

## Symposium: *What Can Indigenous Feminist Knowledge and Practices Bring to “Indigenizing” the Academy?*

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*More than a decade has passed since North American Indigenous scholars began a public dialogue on how we might “Indigenize the academy.” Discussions around how to “Indigenize” and whether it’s possible to “decolonize” the academy in Canada have proliferated as a result of the Truth and Reconciliation of Canada (TRC), which calls upon Canadians to learn the truth about colonial relations and reconcile the damage that is ongoing. Indigenous scholars are increasingly leading and writing about efforts in their institutions; efforts include land- and Indigenous language-based pedagogies, transformative community-based research, Indigenous theorizing, and dual governance structures. Kim Anderson’s paper invites dialogue about how Indigenous feminist approaches can spark unique Indigenizing practices, with a focus on how we might activate Indigenous feminist spaces and places in the academy.*

*In their responses, Elena Flores Ruiz uses Mexican feminist Indigenizing discourse to ask what can be done to promote plurifeminist indigenizing practices and North-South dialogues that acknowledge dynamic Indigenous pasts and diverse contexts for present interactions on Turtle Island. Georgina Tuari Stewart proceeds to describe Mana Wahine indigenous feminist theory from Aotearoa before proceeding to develop a “kitchen logic” of mana, which parallels Anderson’s understanding of tawow. Finally, Madina Tlostanova reflects on how several ways of advancing indigenous feminist academic activism described by Anderson intersect with examples from her own native Adyghe indigenous culture divided between the neocolonial situation and the post-Soviet trauma.*

**Key words:** decolonization; Indigenizing the academy; Indigenous feminist spaces; Mana Wahine; native Adyghe; neoliberal education; settler dispossession; tawow

### **We Keep Moving: Indigenous Feminist Spaces and Colonial Places**

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As we reflect upon what it means to ‘Indigenize the academy,’ we are beginning from the presumption that the academy is worth Indigenizing because something productive will happen as a consequence. Perhaps as teachers we can facilitate what bell hooks refers to as ‘education as the practice of freedom.’[...] Perhaps our activism and persistence within the academy might also redefine the institution from an agent of colonialism to a center of decolonization.

(Mihesuah and Wilson 2004: 5)

These words, issued by Devon Abbott Mihesuah and Waziyatawin (Angela Cavender Wilson), preface some of the early discussion in the project to “Indigenize the academy” in North America, a

project I find myself in as an Indigenous (Metis) scholar working out of a Canadian university. In their introduction to *Indigenizing the Academy: Transforming Scholarship and Empowering Communities* (2004), Mihesuah and Waziyatawin provide a vision for our academic “Indigenizing” efforts, while acknowledging the very real challenges of this monumental task. Essays in their co-edited collection explore how we might make space for Indigenous students, scholars, epistemologies, ontologies, ethical and accountable research, and Indigenous methodologies in academic institutions. *Indigenizing the Academy* was followed in 2007 by Rauna Kuokkanen’s monograph, *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes, and the Logic of the Gift* (2007), in which she argued that, in spite of advances to accommodate Indigenous students, universities continue to expect Indigenous peoples to “leave their ontological and epistemological assumptions and perceptions at the gates” (2007: 2). She advocated for “mainstreaming” Indigenous worldviews and knowledges, which might be taken up as a “gift” by post-secondary institutions. At the same time, Kuokkanen suggested that this might be an “impossible gift” given how “academic practices and discourses are hegemonic, racist, patriarchal and (neo) colonial,” (2007: 5)—grounded in Enlightenment thinking, western intellectual traditions of rationalism, and exclusionary disciplinary boundaries (2007: 12-5).

More than a decade has passed since these early calls to “Indigenize the academy,” and we find an increasing appetite for it as a global “transformative movement” (Pidgeon 2016: 78). In Canada, the uptake is partly owing to the Indigenous-settler reconciliation discourse inspired by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The Commission documented the century-long practice of removing Indigenous children from their families and communities and putting them into residential schooling where many were physically, emotionally, and sexually abused (TRC 2015). Although the mandate of the TRC was particular to Indian residential schools, the 94 “calls to action” of the TRC report take a broader approach in terms of how Canada can acknowledge the truth of colonial relations and reconcile the damage that is ongoing. Universities are being called upon to fulfill their part in this work.

Based on a survey with Indigenous scholars and allies, Adam Gaudry and Danielle Lorenz (2018) have characterized university Indigenizing efforts in Canada along a “three-part spectrum”: (1) Indigenous inclusion; (2) reconciliation Indigenization; and (3) decolonial Indigenization. As I explore possibilities for Indigenizing the academy, I find it useful to focus on two ends of their spectrum. On one end, Indigenous inclusion involves “increasing the numbers of Indigenous bodies on campuses, with less emphasis on changing the structures that have made universities hostile places for Indigeneity to begin with” (Gaudry and Lorenz 2018: 220). Decolonial Indigenization, at the other end, involves paying deeper attention to what constitutes knowledge, moving away from the Eurocentric curriculum, practicing land-based learning, speaking Indigenous languages, engaging in community-based participatory research, supporting community capacity-building, and positioning Indigenous peoples as theorists, rather than as subjects of research. While some might argue that decolonial Indigenization is impossible to achieve within colonial institutions such as universities, Indigenous scholars are already engaging in much of what is called for here, including teaching through land and language, leading transformative community-based research, and theorizing. Building on the scholarship that has been produced about “Indigenizing” efforts and challenges in Canadian universities (Battiste 2013, 2016; Kuokkanen 2007; Pidgeon 2015; Pete 2015, 2016; Ottman 2013; Wildcat et al. 2014), I would like to explore what Indigenous feminist knowledge and practice in particular can bring, with a focus on the creation of spaces and places of collective Indigenous feminist being.

This question necessitates an introduction to what Indigenous feminism entails. While identifying it as an “intellectually and wide-ranging field,” Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013: 11) offer

the useful definition of “Native feminist theories” as “those theories that make substantial advances in understandings of the connection between settler colonialism and both heteropatriarchy and heteropaternalism.” Settler colonialism, they note, involves making Indigenous peoples disappear, be “destroyed, removed and made into ghosts” so that lands can be claimed as their own by the settler colonial subject (Arvil et al. 2013: 12). For me, an Indigenous feminist approach necessitates learning how the Indigenous women of Turtle Island (North America) historically had political, economic, social, and spiritual authority, and how this authority came under attack in what I have referred to elsewhere as “the dismantling of gender equity” (Anderson 2016: 33-55). This dismantling was a deliberate colonial strategy undertaken when settlers realized they could not access lands and resources without breaking down our extended kin networks, which were largely managed by women through an ethics of inter-relatedness and responsibility. Indigenous women’s leadership, organizing, and gathering was systematically disrupted through the imposition of heteropaternalism, which involved (among multiple practices), teaching heteropatriarchal roles in residential schools and sending “field matrons” and missionaries out to reorder Indigenous women as docile housewives in heteropatriarchal nuclear homes (Anderson 2016: 60-2). Although not entirely successful or uniform, this re-ordering of the collective agency of women set up the conditions for gendered and domestic violence, one of the most significant social issues we struggle with today.

As a decolonizing practice, however, Indigenous women in Canada (and elsewhere) take inspiration from our Elders and our stories about how we historically held space on a number of levels. Some of the Elders I have worked with have talked about “women’s place” as collective embodied spaces. Well into the mid-twentieth century, homespaces were considered to be the jurisdiction of women, but it is critical to understand that did not involve “heteropaternal” practices which are made possible through heteropatriarchal nuclear families. Arvil et al. characterize these heteropatriarchal, nuclear-domestic arrangements as making the father “both the center and leader/boss,” and they note that this then serves “as the model for social arrangements of the state and its institutions” (2013: 13). Danny Musqua, a Saulteaux Elder from the Canadian prairies, once relayed to me that women had greater organizational and community management roles in the migratory spring and fall camps of his childhood, stating, “In that world, you had places to go each season. And that required a lot of discipline and order to move from one place to the next” (Anderson 2011: 101). Danny noted that camps were organized according to clans, and it was the “public function” of clan mothers to set the space for order and collaborative work when they moved. Older women had particular roles in managing community health; once in camp, they would set up areas for their healing work, and would make rounds to ensure that community members were well. This “community organizing” function of women is also clear in matrilineal and matrilocal cultures, such as the Haudenosaunee, who traditionally lived in multiple family dwellings/longhouses that were organized according to maternal kinship lines. Closer to home, my own people, the Metis, were born out of unions between European men working in the fur trade and Indigenous women. The men moved into the women’s communities, and this pattern continued as the Metis nation evolved. Brenda Macdougall has demonstrated how the Metis were matrilocally constructed, through “female-centric cultural development and outsider male acculturation through marriage” (2010: 112). These Indigenous feminist spaces were the core of our societies in the past and they hold the potential to define our Indigenous futures. Indigenous (Metis) feminist scholar Cindy Gaudet suggests that Metis Elder Rose Fleury planted that seed when she told her, “Women need to gather again as this is how we evolved socially, politically, spiritually and economically” (2015: 168).

Thinking about how to create Indigenous feminist spaces on campus today, I am further inspired by Mishuana Goeman's work. Goeman has explored questions of "Native Feminism's Spatial Practice" among Indigenous women writers who present space and time "as a matter of narrated relationships constructed not only as a critique of colonial orderings, but also one embedded in Native epistemologies and narrations that envision the future" (2009: 171). As an Indigenous woman working in a university in a small, southwestern Ontario city, I appreciate how Goeman encourages us not to feel restricted by settler colonial boundaries, arguing for "a dialogue that imagines space as not bounded [as within the legal boundaries of the reservation] but as the result of continuous, ongoing storytelling" (2008: 300). In the following section I will describe some of the Native feminist spatial practices I have been involved in, with the hope that symposium respondents will build on the question of how a range of Indigenous feminist practices might contribute to Indigenizing the academy. This might include everything from "rematriating" in cyber space (<https://newjourneys.ca/en/articles/we-are-the-rematriate-collective>), to working on the return of lands from the campuses where we work. However they appear, our various and distinct nation/tribal and territory-specific stories and practices can contribute to a collective vision of how our locations in the academy might contribute to decolonization.

## 1 Challenging Heteropatriarchal Commemorative Spaces

Native women's alternatives to heteropatriarchal representation of national space, referred to as traditional geography, are fundamental to understanding the ways in which nation-states in North America have built themselves through gendered spatial metaphors of dominance.

(Goeman 2013: 14)

In 2015, I was walking across my (then) university campus when I was stopped in my tracks by an unsettling sight: there stood a newly erected bronze statue of our first (Canadian) prime minister, Sir John A. Macdonald. This larger than life Macdonald was holding out two empty chairs, presumably to host Canada's two "founding nations," the English and the French. As a Metis woman, my first association of Macdonald is that he hanged Louis Riel, the Metis leader who resisted colonial invasion on Metis homelands in the wake of Canada's 1867 Confederation. Canada was a budding settler colonial nation, and Indigenous peoples, including the Cree and Metis, stood in the way of colonial western expansion. Macdonald had a "national dream" to unite the country from east to west, and it involved building a railway through these Indigenous lands. In his quest for settler nationalist progress, Macdonald implemented a starvation policy to debilitate our peoples and their capacity to resist, an atrocity that historian Robert Innes (2018) has defined as an "act of genocide." Macdonald hanged Indigenous men who resisted, like the Metis leader Louis Riel, and imprisoned others, like Cree leaders Poundmaker and Big Bear. Macdonald was also the architect of Indian residential schools, the very thing Canada now strives to reconcile as a nation.

The bronze Macdonald was part of a celebratory project in anticipation of Canada's 150<sup>th</sup> year since Confederation, and the idea was to crowd our small campus with statues of every one of Canada's twenty-two former prime ministers, all of them male except for one. I took exception to giving up campus space, because North American nationalist stories, like manifest destiny in the United States and Macdonald's "national dream" in Canada, are stories of erasure, violence, and oppression of Indigenous peoples, and they are also part of ubiquitous narratives that Indigenous

women, like the land, are spaces of conquest, consumption, and violence (Anderson 2010a). In an era of “truth and reconciliation,” this uncritical act of commemoration begged for an Indigenous feminist intervention.

Enter my colleague Dr. Lianne Leddy, an Anishinaabe woman who, like me, holds a PhD in Canadian history. Professor Leddy and I dressed up in Halloween costume jail outfits, taped pictures of Big Bear and Poundmaker to our chests, and sat stoically one late afternoon in the chairs that Macdonald was holding out. In dressing as these leaders, we used our bodies to re-narrate the dominant nation-building discourse and make fluid those spaces of gender, past and present, through irony, by enacting ceremony and kinship, and by revealing multiple histories through the institutional seats of prison and academy (<https://shekonnechie.ca/videob/>). Our act of resistance was just one among a greater campus response from those troubled by this “gendered spatial metaphor of dominance” (Goeman 2013: 14). Macdonald was taken down and his (overwhelmingly great white male) companions never made it to campus.

A few years later I was invited to be part of a symposium about “Canada 150” at the University of Guelph, where I had moved. I called upon Dr. Leddy and another Indigenous (Anishinaabe) historian, Dr. Brittany Luby, as we had recently formed the Kika’ige Historical Society—a performance art troupe that de-centers settler narratives while privileging Indigenous ways of knowing. Playing off the dinners that led up to Canadian Confederation, we invited Indigenous female faculty and staff from neighboring universities to research and then dress up as their Indigenous nation-specific great-grandmothers might have done, had they been invited to the table in 1867 (pic 1). When conference participants entered the lunch room, they found us sitting stoically at/on and around the tables and were thus required to sort out how to enter this space, how to join “the table,” whether to eat and with whom (pic 2). We eventually moved to our own feasting table at the center of the room, and later, after speaking on a panel about Indigenous experiences of Canada 150, did a photo shoot as the “grannies of confederation”—a counter-narration of the nationalist and iconic “fathers of confederation” imagery that would be familiar to most Canadians (<https://shekonnechie.ca/videob/>).



**Pic 1.** Photo credit Tenille Campbell



**Pic 2.** Photo credit Tenille Campbell

I share these stories as they demonstrate what I have experienced as embodied Indigenous feminist approaches to re-narrating spaces and places, albeit in temporary ways. What has been most significant for me has been the generative, creative space that happens between and with Indigenous women when we gather—especially upon finding ourselves in unexpected places like the academy. It brings to mind Rose Fleury’s vision about how we evolve when we begin planning, organizing, resisting, envisioning, and also Danny Musqua’s notion of how we can take back the “public function” of organizing our spaces. We evolve when we work the diasporic spaces that we find ourselves in. And so we keep moving.

Indigenous feminist resistance and re-narrating can also involve allied embodied practices. This was at the center of an anti-violence project that Dr. Luby approached me, Dr. Cara Wehkamp (Algonquin), and Maria Shallard (Coast Salish) about shortly after she was hired at the University of Guelph. In an effort to raise awareness about missing and murdered Indigenous women, Dr. Luby proposed getting as many people as possible to make a human medicine wheel on a campus field, and then to take aerial photos and create an art exhibit (pic 3). What seemed an impossible task of organizing bodies, minds, and spirits was in fact implemented, thanks to the labor and leadership of students in Dr. Luby’s active history class. We did the event on the football field, involving local speakers, singers, and elders, who helped us create a ceremony that also paid respect to the spirits of the missing and murdered women. One non-Indigenous participant pointed out to me afterward that she experienced a remarkable shifting of what might typically be known as the masculine space of a university football field.



**Pic 3.** Photo credit Dronemates

## 2 Tawow: There is Room for You Here

As we have taken up these impermanent spaces, we (like other post-secondary colleagues across the country) are also planning for more permanent ceremonial spaces, land-based spaces, art spaces, and community gathering spaces where we can work among ourselves and with campus and local communities. We are taking up research practices in those spaces, inspired by grandmother teachers—like Maria Campbell, who has taught me on-the-ground “kitchen table methodologies” where “conversational methods” can make change (Kovach 2009). These spaces involve literally cooking and eating together, but they are much broader too, as articulated by Metis scholar Dr. Sherry Farrell-Racette:

It is important to look at the kitchen beyond the female and the domestic [...] Eating was the least of the activities done around our kitchen table. It was primarily a creative space, a work surface, a space for meditation and a social space [...] It was a space of action. Circularity and expansion (almost limitless) is implied in kitchen logic. Even the word *tawow*—most often simply translated as “welcome” can be understood as “there is room for you here” and also implies a space on the ground. It wasn’t a marginalized female space where women served men [...] It was a female-centered space, where men, women and children worked, dreamt and created (Farrell-Racette 2017: 1).

Moving forward we will continue to create spaces that are visible, and others that are invisible. In those visible spaces we can use our spirits, minds and bodies to re-write settler nationalist narratives, counter projects of Indigenous disappearance, make a spectacle of ourselves, haunt settler spatio-temporal imaginaries (Baloy 2016: 213), and advocate for Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies—all the while being respectful of the spirits of our ancestors and the Indigenous nations and territories that we work within. We will also need invisible spaces to gather and build kinship, do our ceremonies, nurture our youth, theorize about our pasts, and strategize for our futures. Perhaps doing so will get us closer to education as a practice of freedom, or closer to undoing the effects of residential schools, or closer to strengthening ourselves to continue working in areas such as the crisis of our missing and murdered Indigenous sisters.

And now, in the interest of keeping the discussion moving, I say “tawow” to the symposium respondents. Welcome. There is room for you here.

## The Structure of Dispossession in Settler México: Neoliberal Education Regimes and Indigenous Feminisms

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We engage in questioning and reformulating those stories that account for  
the relations of power in our present. That is theorizing.

— *Dian Million* (Tanana Athabascan)

Power was trying to teach us individualism and profit [...] we were not good students.

— *Compañera Ana Maria* (Tzotzil)

There is no more pressing issue in the North American academy than meaningfully responding to the structural inner workings of settler colonialism, particularly as it manifests in intersecting violences against women of color and the Indigenous women of Turtle Island (North America). Education is at the helm of an interlocking network of settler processes and values, oriented towards dispossession, that functionalize violence against women, be it through school push-out policies, systemic sexual violence in Indian residential schools, or the whitewashing of academic discourses and curriculum. Dispossession here refers to long-term strategic processes used by white Anglo-European settlers to *irrevocably* take possession of Native Amerindian lands and resources. Intellectual colonialism, or the whitewashing of hermeneutic resources (including historiography) for the purposes of wielding monocultural authority over the instruments of knowledge production, is one of the oldest tools of dispossession in the academy.

Over the past two decades, Indigenous feminist theorizing from First Nations and American Indian scholars has been instrumental in pushing back against intellectual colonialism and the settler myth of a universal, unified epistemology and method. Dian Million, for example, has argued that “American Indian, First Nations, and Indigenous scholars recognize orally based communal knowledges as organized epistemic systems that *do exist* and whose influence is active even though they might not be legitimized by academia. These systems are theory, since they posit a proposition and a paradigm on how the world works [...]. Story *is* indigenous theory” (Million 2014: 35). Other prominent Indigenous scholars like Audra Simpson, Jodi Byrd, Lee Maracle, Sarah Deer, Kim TallBear, Eve Tuck, Kim Anderson, and Leanne Simpson have made powerful contributions to the pluricultural “story-ing” of Indigenous feminist knowledges and lifeways that challenge settler academic hegemony. But the story of Indigenous women’s theorizing on the tail end of Turtle Island—stories from mujeres Nahuas, Purépechas, Tepehuans, Mazahuas, Huichols, Rarámuris, Tzeltals, Mixtecs, Zapotecs, Coras, Mixes, Tojolabales, Mames, and Yaquis, to name just a few—has received less attention. Thinking about Kim Anderson’s (Cree/Métis) rich discussion of the structural and gendered nature of colonial dispossession strategies,<sup>2</sup> in this brief essay I will address the peripheralization of Mexican feminist Indigenous theorizing in the context of state strategies of dispossession and violence against Indigenous women, particularly as it shows up in neoliberal education policy and its connection to land politics. I will then broaden the discussion to ask more generally about what can be done to promote plurifeminist indigenizing practices and North-South dialogues that acknowledge dynamic Indigenous pasts and diverse contexts for present interactions on Turtle Island.

## 1 Méxican Settler Education

There's been historical reticence to talking about México and other Latin American nations as white settler states that work to dispossess native peoples of their lives and lifeways. One consequence of this view has been the delinking of violence against women of color from the structural functionalism of ongoing colonial violences, further invisibilizing femicides and other systemic forms of violence against Indigenous women. As Shannon Speed argues, quite simply, "Latin American states are settler colonial states" (2017: 783). One way to see this is through the development of the formal education system in México and its functional role in dispossession. In what follows, I will address three key stages in the development of Méxican settler education, linking the current neoliberal stage with direct efforts by the settler state to take ownership of Indigenous lands in southern México.

Beginning in the sixteenth century, educational institutions served as administrative arms of colonial assimilation policies that promoted cultural Europeanization and subordination to the Iberian *casta* system of racial hierarchy. This early colonial stage saw the founding of the oldest settler institutions of education in North America, including (what is now known as) the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in 1551. Almost two decades earlier, the Colegio Santa Cruz de Tlatelolco (1536) was founded as the first institution of higher learning. Like the primary school in Texcoco (1523) and "Indian orphanage" schools, it was tasked with taking Indigenous boys from their communities and, through ritualized acts of cultural genocide Latinized as legitimate knowledge practices, preparing them for Catholic teaching. The powerful Indigenous rebellions in the 1540 Mixtón war resulted in new waves of Indigenous children (mostly boys from Chichimecan Nations) rounded up into Catholic, Jesuit, and Augustinian schoolhouses. While religious education served to further dispossession of Indigenous lifeways, perpetuating western heteronormative sexual violence and gender norms, it also gave men access to alphabetization and peninsular Spanish at higher rates. This is the beginning of intersectional gender gaps in the Méxican academy, where today, no Indigenous women are identified as holding a doctorate with tenure in a public university (outside the Indigenous intercultural university system).

The second stage coincides with the late-nineteenth-century rise of positivism and revolutionary reform. This is generally seen as the official birth of the formal academy in México (via the social sciences), yet it also coincides with the fortification of white European migrant settler infrastructures in the academy. White Iberian men (*peninsulares*) like philosopher Luis Villoro (1922-2014) came to be associated with the true cultural spirit of Méxican identity while Indigenous peoples became an ethnographic object of study for them. This period lasted through the second half of the twentieth century.

The third shift coincides with globalization and culminates in the last three decades of neoliberal fiscal policy in the United Mexican States (Estados Unidos Mexicanos) (1824-). Curriculum during this period began to be based on market-driven consumer values and institutional practices that ideologically included (but functionally excluded) Indigenous and afro-Indigenous peoples, especially women, while simultaneously creating new financial social benefit systems for those with access to higher education (now at 8% of the population, with 0.26% Indigenous access).<sup>3</sup> It signaled a repackaging of the Iberian racial *casta* system by structurally limiting Indigenous access to the most important sectors of public life: finance, technology, governance, and trade. Neoliberalization sought to centralize, standardize, and outsource the public curriculum to harmonize it with the extractivist needs of the global market economy and the development of foreign capital infrastructures in the country. In 2017, the settler colonial administration of President

Enrique Peña Nieto announced a brazen “National English Strategy,” a twenty-year, multi-billion peso incentive to have all secondary public school graduates gain fluency in English, not as a secondary language, but as the primary language in the STEM classroom (with Cambridge University producing the curriculum and partnering in the profits).

Neoliberalization is a strategy of *enforcement*, not change. When applied to education in settler colonial contexts, the privatization of public resources for profit enacts a complex chain of asymmetric policies and processes aimed at: a) regulating the distribution of existing knowledges, and b) redistributing communal knowledges *away from* traditional sources. Neoliberal education policy can be seen as an organized regime because it aims to regulate who gets to know what and what someone who is worth something in society should know. It is a settler colonial mechanism for *controlling the free flow of epistemic resources* rather than a practice of freedom. Ideologically, it separates public and private education through the idea of agential choice, yet infrastructurally, it links them through settler administrative systems of governance like accrediting bodies and education boards. It devalues—and in some cases, outlaws—informal processes for education such as storytelling, communal weaving and design, healing circles, and land-based practices of popular assembly that have come to define Indigenous educative practices.

Neoliberal education policies are especially prominent in settler societies undergoing active resistance from Indigenous communities, as part of their function is to regulate how places can emerge as legitimate knowledge-creation spaces. México has the highest population of Indigenous peoples in Latin America, who speak over sixty different Indigenous languages, many of whom are exclusive native language speakers. Over eighty percent live in central-southern and southern México. This is significant since communal *ejido* and ancestral lands in the south are home to some of the largest untapped oil reserves in the world and the most biodiverse natural resources in the country. The modern-day armed conflicts in Chiapas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca stem from the settler government’s need to secure ownership of these lands for collateral in IMF loans and graft-based foreign investment in the form of extractivist industries. To this end, the government has employed a variety of strategies, from military occupation, intimidation, and sexual violence to administrative seizure of rural schools (which double as polling stations).<sup>4</sup> In this context, state education has been both a vehicle for settler cultural assimilation in Indigenous spaces (primary education) and a way to keep Indigenous peoples outside of institutional spaces tied to cultural goods and power (higher education). In the state of Chiapas, for instance, Indigenous primary school attendance is very high, yet only 0.2% of Indigenous peoples have a university degree; it is thus not accidental that over 70% of the state-funded primary schools in the region do not offer the last grade level required for secondary school admission—a prerequisite for university admittance.<sup>5</sup>

In light of these realities, questions of indigenizing the academy in México must be framed in relation to ongoing colonial systems and structural violences, as Anderson does in relation to Canada. Yet it is also necessary to highlight the current role of neoliberalism in maintaining coloniality as an enduring set of social and interpretive processes that regulate how colonial harms are reproduced from one generation to the next, especially via settler instructional technologies and institutions. In the next section, I will highlight some important differences in the Mexican education system that impacts questions of indigenizing the academy. I will also show how Indigenous women’s knowledges and activism have powerfully contributed to resisting neoliberalism and how current academic practices work to silence those contributions.

## 2 Unsettling Settler Education

There has been strong resistance to neoliberal education policy by Indigenous peoples, both as a critique of colonial knowledge systems and a strong defense of existing public schooling infrastructures. The latter is prevalent in places where the government is actively involved in land and natural resource seizures. While nearly 3% of the Indigenous population in México is employed in educational work, in southern states like Chiapas that jumps to 52%.<sup>6</sup> To understand the connection between schools and resistance to settler occupation, it is helpful to know that México once had an Indigenous president, Benito Juárez (Zapotec) (1806-1872). After Napoleon III invaded México in 1861, he installed the Austrian archduke Maximilian as Emperor of México; Juárez was instrumental in the organized resistance and overthrow of the French Empire and allied imperial forces. As president, he initiated some of the largest liberal reforms in México's history. This included a social policy agenda that sought to democratize education through the creation of an extensive national infrastructure of public education that separated the Catholic Church from state-run education. He sought free, open, public, and secular education that gave curricular autonomy to local communities at the primary level yet built bridges to a more centralized system of secondary education, with the goal of increasing overall access to universities. While few historians recognize Juárezismo as a strategy of academic decolonization, his policies effectively gave Indigenous communities unprecedented freedoms to conduct state-funded primary education in native languages (México has over 70) and customs, free of the traditional influence of the Catholic Church. Today, there exists a national infrastructure of state-funded primary schools, teachers' colleges (*escuelas normalistas*), and intercultural universities that operate autonomously (or in a few cases, semi-autonomously) from the state system.<sup>7</sup> These institutions—especially teachers' colleges—have been at the epicenter of local organized resistance and popular assembly against neoliberal reforms that seek to shut down spaces where land defense, water protectors, and organized labor collectives have strongholds. As such, they have been the targets of several settler administrations. In fact, the 43 Indigenous students kidnapped and murdered by the state in 2014 came from one of these *normalista* colleges in Ayotzinapa.<sup>8</sup>

But a lesser known consequence of the autonomous education system is a kind of separate but (un)equal infrastructure that settler administrations have strategically underfunded as part of a counter-insurgency strategy in Indigenous zones. Today, when one speaks of the academy in México, one must first answer, "Which one?" The national intercultural university system currently has twelve universities with over a thousand Indigenous professors, yet the national university system, which includes UNAM, has no official records of Indigenous tenure-track "profesores de carrera" holding doctorates.<sup>9</sup> Because the bulk of published research and Qualtrics-eligible output is attributed to the official system, a significant social gap is maintained while the overall numbers of Indigenous participation in higher education may increase. So there exists the dual task of decolonizing the social practices that produce epistemic and physical exclusion of Native lives in the national academy while attending to the internal diversity of hard-won spaces in the Indigenous intercultural system, as these are spaces that historically serve as collective sites of resistance and linguistic resurgence. Part of this internal diversity means attending to the exclusion of native women; the college at Ayotzinapa, for instance, was all-male, thus explaining the absence of Indigenous women among the murdered. This not only downplays the role of state violence against Indigenous women, but the overall culture of racialized sexism that exists across both systems.

*The lack of academic representations of Indigenous feminisms in both systems* is a pressing issue. While Indigenous issues are a common topic in humanities research circles, they rarely address Indigenous scholarship as primary literature (typically citing the lack of published materials) irreducible to

ethnography and almost never cite Indigenous women as intellectual leaders. This disregards the wide availability of feminist writings by Indigenous Chiapotecanas like Insurgente Erika and Comandanta Ramona (2001); the work of Bettina Cruz (earth protector of the Tehuantepec isthmus), Eufrosina Cruz Mendoza, Hermelinda Tiburcio (grupo K'in al Antezetik) are also readily available as oral primary sources and interviews. To return to Million, *story is Indigenous theory*.

Yet Indigenous feminist intellectual labor is often obscured, particularly when women's organizational labor is seen as intersecting with intellectual authority and women's contributions to epistemic frameworks for liberatory strategy and action (Canabal 2002; Castillo 2000; Cruz 2016; Sánchez 2003). It was Indigenous Chiapotecan women that headed the first Zapatista uprising, yet the revolutionary mythology still persists that the movement was started by Subcomandante Galleano (formerly Marcos).<sup>10</sup>

Historically, Indigenous women's intellectual labors are systemically exploited like other extractable primary resources, where the value and profit are determined and reaped by the people refining the use-value of the resource into a commodity. I think of this neoliberalizing process of *epistemic extractivism* as knowledge extraction and privatization that relies heavily on colonial gender relations.<sup>11</sup> A good example of epistemic extractivism is the scholarship surrounding best practices and pedagogy at intercultural universities. Laura Selene Mateos Cortés (2017), for example, identifies four knowledge-practice models currently being used in intercultural university spaces:

1. *Saberes-haceres* (knowledge-as-action) refers to applied knowledge acquired through a formal educational process, whether in a classroom or elsewhere.
2. *Saberes-poderes* (knowledge-as-ability) refers to the honing of critical thinking skills for questioning asymmetrical power constellations.
3. *Haceres-poderes* (ability-as-action) refers to critically linking practices learned within academia with those gained outside a formal educational context.
4. *Poderes-haceres* (action-based-ability) refers to experiential learning and knowledge that comes from grassroots practices based on regional needs and organizational contexts.

These are thinly-veiled reformulations of Indigenous feminist theory, particularly of the various modalities of knowing and doing articulated by the women of La Escuelita Zapatista, who themselves draw on various strands of Zapotec, Tzotzil, and Nahuatl epistemology (to name just a few). Cortés fails to note how these knowledge-practices have been in circulation far longer than the universities have existed and have been specifically cultivated by Indigenous women *for the purposes of land-based stewardship and communal resistance to colonization, environmental racism, and sexual violence in petrocultures* (as in El Movimiento de Mazahua). As Anderson wisely cautions, “an Indigenous feminist approach necessitates learning how the Indigenous women of Turtle Island (North America) historically had political, economic, social, and spiritual authority, and how this authority came under attack in what I have referred to elsewhere as ‘the dismantling of gender equity’” (Anderson 2016: 33-55). Following Anderson, the euro-gendering of Indigenous social organization left an indelible mark in México in the form of *machismo* and violently heteronormative gender norms. México is still a country where an Indigenous Zapotec man was once president; yet over a century later, when an Indigenous woman runs for the same office (María de Jesús Patricia Martínez, otherwise known as Marichuy), her caravan is run off a ravine.

Too often, the academy is discussed outside its origins in missionary and settler cultural processes because it is strategically constructed to be seen as an essential resource that powerfully contributes to positive life indicators and upstream determinants of health (like social class and

geography). A closer look at the functional structure of the academy reveals not just settler colonial processes at work, but intersectional violences that disproportionately target Indigenous women. As part of this framework, neoliberal education policy and the academization of knowledge works to dismantle gender equity by erasing pluricultural epistemologies and ontologies—by unstorying stories and culturally gaslighting storytellers about their own histories and knowledges, and then asking them to pay for it. The wider disruption to extended kin networks is thus structurally based on a *hermeneutic violence*, or a violence done to structures of meaning and intelligibility that is supported by physical technologies of violence like state terror and sexual violence against Indigenous women.

This is one way Indigenous feminisms offer powerful analyses of knowledge-practices: as epistemic power-placeholders in academe that need to be critically questioned via inclusive and diverse methodologies. Yet more cautions than green lights are warranted here. Consistent with this essay, far more is written in the academy about México's Indigenous women than by Indigenous women (Díaz 2004). As Dale Turner argues, "it matters *how* indigenous knowledge is brought into courtrooms, political negotiations and university classrooms" (2006: 112). While monolingualism and lack of access to alphabetic literacy are often cited as the primary reason for the citational absence of Mexican Indigenous women, the root lies in settler colonial culture and the multiform technologies of violence it deploys to consolidate dispossession, including academic knowledge.

There are certainly more issues to bring out in terms of ongoing North-South dialogues that reflect a critical understanding of the historical differences and power asymmetries that impact Indigenous Mexican women's marginalization in the North American academy, some of which Anderson may wish to address as part of a coalitional dialogue. For example, what points of North-South coalition might prove to be effective structural interventions in indigenizing the settler academy (whether through inclusion, reconciliation, decolonization, or another formulation)? I am particularly moved by Anderson's own embodied strategies for activating indigenizing spaces and the possibilities of renarrating settler histories against themselves. One strategy I think is useful, from my own experience, is marshalling institutional resources towards greater community accountability. For me to be truly accountable for this writing, it must be made accessible in the languages I write about; as I have argued to university administrators, the onus is on settler institutions to provide the resources for translating relevant work into Indigenous languages and meaningfully engaging in intercultural dialogue. This means it must resist the neoliberalizing tendency to appropriate the knowledges and practices it funds, including the creation of independent databases of Indigenous knowledges and languages without Indigenous peoples as stewards of those knowledge systems.

But it is also not a clear-cut North-South issue. Methodologically, not enough Mexican academic mestizxs are mindful of the functional role we can play in the maintenance of settler colonial structural violence by narrating/representing the realities of Indigenous women's lives in ways that structurally exclude them: i.e., via ethnographic extractivism, or by writing in the codes of two, sometimes three settler languages downstream (Castellano → English → specialized academic jargon). The almost total lack of self-reflexivity in engaging with mainstream Mexican mestizx scholarship on Indigeneity has been one of my lasting philosophical frustrations. While it is useful to situate our voices in our ancestral and coalitional struggles—I am a direct descendant of Indigenous Tzotzil and Zapotec peoples in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas and settler Iberians in Atotonilco el alto, Jalisco—too many of us blur out the social axes of intersecting power and privilege that gave us preferential access to the settler academy in the first place. There is no substitute for doing the work of understanding violence against Indigenous peoples and combating the settler myth of Indigenous terminal death. Indeed, no intersectional feminism theory can operate without meaningful coalitions with Indigenous feminisms.

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- 1 Michigan State University occupies the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary Lands of the Anishinaabeg—Three Fires Confederacy of Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi peoples. In particular, the University resides on land ceded in the 1819 Treaty of Saginaw. We recognize, support, and advocate for the sovereignty of Michigan’s twelve federally-recognized Indian nations, for historic Indigenous communities in Michigan, for Indigenous individuals and communities who live here now, and for those who were forcibly removed from their Homelands. By offering this Land Acknowledgement, we affirm Indigenous sovereignty and will work to hold Michigan State University more accountable to the needs of American Indian and Indigenous peoples.
- 2 Anderson describes how the strategic process of “dismantling was a deliberate colonial strategy undertaken when settlers realized they could not access lands and resources without breaking down our extended kin networks, which were largely managed by women through an ethics of interrelationality and responsibility” (2016: 60-2).
- 3 “el censo del 2000 muestra que únicamente un 8.7% de la población en el rango de 22 a 29 años (INEGI, 2000) cursaba estudios superiores y de postgrado. Esta exclusión educativa se profundiza cuando se trata de los pueblos originarios, que representan 0.26 %” (*Indicadores con Perspectiva de Género para los Pueblos Indígenas* 2006).
- 4 It is also why the federal government partners with paramilitary and drug trafficking organizations to contract out raids and violent enforcement of seizures of Indigenous land holdings, including rivers.
- 5 “En los niveles de educación superior es posible observar que una proporción minúscula, 0.2% de la población indígena de Chiapas, tiene un grado universitario; en el ámbito nacional, sólo un 0.6% de la población indígena lo tiene” (Carnoy et al. 2002: 14).
- 6 “Casi un 3% de la población indígena total está empleada en trabajos educativos. Como veremos más adelante, en estados como Chiapasy Oaxaca un 52% y 45%, respectivamente, de la población indígena con educación superior labora en el sector educativo” (Carnoy et al, 2002: 18).
- 7 However, it is important to note that not all Indigenous leaders welcome the infrastructures, as they can easily undermine cultural autonomy.
- 8 The Mexican state, via paramilitary troops, had also killed forty-five Indigenous people in Acetal, Chiapas and 193 in Tamaulipas. Prior to the massacre, the Peña Nieto administration implemented a covert strategy of disinformation, tuition hikes, forced unpaid parental labor requirements, and other draconian reforms meant to dismantle rural organized labor in Indigenous zones.
- 9 *Sistema Nacional de Información Estadística y Geográfica*. Retrieved February 2019. See updated data available from the Public Ministry of Education at <https://datos.gob.mx/>
- 10 “This is the truth: The first uprising of the EZLN was in March 1993, and was headed by women Zapatistas” (Poniatowska 2002: 55).
- 11 Cf. Gudynas (2013).

## Forms of Indigenous Feminism: Mana Wahine Theory

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I am grateful to Kim Anderson for her strong symposium opening piece about indigenous feminist knowledge and practices, and for this opportunity to respond, making links with similar endeavors from Aotearoa-New Zealand (Anderson 2019). Anderson's first sections are about "indigenizing the academy" and do not invoke the "feminist" aspect of the theme. Anderson reminds us that calls to indigenize the academy in North America are over a decade old, though she suggests not enough progress has been made in that time. We need to keep discussing what we mean by the term "indigenizing the academy" and whether it is even possible, since fundamental ideas about knowledge are entailed in these questions. Academic knowledge has been defined by exclusion of "other" knowledge, including indigenous knowledge, so there is a hierarchy of power and ideology built into the disciplinary structure of the academy.

Like all indigenous theory, forms of indigenous feminism relate to specific localities and do not aim or claim to be the basis of general rules, although similar patterns are discernible in countries with similar histories, including the four CANZUS countries (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the United States), based on indigenous-settler relationships (Bell 2014). In these contexts, schools have been used as powerful instruments of assimilation of the indigenous populations. Schooling in these countries involves all children, and therefore all mothers and families. For these basic reasons, schooling is one important real-world site of indigenous feminist knowledge and practice.

British colonizers in Aotearoa used schooling to hasten linguistic and cultural assimilation of Māori, with corporal punishment used to discourage Māori children from speaking their home language (Selby 1999). Māori were spared, however, from the genocidal history of residential schools as endured by the indigenous peoples of Canada, which Anderson mentions as the primary focus of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Anderson refers to the "increasing appetite" for indigenizing the academy caused by the TRC in the universities of Canada. Caution must be exercised, however, to ensure that such policies meet indigenous<sup>1</sup> needs, not those of White academics who are obliged to "tick the box" of performance indicators relating to "reconciliation." Indigenous politics are always vulnerable to domestication (G. H. Smith 2012) in this way—still meeting the needs of White academics, even in the TRC process.

Anderson offers three vignettes from her own experience as examples of indigenous feminist knowledge and practices: one about a protest that successfully scuttled a plan for statues of past prime ministers to be placed on campus; the second about a protest action at a symposium held to celebrate "Canada 150"; and thirdly a vignette about the uplifting process of forming a "human medicine wheel" on a football field in order to raise awareness about missing and murdered indigenous women.

Anderson's last section, *Tawow: there is room for you here*, describes the female-centric "kitchen-table methodologies" encapsulated in the indigenous Cree word "tawow." Usually translated simply as "welcome," tawow also refers to the idea of a place at the table: indigenous "kitchen-logic" that implies qualities of circularity and "almost limitless" expansion. This is a rich example of an indigenous feminist approach, and of the philosophical depths that one indigenous word can contain. Taking a cue from this analysis of "tawow" I also undertake some indigenous feminist reflection below on "mana," a well-known indigenous concept from the Pacific, referring to

personal power or authority, “favoured by the gods” (Barlow 1991). But first, I describe Mana Wahine indigenous feminist theory from Aotearoa.

## 1 Introducing Mana Wahine Theory

Mana Wahine theory is a Māori form of indigenous feminism from Aotearoa-New Zealand, related to but not the same as Kaupapa Māori theory, which is well-established as a critical indigenous paradigm for Māori-centric research and scholarship (Hoskins and Jones 2017). Mana Wahine theory adds a critical feminist lens to the critical indigenous lens of Kaupapa Māori theory.

Mana wahine is often understood to be a type of Māori feminism. It extends Kaupapa Māori theory by explicitly exploring the intersection of being Māori and female and all of the diverse and complex things being located in this intersecting space can mean. At its base, mana wahine is about making visible the narratives and experiences, in all of their diversity, of Māori women (Simmonds 2011: 11).

As a traditional term, “mana wahine” has long been discussed in the academic literature, including feminist literature (Jahnke 1997), and Mana Wahine theory was articulated in the doctoral thesis of Kaupapa Māori scholar Leonie Pihama (2001). Pihama found that Mana Wahine theory is necessary in the pursuit of non-dominant gender relations in research and education. Two reasons for this are: (1) Māori women were historically subjected to colonial forms of sexism that placed them at a disadvantage in relation to Māori men, as well as Pākehā/White women and men (L. T. Smith 1992); and (2) the specific interests of Māori women may be sidelined, even in Kaupapa Māori circles, in the quest to overcome two centuries of ethnocentrism against Māori people and culture (Waitere and Johnston 2009). The two forms of oppression, racism and sexism, are often in “competition” for scholarly attention, a competition that women often lose. Mana Wahine theory, like other forms of feminist theory, focuses specifically on the needs of women, in particular Māori women, subject to both axes of domination. Mana Wahine theory, like Kaupapa Māori theory itself, is located in the actual contexts of Aotearoa-New Zealand, where the development of the nation and its identity has been based on the relationship between indigenous Māori and mostly British settlers.

Given the history of Māori schooling as a technology of assimilation, it makes sense that Kaupapa Māori theory first emerged in Education, later extending into other social science domains. Kaupapa Māori theory was inaugurated over 30 years ago as a theorization of Kaupapa Māori education practice (G. H. Smith 2003)—a strategic “making space” in the academy for Māori-centered research and scholarship that privileges Māori perspectives and ways of thinking (L. T. Smith 2012). Clearly, Kaupapa Māori and Mana Wahine theory and research lay claim to being examples of “indigenizing the academy,” although in Aotearoa-New Zealand, the earliest calls to include the Māori language and culture in the university curriculum date back as far as 1908, attributed to one of the first Māori university graduates, Apirana Ngata (see Durie 1996).

Mana Wahine theory is characterized by its complexity, given the intersections between being Māori and being female, thereby belonging simultaneously to multiple subjugated social groups. Feminism has grown up in the cracks of the academy, and indigenous academics can learn to use similar strategies. Furthermore, Māori words and concepts do not map neatly onto their nearest English-language equivalents, so “Māori feminism” is only ever an approximation of the meaning of Mana Wahine theory. More important than defining it is to discuss what Mana Wahine

can do. Anderson describes the “generative, creative space that happens” in indigenous feminist projects, in terms that also apply to Mana Wahine theory: “We evolve when we work the diasporic spaces that we find ourselves in. And so we keep moving” (p. 6). The nature of indigenous feminist space is intersectional: it is the doubled doubling of identity that takes our critique one step further, disrupting the neat categorizations by which we are neutralized and domesticated within the academy.

## 2 Mana Wahine Doesn't Live by Itself

But with the complexity and intersectionality of Mana Wahine theory comes an impermanence, a lack of structure. One analogy for this idea of a “complex, shifting space” is a kaleidoscope: the ability to re-arrange the pieces, to form new patterns and ways of working. A “kitchen” analogy works even better: indigenous feminist theory is like an intellectual pantry, with many different meals waiting to be put together from its stores. Mana Wahine theory names our conceptual tools of trade. And it is important because it sustains Māori women in their academic work.

One principle of Mana Wahine theory is to privilege indigenous wahine Māori language, philosophies, and concepts, so I call on a paper published in a local, pre-digital Māori law journal (Robin 1991), which endorses the notion of Mana Wahine theory as a shifting, impermanent space in simple, authentic cultural terms. The paper is titled *They separate the mana*, below which is stated (with my translations and explanations given in parentheses): “Ruruhira Robin is a kuia (female elder) of Ngāti Kahungunu (name of her kin group). Ānei tana kōrero (Here is what she said).” The paper consists of a series of quotes from the author-elder in twelve paragraphs. She starts by calling mana wahine “a very serious thing” that cannot be separated from all the other forms of mana, including that of men, and of the family and tribal kin groupings.

You see mana wahine is something special but it doesn't live by itself [...]. Because we are all joined together by the whakapapa [tribal genealogies] our mana is all joined together [...] and each tamaiti [boy], kōtiro [girl], every wahine [woman] has her own mana that makes her special but joins her too to everything else [...] (Robin 1991: 3-4).

The author laments that through colonization the indigenous traditions of male and female mana as “complementary” (Robin 1991: 3) have been lost, which she expresses as “separating the mana” at various levels: between men and women, between different Māori tribal groups, and between Māori and the land through urbanization. She rails against Māori domestic violence, which she sees as caused by the mana being separated, saying “they [meaning the colonizers] have taught us that mana tangata [male mana] is better than mana wahine but the only result of that has been the violence” (Robin 1991: 3).

I wish they would stop using what they think is their mana as a weapon [...] and it is up to our wahine to decide what their role is in this te ao hurihuri [today's world] [...] to make mana wahine strong again because without it there can be no mana Māori (Robin 1991: 4).

To unearth the wisdom in gems such as Robin (1991) is to point to the potency of the archive in indigenous research, including indigenous feminist research. Archival work harnesses the power of the written word, and yokes it to indigenous feminist activism in politics, projects, and scholarship.

Our mothers and grandmothers were indigenous feminist gardeners, weavers, cooks, and poets, and Mana Wahine is what we do: it is one of the “invisible spaces” Anderson (2019) writes that “we will continue to create” in the academy.

We have already indigenized the academy, in our own feminist ways, working from the margins and often at great personal cost. Our life work has been to bridge the deep divides between the academy and the indigenous communities in our various different locales and situations. Our work lives on through our writing, our indigenous crafts, songs and ceremonies, and especially through our children. I am honored by this opportunity to keep moving forward together, and sharing a voice from Aotearoa at this table.

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<sup>1</sup> In this sentence “indigenous” denotes a category, not an ethnicity name, in the way that Māori and White, although also umbrella categories, are ethnicities. Nobody identifies their own ethnicity as simply “indigenous,” so on its own it is not a name. “Indigenous Australian” on the other hand *is* an identity name, so is capitalized: it is equivalent in meaning to “Māori,” which is an umbrella term for the indigenous peoples of Aotearoa. To describe people as “white” merely describes their skin tone, but to describe them as “White” or “Westerner” ascribes them membership to these ethnic groups, and recognises their relationships with non-Western, non-White others.

## **The Missing Sataney's Daughters: Indigenous Knowledge Production in the North Caucasus**

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Responding to Kim Anderson's welcome to share the space of reflection on indigenous feminist interventions in academia, I would like to first address the more general issues of decolonizing knowledge and learning, and then discuss an example of the nascent epistemic decolonization in my native indigenous culture—the Adyghe, known in the west under the name Circassians, one of the most ancient aboriginal ethnic groups of the North Caucasus and the southernmost indigenous people of Europe (Natho 2009).

Efforts to decolonize the university as a major modern/colonial institution for the production and dissemination of knowledge can be found all over the world. Recent examples include the Fallist movement in South Africa (UCT Rhodes Must Fall 2015), the SOAS students' protests against the exclusively white curriculum (Decolonizing SOAS Vision 2017), and internal university responses in the form of various commissions on diversity and inclusion (Wekker et al. 2016). Decolonial academics have been striving to advance the ideal of education as an emancipating force, giving people back their ancestral memory and hope for the future. Working in the modern/colonial university, indigenous scholars have to master indirect ways of decolonizing their institutions, such as problematizing and widening the curriculum, filling the standard courses with new names and content, questioning the predominant modes of perception, cognition, and representation, offering critical classes applying indigenous methodologies, and bursting Eurocentric epistemic normativity (Mignolo and Tlostanova 2012) grounded in a specific positionality of the gazing, sensing, and thinking subject, occupying a delocalized and disembodied vantage point which eliminates any other ways to look at the world, to produce, transmit, and represent knowledge.

All of this is hardly enough under the persistent structural inequality, intersectional discrimination, and stubborn epistemic hierarchies blocking a symmetrical dialogue of different knowledge systems. Indigenizing the university can be then seen as a preparation for a more radical decolonization of this institution, through shattering the system from within, infiltrating it with islands of decolonial thinking and agency, the micro-interventions and the longer-term higher-impact events such as described by Kim Anderson. We will act then as intellectual smugglers, dragging into the modern/colonial university the ideas, concepts, words, and projects that were never considered proper knowledge before, thus disrupting the hegemony of the western optics and humbling the western "hubris of the zero point" (Castro-Gomez 2007: 433) by designing multiple epistemic spaces.

A complete decolonization of the university would mean dismantling it and rebuilding anew, or perhaps even abandoning the idea of the university as such and designing alternative knowledge production institutions, including the indigenous ones. An interesting example was Amawtay Wasi pluriversity (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012) of the indigenous people and nations of Ecuador. It decentered the western educational canon, making it equal with indigenous learning systems, and shifted the emphasis from supplying the learners with a sum of facts, or from teaching them to comply with the national and state expectations, to letting them learn how to be themselves. In the center of its cognitive matrix stood the principle of relational-experiential rationality and building knowledge not outside the human experience and not by presenting the problem outside the context, but necessarily, through a never-ending process of learning to unlearn in order to relearn.

Hopefully there will be more such examples in the future when we would stop dismantling the master's house using his methodological tools, and focus more on questioning the "hegemony of the master's house" as such, "in fact, mastery itself which will then cease to maintain its imperial status" (Walsh and Mignolo 2018: 7). To make this possible it is necessary to problematize other modern/colonial delusions, such as the nation-state that remains neocolonial or neoimperial and impossible to democratize, and uninterested in supporting any emancipating knowledge production institutions. No matter if weakened or reinforced, the nation-state is still aiming at a forceful assimilation or ersatz status quo with token multiculturalism hiding the continuous indigenous epistemicide (Santos 2016). Therefore, it is wiser to look at the indigenous communities themselves as agents of epistemic and pedagogical decolonization.

The very structure of university curriculum compartmentalizes and simplifies the complex intersectional areas of indigenous knowledge and being such as gender and sexuality. Similar to gender mainstreaming, indigenous mainstreaming that is advocated by many presumably progressive universities would ultimately fail as it does not attempt to change the curriculum structure and logic but only alters the content a bit.

Thus several Adyghe women scholars working in the local university in my native North Caucasus infiltrate the rigid academic space with indigenous feminist knowledge in the spheres of literature, arts, history, and anthropology and through writing books and organizing conferences and community-based projects with alternative optics and ethics (Kharayeva and Kuchukova 2018; Tekuyeva 2006). However, the academic system remains hierarchical; its disciplinary divisions and curriculum canons are still set by the imperial center, and no matter how hard they try, these scholars are confined to their narrow niches with little impact. No wonder that Adyghe designer Madina Saralp's (Saralp 2019) private cultural center, with its highly popular educational, music, and art programs, is much more important for indigenous knowledge dissemination than the state university. In contrast with the museumizing of indigenous culture typical for university programs, Saralp attempts to allow the Adyghe to experience affectively their connections with ancestral roots and remain contemporary and up-to-date, to bring past into the present.

The post-Soviet colonial universities where the Adyghe feminist scholars work were created by the Soviet authorities presumably to facilitate access of indigenous people to education. This brand of universities always boasted of their departments of national literature, language, and history, trying to brainwash the indigenous populations into believing that the Soviet recolonization was in fact a decolonization. But knowledge taught in these departments was invariably produced by the colonizers or their local clones. The indigenous people could enroll in such departments, but only to learn their own history, culture, or language distorted and mediated by the Russian commentators according to the Eurocentric logic, colonizing views, and Marxist-Leninist ideology.

Gender departments sadly remain largely Eurocentric and tend to ghettoize any non-western feminists within a narrow menu of prescribed roles, whereas indigenous departments seldom prioritize gender issues for the sake of advocating the common decolonial cause. The existing knowledge production matrix largely prevents indigenous feminist knowledge from making an impact on contemporary education. It is impossible to fix this structural and notional bias in one national educational system or even one school. The reason is coloniality of knowledge and epistemic asymmetry preventing non-western knowledges from being considered as such. This is a systemic phenomenon on which the global knowledge production and distribution has rested for the last five centuries. Superficial changes such as multicultural inclusion or diversity awareness are unable to change this structure, always leaving the non-western knowledges in the role of marginal others and exotic additions to the normative Eurocentric model of knowledge. To counter this

situation, we need to act alter-globally and develop first decolonial feminist “deep coalitions” that “never reduce multiplicity” and “span across differences [...] towards a shared struggle of interrelated others” (Lugones 2003: 98). These deep coalitions could evolve as transversal alliances of gendered indigenous knowledges with transnational outlets such as educational and research platforms involving the local communities on a parity-grounded basis, summer schools, and other beyond-the-university learning-together activities and spaces in which different indigenous groups could meet and interact, learning with and from each other.

More and more students in the world are interested in such “learning otherwise” initiatives. Yet the coloniality of knowledge still does not allow such projects to be regarded as more than an exotic addition to traditional curriculum or a short-range edutainment. A shifting in the geography of reasoning (Gordon 2010), echoing Kim Anderson’s agenda of reclaiming indigenous women’s spaces, is necessary to legitimize indigenous knowledges as equal to normalized forms that we find in the class room and in the text book. One can learn much more about the indigenous culture from spending time with the Caucasus women healers still living in the mountain villages, from watching the process of making and then deciphering the symbols of Kaitag embroidery (Chenciner 1993) as a non-alphabetic writing system, or from following a deportation testimony of an elderly Chechen woman in Aslan Gaisumov’s video art *Keicheyubea* (Gaisumov 2017).

In Adyghe cosmology, the women’s spaces refer to the most ancient layers linked with correlational land-based ontology, epistemology, and ethics. Women (Colarusso 2002) are presented as carriers of prophetic and magical qualities, possessing exceptional spiritual power. Gender relations are marked by a profound parity. The central female character of Adyghe cosmology is Sataney, originally a forest deity giving birth to a solar god Sosruko. All the important events and heroic deeds take place under the supervision of the wise, eternally beautiful, young, and immortal Sataney. Exclusively female Adyghe sacred rituals included healing practices, the control of rain and thunder, the rituals performed at the building of a new house, and the initiation of the younger generation into adulthood and marriage. In order for the contemporary Adyghe women to reclaim their ancestral memories and reconnect with the powerful legacy of their grand-mothers, it is necessary to introduce them to these forgotten layers of indigenous knowledge at all levels. And here the role of indigenous feminist scholars, teachers, and activists is hard to overestimate.

An interesting example of decolonial pedagogy reconnecting education and learning with indigenous cosmologies is Жыгц1агъ (Under the Tree) (2017)—an international educational project for children organized by an Adyghe feminist scholar living in the US, Lidia Zhigunova, and her local Caucasus colleagues and members of the local community. The classes are held literally under the tree, as opposed to the confines of the usual schooling system, but also as a connection with the druidic roots of Adyghe culture for which the man-created forest-garden (Daurov 2011) was a sacred space, merging the domesticated and the wild in a correlational way, reinstating the unity of the people and the world, their existence in and through each other.

The children in the Жыгц1агъ project are taken to the spaces where various kinds of indigenous knowledge are still produced and practiced in village artisan workshops, horse breeding farms, and even just local kitchens where women cook ritual dishes to restore the equilibrium of the universe, and engage in geo-body story-telling and healing practices. Importantly the school is held in the Adyghe language, which is an endangered language due to the assimilationist policies of the Russian state and the elimination of the Adyghe language courses from the school curricula.

In spite of differences in our local histories, the general trends of modernity/coloniality are frighteningly similar in the Americas, in Asia, in Africa, and in the colonies of the Russian Empire. Breeding of loyal colonial others in residence schools and/or universities have generated double

consciousness and mental colonization that are hard to eliminate even in the subsequent generations. Therefore our goals are also similar today: we need to dismantle the dominant educational institutions such as universities, or at least thoroughly question their curricula and structural principles, to rebuild alternative spaces of indigenous knowledge production, design areas of transnational indigenous dialogues grounded in deep coalitions, and legitimate this knowledge as opposed to the dominant modern/colonial views on indigenous people. We must try to give our often demoralized compatriots back their human dignity and awareness that they are also creators of knowledge, of their own present and future.

**Response: There is Room for You Here**

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I will begin with a confession. When asked to write the lead essay for this symposium I felt nervous at the possibility of opening myself up to criticism. It wasn't the same nervousness I had the first time I was asked to write an article related to my Indigenous feminist practice. At that time I felt a need to defend Indigenous feminist identity, theory, and practice because of the resistance to feminism in "Indian country" on the whole (Anderson 2010b). Writing now—less than a decade later—I no longer see Indigenous feminism as an outlier, as there is an established and growing body of self-identified Indigenous feminist scholarship and activism. Thus, writing about Indigenous feminism is not in itself an invitation to criticism from Indigenous peoples. My nervousness at this point comes from wondering whether or not I can live up to the challenges presented by Indigenous feminist theory, and particularly within settler colonial spaces like the academy. I am acutely aware that I write from the privileged position of being a well-supported Indigenous scholar working at a Canadian university. Further to this, the Indigenous feminist practice I wrote about in the lead essay is taking place during a time of national discourse around "reconciliation," when post-secondary institutions in Canada feel pressure to make space for Indigenous peoples like me. With all this in mind, and given the ongoing levels of trauma, violence, and dispossession faced by Indigenous peoples worldwide, I had that nagging question: Are my efforts enough? Is "decolonizing" the academy even worthwhile as a project? I harbored these questions as I wrote the lead essay and wondered what responses it might invite.

A few months have passed and I am now in the metaphorical kitchen with Indigenous feminist scholars from around the world. I think of them as esteemed colleagues, but also "sisters," and I have chosen to use their first names here. I don't often do this in my scholarly writing, but as I approached this piece I found it helpful to imagine us sitting together, chatting as we might in a visit. I wanted to circumvent the hierarchies, titles, and posturing that we are called upon to do in academic settings. This is not to deny the value of performing such roles when we find ourselves in the "great" halls and boardrooms that have positioned our peoples and knowledges as inferior. But for this response I wanted to sit with the women as Indigenous relations at the kitchen table. With the exception of Madina—whom I met briefly once—I don't know the women personally. But relating to them as sisters feels right because there is a kinship that comes from our shared Indigenous feminist practices.

As I sit down with these sisters, my initial apprehensions have dissipated and I feel nurtured, validated, and also humbled by the thoughtful responses to what I originally expressed. The "debate" we were invited to take up has become more of a collaborative problem-solving exercise, although doubts remain about the overall premise of "Indigenizing the academy." I am grateful that the women have further articulated questions around my positioning and the challenges of doing Indigenous feminist work in academic settings. Elena has reminded us about the need for "self-reflexivity," as "too many of us blur out the social axes of intersecting power and privilege that gave us preferential access to the settler academy in the first place" (Ruiz 2019). Madina has astutely named some of what occurs in universities as the "museumizing of Indigenous culture," "exotic addition," or "short-range edutainment" (Tlostanova 2019). And Georgina has cautioned us about how efforts to Indigenize the academy risk becoming policies that allow others to "'tick the box' of performance indicators relating to 'reconciliation'" (Stewart 2019). All, however, have made

compelling arguments for continuing the work of carving out Indigenous feminist spaces and practices in academic as well as other educational environments.

How we do this is, of course, dependent on our particular contexts, which create very distinct opportunities and challenges. I appreciate that the editors of the journal sought out Indigenous scholars from very different languages, geographies, and identities, as this shows both the diversity of Indigenous feminist scholars and how we might come together to advance common goals. I am affirmed that this exercise is in keeping with what Metis Elder Rose Fleury asked us to do more often: gather together as Indigenous women so we can collectively evolve in multiple ways.

So what do we have in common? The women's responses confirmed for me that settler educational institutions *are* important sites of resistance and Indigenous feminist activism, if only because they have long been vehicles for dispossession and violence against Indigenous peoples. The global nature of this comes through when we see how the same colonial strategies have been employed against the very diverse peoples we come from. Examples provided by the women demonstrate the ubiquity of assimilationist tactics, positivist biases, cultural genocide, exclusionary practices, and neoliberal values in our academic institutions. The sisters around this particular table work within institutions formed by culturally and geographically distinct British, Soviet, and Latin American colonial states that have employed similar tactics towards the same nefarious ends. Their stories demonstrate how Indigenous women are further marginalized, excluded, or subjected to violence within the colonial processes that have defined the academy. But while the women's responses position the academy as a site of resistance, they also confirm the possibilities of working simultaneously within the academy and outside/inside our communities to bring Indigenous feminist ways to the project of "education as the practice of freedom" (Mihesuah and Wilson 2004: 5).

As I join the group again, I will revisit some of the sisters' suggestions about Indigenous feminist practices in settler as well as Indigenous educational settings. I'll reflect on what these practices mean in my own context, and then finish with an affirmation that we need to keep moving and taking up space together through tables like the one we have now shared.

## 1 Indigenous Feminists in the Academy

Georgina has suggested that we have "already Indigenized the academy in our own feminist ways" (Stewart 2019) by bringing ourselves and our peoples to the academy, and vice versa. This, she says, is the "life work" for those of us who are bridging "the deep divides between the academy and Indigenous communities in our various locales and situations" (Stewart 2019). One way to do this is through community-based research employing Indigenous research methodologies. These practices have certainly been informed by the Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her seminal and globally influential work *Decolonizing Methodologies* (1999). When Georgina remarked on the influence of Kaupapa Māori theory on research and scholarship in Aotearoa, I was reminded of how influential the Māori have been in decolonizing education at home, and how generous they have been in sharing their strategies abroad. These strategies have been particularly useful for those of us trying to decolonize education and reinvigorate Indigenous languages and cultures in our own territories and institutions, and particularly in the CANZUS countries. Their leadership is perhaps connected to the fact that decolonizing education is not new for them; Georgina noted that the theory of Kaupapa Māori education practice is over thirty years old and that there have been calls for including Māori language and culture in the university curriculum since 1908. Within this context of success,

however, she identified a need for Mana Wahine theory, which addresses the particular interests of Māori women who have been “sidelined” (Stewart 2019).

Elena’s description of Juárezismo provides another example of decolonizing educational practices with a long history. She described the system initiated by Indigenous president Benito Juárez in the late nineteenth century in Mexico, supporting “state-funded primary education in Indigenous languages and customs, free of the traditional influence of the Catholic Church” (Ruiz 2019). She pointed out that there is an ongoing system of autonomous primary schools, teachers’ colleges, and intercultural universities dating from this time. This system provides institutional sites for Indigenous-led education and resistance, but within a dual track academic system that privileges Mexican state institutions and scholars over the autonomous ones she describes. Like Georgina, she has shown how decolonizing educational practices often privilege men over women.

There is so much to learn from the histories of Indigenous presence and influence in settler educational institutions that the women in this symposium described, but I’ll focus my attention here on a few particular concerns. First: although I currently work within a supportive “Indigenizing” post-secondary discourse following the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada, there is no guarantee that it will last. Second: we need to stay focused on how “Indigenizing the academy” can contribute to the interests of Indigenous women and further, to dismantling heteropatriarchal gender relations.

On the first note, I appreciated Elena’s analysis about the neo-liberal interests and “market driven consumer values” influencing current educational systems (Ruiz 2019). Universities within the post-secondary environment I work in are now being called upon to identify how they measure up to metrics associated with post-graduate employment. I work in a Canadian province (Ontario) that has declared itself “open for business,” and universities may increasingly be rewarded for how they advance goals related to a capitalist economy. The critical and liberating content and pedagogies that Madina has suggested we might “smuggle” into university curriculums are hard to justify against such metrics. But perhaps in the current “open for business” environment they become even more important, not only to our own Indigenous students, but to settler students, staff, and faculty whom we will need as allies as we collectively face growing global challenges. As an example, some of my efforts include engaging Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, campus, and community partners in land-based education as we relearn the richness of Indigenous environmental knowledge. We are growing food and plant medicines in the university grounds, doing our best to contribute to student food security and Indigenous food sovereignty. We bring in Elders to work with us as we learn about local Indigenous gardening practices, which include things like songs and ceremonies. This also involves learning how to relate to each other, to the ancestors, to the lands where we now work. Our efforts are small, local and university-based, but I see value in the critical pedagogy they offer to address large global concerns like climate change (and climate change deniers). My hope is that Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies might inform everyone’s responsibilities to the future. Simply put, we need to train the future generations for what is coming.

With relation to how we can address the particular needs of Indigenous women and dismantle heteropatriarchal gender relations, I think about how I might help to create safer spaces. Sometimes this means just being a kind “auntie,” making space for Indigenous women, two-spirit, and transgender individuals within our institutions. Maybe it’s something as simple as listening, serving tea, smudging, or providing access to other medicines in those university spaces we occupy, like our offices. It might include leading gender-inclusive ceremonies and practices or promoting non-heteronormative teachings through our curricular, extra-curricular, and research activities. One of the Indigenous masculinities research projects I work on has created sacred fire gatherings for

campus- and community-based men and male-identified individuals. The coordinator of that project and circle/gathering facilitator is mindful that the teachers we bring into that space are inclusive. We know that some of our “traditional” teachings around gender are patriarchal and heteronormative, and so we try to demonstrate leadership in reframing what we may have learned in the past. The queer, feminist, and Indigenous feminist theorizing that many of us learned in academic settings is part of this evolutionary work.

Other work within academic institutions includes sitting on multiple committees, creating or responding to policy documents, or taking on institutional speaking engagements related to things like equity (or things that we worry are problematic, like “inclusion and diversity”) (Ahmed 2012; Gaudry and Lorenz 2018). All of this can add up to an inordinate amount of university service work and the contradictory sensation of being grateful for opportunities to make change while experiencing what I (and others in Canada) now half-jokingly refer to as “reconciliation fatigue.” This is one of the places where my doubts return, as I ask myself, “How much of this effort serves the institution, and how much of it works in the service of change?” And as we open up the academy, I am mindful of Elena’s comments that “historically, Indigenous women’s labors are systematically exploited like other extractable primary resources,” what she calls “epistemic extractivism” (Ruiz 2019). In bringing in Indigenous women’s epistemologies, do we risk creating sites of extractive knowledge production? Are these places where, as Elena suggested and Lee Maracle has written, we end up asking Indigenous students to buy back their own knowledge? (Maracle 2017: 110).

While I have these doubts about making change within the Master’s House, I do not underestimate the value of the allies and opportunities we find inside. The academy also provides us with new languages, theories, and global networks where, as Georgina inferred, we might grow our feminism “in the cracks” (Stewart 2019). Perhaps some of these cracks afford us places to smuggle in Indigenous ways of knowing and being, or even to prepare for a more radical decolonization of educational institutions, as Madina suggested. Ultimately, I believe that all of this work must take place simultaneously with other work we do with our relations in the Indigenous educational venues outside the academy.

## 2 Community-Based Indigenous Knowledge Production

Moving outside the academy, Madina has provided some inspiring examples of Indigenous-led educational processes. One involves a university created by Indigenous peoples in Ecuador that has created an environment for students to “learn how to be themselves” through “relational-experiential rationality” (Tlostanova 2019). Turning to her own people, Madina described how Adyghe women have created their own educational environments, grounded in pedagogies that draw on creativity and connection to land. Adyghe women have even taken up this leadership in diasporic places, like the United States. There is spirit power to the practices she outlined; power that resonates with the Mana Wahine theory that Georgina described and the Indigenous educational practices of “storytelling, communal weaving and design, healing circles, and land-based practices of popular assembly” that Elena referred to (Ruiz 2019). There is healing.

These community-based educational places are often the first training environments for Indigenous scholars, and they remain foundational to our theorizing as well our everyday work. I came to the academy after decades of working for Indigenous communities and organizations. I started my PhD as a forty-year old mother of two school-aged children, and in this I am not unique

as an Indigenous woman scholar. I brought with me prior learning from more formal settings, like Indigenous political and non-governmental organizations, and from informal kinship environments, the aunties and grandmothers who schooled me in their homes. When we are doing community work, these places also intersect.

I am an urban Indigenous person and a lot of my training as a young person came from working with the Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centers and under the leadership of their executive director, Sylvia Maracle. This is a female-led organization that has been at the cutting edge of policy-making, social, health, and economic development, governance, and cultural revival for urban Indigenous peoples across Canada. It provides institutionally based and Indigenous-centered education out of their training department and programs, and has built a research department that now includes twelve full-time staff. Critical approaches to gender are part of all of this work, whether they are working on ending gendered violence or introducing Indigenous feminist theory into their training programs. My association with the OFIFC, first as an employee, then as a consultant, and now as an academic partner has provided me with a foundation to make change, and I keep learning through our collaborations. I have been schooled in how to integrate ceremony, Indigenous language, work with Elders, and connection to lands as part of the “everyday good living” they define as culture.

The aunties and grannies I refer to are the Elders, healers, medicine people, and traditional teachers who have held onto Indigenous knowledges in spite of laws and histories to outlaw or shame traditional practices. Many of the Elders today have gone through a lifetime of community-based educational processes to seek out and recover such knowledge. I have been lucky to work most closely with Maria Campbell, a Metis author, playwright, facilitator, and Elder. Maria’s lodge family includes artists, academics, lawyers, and health professionals, and together we train, do ceremony, collaborate on projects, and spend time learning and visiting together around the kitchen table in her home. Our Indigenous feminist work there is connected to her steadfast work to improve the lives of Indigenous women, children, and families. Much of this work involves engaging art and storytelling in the service of healing.

As she approaches her eightieth birthday, Maria is increasingly encouraging her lodge family to build and make room at our own kitchen tables. I position myself now as a middle-aged auntie with responsibilities to students and community members alike. From this position I have decided recently that one way of fulfilling that role and the legacy of women before is to build a grannie’s cabin/Nokum’s House in the university arboretum lands. The intention is to create a space of safety, creativity, training, and healing. It is my hope that such a space might open up possibilities for the “under the tree” Indigenous feminist education that Madina described. It’s a way to keep moving.<sup>1</sup>

### 3 Global Conversations and Packing the Kaleidoscope

This symposium has provided me the opportunity to think critically beyond my local and everyday work of Indigenousizing the academy, and to revisit how such work might be considered Indigenous feminist practice. Elena now calls upon us to have more North-South dialogues, and Madina notes the potential for deep coalitions transnationally. The academic house does afford us certain possibilities. We can coalesce within the Master’s kitchens, while simultaneously setting our own tables in the academy and elsewhere. We have common theoretical languages that allow us to examine how power works, how we have common histories, and the ways in which gender is part of both the inequities and the freer paths forward. Our common experiences as Indigenous women

working in academic institutions provides room to share concerns about how to bridge our multiple positions and responsibilities.

In all of this work, the Mana Wahine theory that Georgina articulated resonates. For the work we do doesn't live by itself. It is part of a living, breathing set of relations. It's movement and vision. And so I will pack up the kaleidoscope that these sisters have provided, and leave the table for now, with much gratitude.

Ekosi. (That's it!)

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<sup>1</sup> I have written about Maria Campbell's influence in the introduction to the forthcoming revised edition of her memoir *Halfbreed*, and I have written about how I am trying to bring Indigenous feminist influence to my department in a forthcoming "Musing" I have written for *Hypatia: A Journal of Indigenous Feminist Philosophy* 35, no.1, (2020; forthcoming).

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