviews that do not cohere and may be in conflict. Like other modern individuals, Indigenous individuals are heterogeneous, and negotiate multiple, conflicting, and changing perspectives and worldviews.⁵⁷ Indigenous practices and traditions are not fixed but change through history and through various interactions and relations. Indigenous cultures are continuous, not static.

The assertion of a special connection to land does pose certain dangers. Indigenous and non-Indigenous theorists and activists can romanticize the image of the authentic Indian, and do make truth claims about origins and history that are open to question. Indigenous feminist theorists point out that claims of Indigenous tradition often mask patriarchal, homophobic, and racist views and practices.⁵⁸ As Andrea Smith writes, Indigenous scholars can draw on postcolonial and queer critiques of origin stories to question these claims, and to ask whether some "Indigenous traditions" are actually *effects* of colonization.⁵⁹ As Uma Narayan points out, ideologies of a pure and homogeneous culture and unchanging traditions typically mask not only differences but also power relations internal to "cultures," as well as interpenetrations between and among cultures, which are always changing. What counts as "culture" is produced through historical change and is subject to conflict and contestation.⁶⁰

Moreover, the claim of a special connection to land can pose the danger of exclusive nationalism. Claims to sovereignty may fail to consider the claims of other precarious groups, including non-Indigenous refugees, asylum seekers, immigrants, and racialized groups. As I've already noted, we need to resist a simple binary model of relation to land, to complicate our understandings of settlers and colonized.

While all of these arguments are important, they sometimes obscure the fact that indigeneity and Indigenous sovereignty can be grounded in connections to land without being exclusive, essentialist, or ahistorical. Indigenous theorists do address these issues, and have conceptualized Indigenous relationality and sovereignty in ways that do take account of these issues, while also explicitly criticizing forms of internal oppression.

RESPONDING TO CRITIQUES OF ESSENTIALISM: HETEROGENEOUS RELATIONAL SELVES AND FREEDOMS, AND INDIGENOUS FEMINIST POLITICS

Moreton-Robinson argues that from an Indigenous standpoint, anti-essentialist critiques of the idea of an Indigenous relational self actually rely on an essentialist, specifically Western ideal of the self as "multiple, becoming and unfixed." This is a conception of self in which "humanness is disconnected

from the earth," and it is "falsely universalized." Insistence on this ideal of self as a universal "can silence and dismiss non-Western constructions, which do not define the self in the same way."⁶¹ The implication of Moreton-Robinson's argument is that anti-essentialist arguments and assertions of a fluid unfixed self are not just specifically Western and provincial; such arguments are also typical of a colonizing worldview—a view that idealizes the cosmopolitan disconnected self as the model for liberation. Do secular feminists need to ask whether our models of fluid multiple unfixed selves are actually still dependent on ideals of liberal negative freedom?

Feminist theorists, along with postcolonial, socialist, and queer theorists, have long criticized the ideal of the unitary, independent, and self-determining subject bent on mastery and control. Similarly, the ideal of the true and authentic pre-given self has been criticized with the argument that subjects are constituted through relations of power and social relations of meaning. The conception of the subject as fluid, hybrid, plural, in process, and unfixed was developed by many feminist and queer theorists as an alternative to the spectre of the unitary subject.

But Indigenous theorists have argued that theories of fluid and unfixed selves often bear traces of the ideal of the liberal individual. The fluid unfixed self echoes, in some ways, the ideal of the unfixed cosmopolitan liberal individual, which has historically been posited against the Native subject who is fixed in place and tradition. Like the cosmopolitan liberal individual, the fluid subject in process, who is heterogeneous and mobile, who easily crosses borders, is contrasted to a premodern Native subject, who is defined by ties of belonging and connection to land, and thus is locked in place and in history.⁶²

Some queer of color theorists have similarly argued that in valorizing a fluid and unfixed self, a "postidentity" politics and "subjectless critique," "freedom from norms" and "tradition-free subject," postcolonial and queer theories tend to retrench white liberal ideals and identities while disavowing them.⁶³ For example, as Indigenous queer theorist Andrea Smith notes, Michael Warner "marks queer culture as free-floating, unlike race, which is marked by belonging and not-belonging."⁶⁴ Smith argues that these understandings of freedom are posited against a background of the fixed and unchanging Native. "The 'Native' serves as the origin story that generates the autonomous present for the white queer subject."⁶⁵

Smith argues that this critique also applies to the feminist/queer of color ideal of the *mestiza*, which is widely embraced in feminist theory as an alternative to a fixed essential identity. Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands*, a foundational text of *mestiza* theory, "situates Indians and Europeans in a dichotomy that can be healed through *mestizaje*." In *Borderlands*, "Anzaldúa positions Indian culture as having 'no tolerance for deviance,' a problem that can be healed by the 'tolerance for ambiguity' that those of mixed race

'necessarily possess.' Thus a rigid, unambiguous Indian becomes juxtaposed unfavourably with the mestizo who 'can't hold concepts or ideas in rigid boundaries.'" And thus 'Native identity is relegated to a primitive past, a premodern precursor to the more modern, sophisticated mestizo identity.'"⁶⁶ Indigenous claims of connection to land are reformulated as expressions of fixed essences locked in place and time, and serve as a contrast or ground for images of *mestiza* world traveling, boundary crossing, heterogeneity, fluidity, and multiplicity.

Clearly, feminist critiques of the self-determining unitary subject need to include analyses of the ways in which this subject is posited against the primitive land-bound Native. The alternative is not to affirm the true and authentic noble Native. Indigenous groups and peoples are heterogeneous, multiple, and diverse. Many can trace their lineages through relations among diverse groups, including diverse groups of settlers. But this heterogeneity is not opposed to a strong affirmation of identity in relation to land. Indigenous struggles against colonization depend on a conception of self that is rooted in belonging to place and is heterogeneous and in process. This affirmation of indigeneity that includes heterogeneity has been particularly important in combatting the divisive tactics of colonizing states. In Australia, for instance, the Half Caste Act of 1886 and the Aboriginal Protection policies that were in effect until 1969 legislated the removal of children of "mixed" parentage from Aboriginal communities, as a means of assimilating them into white society, in an explicit eugenic policy: the aboriginal would be gradually bred out of those with white blood, who could be civilized, while the "full-blooded" Aboriginals would die out. In response to these tactics, Aboriginal Australians resist the label "mixed race" as inherently racist, recognize that most people are of "mixed" descent, and affirm that Aboriginal identity includes any line of descent, along with identification and acceptance as part of an Aboriginal community or kin network. Thus Aboriginal identity explicitly includes heterogeneity.⁶⁷

Against the dualistic opposition of a heterogeneous, unfixed *mestiza* self and a fixed Native self related to land, the Indigenous relational self is both heterogeneous and rooted in place, connected to land. Against the opposition of movement and fixity, movement is grounded in connection to particular land: many Aboriginal tribes have been nomadic, and many are able to navigate vast distances following "songlines," detailed maps of the land held in songs, which mark the paths of creator beings. The idea of the relational self—the self as part of others and others as part of the self—entails a radical relationality: connection to land includes connection to the living ensouled world, in all of its diversity and processes of change. So this self is not "fixed" but radically heterogeneous through its connections.

As I have argued, this radical relationality produces a unique conception of *freedom*. Individual freedom is not based on an opposition between fixed and unfixed, autonomous and determined, but is found in connection.

Some theorists have pointed to parallels between the Indigenous relational self and feminist theories of the relational self and relational autonomy.⁶⁸ While there are commonalities, Indigenous relational individual *freedom* is distinct in that it is situated in relation to land (in the broadest sense), and is deeply connected to struggles for *sovereignty*. For Indigenous women and feminists, ideals of individual freedom, and resistance to patriarchal oppression, are intrinsically connected to struggles for sovereignty.

Feminist theorists of relational autonomy focus on the need to structure relationships to support individual autonomy. For Nedelsky, this is the capacity to discover and to follow one's own will or law.⁶⁹ For Iris Young, relational autonomy "entails recognizing that agents are related in many ways that they have not chosen." But it also entails recognizing that in these relationships "agents are able either to thwart one another or support one another. Relational autonomy consists partly, then, in the structuring of relationships so that they support the maximal pursuit of individual ends."⁷⁰

Many Indigenous women and feminist theorists are wary of a philosophy that prioritizes the maximal pursuit of individual ends, even if it is situated in a relational conception of self. For them, Indigenous women's freedom must be connected to Indigenous struggles for sovereignty. Both of these struggles do require the restructuring of relationships, but the focus is on recognizing women's historic and contemporary roles as legitimate participants in governance and as leaders of Indigenous communities.

Freedom from violence and oppression is understood not simply as an individual right but as a quality of ethical relationships. If we do not understand the specificity of Indigenous conceptions of relational selves and relational freedom, we risk misreading Indigenous feminist struggles.

An example of such a misreading is a common interpretation of the historical challenge to the primacy of Indigenous sovereignty mounted by the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). During the debates on constitutional reform in the 1990s, following the establishment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the NWAC resisted the Assembly of First Nations' call for exemption of Aboriginal self-government from the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. While the NWAC supported the right to aboriginal self-government, they argued that the Canadian Indian Act had structured status, band membership, and governance according to patriarchal laws, such that Indigenous governance and representation were overwhelmingly controlled by men. Thus they argued that Aboriginal self-government should be subject to the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Charter, to ensure that Indigenous women would have the same rights as other Canadians, including

individual rights of citizenship, thought and belief, conscience and religion, assembly, association, press, speech, and especially equality rights.

The debate between the NWAC and the Assembly of First Nations was framed around the opposition between individual and collective rights, and not only by observers. The Assembly of First Nations argued that the NWAC was introducing Eurocentric individual rights against Aboriginal law of collective rights. But the interpretation of this case as an example of the struggle for women's individual rights against Indigenous sovereignty misrepresents the issues. In fact, the NWAC does support Indigenous sovereignty but has asserted the importance of individual rights as protection from patriarchal oppression masked as collective rights. Moreover, the NWAC was arguing for the collective rights of Indigenous women, mounting a court action demanding a seat at the table—a demand that was denied.

The NWAC argued for women's rights as legitimate participants in Indigenous and state governance, noting that women had always exercised considerable power in the governance of Indigenous communities, and they argued for protection under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms from oppression within Indigenous communities and within the Canadian state. They were not opposed to Indigenous sovereignty, they did not argue for individual rights against Indigenous sovereignty, and they were not arguing for the structuring of relations to support the maximal pursuit of individual ends.

Decolonizing feminist theory would require us to ask to what extent our alternatives to liberal feminism—including queer and *mestiza* feminist theories, and feminist theories of relational autonomy—are still wedded to particular Western liberal ideals of individual freedom. This does not mean that they ask us to reject the ideal of individual freedom. They challenge us to consider the possibility of a different conception of individual freedom in relationship. I have argued that the Indigenous conception of freedom in relationship is distinctive, and that it is essentially related to the freedom and sovereignty of Indigenous peoples. This conception of freedom grounds Indigenous feminist resistance to patriarchal power, as well as other forms of oppression.

CONCLUSION: INDIGENOUS RELATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY

In these "postcolonial" times, terms such as *sovereignty* and *nation* have gone out of fashion. . . . Nationalism and sovereignty, it is suggested, inevitably lead to xenophobia, intolerance, factionalism, and violence. . . . The assumptions behind some of this analysis are that nations can be equated with nation-states and that the end goal of a national liberation struggle must be the attainment of a state or statelike form of governance.⁷¹

Indigenous struggles for sovereignty are often misread as struggles for nation-statehood, with all of the forms of oppression and exclusion that have characterized nation-states. In fact, Indigenous legal and political theorists criticize the nation-state model of sovereignty and argue for forms of sovereignty that draw on the history of systems of Indigenous political governance.⁷² While the concept of sovereignty is contested and many Indigenous theorists reject the term, many argue that Indigenous sovereignty is not conceived on the model of the nation-state but is conceived in terms of relations of reciprocity. As Maaka and Fleras write, "Indigenous sovereignty rarely invokes a call for independence or noninterference: preference is in cultivating relationships as a way of working through difference in a non-combative manner."⁷³ As Irene Watson writes, "Aboriginal sovereignty is different from state sovereignty because it embraces diversity, and focuses on inclusivity rather than exclusivity. Aboriginal sovereignty poses a solution to white supremacy in its deflation of power."⁷⁴

Andrea Smith argues that Indigenous women and feminists are at the forefront of Indigenous arguments for alternative relational forms of sovereignty. Indigenous feminists are critical of the heteropatriarchal logic of colonialism, and of the internalization of this logic in some struggles for Native sovereignty. They believe that when Indigenous liberation movements accept the assumption that social hierarchy is natural, assume male domination and heteronormativity, and accept property ownership as the model for land claims, they are internalizing the values of the colonizer. In response, they draw on the histories of Indigenous law and governance and on Indigenous philosophies of relationality to articulate alternative conceptions of sovereignty.

Native women activists have begun articulating spiritually based visions of nation and sovereignty that are separate from nation-states. Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, [these visions of] Indigenous sovereignty and nationhood are predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility. In opposition to nation-states, these visions of Indigenous nationhood are based on care and responsibility for land that all can share. These models of sovereignty are not based on a narrow definition of nation that would entail a closely bounded community and ethnic cleansing. So, these articulations pose an alternative to theories that assume that the endpoint to a national struggle is a nation-state and that assume the givenness of the nation-state system.⁷⁵

Indigenous feminists are rejecting hierarchical structures that have too often been replicated in liberation movements, and inventing models of decolonial struggle that are being taken up by contemporary Indigenous movements like Idle No More, along with other resistance movements, including Black Lives Matter. The philosophy of "Taking Power, Making Power" in Indigenous-led social movements in Latin America, as described by Adjoa Jones de Almeida

and Paula Rojas in *The Revolution Will Not Be Funded*, involves both opposition to corporate and state power (taking power) and also “creating those structures within our organizations, movements, and communities that model the world we are trying to create” (making power). Recognizing that “not everyone can take up guns and go into the mountains to become revolutionaries,” Indigenous feminist activists are developing organizing models that integrate political organizing into everyday lives, involving daily activities such as food preparation, and that emphasize pleasure and the liberation of self in community with others. “How do we build movements that engage our whole selves, and in which we get back as much as we give? What this theorizing of Native feminist activists suggests is that by starting to build the world we want to live in, we create a revolutionary movement that is sustainable over the long term.”⁷⁶

While Smith is writing about Indigenous feminist activism, these ideas and practices can be taken up in a politics of decolonizing feminism.

“Native feminisms transform how we understand the project of sovereignty and nation-building. . . . They challenge how we conceptualize the relationship between Indigenous nations and nation-states, how we organize for sovereignty, and how we tie sovereignty to a global struggle for liberation.”⁷⁷

NOTES

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2. See for example, Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*; Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*; Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*; and Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism, and International Law*.
3. Gayatri Spivak, 1990. “Questions of Multiculturalism.” In S. Harasayam, ed. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York: Routledge). Quoted by Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*. Second Edition (London: Zed Books, 2012), 74.
4. Miriam Rose Ungunmer-Bauman, 2015. Miriam Rose Foundation videos. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pkY1dGk-LyE>, accessed online October 17, 2016.
5. Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 109.