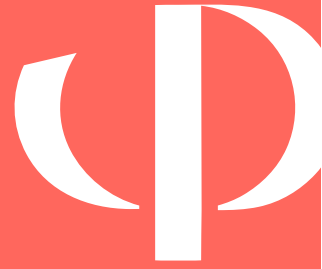


# Native American and Indigenous Philosophy



FALL 2020

VOLUME 20 | NUMBER 1

## FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry

## COMMITTEE CHAIRS' REMARKS

## STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

## ARTICLES

Pedro Lebrón Ortiz

### *Reconstructing Locality through Marronage*

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke

### *Relations and How Allies Acknowledge Land*

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke

### *Preliminary Remarks on the Graduate Submissions*

Éamon Brennan

### *The Role of Indigenous Peoples in the Environmentalist Movement: McKibben's View Analyzed*

Emmanuel Onyemachi

### *Indigenous Philosophy on Nature*

Katherine E. Richard

### *Indigenous Critiques of Western Conceptions of Nature: Exploring the Value of Indigenous Knowledge in Relation to Climate Change*

Shay Welch

### *Preliminary Remarks on the Undergraduate Submissions and Course Syllabus*

Spencer Nabors

### *Procedural Knowing to Facilitate Healing after Collective Trauma*

Dargenae Somerville

### *How Reconnecting with the Land May Help Heal Trauma in Native American Communities*



APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Native American and Indigenous Philosophy

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AGNES B. CURRY, EDITOR

VOLUME 20 | NUMBER 1 | FALL 2020

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## FROM THE MANAGING EDITOR

Agnes B. Curry

UNIVERSITY OF SAINT JOSEPH, CONNECTICUT

I have the happy task of introducing the fall 2020 edition of the newsletter, writing in mid-summer 2020, a time fraught and tragic, yet with some grounds for hope.

In the US, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has hit Native American reservations and communities of color particularly hard, while strains on protective equipment supplies and hospital systems nationwide have stripped away even the pretense of adequacy in healthcare. Likewise with food security: due to the pandemic, the percentage of all US households reporting food insecurity has more than doubled, to nearly 23 percent, compared to 11 percent two years ago, surpassing levels during the recession of 2008.<sup>1</sup> The US government has had to admit that undocumented workers are “essential” to the food system<sup>2</sup> while shoppers are seeing grocery stockers and delivery drivers as heroes along with healthcare workers. Meanwhile, safety protocols in meatpacking plants—staffed largely by people of color—remain inadequate. The *Midwest Center for Investigative Reporting* claims that “As of July 2, there have been at least 26,500 reported positive cases tied to meatpacking facilities in at least 254 plants in 33 states, and at least 95 reported worker deaths at 39 plants in 24 states,” while noting that these numbers are almost certainly an undercount.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, the pressures to keep plants open—and to export meat—lay bare the implications of the global consolidation of the meat industry. Worldwide, pandemic-related increases in poverty and unemployment have accelerated deforestation<sup>4</sup>—increasing the chances of transmission of emerging diseases.<sup>5</sup> Both domestically and globally, the pandemic has exacerbated both social inequities and governmental moves to authoritarianism.<sup>6</sup> In the US, a combination of posturing, pandering, and indecision has contributed to a new surge of infections while the worldwide death toll as of this writing was over 558,000.<sup>7</sup>

Yet also a glimpse of cause for hope: in a charged US context, with inequalities laid so bare, the latest round of all-too-predictable instances of police brutality and extrajudicial execution of unarmed Black people sparked mass protests that spread to over 1,700 places across the US<sup>8</sup> and over 120 countries on every continent except Antarctica.<sup>9</sup> What seems different this time is the extent of white participation. A broader swath of the US population is engaging in deeper critique of law enforcement, interrogation of historical

memory and monuments, and education about the daily strains of living in a racist culture. Despite also-predictable moments of backlash, perhaps we’re finally approaching a fuller scale de-legitimation of white supremacy as the default social order. The APA Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers joins a growing tide of groups and organizations declaring formally their solidarity with Black Lives Matter; our statement is published in this newsletter.

The US courts are an arena for some other positive developments. One is the decision by the US District Court for the District of Columbia in favor of the tribes fighting the Dakota Access Pipeline, vacating the US Army Corps of Engineers’ Lake Oahe easement and requiring that all oil flowing through the pipeline be removed by August 5, 2020.<sup>10</sup> A second is the US Supreme Court ruling upholding the treaty rights of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation and reaffirming that most of eastern Oklahoma continues to be part of the Muscogee reservation. While the decision has no effect on private land ownership within reservation boundaries, it has important implications for prosecution of some criminal and civil cases.<sup>11</sup> Both these decisions are steps in the direction of justice and substantive respect for sovereignty.

Although the articles featured in this edition of the newsletter were generated before these recent events, there are important topical resonances. First, with respect to the relationship between Native American and Black issues and philosophies, it is fitting that the newsletter starts with work by Pedro Lebrón Ortiz (17, Instituto de Estudios Críticos). Lebrón Ortiz critiques Cherokee philosopher Brian Burkhart’s reading of Frantz Fanon in service of a broader argument for deeper conversation between Indigenous philosophy and Afro-diasporic thought. Lebrón Ortiz articulates that conceptually, as well as socio-politically and existentially, “Black liberation and Indigenous liberation are forever intertwined.” Next, Andrea Sullivan-Clarke of the University of Windsor interrogates the growing practice of land acknowledgment statements; analyzed as performative utterances, they often exhibit patterns of failure about which those wanting to practice genuine allyship should be cognizant and wary. One could extend some of these worries to statements about anti-Black racism as well.

The newsletter also features two sets of articles that connect to the committee’s ongoing aim to provide resources for teaching Native American and Indigenous philosophy in light of the inevitable institutional constraints. The first set is of three essays composed by students in the

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Master of Arts in Philosophy program at the University of Windsor. These are responses to a single lecture on Native American philosophy that was part of a course on nature. I daresay that in many colleges and universities, students' main exposure to Native American philosophy will come in the context of a relatively brief discussion about how Native philosophy "applies" to other topics such as nature or the environment: given that constraint, how does one make clear the differences animating Native American perspectives?

The second set includes two essays by undergraduate students from Spelman College, along with the syllabus for the course in Native American philosophy in which they generated their work. As instructor Shay Welch notes, much of the students' work through the semester was oral—in keeping with time-honored Native American philosophical practice. In the context of teaching Native American philosophy, how does one present and practice Indigenous methodologies while also supporting students' practicing the skills they'll need for graduate study? To neglect either would do the students a disservice.

We invite other instructors to share their syllabi and thoughts on appropriate assignment design; if you have students whose work you believe exemplifies something promising or interesting about doing Native American philosophy, please invite them to submit their work for consideration for publication. Work should be thoroughly proofread with references adhering to *Chicago Manual of Style* endnote-bibliography style. Further submission guidelines appear below.

#### NOTES

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8. Janie Haseman, Karina Zaiets, Mitchell Thorson, Carlie Procell, George Petras, and Shawn J. Sullivan, "Tracking Protests Across the USA in the Wake of George Floyd's Death," *USA Today*, June 18, 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/graphics/2020/06/03/map-protests-wake-george-floyds-death/5310149002/>.
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## COMMITTEE CHAIRS' REMARKS

### *From the Outgoing Chair*

Lori Underwood

CHRISTOPHER NEWPORT UNIVERSITY

We have had an exciting year of activities. I would like to reflect back on our activities and accomplishments and enthusiastically welcome our incoming chair, Andrea Sullivan-Clarke. During the spring, I met with the APA board for the review of our committee, which happens every few years. I introduced our committee's desire to develop a mentoring program for Native American and Indigenous graduate students in the profession. The board was supportive and will provide resources as our planning evolves. The board praised our newsletter and APA session contributions.

Our committee continues to contribute actively to the profession. This marked the first year our Land Acknowledgement statement was included in APA Divisional session materials. At the Eastern Division meeting, we sponsored a session entitled, "Land Acknowledgment: Traditions, Relations, and Land Ontology." Brian Burkhart, who also presented, "'On the Meaning of Land in Land Acknowledgment,'" chaired the session. Andrea Sullivan-Clarke presented "Relations and How Allies Acknowledge Land." There were additional sessions planned for the other divisional meetings, but COVID-19 prevented those from occurring.

It has been my sincere pleasure to serve as chair of this committee for the past three years. I have enjoyed getting to know and working with the remarkable philosophers who work on this committee. I have enjoyed our many projects and contributions. We may be few, but our perspective is important. Thank you for allowing me to be a part of this work. I look forward to continuing to serve under Andrea's capable leadership.

## From the Incoming Chair

Andrea Sullivan-Clarke  
UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

Hensci! (Greetings!)

I am very excited to begin my tenure as the chairperson of our committee, and I hope that I can fill the shoes of those who have come before me. I want to thank (Mvto!) Lori and all the members for supporting my nomination; I will endeavor to be worthy. This year we have seen great turmoil, the effects of which we will be experiencing this fall—whether we are teaching on campus or providing our courses online. While we may not know what challenges lie ahead, I think we can, as Indigenous philosophers, draw from our unique experiences to advance the resilience we have inherited from our communities. I take heart that we are increasing in numbers and that the scholarly contributions from our members, in terms of the quality of publications and research, is impressive. Looking toward the future, I would like to see us counter the challenge of doing scholarly work while distancing as a result of the pandemic by developing a working group devoted to the support of our community. Lastly, I would like to see our committee support our colleagues of color by providing a statement of support and to create a venue of shared scholarship at future meetings of the American Philosophical Association.

## STATEMENT OF SOLIDARITY

The Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers stands in solidarity with the Black community, and in particular our colleagues in the American Philosophical Association. We bear witness to the ongoing violence and brutality that arises from the racism inherent in a colonial nation. Although the settler-colonial system seeks to pit our communities against each other, we acknowledge the need for anti-racist support in thought and action. We recognize that our nations cannot be truly sovereign unless Black Lives Matter. To that end, we will, as individuals, speak out against racism in our communities, and collectively, we seek to develop a relationship with our colleagues by hosting a combined session for each division conference through 2023. Together, we can bring about reconciliation and justice for **all** of us.

Black Lives Matter.

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES AND INFORMATION

We invite you to submit your work for consideration for publication in the *Newsletter on Native American and Indigenous Philosophy*. We welcome comments and responses to work published in this or past issues. We also welcome work that speaks to philosophical, professional

and community concerns regarding Native American and indigenous philosophies and philosophers of all global indigenous nations. Editors do not limit the format of what can be submitted; we accept a range of submission formats including and not limited to papers, opinion editorials, transcribed dialogue interviews, book reviews, poetry, links to oral and video resources, cartoons, artwork, satire, parody, and other diverse formats.

In all cases, however, references should follow the *Chicago Manual of Style* and include endnotes rather than in-text citations. For further information, please see the Guidelines for Authors available on the APA website.

Please submit material electronically to Agnes Curry ([acurry@usj.edu](mailto:acurry@usj.edu)). For consideration for the spring 2021 newsletter, please submit your work by January 15, 2021.

## ARTICLES

### *Reconstructing Locality through Marronage*

Pedro Lebrón Ortiz  
17, INSTITUTO DE ESTUDIOS CRÍTICOS

This text intends on putting what may be called a philosophy of marronage<sup>1</sup> in conversation with Indigenous thought, particularly by engaging with the thought of Cherokee Nation philosopher Brian Burkhart from his essay “Locality is a Metaphysical Fact.”<sup>2</sup> While the topic is treated in detail in Burkhart’s *Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land* (2019), my engagement with that specific text will be reserved for a separate project. What is of interest to me here is Burkhart’s elaboration of the concept of *locality*, which refers to an “ontological kinship with the land”<sup>3</sup> that serves as a bulwark against the sedimentation of the *coloniality of being* in the ontology of the Indigenous subject. I would like to add some nuance to it from the positionality of a subject whose ontological kinship with the land was severed through the kidnapping and enslavement of the ancestors from the African continent. In the process, my intent is to offer an alternate reading of Frantz Fanon (1925–1961) which may allow Fanonian thought to be reconciled with North Native American Indigenous thought, which has typically rejected Fanon’s rejection of a return to ancestral ways. This alternate reading of Fanon shows that a reconnection with ancestral ways, and reconstruction of locality, constitutes only part of the liberation project for Afro-diasporic subjects.

In this essay, I focus on three elements. First, after briefly defining my conception of a philosophy of marronage and reviewing Burkhart’s concept of locality for context, I explore the relationship an Afro-diasporic subject has to the land by arguing that they are *dis-located* subjects. In the following section, I will explore Fanon’s thoughts regarding violence and death as they relate to the struggle for decolonization by addressing Burkhart’s critique of Fanon. In the final section, I elaborate one of the elements of what I have termed *analectical marronage*, which refers

to flight from the *world* of European modernity to another *world*. The term “world,” when italicized, refers to an ontological totality through which a singular or collective subject interprets the ontic. For example, the *world* of the Aztecs is different from the *world* of the Cherokee, which in turn is different from the *world* of the Puerto Rican. In this regard, analectical marronage constitutes a resistance to the coloniality of being. I suggest that through spatial flight, a subject can forge an alternate relationship to the land than that imposed by the logics of Euromodernity/coloniality. As such, it constitutes a recovery or refashioning of the ancestral ontological kinship with the land. In other words, I explore the relationship an Afro-diasporic subject has to the land by arguing that they are *dis*-located subjects and therefore an ontological kinship with the land must be reforged, potentially through what Paul Dill Barea and other activists in Puerto Rico have called *autogestión radical*,<sup>4</sup> or radical autonomous organizing.

It is important to note that Puerto Rico, a colony of the Spanish Empire from 1508 to 1898 and a colony of the United States from 1898 until today, was one of the first loci of the transatlantic slave trade. Puerto Rico witnessed a rapid influx of kidnapped and enslaved African bodies after the decimation of its Indigenous population in the early sixteenth century. Nevertheless, eugenicist discourses of “improving the race,”<sup>5</sup> combined with a downplay if not complete disavowal of African heritage to reproduce national ideologies of *mestizaje*,<sup>6</sup> not only silence systemic racism within the Puerto Rican archipelago but also inhibit the identification of Puerto Ricans as Afro-diasporic subjects. I situate my thoughts on a potential philosophy of marronage within the Caribbean context as a product of the Afro-diasporic experience and intellectual production. Inasmuch as a philosophy of marronage takes seriously the maroon experience in Abya Yala, it must seriously engage Indigenous thought. This essay is an attempt to start that engagement.

### TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF MARRONAGE

Prior to entering the crux of this article, a definition of my conception of a philosophy of marronage and its concepts would be useful.<sup>7</sup> What I seek to achieve in thinking through a philosophy of marronage is a conceptual framework for understanding social and political praxis without subscribing to the myth that colonization, and more crucially, the coloniality of being, was a totalizing endeavor. The coloniality of being refers to the internalization of the subontological difference.<sup>8</sup> Stated differently, it refers to a “complication in ego development attendant the confusion of second- for first-order consciousness,”<sup>9</sup> which refers to the way in which the racialized/colonized subject develops a sense of Self through the eyes of the imperial subject and is relegated to the realm of subhumanity. Or as LaRose T. Parris stated in her discussion of Fanonian thought, “The colonized subject’s awareness of Being is therefore distilled from the oppressive material conditions of Western domination that shape the individual’s psyche and ontology.”<sup>10</sup> If the question that emerges as a product of the sedimentation of the coloniality of being is “why go on?”—“a question that illuminates the condition of the damned of the Earth”<sup>11</sup>—and we buy into the myth of the coloniality of being as ubiquitous, then there is no possibility for

struggle against the colonial logics of European modernity. All would be lost.

My conception of a philosophy of marronage draws on Latin American liberation philosophy, particularly Enrique Dussel’s conception of *exteriority*, which was inspired by Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas to argue against this apparent ubiquity. If G. W. F. Hegel understood exteriority as that which is distinct from the totality [of European modernity], while still situated within that totality, and which must be annihilated or assimilated to achieve a harmonious unity through a dialectical movement, Dussel understood exteriority as being left *outside* the totality. While Arturo Escobar argues that “in no way should this exteriority be thought about as a pure outside, untouched by the modern,” that it “does not entail an ontological outside,” but that “it refers to an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by a hegemonic discourse,”<sup>12</sup> my conception of a philosophy of marronage provides a different interpretation by taking seriously the lived experience of Indigenous and Afro-descendant subjects who established maroon communities across the so-called New World. In this way, I agree with Nelson Maldonado-Torres’s critique when he states that “for Dussel [in his *Philosophy of Liberation*] the Other is a concrete human subject in a position of subordination,” which confuses “the ‘beyond Being’ with the non-Being.”<sup>13</sup> Maroon subjects, whether of African or Indigenous ancestry, and Indigenous subjects more broadly continually affirm(ed) their “beyond Being.”

Nevertheless, it would be naïve to believe that marronage as flight from the plantation—Euromodern *world* par excellence—was and is sufficient to stop the totalizing force of European modernity. Therefore, on the one hand, marronage refers to flight from the *world* of Euromodernity and its colonial logics as a means to resist the coloniality of being. I refer to this as analectical marronage, which constitutes one of the two axes of my thinking on a philosophy of marronage. Maroons established communities and organized them by drawing on ancestral epistemologies and ontologies, albeit adapted to the material circumstances thrust upon them. Nevertheless, this did not stop the imperial project from encroaching on maroon and Indigenous lands.

On the other hand, to prevent further land encroachment and colonization, a fracture of colonial logics, which can be interpreted as another manifestation of marronage, is required and constitutes the second axis of my thinking on a philosophy of marronage: *sociogenic marronage*. Elaborated by Neil Roberts in his text *Freedom as Marronage*, sociogenic marronage refers to permanent institutional change as a manifestation of flight from the oppressive forces of European modernity. As Roberts put it, “sociogenic marronage allows us finally to understand how revolutions are *themselves* moments of flight that usher in new orders and refashion society’s foundations.”<sup>14</sup> The case of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution, which serves as Roberts’s conceptual point of departure, has shown that traditional maroon communities such as Le Maniel did not transform the foundations of European modernity, evidently, because they never sought to. Instead,

maroon communities affirmed their transontological difference away from the Euromodern *world*, physically and ontologically, constantly fending off attacks from the colonizers. Rather, the Haitian Revolution was a product of what Leslie Manigat called a “mutation of marronage,” which was the product of a “critical threshold” through which flight from colonial society mutated into a desire to extirpate colonial logics from the hegemonic order.<sup>15</sup> The Haitian experience shows that struggle must occur in two different dimensions which complement and depend on each other. Struggle must occur within and without the *world* of European modernity. Analectical marronage, then, in addition to a resistance to the coloniality of being, also serves a pedagogical role in that it provides an answer to the question “why go on?” which manifests in the psyche of the subject who has internalized the coloniality of being: “because another *world* is possible; it stands before me.”

This struggle on two fronts is highlighted by Agustín Lao-Montes’s critique of the figure of Caliban as a metaphor for Afro-diasporic subjects. The figure of Caliban “was developed as a conceptual character in Caribbean critiques of occidentalist discourse, racist reason, and imperial power.”<sup>16</sup> As Paget Henry conceives it, *Caliban’s reason* “could be formulated as a consciousness of existence as being the racialization and colonization of Africans and our way of life within the framework of Euro-Caribbean plantation societies.”<sup>17</sup> In short, Caliban became a concept-metaphor through which Afro-diasporic subjects tried to understand their sense of Being within the *world* of European modernity by employing the language and concepts of the Euromodern *world*. According to Lao-Montes,

there is a valuable critical edge in Caliban as concept-metaphor, [but] it is also problematic. To speak from the standpoint of the reason of Caliban is somehow to assume the language and the naming given by the European colonizer. On the other hand, it becomes a postcolonial strategy of resistance and critique by appropriating and re-signifying the colonizer’s categories of discourse.<sup>18</sup>

Put differently, the figure of Caliban, as I interpret it, also assumes the ubiquity of the colonial enterprise since it renders Afro-diasporic thought as completely dependent on European discourse. When circumscribed to this logic, an Afro-diasporic sense of Self can only ever emerge as an appendage of European modernity.

Without an affirmation of the transontological, no liberation project is possible for racialized/colonized subjects which are forced to navigate the physical spaces which permeate the ethos of the Euromodern *world*. Nevertheless, a complete fracture of that ethos is also necessary. It is this dynamic that I believe Fanon experienced with his relationship to the *Négritude* movement, which many have interpreted as a repudiation of a return to tradition or ancestral ways. After initially adopting *Négritude* “to the point of [ . . . ] working for Aimé Césaire’s election to the mayorship of Fort-de-France on the Communist ticket,”<sup>19</sup> Fanon would become disillusioned because of Jean-Paul Sartre’s treatment of the movement in “Black Orpheus.”

According to Lewis R. Gordon,

in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon had accused Sartre of guiding in a Trojan Horse to [B]lack semiotic and psychic resistance by pointing out in “Black Orpheus” that *Négritude* was an antiracist racism that was revolutionizing black consciousness as a negative moment of a dialectic in which the “universal” proletariat of Marxism would emerge through a cross-racial coalition of black, brown, and white workers.<sup>20</sup>

Put differently, Sartre had robbed Black subjects immersed in the *Négritude* movement of their attempt to affirm their transontological Being by subsuming them within a dialectical movement in a Hegelian sense described above. Or as Gordon poetically put it, “what Sartre didn’t understand was that he was in effect counseling the death of blackness through eventual absorption into the light of whiteness.”<sup>21</sup> The “bitter taste of disenchantment” that Sartre left is what then drove Fanon to argue that “Legitimacy [ . . . ] emerges [ . . . ] from active engagement in struggles for social transformation and building institutions and ideas that nourish and liberate the formerly colonized.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, I argue that Fanon understood that in a world indelibly marked by the experience of colonization, first-order consciousness was not possible for the racialized/colonized subject without a radical transformation of hegemonic institutions to prevent the totalizing impulse of the Euromodern *world*. A mere return to ancestral modes of life is not possible under the constant threat of European modernity; liberation requires a radical transformation of hegemonic institutions to extirpate its colonial drive in addition to an affirmation of the transontological.

## AFRO-DIASPORIC SUBJECTS AS DIS-LOCATED SUBJECTS

Burkhart critiques what he interprets as Fanon’s requirement of violence in the struggle for decolonization through what I understand to be a canonical interpretation of Fanon’s treatment of the Hegelian dialectic. “Unlike Hegel’s master/slave story,” Burkhart tells us, “colonizer and colonized are not locked in a life-or-death struggle.”<sup>23</sup> Because decolonization tends to be circumscribed to the Hegelian dialectic, “being set free by the master here means nothing to the [enslaved].”<sup>24</sup> This led scholars to believe that for Fanon, decolonization necessarily requires physical violence. Burkhart subscribes to this reading when he states, “for Fanon, it is through struggle and conflict, which he understands as often necessarily violent, that colonized peoples can shrug off the coloniality of their being.”<sup>25</sup> Thus the common interpretation is that for Fanon, decolonization requires recognition which is achieved in a physically violent struggle against the colonizer.

In contrast to this reading of Fanon whereby decolonization, or rather, the unsettling of the coloniality of being requires a violent struggle for recognition, Burkhart proposes that for the Indigenous subject, the coloniality of being does not quite sediment in the subject’s ontology. This is to say, the Indigenous subject’s “being is never colonized to the point in which we do not experience the alienation of coloniality

that Fanon thinks often requires a life-or-death struggle with the colonizer to achieve.<sup>26</sup> This is due to the fact that for the Indigenous subject, “being is itself, in the context of Indigeneity, an originary and continual manifestation of the land.”<sup>27</sup>

While Burkhart identifies European locality as a “de-localized, universalized system of culture, values, meaning, being and so forth,”<sup>28</sup> he does not include Afro-diasporic subjects in his theorization of locality. This explains why Burkhart critiques Fanon when he states that

It was just as hard, it seems, for Frantz Fanon to see the remainder of being that existed and exists still for colonized people as that part of our being that is in the land, which is our locality. Thus Fanon saw little hope for Indigenous liberation that could come from outside of the Manichean circle of colonizer and colonized. The struggle was for him always within this circle rather than something that, as Indigenous liberation strategies show, can arise from our Indigenous being in the land or our locality.<sup>29</sup>

I defend Fanon against this critique by reminding the reader of Fanon’s positionality as an Afro-diasporic subject whose locality was ruptured through the kidnapping and enslavement of the ancestors. Therefore, one cannot deduce that it was hard for Fanon to see that “remainder of being,” but rather that Fanon was cognizant of his position within European modernity. In this regard, the experience of the Middle Passage is central. For Michael E. Sawyer, “the Middle Passage is just that, a passage or transition to a *world* where the coercive nature of society is so complete that the enslaved can be restrained without the use of physical bonds or, more carefully, restrained differently.”<sup>30</sup> What I am interested in here is the way in which Sawyer sees the Middle Passage as the vehicle through which the subjectivity of the African subject is transfigured. The African becomes “The Negro” in the so-called New World. The African is forcefully moved from the *world* of the Yoruba or the *world* of the Asante, for example, to the *world* of European modernity, fracturing their originary subjectivity in the process. Put differently, the sovereign subject which constitutes the African subject in their homeland has a locality akin to that which Burkhart attributes to the Indigenous from across the Atlantic, but it becomes severed through the Middle Passage.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade in general, and the Middle Passage specifically, necessitated the erasure of Black sovereignty to enact the level of violence essential to the institution and practice of African enslavement. This led to the creation of “The Negro.” In this regard, Ronald Judy stated that

[t]o be black is to be Negro. Given that such a concept is not empirical, these judgments cannot be deduced on sensible grounds; rather, they are completely transcendental, i.e., metaphysical. That is to say, the phenomenal appearance of blackness does not achieve the significance of stupidity until it is subsumed under a concept, and for Kant that

concept is *The Negro*, which is the *a priori* principle of stupidity.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, LaRose T. Parris stated that “the African’s re-creation into the ahistorical, bestial Negro slave became central to Western slavery’s ideological and economic survival.”<sup>32</sup> Following Sawyer and Parris, I suggest that the experience of the Middle Passage, inasmuch as it produced a transfiguration of the African’s subjectivity, also severed the ontological kinship to the land. As such, the Afro-diasporic subject is a *dis*-located or *dis*-localized subject. Therefore, while “the colonization of [Indigenous] subjectivity and of land is never complete. Neither can be fully colonized because of their locality,”<sup>33</sup> the situation is quite different for Afro-diasporic subjects although both were subjected to catastrophic levels of physical and epistemic violence.

To circle back to the question of the applicability of Hegelian dialectics to colonial contexts, it is worth revisiting a key statement from Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. “There is a zone of non-being,” Fanon says. “In most cases, the [B]lack subject *cannot take advantage* of this descent into a veritable hell.”<sup>34</sup> Nelson Maldonado-Torres interprets this as the relegation of the colonized subject *outside*, or *underneath*, the zones of being and non-being. “This is so, Maldonado-Torres says, because the colonized subject is already living in a hell in which his existence, and not his authenticity (in the phenomenological sense), is at stake.”<sup>35</sup> Following Maldonado-Torres, it would be difficult to argue that Fanon believed that decolonization requires a physically violent struggle for recognition. Certainly, Fanon thought decolonization was a violent process, but he did not refer strictly to *physical* violence nor was it recognition, in the Hegelian sense, that he sought.

As Lewis R. Gordon constantly reminds us, Fanon was a psychiatrist who treated both French and Algerian patients during the Revolution, and thus saw the psychiatric effects of war and violence on both parties firsthand—and deplored it. Because decolonization implies a shift, or, rather, a fracture of the intersubjectivities brought about by the *metaphysical catastrophe* which created a “profound scission in the concept of humanity, serving as foundation for a system that will no longer be structured in terms of intra-human differences,”<sup>36</sup> it is read as violence by the hegemonic order. Gordon states the following:

The criteria that would constitute suitable means for the settlers, for the colonial government, would be the absence of challenges to it. This is because such a system does not see itself as unjustified and unjust, which means its overturn would be, from its perspective, unjust, unwarranted, a violation of decency and order—in a word, *violent*. [. . .] Decolonial violence is simply what is manifested in, as [Fanon] put it, “the replacement of one ‘species’ of men by another ‘species’ of men.”<sup>37</sup>

This is why, for example, the protests in Puerto Rico during the summer of 2019 were met with physical repression on behalf of the State, although the protests consisted of yoga, dancing, and other activities typically read as “peaceful.”<sup>38</sup>

The topic of decolonial violence in Fanonian thought is worth elaborating further.

### FACING DEATH: TOWARDS THE POSSIBILITY OF IMPOSSIBILITY

Fanon closes *Black Skin, White Masks* with a beautifully posed question: "Superiority? Inferiority? Why not simply try to touch the other, feel the other, discover each other?"<sup>39</sup> In Maldonado-Torres's reading, Fanon is arguing for the formation of a decolonial attitude "against the devastating effects of metaphysical catastrophe."<sup>40</sup> As such, following Maldonado-Torres, I suggest that Fanon is arguing against the Euromodern ethos which is predicated on hierarchization, rationalization, dehumanization, and the imperative of transparency. This last concept, the imperative of transparency, consists in the colonial impulse to rationalize that which falls outside one's *world* by placing it in a lower category. Said differently, it is the collapsing of the transontological difference into the subontological difference.<sup>41</sup>

In other words, *world-world* relationships are mediated by what Édouard Glissant referred to as "opacity." The European imperative of transparency driven by principles of the Enlightenment, exemplified in the phrase *sapere aude*, necessitated the transfiguration of the figure which lies beyond the *world* of Europe such that it could be *known* to or *understood* by Europe. Glissant tells us that

[i]f we examine the process of "understanding" people and ideas from the perspective of Western thought, we discover that its basis is this requirement for transparency. In order to understand and thus accept you, I have to measure your solidity with the ideal scale providing me with grounds to make comparisons and, perhaps, judgments. I have to reduce.<sup>42</sup>

This reduction is one of the many ways the metaphysical catastrophe constitutes a violent process. "I admit you to existence," Glissant says, "within my system. I create you afresh."<sup>43</sup> "I create you afresh" implies first the destruction of the Other in their alterity prior to a reconstruction within the Euromodern imaginary. This process is what Audre Lorde referred to when she asserted that "if I didn't define myself for myself, I would be crunched into other people's fantasies for me and eaten alive."<sup>44</sup> It implies the destruction of the sovereign Yoruba subjectivity, for example, and the creation of "The Negro."

What Fanon referred to as the "replacement of one 'species' of mankind by another"<sup>45</sup> was a reconfiguration of (inter)subjectivities which eliminate the subontological difference. As such, I disagree with Burkhart's circumscription of Fanon's thought to "the Manichean circle of colonizer and colonized."<sup>46</sup> Fanon's desire to eliminate the Manicheism which constitutes European modernity is implied in the questions "Inferiority? Superiority?" which immediately preceded his urging to simply "touch the other, feel the other, discover each other." In other words, Fanon sought to eliminate colonial logics with its tendency towards hierarchization, classification, and categorization

in terms of subhuman/human differences. This would necessitate a fracturing of the Euromodern *world*, which is read as violence by the colonizers. This is different from Burkhart's reading, which posits that "Fanon cannot see the scope of the possibilities of decolonial resistance that can exist outside and transcend [. . .] the life-or-death struggle between colonizer and the colonized,"<sup>47</sup> which establishes that "The colonized are good. The colonizers are evil."<sup>48</sup> If Fanon believed this to be true, how does his assertion that "I am French [. . .] I take a personal interest in the destiny of France, the French nation, and its values"<sup>49</sup> make sense? In this statement, I argue that Fanon is cognizant of his positionality as an Afro-diasporic subject within the broader history of France, which may be understood as an articulation of DuBoisian double-consciousness. In addition, Fanon understood the importance, but also the limitations, of mere transontological affirmation.

Following Sawyer, I argue that the "life-or-death" struggle Fanon was alluding to was not one in the physical sense necessarily, but rather that Fanon was suggesting that the "metamorphosis of subjectivity"<sup>50</sup> which constitutes decolonization, at least for the Afro-diasporic subject, implies a type of death. "In a fierce struggle," Fanon states, "I am willing to feel the shudder of death, the irreversible extinction, but also the possibility of impossibility."<sup>51</sup> I read Fanon as stating that he is willing to move from the stable subjectivity of subhumanity, through liminal *Being*, into the stable position of the human proper. This requires the subhuman subject to "first become a transitional being,"<sup>52</sup> which is a type of extinction inasmuch as one ceases to *Be*, in order to reach the realm of humanity. As such, Fanon's project is to fracture "the notion of whiteness as ontological [. . .] human-ness"<sup>53</sup> which produces an "abnormal psychological state"<sup>54</sup> in the Afro-diasporic subject inasmuch as they have internalized and assimilated the coloniality of being. This would allow the subject previously constituted as subhuman, subjected to a permanent state of violence and war, to limit death to the realm of mere possibility. This is an allusion to Heidegger, who stated that "death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein. Thus death reveals itself as that *possibility which is one's ownmost, which is non-relational, and which is not to be outstripped [unüberholbare]*. As such, death is something *distinctively* impending."<sup>55</sup> For the racialized/colonized subject, death is not "distinctively impending," but rather it is a guarantee.

In short, Fanon was not necessarily referring to physical violence as a means of altering one's subjectivity, but rather that the process itself is read as violence by the colonial order. Part of the project of altering one's subjectivity through the fracturing of Euromodern subjectivity may require for the Afro-diasporic subject to recover or reconstruct its locality in the sense that Burkhart refers to. It is here that I see a connection with analectical marronage.

### ANALECTICAL MARRONAGE AND RADICAL AUTONOMOUS ORGANIZING

How can a subject who has lost their locality through the various technologies of coercion imposed during slavery, which still persist today albeit in different form, reconstruct



their ontological kinship to the land and in doing so create a bulwark against the colonality of being, as it functions for Indigenous ontologies, preventing it from seeping back into the ontology of those who have altered their subjectivity? I argue that what I have termed analectical marronage and its potential relationship to radical autonomous organizing may offer a solution.

To reiterate, analectical marronage refers to flight from the Euromodern *world* through the process of affirming a distinct *world*. Put differently, it is flight from the subjectivity which Euromodernity seeks to impose by means of affirming one's own transontological subjectivity. The term is a direct reference to Enrique Dussel's concept *the analectical moment*, which refers to the affirmation of exteriority *from exteriority itself*.<sup>56</sup> In other words, it refers to the negation of negation through a primary affirmation. The enslaved does not simply negate slavery which negates their *Being*, but rather the enslaved negates slavery which negates their *Being* by way of an affirmation of their humanness. Said differently, the Yoruba, for example, does not simply reject the conception of "The Negro" thrust upon them, but rather does so by affirming their *Being* as Yoruba.

If the plantation society is taken to represent the spatial manifestation of the Euromodern *world* par excellence, marronage, as experienced historically, is not merely physical flight but also ontological flight. It is a process by which the enslaved subject resists "The Negro" subjectivity through an affirmation of their autochthonous subjectivity. In this regard, analectical marronage may be interpreted as serving a pedagogical role which ushers in Roberts's notion of sociogenic marronage. As such, sociogenic marronage is a struggle for liberation which occurs *within* the Euromodern *world* through a frontal attack on it through decolonial institutional reconfigurations, while analectical marronage is a multidimensional flight from the Euromodern *world*. The concept of analectical marronage, as I have elaborated it, answers George Ciccariello-Maher's critique of sociogenic marronage when he poses the question "from slavery to what world?"<sup>57</sup> Ciccariello-Maher's statement that "the active process of marooning, of leaving *this* world for another entirely,"<sup>58</sup> in my reading, alludes to Dussel's analectical moment in the context of the plantation society, which I have termed analectical marronage. One of the axes of analectical marronage is what I have termed *analectical praxis*.

Analectical praxis refers to praxis which falls *outside* the *world* of European modernity, its institutions, and its logics. Historically, maroons fled the plantation to forge a society ordered by logics recovered from ancestral African memories fractured during the Middle Passage and Indigenous memories which survived genocide and epistemicide. No recourse was made to hegemonic institutions, nor were processes, laws, or legal channels followed to carry out their activities. Analectical praxis refers to social and political acts that are outside the structures and logics of the current order. As Adam Bledsoe stated, "maroon communities worked to disrupt the geographies of slavery while simultaneously underwriting the geographies of the early Americas and creating territories of Black humanity."<sup>59</sup> The "creating territories of Black humanity"

through flight from the plantation may be indicative of analectical marronage in general, and analectical praxis specifically. I am thinking of analectical praxis in potential relation to the notion of radical autonomous organizing advanced by Paul Dill Barea.

Radical autonomous organization, according to Dill Barea, rests on the premise of "not asking for permission, of exercising the power that exists in our communal environments to collectively change our social realities and implement initiatives that meet our needs by way of our collective strengths."<sup>60</sup> Radical autonomous organizing refers to the organic formation of collectives and work groups which operate outside Euromodern institutionality, including nonprofit organizations, to carry out community-based activities such as distributing food to the impoverished. Funding is typically provided through crowdfunding and community solidarity. This is a concept employed primarily within agroecological militant circles in Puerto Rico to describe their political praxis. As such, there is an undeniable relationship between this mode of *Being* and the land which I suggest relates to the notion of locality. It implies a return to a relationship with the land that is not predicated on the extractivist impulses and the imperative of transparency which constitute colonial logics. Inasmuch as small independent farmers organize themselves around the principle of food sovereignty, radical autonomous organization implies a rejection of the supply chains of the "agrobusiness [. . .] whose only concern is excessive profit."<sup>61</sup> In my view, this allows for the development of a relationship to the land which approximates the relationship Indigenous subjects have with the land. Therefore, I read radical autonomous organization potentially as a manifestation of marronage that permits the reconstruction of locality in the sense elaborated by Burkhart. In addition, radical autonomous organizing, inasmuch as it is conceived as a means to reconstruct locality, may also be predicated on a reconnection to ancestral modes of *Being* and understandings of the land, such as a reconnection with conceptions of "nature" as the Pachamama, through a rejection of Cartesian dualism which locates "man" as an entity apart from and independent from "nature." Radical autonomous organizing, as a potential expression of analectical praxis, may be understood as a practical component of analectical marronage, which implies an affirmation of an *Other world*. For the Afro-diasporic subject, this would require a reconnection to autochthonous African and Native American ways of understanding their place in the cosmos, albeit fragmented and adapted to current material realities. *Damn e* subjectivity transforms into an Indigenous subjectivity through the process of flight and a reconnection with the land, affirming an *Other world* in the process. This explains why certain agroecological movements in Puerto Rico have adopted the figure of the maroon as a concept-metaphor such as La Colmena Cimarrona (the Maroon Beehive)<sup>62</sup> and Brigada Cimarrona (Maroon Brigade).

Dill Barea also makes what I read as a critical distinction in the discourse related to autonomous organization in the context of Puerto Rico. In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which devastated the archipelago on September 20, 2017, the term *autogesti n* became a catchphrase.

To talk about autonomously organized projects became trendy. Nevertheless, acting outside the grasp of State institutions does not constitute the analectical praxis which I conceive as allowing for the possibility of the recovery of locality. The European pirates of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, acted outside European political institutions but did not embody analectical marronage; they did not conceive piracy as flight from Euromodernity *itself*. This is evidenced by the seamless integration of European pirates and buccaneers into the multiple enterprises of nascent capitalism. In this sense it is quite easy to conceive autonomously organized projects which reify, rather than reject, colonial logics. The term *radical* autonomous organization, for Dill Barea, is a way to distinguish this conception such that “it cannot be usurped by neoliberalism, since in that context the term ‘radical’ would never be used.”<sup>63</sup> I read Dill Barea’s conception of radical autonomous organization as having parallels with Abdias do Nascimento’s conception of *quilombismo*, which denotes the “erection of a society [. . .] whose intrinsic nature makes economic or racial exploitation impossible.”<sup>64</sup> It is well known that maroons of African descent often established communities in solidarity with Indigenous subjects,<sup>65</sup> and in some occasions, poor white subjects. Therefore, it is easy to see how *quilombos* or *palenques* were spaces constituted by transontological, rather than subontological, differences. Inasmuch as radical autonomous organizing excises the colonial logics constitutive of European modernity, it may represent a political praxis that constitutes an ontological fracture of Euromodern ways of *Being* and a reconnection with ancestral ways. Therefore, it permits the Afro-diasporic subject to recover or reconstruct locality.

In closing, analectical praxis, which may be expressed as radical autonomous organization, represents a reconceptualization of spatiality mediated by analectical marronage. Flight from the plantation, inasmuch as it represented flight from the Euromodern *world*, also implies flight from the colonial relationship to the land oriented by practices of extraction and “development.” In reference to the Rio dos Macacos, Tororó, and Ilha de Maré communities in what is referred to today as Brazil, Bledsoe states that “autonomy for these communities means cultivating territories that remain separated from the labor exploitation and direct, fatal violence in urban Bahia. In order to maintain this separation, the communities cultivate life-support systems for themselves.”<sup>66</sup> This relates to bell hooks’s notion of *marginality*,<sup>67</sup> which implies an ontological positionality which translates to a mode of relating to the Self, the Other, and the land. Analectical praxis excises the Euromodern logic of *imperiality*, which denotes “the idea of an Empire of the human race over nature”<sup>68</sup> and is mediated by the Euromodern imperative of transparency, thus enabling the reestablishment of locality in the diaspora. In this sense, these types of agroecological projects may express what Adriana Garriga-López called “ecological marronage,” which is predicated on

[e]mpowering poor communities to use scientific and technical knowledge through citizen science, valorizing black and indigenous knowledges about land and farming, and buttressing autonomy for

women, girls, and gender-nonconforming people through the reclamation of small farming and egalitarian water management practices is more than an important feminist, trans/queer, and decolonial agenda.<sup>69</sup>

While I do not believe that for the Afro-diasporic subject, locality in itself plays a fundamental role in unsettling the coloniality of being, what is certain is that it becomes a cornerstone in the prevention of the reinstatement of coloniality. In other words, reestablishing the ontological kinship with the land severed during the Middle Passage can serve as a bulwark against the Euromodern *world*. As such, it is a crucial step in any decolonial project.

Finally, I suggest that Indigenous philosophy and Africana/Caribbean philosophy are each undermined by often excluding each other’s historical experiences within the Euromodern *world*. Inasmuch as Indigenous subjects, whether Maori, North and South American, or Hawai’ian, were spared the experience of the Middle Passage, affirming their transontological difference may or may not be as complicated as it is for Afro-diasporic subjects. Nevertheless, it seems that one cannot fully grasp the effects of Euromodernity/coloniality unless the Afro-diasporic experience is taken seriously and brought into conversation with Indigenous thought to paint a complete picture. On the other hand, Indigenous philosophical thought, whether African, North American, or South American, serves a crucial pedagogical role for Afro-diasporic subjects, as analectical marronage does to bring about sociogenic marronage, inasmuch as they provide alternative modes of relating to the cosmos that are distinct from European modernity. As such, Indigenous philosophies require engagement beyond relegation to footnotes within Afro-Caribbean thought. As evinced in the *palenques*, *quilombos*, and maroon towns, Black liberation and Indigenous liberation are forever intertwined.

#### NOTES

1. This essay is an adaptation of an argument presented in a forthcoming book project titled *Filosofía del cimarronaje*.
2. Burkhart, “‘Locality Is a Metaphysical Fact’ Theories of Coloniality and Indigenous Liberation Through the Land: A Critical Looks at Red Skin, White Masks.”
3. *Ibid.*, 4.
4. Quijano y Dill Barea, “Autogestión Radical,” 12–18.
5. See María del Carmen Baerga Santini in Santory Jorge y Rivera, *Antología del pensamiento crítico puertorriqueño contemporáneo*, 131–52.
6. See, for example, Franco Ortiz, Cuadrado Oyola, y Godreau Santiago, “Las lecciones de la esclavitud: Discursos de esclavitud, mestizaje y blanqueamiento en una escuela elemental en Puerto Rico.”
7. Some of the concepts related to my thoughts on a philosophy of marronage were first elaborated in Lebrón Ortiz, “Maroon Logics as Flight from the Euromodern”; Lebrón Ortiz, “Resisting Catastrophes through Marronage”; Lebrón Ortiz, “Teorizando una filosofía del cimarronaje.”
8. Maldonado-Torres, “Sobre la colonialidad del ser,” 146.
9. Sawyer, *An Africana Philosophy of Temporality*, 286.
10. Parris, *Being Apart*, 109.

11. Maldonado-Torres, "Sobre la colonialidad del ser," 150.
12. Escobar, "Worlds and Knowledges Otherwise," 186.
13. Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 181–82.
14. Roberts, *Freedom as Marronage*, 115–16. Emphasis in the original.
15. Manigat, "Marronage and Slave Revolts," 412.
16. Lao-Montes, "De-Calibanizing Caribbean Rationalities," 161.
17. Henry, *Caliban's Reason*, 5.
18. Lao-Montes, "De-Calibanizing Caribbean Rationalities," 162.
19. Gordon, *What Fanon Said*, 52.
20. *Ibid.*, 130.
21. *Ibid.*, 57.
22. *Ibid.*, 56, 126.
23. Burkhart, "'Locality Is a Metaphysical Fact'—Theories of Coloniality and Indigenous Liberation Through the Land: A Critical Look at Red Skin, White Masks," 4.
24. *Ibid.*, 4.
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Ibid.*, 6.
29. *Ibid.*, 6.
30. Sawyer, *An Africana Philosophy of Temporality*, 227. My emphasis.
31. Quoted in Sawyer, 241. Emphasis in the original.
32. Parris, *Being Apart*, 2.
33. Burkhart, "'Locality Is a Metaphysical Fact'—Theories of Coloniality and Indigenous Liberation Through the Land: A Critical Look at Red Skin, White Masks," 6.
34. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii. My emphasis.
35. Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," 14. Sawyer offers a reading of Fanon's zone of non-being as a "transitory position of metamorphosis of subjectivity" (p. 173). A detailed analysis with this conception will be bracketed for the sake of the present article.
36. Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," 13.
37. Gordon, *What Fanon Said*, 118. Emphasis in the original.
38. See Lebrón Ortiz, "Si es cuestión de morir."
39. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 206.
40. Maldonado-Torres, "Outline of Ten Theses on Coloniality and Decoloniality," 23.
41. See Maldonado-Torres, "Sobre la colonialidad del ser," 147.
42. Glissant, *Poetics*, 189–90.
43. *Ibid.*, 190.
44. Lorde, "Learning from the 60s."
45. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1.
46. Burkhart, "'Locality Is a Metaphysical Fact'—Theories of Coloniality and Indigenous Liberation Through the Land: A Critical Look at Red Skin, White Masks," 6.
47. *Ibid.*, 4.
48. *Ibid.*, 5.
49. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 179.
50. Sawyer, *An Africana Philosophy of Temporality*, 173.
51. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 193.
52. Sawyer, *An Africana Philosophy of Temporality*, 178.
53. *Ibid.*, 178.
54. Parris, *Being Apart*, 109.
55. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 294.
56. Dussel, *Filosofía de la liberación*, 240.
57. Ciccariello-Maher, "From Slavery to What World?"
58. *Ibid.*, 193.
59. Bledsoe, "The Present Imperative of Marronage," 45–46.
60. Quijano y Dill Barea, "Autogestión Radical," 12–13. My translation.
61. *Ibid.*, 13; my translation.
62. See <http://www.colmenacimarrona.org/>.
63. *Ibid.*, 12. My translation.
64. Quoted in Bledsoe, "Marronage as Past and Present Geography," 36–37.
65. Hill, *500 Years of Indigenous Resistance*, 37–39.
66. Bledsoe, "The Present Imperative of Marronage," 53.
67. hooks, "Choosing the Margins as a Space of Radical Openness," 20.
68. Scalercio, "Dominating Nature and Colonialism," 1077.
69. Garriga-López, "Debt, Crisis, and Resurgence in Puerto Rico," 132.

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Generally speaking, the motivations for creating these statements vary. The intention behind them may be to inform those in attendance, or perhaps call attention to the contemporary existence of Indigenous people—a notable goal given that the history of settler-colonialism has often erased the existence of Indigenous people from social memory. Other motivations include seeking to heighten the public's awareness of the past wrongs arising from the social-political policies of cultural eradication and physical removal of Indigenous people from their ancestral lands. Or it may be to honor Indigenous people; although this motivation is less apparent than the previous ones. Finally, land acknowledgement statements may also serve to remind non-Indigenous people of their colonial settler privilege; even today non-Indigenous people incur benefits from the historical land grabs initiated in the past.

While the motivations may differ, the adoption and creation of land acknowledgement statements by non-Indigenous entities seem to originate from a locus of social awareness and the intention to correct past wrongs. As such, it is plausible to describe land acknowledgement statements as a performative utterance or speech act as put forth by J. L. Austin.<sup>2</sup> According to Austin, speech acts are "perfectly straightforward utterances" that when spoken are "doing something rather than merely saying something."<sup>3</sup> For example, I can christen a ship, make a promise, or even marry someone by uttering a particular phrase under the right circumstances. In a similar way, land acknowledgement statements are performative; through the speaker these statements acknowledge the intent to reconcile and create a relationship with Indigenous communities. These statements are not only speech acts, but it also appears that they result from the work of decolonial allies because the speaker acknowledges their own privilege and responsibility with respect to the current state of affairs in Indian Country.<sup>4</sup>

In this paper, I discuss the drafting of land acknowledgment statements and present some of the worries associated with their creation. Worries about these as performative utterances highlight a fundamental, yet meaningful, inconsistency between the motivations behind the drafting of land acknowledgement statements and the actual practice. In "Performative Utterances," Austin cautions that speech acts "suffer from certain disabilities of their own."<sup>5</sup> Referred to as "infelicities" by Austin, speech acts can fail to obtain; the words fail to accomplish the act that the speaker intends.<sup>6</sup> I propose that the inconsistency between the motivations and the actual practice of land acknowledgement statements is worrisome and may cause these statements to misfire—that is, the intended state of affairs may not obtain. Potential allies must attend to these worries, not only because they impact the practice of land acknowledgement statements, but also because these concerns would prevent them from being decolonial allies to Indigenous people. If these statements misfire, then they are merely words and do not accomplish the intended task—just as my saying "I do" in an elevator of strangers does not approximate a wedding vow.

## Relations and How Decolonial Allies Acknowledge Land<sup>1</sup>

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Often described as a first step toward reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada, land acknowledgement statements are a recent trend in the United States. Originally an Indigenous protocol, these statements are slowly making their way onto various websites, event programs, and university webpages. Recently, our own American Philosophical Association (APA) requested the Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers to draft a land acknowledgement statement to be read when convening the organization's conferences as well as displayed in the conference program—the Eastern Division of the American

The popularity of land acknowledgement statements is on the increase. In Canada, the non-Indigenous practice commenced after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada released its final report in 2015, which contained ninety-four calls to action. While “no level of [Canadian] government has mandated the practice,” essayist and cultural commentator Stephen Marche notes, the creation of such statements “is spreading of its own accord. There is no single acknowledgment. There are many acknowledgments, depending on where you are in the country.”<sup>7</sup> In spite of the differences in verbiage and format, Marche points out the one thing land acknowledgment statements share: the drafting of them “forces individuals and institutions to ask a basic, nightmarish question: Whose land are we on?”<sup>8</sup>

The drafting of land acknowledgement statements can be a teaching moment. Those tasked with developing them are prompted to do some research and perhaps even learn how to pronounce the names of the people recognized in those statements. In crafting a land acknowledgement statement, individuals may learn about treaties such as the Robinson Huron Treaty, as well as which nations are named as participants to those negotiations (in this particular case the parties are twenty one nations of the Anishinabek and The Crown-1850).<sup>9</sup> Not all Indigenous land, however, was acquired in such a manner. For example, Marche notes that although the Toronto Purchase was negotiated between the Mississaugas and the British Crown (occurring in 1787, and exchanging 250,000 acres of land for two thousand gun flints, two dozen brass kettles, ten dozen mirrors, two dozen laced hats, a bale of flannel, and ninety-six gallons of rum and later, in 1805 an additional ten schillings to signify purchase), the land in question at the time of said negotiations, however, was also contested amongst the Anishnaabe, Haudenosaunne, and Wendat.<sup>10</sup> Thus, even when there is documentation (in this case, a treaty), it does not necessarily follow that the Indigenous nations listed on the documents are the only ones with a relationship to the land. The issue of unceded lands (lands that were never part of negotiations and were just taken) also poses a difficult challenge to the creation of land acknowledgment statements. In a litigious society, government institutions may balk at acknowledging that the land was stolen, and as we shall see, the worry of opening up oneself to a lawsuit is evident in the wording of some of the constructions.

While the drafting of land acknowledgment statements poses challenges, there are other worries that are connected with their implementation. Perhaps the most pressing worry is that the statement becomes rote, that it becomes a *pro forma* act devoid of any intent. In these cases, the land acknowledgment is something to begin the meeting, the conference, or the address; it amounts to nothing beyond the mere repetition of words before the “real content” gets underway. This seems analogous to the problem of opening a conference with a Native elder providing a prayer or blessing, but not actually having any Native scholars on the program. Thus, decolonial allies, those who seek to stand in an invested relation to Indigenous people, should attend to the worry that the statement becomes a token performance.<sup>11</sup> For example, decolonial allies might ask whether the performance of a land acknowledgment

statement indicates an institution also has decolonized classrooms/pedagogies, equitable representation in its boardrooms, Native sovereignty as part of its workings, or a host of other actions that demonstrate a meaningful commitment to Indigenous people and their communities.

It is not only repetition that diminishes the impact of land acknowledgment statements; critics claim the language is also problematic. According to Marche, land acknowledgment statements are comprised of “purifying language”—wording that seems to whitewash the unjust treatment of Indigenous people.<sup>12</sup> For example, the following is the script for a land acknowledgment statement read at the functions of a school district in Toronto:

I would like to acknowledge that this school is situated upon traditional territories. The territories include the Wendat, Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nations, and the Métis Nation. The treaty that was signed for this particular parcel of land is collectively referred to as the Toronto Purchase and applies to lands east of Brown’s Line to Woodbine Avenue and north towards Newmarket. I also recognize the enduring presence of Aboriginal peoples on this land.<sup>13</sup>

Among other venues, this particular statement is read at the beginning of the academic day in the schools of the district. The participants are the faculty and students. When this is said in the morning, what is the school actually acknowledging? Is it merely that the school is located where it is located? Earlier in my paper, I included the details of the Toronto Purchase (which is mentioned in this statement) and when I read those details, I imagine that most individuals would find the exchange unjust. Thus, it appears that the statement is as Marche describes; it fails to capture critical details about the interactions between the Indigenous nations referenced and the colonial settlers. The wording of the statement seems to reify a lack of culpability. Marche notes that “the passive constructions, the useless adverbs, the Latinate jargon” of many of the land acknowledgment statements fail to capture what we think of when we use the term “acknowledgment.”<sup>14</sup> Even when the statement acknowledges “the continued presence of Indigenous peoples on the land,” it seems to be “a pure afterthought.”<sup>15</sup> If the above statement is intended to initiate reconciliation by acknowledging the unjust treatment of the affected Indigenous communities, it fails. The misfire results from the acknowledgment failing to acknowledge anything beyond a colonial version of Canadian history.

Consider another example from the University of Windsor:

The University of Windsor sits on the traditional territory of the Three Fires Confederacy of First Nations, which includes the Ojibwa, the Odawa, and the Potawatomie. We respect the longstanding relationships with First Nations people in this place in the 100-mile Windsor-Essex peninsula and the straits—les détroits—of Detroit.<sup>16</sup>

This statement is read prior to the conduction of university business and functions. It is optional whether it appears in the signature line of faculty e-mails, and it occasionally appears on course syllabi. This statement differs from the previous example: it is written in the active voice. However, the events leading up to how the university came to be situated on the traditional territories and the types of longstanding relationships (they could be supportive or oppressive) are not transparent. In this case, the statement also appears to misfire; it lacks the context to acknowledge harm and introduce reconciliation.

Let's consider one from an American source, Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana.

We want to acknowledge that we gather as Goshen College on the traditional land of the Potawatomi and Miami Peoples past and present, and honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations. This calls us to commit to continuing to learn how to be better stewards of the land we inhabit as well.<sup>17</sup>

Unlike the previous examples, this statement was drafted more recently and is not written using the passive voice. In spite of these differences, it shares a common feature of the previous examples: key information is omitted from the acknowledgment. For example, the statement neglects to mention that the Potawatomi and Miami Peoples were subject to the Indian Removal Act of 1830. According to this law, all Native American nations living east of the Mississippi River must be removed from their homelands by the United States government. In fact, the 1838 removal of the Potawatomi is known as the Trail of Death, given the loss of life on the journey. The statement above, as written, neglects to mention any Indian removal policies or the profound, negative impacts (death, separation from the land, and the division of people) to those communities.

This is not the only worry associated with this particular acknowledgment statement. If the Potawatomi and Miami people were removed from what is now Goshen, Indiana, then it seems that this particular statement, which acknowledges the instrumental value of the Indigenous people (as stewards), also acknowledges the contributions of colonial settlers who made their home on these traditional lands! Even more egregious is that it may also include corporations, like Johnson Controls, Inc. and TOCON Holdings, LLC, both known for releasing trichloroethylene (TCE), a carcinogen into the air and groundwater of Goshen, IN, since 1937.<sup>18</sup> Like the previous statements, this one misfires as well. The language does not adequately capture the treatment of the Potawatomi and Miami Peoples, and it acknowledges the "contributions" of other, less noble "stewards."<sup>19</sup>

Marche states that an unspoken belief underwrites the land acknowledgment statements: "if we repeat [this] truth often enough, publicly enough, to children who are young enough, it will lead us [Canadians] to reconciliation."<sup>20</sup> I am not convinced that the truths spoken in these statements are the types of acknowledgment that approximate a path toward reconciliation, and given the above example, it may

perpetuate the whitewashing of the historical treatment of Indigenous people of North America.

In his discussion of speech acts, Austin makes no mention that an utterance must be repeated in order for the action to obtain. In fact, speech acts are often singular statements that accomplish the speaker's intention if spoken given the proper context. (Recall, christening a ship, or getting married.) Admittedly, my sample size of statements is small. Yet, if these statements are any indication of an individual's, institution's, or organization's commitment to reconciliation, then there is cause for concern, as it appears these statements have misfired. It is all the more troubling when these statements are drafted by allies because decolonial allies seek reconciliation with Indigenous people. In these cases, however, their words fail them, and more importantly, those words also fail the communities they seek to support. In order to troubleshoot the misfire of land acknowledgment statements, we must examine the context or practice associated with them.

Overall, the statements as written avoid an admission of duty/obligation that grounds the act of acknowledgment. Trudy Govier describes acknowledgment as "knowledge with a kind of avowal which amounts to a spelling out or marking of what we know. A person who acknowledges something admits or allows that that something is attached in some way to himself or herself."<sup>21</sup> For example, by acknowledging that I have treated someone poorly, then I recognize my responsibility for my actions. In the case of land acknowledgment statements, the speaker must recognize their connection with the colonial treatment of Indigenous people. Simply put, to acknowledge means to be aware of colonialism and how we each benefit from it.<sup>22</sup>

Acknowledgment, according to Govier, stands in stark contrast to self-deception. "When we deceive ourselves, we turn our attention away from unwelcome information and fail to attend to it."<sup>23</sup> For example, if I have treated someone poorly, I must actively ignore what I did. As Govier notes, we can only ignore something when we have some awareness of it.<sup>24</sup> Self-deception is not easy to do, but the undertaking is made easier when it is the "result of collusion or complicity among people."<sup>25</sup> It is less difficult to distance oneself from one's responsibility when the community shares the motivation "to ignore certain unpleasant things that we would rather not acknowledge."<sup>26</sup>

Land acknowledgment statements appear to fall victim to this sort of emotional and epistemic distancing. By repeating a sterilized script of acknowledgment, individuals who benefit from colonial settler privilege adopt the appearance of being socially aware without needing to take further steps to correct historical wrongs—or even address the contemporary consequences of colonialism. It is especially difficult to accept the land acknowledgment statements as a serious step toward reconciliation when the current actions of the government, corporations, and/or the non-Indigenous public are not consistent with the intent.

As support, Marche cites the case of Muskrat Falls as a reason for doubting the sincerity of the Canadian government's

efforts of reconciliation. In the fall of 2016, “leaders of the Inuit, Nunatsiavut and the NunatuKavut near Muskrat Falls went on a hunger strike to protest the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the their traditional territories.”<sup>27</sup> The manner of the dam’s construction resulted in an increase of mercury levels in the water, adversely affecting the food supply of those communities (fish and seal). The government did not consult the communities prior to construction, nor was there uptake of the community’s requests for the removal of tainted soil prior to the flooding of land. Yet, these communities bore the brunt of the negative effects of the federal project. Marche focuses on the inconsistency between cases like Muskrat Falls (and other policies enacted without consultation) and the use of land acknowledgment statements, noting “[Canadians] want desperately to atone for a crime while [we’re] still in the middle of committing it.”<sup>28</sup>

The case of Muskrat Falls is not unique. While in my first year at the University of Windsor, Indigenous groups and their supporters marched in solidarity for the Wet’suwet’en People in British Columbia, who challenged the construction of an oil pipeline on their land. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) cordoned off the area, preventing the press from entering and reporting on the RCMP’s militarized raid.<sup>29</sup> On December 24, 2019, *The Guardian* reported on “an RCMP strategy document which said that ‘lethal overwatch’ would be required during the 7 January raid.”<sup>30</sup> According to the report, “the term ‘lethal overwatch’ specifically refers to an officer who is ‘prepared to use lethal force.’”<sup>31</sup> In addition, “a transcription dated 7 January, stamped with the name of Tactical Team Commander Sgt Kevin Bracewell, states that arrests would be necessary for ‘sterilizing [the] site’ and includes instructions to other officers to ‘use as much violence toward the gate as you want.’”<sup>32</sup> Truly, it is hard to see the land acknowledgment statements as a move toward reconciliation when a group vested with authority by the national government hides their abuse of power on Indigenous land.

Hayden King, an Anishnaabe writer and educator, reveals additional worries when interviewed about his experience drafting a land acknowledgment statement for Ryerson University. King notes that at the time, “there was sort of a rush to catch up, and a lot of pressure [was] put on the Indigenous community at Ryerson to come up with a territorial acknowledgement.”<sup>33</sup> The need for a quick response resulted in a statement that, according to King, failed to anticipate “the growth of acknowledgement in Ontario or the politics that would accompany it.”<sup>34</sup> Beyond these issues, there is a further worry—that the statements are written “by and large for non-Native people.”<sup>35</sup>

Reading a script places very few demands upon the reader and audience. King expresses his concern that a script “effectively excuses them and offers them an alibi for doing the hard work of learning about their neighbors and learning about the treaties of the territory and learning about those nations that should have jurisdiction.”<sup>36</sup> Instead of an opportunity to research and embark on a relation with Indigenous people, a scripted acknowledgment statement gives the impression that crucial work has been done. (And the task is made all the easier if phonetic pronunciations

of the tribal names are provided.) Scripts do not lend themselves to speech acts. They do not generate the context needed—the intention that is bound up in the performance. Working from a script, the speaker need not think, but they get credit for it as if they had.

An interesting point that struck me about King’s interview is that he states the responsibility for crafting the land acknowledgment statement was given to the Indigenous community at the university. This is analogous to the task given to the Committee on Native American and Indigenous Philosophers by the APA Board of Officers. While it may be permissible, and even encouraged, to consult Indigenous people concerning drafted statements, delegating the task of drafting a land acknowledgment statement shifts the burden of work to the shoulders of those who do not necessarily need to learn the lessons associated with settler colonial privilege.

What makes this practice particularly troubling mirrors a situation that Audre Lorde points out in *Sister Outsider*.<sup>37</sup> Lorde states, “Whenever the need for some pretense of communication arises, those who profit from our oppression call upon us to share our knowledge with them. In other words, it is the responsibility of the oppressed to teach the oppressor’s their mistakes.”<sup>38</sup> As Lorde continues to explain, “Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to [their] humanity.”<sup>39</sup> In such cases, teaching becomes an additional burden, as “there is a constant drain of energy” on the part of the teachers.<sup>40</sup> Individuals and communities that are in the margins of society have other, more pressing issues that require their attention. We have seen only a couple of examples: Muskrat Falls and the Wet’suwet’en People in British Columbia. To place the additional burden of educating those who benefit from settler colonial privilege is not a step toward reconciliation. Groups and institutions that claim to critically reflect on the demands of social justice should know better. Universities and the American Philosophical Association are comprised of researchers—who better to conduct the initial draft of a land acknowledgment statement? The worries expressed by Marche and King (that acknowledgment statements may become rote or that they signify a checked box in the conscience of individuals with settler colonial privilege) acquire a more serious nature when Indigenous people draft statements at the request of non-Indigenous institutions. In these cases, the epistemic labor for non-Indigenous people stops at the creation of the statement. What should be taking place, if we bear in mind the various motives for their creation and what it means to acknowledge something, is the transformation of the social consciousness as regards settler colonial privilege. This is when the land acknowledgment statement as a speech act accomplishes its goal.

The land acknowledgment statement of the APA differs from the previous examples in a very positive way: it is written using the active voice to acknowledge the historical and contemporary mistreatment of Indigenous people. The APA statement reads as follows:

The American Philosophical Association acknowledges and pays respect to the indigenous

people upon whose ancestral lands this conference is being held. We recognize that the rights of native and indigenous people and nations have been and continue to be denied and violated, and we honor with gratitude the land itself and the people who have stewarded it throughout the generations.<sup>41</sup>

This construction, however, poses a unique worry because it is not connected with a particular community or more importantly, the land (what Brian Burkhart refers to as locality). Other statements, like the examples above, address the historical presence of Indigenous people belonging to a particular place, and this is a feature of Indigenous protocols that we may not want to omit, especially if we are seeking reconciliation.<sup>42</sup>

Reconciliation calls for the acknowledgment of specific offenses done to particular groups. To acknowledge an individual's part in settler colonialism, they need to know the details of how they benefit and whom they have harmed. Decolonial allies need to be concerned with context as well because they are entering into a relationship and that is with a particular community. The worry is that by opting for an all-purpose statement the epistemic labor needed to transform social consciousness has been preempted by losing its particularity. In short, the statement effectively lumps all Indigenous people together. Wherever we hold our conference, we do not need to know the details of particular oppressions. But this seems to go against what Govier said about acknowledging—when I acknowledge harming someone, I acknowledge harming a **particular** someone. When the statement is too broad, victimhood is diluted and the way of coming to know how to make amends is prevented. Thus, the speech act misfires.

So, how might the practice of land acknowledgment statements be improved? Although this topic exceeds the scope of this particular paper, I have a couple of suggestions for improving the practice of land acknowledgment statements.

In "A User's Guide to White Privilege," Cynthia Kaufman suggests ways in which society can enlighten themselves about white privilege without posing a burden. First, she suggests individuals "Inform themselves [ . . . ] Take initiative , read a lot. Read novels by people of color, read sociological, political, and historical works that take racism seriously."<sup>43</sup> To those seeking to respectfully acknowledge Indigenous people, I suggest you do your research, but be selective with respect to authors. As Vine Deloria, Jr. notes, academics, especially non-Indigenous ones, view Native Americans as a phenomenon and their communities as an opportunity to support their latest theories.<sup>44</sup> Today, I encourage you to do a little research and learn out about the Indigenous people of the area—in both historic and contemporary contexts. Do this to draft your own statement. Identify your privilege and come to know how this affects the Indigenous people you seek to support.

If you attend a function where a land acknowledgment statement is being read, ask for more information. Kaufman advises individuals to "be ready to see ideas that are widely accepted as false"<sup>45</sup> in order to understand your

privilege. To that end, I suggest looking beyond the text of land acknowledgment statements to learn what is not said in the text. The mention of particular treaties and the acknowledgment of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities should prompt one to seek out the details. In other words, if a university acknowledges that it is situated on traditional lands, ask "Whose land?" and under what circumstances did it change hands? Settler colonial history has a way of making Indigenous communities invisible. Don't limit yourself to researching only the historical details that are often glossed over in a land acknowledgment statement. Take your research one step further and ask where those communities are today and what are the issues they are currently facing.

Land acknowledgment statements are based on the protocols used by Indigenous communities, and yet in the contemporary context, many of the statements used by non-Indigenous institutions are speech acts that fail. If the goal is reconciliation, then the context of these statements must change in order for these statements to function successfully. Decolonial allies should be aware of these worries and ensure that this practice is not merely appropriated in order to alleviate settler colonial guilt.

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#### NOTES

1. The term "decolonial ally" refers to an individual whose actions are described by Lynn Gehl. See Gehl, "A Colonized Ally Meets a Decolonized Ally: This Is What They Learn."
2. J. L. Austin, Geoffrey James Warnock, and J. O. Ed. Urmson, *Philosophical Papers (of) J. L. Austin*.
3. *Ibid.*, 237.
4. I use the term "Indian Country" to denote not only the geographical spaces related to the American Indians and First Nations people, but also the political spaces and issues that affect them.
5. Austin, *Philosophical Papers (of) J. L. Austin*, 237.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Stephen Marche, "Canada's Impossible Acknowledgement."
8. *Ibid.*
9. See <https://www.robinsonhurontreaty1850.com/history>.
10. Marche, "Canada's Impossible Acknowledgement."
11. I do not intend to confuse the reader; there is no reference to type-token.
12. Marche, "Canada's Impossible Acknowledgement."
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*



16. See <https://www.uwindsor.ca/indigenous-peoples/>.
17. See <https://www.goshen.edu/about/diversity/land-acknowledgement/>.
18. Madeline Buckley, "Plant Blamed for Pollution near Goshen High School." The cleanup effort for this particular environmental disaster has yet to be resolved; see John Kline, "Public Receives Update on Remediation Work at Former Johnson Controls Site."
19. The reader may find the accompanying web page for the land acknowledgement statement of Goshen College useful. See <https://www.goshen.edu/about/diversity/land-acknowledgement/>.
20. Marche, "Canada's Impossible Acknowledgement."
21. Trudy Govier, "What Is Acknowledgement and Why Is It Important?," 71.
22. For example, even I—a member of the Muskogee Nation—benefit from the colonization of the Indigenous nations of Ontario given that is where I live and work. I must also note that this is only one example of how I benefit from colonialism.
23. Trudy Govier, "What Is Acknowledgement and Why Is It Important?," 73-74.
24. *Ibid.*, 74.
25. *Ibid.*, 75.
26. *Ibid.*, 75.
27. See also CBC News, October 27, 2016. URL provided in References section.
28. Stephen Marche, "Canada's Impossible Acknowledgement."
29. Andrew Nikiforuk, "When Indigenous Assert Rights, Canada Sends Militarized Police."
30. Will Parrish and Jaskiran Dhillon, "Exclusive: Canada Police Prepared to Shoot Indigenous Activists, Documents Show."
31. *Ibid.*
32. *Ibid.*
33. Hayden King, "I Regret It': Hayden King on Writing Ryerson University's Territorial Acknowledgement | CBC Radio."
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.*
37. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*.
38. *Ibid.*, 114.
39. *Ibid.*, 115.
40. *Ibid.*
41. American Philosophical Association (APA), "Eastern Division Program, 2020," 2.
42. I believe there is the additional worry of creating a general, all-purpose statement that is suitable for all conference venues. It lacks particularity. And as we have seen, the Indigenous people of North America have had diverse experiences in the face of settler colonialism. This statement would hinder, if not prevent, the development of relations with Indigenous communities.
43. Cynthia Kaufman, "A User's Guide to White Privilege," 36.
44. Vine Deloria, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, 78-100.
45. Kaufman, "A User's Guide to White Privilege," 37.

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## Preliminary Remarks on the Graduate Submissions

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The following papers are the result of a Graduate Seminar at the University of Windsor, Winter 2020. The professor who oversaw the course, Dr. Jeff Noonan, selected the topic, "Nature." The Department Seminar is structured so that six weeks of the term are lecture-based with the alternate weeks being the peer review of student papers. There were eight MA students in this course, and I was invited to lecture on Indigenous understandings of nature.

For the first session, I provided an introduction to First Nations philosophy, which included creation stories from

the Yuchi, Ute, and the Haudenosaunee communities.<sup>1</sup> I invited the students to look for the different areas of philosophy (epistemology, metaphysics, and values) in the creation stories, focusing on human and nonhuman relations. I introduced the Indigenous view of nature by assigning approximately fifty pages of reading that covered excerpts from Winona LaDuke's *All Our Relations* and her article titled "The People Belong to the Land."<sup>2</sup> I ended the first class with the question intended to motivate their papers. The following is the prompt for this assignment.

In an April 2019 interview for *Maclean's*, environmentalist and author Bill McKibben states,

Indigenous people are at the absolute forefront of the [environmental] fight in North America, and around the world. There are two reasons for that, I think: one is, in many places, we relocated or relegated the people who were here first to places we thought were not valuable, and as it turns out in the 21st century, those places often are atop large deposits of carbon or they're straddling the routes you'd need to run a pipeline to get it out. So, they have real tactical importance—but also extraordinary moral significance.<sup>3</sup>

Based on today's discussion of Indigenous philosophy and nature, is McKibben's appraisal of the role for Indigenous people in the fight against climate change accurate? Why/Why not?

As an Indigenous philosopher, I wanted the students to try to see the issue from an Indigenous perspective. To complete the assignment, they needed to understand McKibben's remarks, but also note if he went too far—for example, we might ask whether non-Indigenous people think Indigenous communities are merely instrumental in the fight for the environment. (After personal discussions with the students prior to writing their papers, I suggested works by Kyle Whyte, Daniel Wildcat, and Audre Lorde, as appropriate.) Of the eight students, two from the course used their papers to complete one of the requirements of the MA degree (to present and defend a publishable paper).

The papers below are the result of one lecture, several readings, and numerous meetings (which, I believe, is one of the pleasures of teaching). For these authors, it is their first attempt at publishing their work in a reviewed venue. It is exciting to see First Nations philosophy have a place in a core course.

#### NOTES

1. The creation story of the Yuchi is found in Bill Grantham, *Creation Myths and Legends of the Creek Indians* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002), 89–91, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00011679/00001>. The Ute creations story can be found at <https://www.southernute-nsn.gov/history/ute-creation-story/>.

The Haudenosaunee story of Skywoman can be found in Robin Wal Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 3–21.

2. Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999), 9–23. The second

LaDuke article, "The People Belong to the Land," is found in Jerry Mander, Victoria Tauli-Corpuz, and International Forum on Globalization, *Paradigm Wars: Indigenous Peoples' Resistance to Globalization* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books: Los Angeles, CA: Distributed by University of California Press 2006), 23–25.

3. Mike Doherty, "Bill McKibben on How We Might Avert Climate Change Suicide," *Maclean's*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.macleans.ca/society/environment/bill-mckibben-on-how-we-might-avert-climate-change-suicide/>.

## *The Role of Indigenous Peoples in the Environmentalist Movement: McKibben's View Analyzed*

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Perhaps most well-known for his seminal important book *The End of Nature*, American environmentalist Bill McKibben has repeatedly asserted the need for a more responsible, morally conscious approach to environmental issues. In a recently published interview with *Maclean's*, McKibben renews this focus and notes how Indigenous communities often face environmental concerns in relation to the land they live on, specifically how such land is oftentimes taken for the completion of private environmentally harmful projects without the consent of the relevant Indigenous communities. Stating that such issues place Indigenous communities in a tactical and moral position within the environmentalist movement, McKibben professes his belief that it is because of these issues that Indigenous communities are now at the "forefront" of the environmental debate. However, the role that McKibben attributes to Indigenous people within the environmental movement is not an accurate summary of their positions; while the stances of Indigenous people could be summarized as allied to the movement's goals, it would be incorrect to say that Indigenous people are involved in the movement per se, as their approach involves a rejection of the Western principles of conservation and mastery over nature that are central to said movement. It thus follows that the assigned moral and political significance of the role of Indigenous people that McKibben advocates for would stem from his own assessment of their significance, not in reality.

To articulate how the approach of Indigenous philosophy to environmental issues differs from those that drive the main approach of the environmental movement in North America, it is first necessary to analyze McKibben's claim in order to understand the sort of role he envisions Indigenous people as occupying within said movement. Here, McKibben says:

Indigenous people are at the forefront of the environmental fight in North America, and around the world. There are two reasons for that, I think: one is, in many places, we relocated or relegated the people who were here first to places we thought were not valuable, and as it turns out in the 21st century, those places are often atop large deposits of carbon or they're straddling the routes you'd need to run a pipeline to get it out. So, they

have real tactical importance-but also extraordinary moral significance.<sup>1</sup>

In deconstructing this statement, it would seem that the point McKibben wants to make about the role of Indigenous communities is that they are in a unique position to fight for the environmentalist cause. This is a direct result of the land they live on, as this land is situated in locations such that nonenvironmentalists cannot achieve their goal without interacting with Indigenous peoples (be it from wanting to use said land to build a pipeline, a factory, or so forth). McKibben therefore argues for the tactical importance of these communities. On this point, there can be no dispute. It is a matter of fact that there is a significant threat posed to Indigenous communities through the efforts of nonenvironmentalists to promote their own economic self-interest. Furthermore, it is also true that there is a sense in which Indigenous ownership of the land allows them a strategic power over it insofar as they can choose to deny access, making further development cumbersome.<sup>2</sup>

Yet the more subtle claim seems to be that the Indigenous communities are somehow uniquely qualified to articulate a *moral* response to environmental issues, which based on the context of McKibben's initial statement, appears to be derived from the same principle of land ownership. Naturally, in reflecting on this ownership, one is reminded of the painful history behind its acquisition and how such violations of sovereignty and identity should never have occurred in the first place. In McKibben's view, then, part of the Indigenous contribution to the environmental movement is emergent from the moral significance of those Indigenous communities who live and work on the land that private interests want to utilize without regard for environmental concerns, the violation of said land being a cause for moral indignation. The argument for the unique moral significance of Indigenous contributions to the environmental movement thus stems from the fact that Indigenous communities do indeed own the land; similar to how Indigenous ownership of the land introduces a potential roadblock for anti-environmentalist movements, McKibben's view would charge that this same ownership highlights the very real moral concerns of the environmental project as seen through the Indigenous struggle for land and recognition.

By extension, then, McKibben appears tacitly to admit to the centrality of land ownership (insofar as there is a question regarding land access) and its proper usage (that it should be utilized in accordance with the wishes of the community who lives on it and not merely in accordance with exterior private interests). Moreover, in identifying that Indigenous communities face the very real problem of potential invasions of sovereignty on their land, their place within the movement is one "at the forefront" insofar as they deal with these concerns daily. Thus, McKibben assumes that the concerns of the Indigenous community are of the utmost importance because they reveal the practical necessity of fighting anti-environmentalist efforts and are thereby emblematic of the environmental movement as a whole; the relevancy of Indigenous concerns to the environmental cause is seen as commensurate with those difficulties that Western minds appreciate; issues of ownership, of land

use, and so forth. The accuracy of McKibben's statement depends on Indigenous communities operating under these principles in their fight against anti-environmentalists. Therefore, it will be by analyzing the Indigenous view of property and conservation that McKibben's statement will be understood as justified or unjustified.

Towards obtaining a view of Indigenous ideas of land, property, and the environment,<sup>3</sup> Winona LaDuke provides her reader a cursory look at how best to conceptualize the land, stating that the perspective of her people (the Anishinaabeg) relates the entirety of their way of life, from language to cultural teachings, to the land that they inhabit. But this is not because the land is simply there to be used as a resource, with other cultural considerations simply emerging from the way in which the land is utilized by a particular people; rather, in an inversion of the traditional Western view of land "belonging to people," LaDuke states how "the people belong to the land."<sup>4</sup> As LaDuke explains, this is because the various aspects of Indigenous cultural identity all hinge on the relationship of the people to the land and how both land and people depend on each other in order to meet their respective needs. Moving beyond the idea that land is simply there to manipulate so as to provide the individual with the necessities they need to live, the Indigenous paradigm relates the activity and way of life of the community to the land that they inhabit, which in turn is reflected in the peoples' language and cultural practices. In demonstration of this, LaDuke points to the Anishinaabeg way of traditionally harvesting birch trees for the construction of canoes. Within such an activity, it was acknowledged that the trees, as distinct entities that existed beyond their usefulness, provided for the material basis of their canoes. In comparison with the relatively new practice of preferring plastic canoes, the traditional use of birch was reflective of a relationship that the Anishinaabeg had with the land, wherein nature was not regarded as something alien that exists for personal use, but rather that which provided for a way of being in the world.<sup>5</sup> Each thing that existed in the world existed in a relationship with each other, such that they were to be regarded as relatives, whose usage by another was the result of a gift to whomever was using them.

Rather than be a static manipulatable thing, then, the land actively teaches people how to exist, and delineates a certain way of acting that allows for human flourishing. But, more importantly, it does so in a manner that allows for the flourishing of other things within nature. While such an attitude can be seen as embodied through the subsistence practices of various communities, it is no more clearly demonstrated than in traditional creation stories, particularly in the story of the Skywoman as told by Robin Wall Kimmerer.<sup>6</sup> Having fallen to an ocean-covered earth and finding no place that she could rest, it is only through the kindness of the animals that she is able to find a home upon the earth. Through detailing how the land provided for the first human beings just like how it continues to provide for them now,<sup>7</sup> Kimmerer's use of this story is meant to illustrate the sense of responsibility that is implied in man's relationship with the world. For providing mankind with so much, it is fitting that the land should in turn be given a gift<sup>8</sup> and be treated with respect and in such a way

that promotes both the well-being of mankind and those animals, plants, and things whom Kimmerrer refers to as the “older siblings” of creation. In the Skywoman story, the titular character repays this kindness by dancing, and by cultivating the plant life that she introduces to earth for the benefit of herself *and* the animals of the world. Today, efforts are focused on restoring the relationship between man and the relatives around him, such that flourishing once again becomes mutual.<sup>9</sup>

Following the Western paradigm as outlined by LaDuke, the use of the earth has become distorted to the point that those considered relatives (e.g., sturgeon and buffalo) are disappearing, necessitating efforts that “restore and strengthen”<sup>10</sup> a relationship with them. Comparing this with the Western idea of conservation, it can be seen that there is a stark contrast between the two. In the Western idea, conservation is defined in relation to other human beings and in defiance of the overall attitude to “use land how we best see fit”; in saying that a particular type of land deserves to be conserved, we tacitly state that the land has been set aside from its primary function of serving the whims of the person who would otherwise hold the deed. The attitude of conservation is one that contrasts with the typical idea towards land (in that it can become property) yet remains defined by such an idea. Restoration, however, involves an abandonment of such a project of mastery in order to foster a mutual relationship between the world and people. Restoration is impossible without heeding the stories of the land, which here means that efforts must be attuned to the responsibility that mankind owes the earth. As Kimmerrer notes, Skywoman was providing teachers for the world to tell mankind how to live<sup>11</sup> in her act of planting the first seeds. Extrapolating from this, there must be a recognition that mankind does not occupy a position of authoritative power in relation to the world, but that each thing in existence is dependent on others for its survival. There is an ethical obligation in a way that differs from prevailing Western notions of what has moral status, in that both man and the world must cooperate to achieve flourishing, and it is only by acting in accordance with the responsibility owed to the land that such flourishing can be achieved.

In contrast to the Western tendency to associate conservation efforts with the desire not to obtain mastery over a particular area of land, then, environmental concerns of Indigenous communities are focused on the project of restoration, that is to say, Indigenous communities are interested in strengthening the relationship between the community and land. Because the land and what it provides are regarded as gifts for the benefit of all, ownership of said land for the purposes of either preservation or exploitation is an alien concept for Indigenous concerns regarding the environment. In illustrating this essential difference, Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) demonstrates how any forthcoming discussion on environmentalism must not be simply about selectively saving or conserving a particular species, but in settling on what aspects of nature should be focused on given the immense challenges of environmental issues. Such a discussion would naturally be focused on both the social relationships that Indigenous people have with said aspects<sup>12</sup> and the overall sense of dependence

that man has on the environment.<sup>13</sup> As much can be seen in how his own community is attempting to restore the populations of Nmé (lake sturgeon) and Manoomin (wild rice) and cultivate the health of the nibi (water, in this case referring to the waters of the Great Lakes region). By focusing on these particular parts of nature and attempting to restore them in relation to the Indigenous stories that highlight both their historical and contemporary importance, attention is drawn to Indigenous perspectives such that it is possible to articulate the aforementioned dependence and, moreover, build upon these perspectives in cultivating a sense of responsibility and collective maintenance among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.<sup>14</sup> The efforts of Indigenous communities towards this end are thus not directed towards the same goals of conservation or environmentalism that are found in Western ideas of these terms, but in articulating a different sort of paradigm that is in some respects antithetical to the traditional Western one.

Having now demonstrated that Indigenous ideas of land and relationships towards it are particular to said communities, a return to McKibben’s initial claim reveals that his assessment is wholly inadequate. While it is undoubtedly true that Indigenous communities possess a strategic position insofar as their voices are seen as relevant within particular environmental disputes in virtue of being recognized as legally owning the land they live on, the moral significance that McKibben assigns these communities does not adhere, as it is based on ideas of property and conservation that Indigenous communities do not share. Indeed, rather than proceeding from a view of land as in need of some extrinsically given purpose, Indigenous concerns about environmental issues centralize the necessity of acting in accordance with the land inasmuch as the land and other nonhuman relatives can help teach the best way to achieve mutual flourishing. Thus, because of the radical differences between such a view and the prevailing Western paradigm, McKibben’s attempts to encapsulate Indigenous environmental efforts within this dominant Western model are ultimately unjustified.

**NOTES**

1. Mike Doherty, “Bill McKibben on How We Might Avert Climate Change Suicide,” *Maclean’s*, 2019.
2. The *relative* nature of this comment must be stressed. While it is without question that various Indigenous communities possess this strategic power due to their ownership of the land as understood through the Western paradigm, it is also true that this power is severely hampered by the repeated violations of sovereignty as perpetuated by various interests. Thus, the qualification of “relative” power, that is, relative to the very real possibility of another encroachment on Indigenous sovereignty, the success of which is undetermined.
3. This account is by no means meant to be an exhaustive look at how each Indigenous community regards land. Nor is it meant to be describing a pan-Indigenous approach, or even to suggest that such a view is possible. Rather, it is meant to highlight some relevant similarities between the stances of a select few Indigenous peoples.
4. Winona LaDuke, “Aspects of Traditional Knowledge and Worldview,” 23.
5. *Ibid.*, 23-24.
6. Robin Wall Kimmerrer, “Skywoman Falling,” 1–15.
7. *Ibid.*, 1–5.

8. Ibid., 8.
9. Ibid., 15.
10. LaDuke, "Aspects of Traditional Knowledge and Worldview," 24.
11. Kimmerrer, "Skywoman Falling," 7.
12. Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene," 207.
13. Ibid., 210.
14. Ibid., 213.

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*Our Relations*, where she discusses some of the negative effects that industrialization has had on Indigenous people.<sup>2</sup> She highlights how environmental struggles have been part of the history of Indigenous people. Huge amounts of land were lost to flooding resulting from the establishment of industrial facilities like dams. Native lands were lost and people were displaced, all in a bid to promote industrialization and globalization. Beyond this, great amounts of pollution generated by industrial companies have had telling effects on the ways of life of Indigenous people. An example of such is the high rate of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination at Akwesasne. It is estimated that 25 percent of all North American industry is located near Akwesasne settlements, putting them at the receiving end of lethal and extensive pollutions. PCBs, which science has shown to be extremely poisonous, ended up in the surrounding water, soil, and air of these settlements. The land became contaminated to the detriment of Mohawk farmers. The water was equally affected, which meant that fish was no longer safe to eat. Beyond drastically altering their traditional ways of life,<sup>3</sup> the pollutions left them with sicknesses that can be passed on to future generations. This example seems to capture the tactical aspect of McKibben's argument. The location of Indigenous communities is of tactical as well as instrumental value to the issue of climate change. For who is best suited to address the issue if not those directly affected by it?<sup>4</sup>

## Indigenous Philosophy on Nature

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The importance of Indigenous philosophy in the environmental and climate change fight, even though contested, cannot be understated. Here, I explore some of the reasons why I hold this view. As a starting point, I consider Bill McKibben's argument for how the location of Indigenous people is of tactical importance and moral significance in the fight against climate change. Although I agree with McKibben that location and being at the brunt of the effects of environmental changes puts Indigenous people at the forefront, I argue for two other reasons for the importance of Indigenous philosophy to issues on climate change. One, the Indigenous worldview of interdependency and respect for all life needs to be considered as a pragmatic as well as sacred claim. Secondly, protection and flourishing are crucial actions to preserve Indigenous rights and culture.

In his April 2019 interview response,<sup>1</sup> McKibben argues that the geographic location (atop large deposits of waste or on the best routes to clean it) and history behind how Indigenous people came to be situated legitimizes the role they play in addressing the issue of climate change. In other words, Indigenous people feel the direct effects of climate change and, due to this, should be at the forefront of the debate. This for him means that environmental issues have moral significance to most Indigenous people solely because of their geographical location.

An example of the detrimental effects of climate change on Indigenous people is found in Winona LaDuke's book *All*

However, not to reject McKibben's argument or belittle the importance of the role location plays in legitimizing the voice of Indigenous people on issues of environmental changes and pollution, Indigenous philosophy is also of importance to issues of climate change. To understand this, we turn to the teachings of Indigenous people concerning the relationship that should exist between humans and nature. These teachings are found embedded in the language of the people and passed down in the form of stories—stories which serve as ethical prescriptions for all aspects of life, be it respectful hunting,<sup>5</sup> family life, ceremonies, etc. For instance, the Ute creation story and that of the Skywoman, even though not entirely similar, serve to pass along this type of teaching. The mistake and consequent punishment of the Coyote in the Ute creation story points towards discipline and curtailing curiosity, especially when we do not fully understand the phenomena in question.<sup>6</sup> The story of Skywoman relays the story of how the world as we know it came to be. It begins with a pregnant woman's drop from an island in the sky inhabited by sky people. She drops through a hole created by an uprooted tree and continues her descent for what seems like an eternity, until she gets closer to the earth. Animals who already inhabit the earth watch her descent and congregate in order to help her. A flock of birds catches her and gently guides her down to the back of the Great Turtle. The back of the Great Turtle has also been prepared by water animals like otters and beavers with sand from the ocean's bottom, and this continues to increase in size until the earth is formed. The Turtle's back becomes Skywoman's home, and with the fruits she brings along with the help of the animals, she makes a life for herself and becomes mother of Haudenosaunee life, as we know it today. The story of Skywoman exemplifies the symbiotic relationship that should exist between humans

and other life forms (both animate and inanimate). Things we get from nature and other life forms are considered gifts and not entitlements. Nature is not a hierarchy with humans at the summit; rather, humans should acquire wisdom from other creatures who are considered more knowledgeable than humans.<sup>7</sup>

Robin Wall Kimmerer points to how creation stories and cosmologies are a source of a people's identity and orientation about the world. It shapes them even when they are not aware of it.<sup>8</sup> Here, Kimmerer stresses the effects that certain cosmologies have on the environment. The Skywoman who sees the world as a garden to be taken care of is contrasted with Eve who considers herself on exile and journeying to her real home. The effects on the environment of cosmologies of alienation have been gruesome, leading us to where we are today.<sup>9</sup>

Through adopting some of the teachings of Indigenous philosophy, we might be able to change some of the behavior that comes with the dominant cosmologies, and perhaps change the parasitic relationship between humans and the environment or other life forms. This adoption could also play a restorative function, that is, help us retrace our steps and correct ills that have been done to the environment.

In an article titled "The People Belong to the Land," LaDuke reviews some of these teachings and contrasts them with the Western paradigm. For her, the adoption of the Western globalization model and neglect of the Indigenous teachings is responsible for the ills of the environment which we see today. The Western paradigm regards land as a commodity to be shared and exploited. The Indigenous paradigm, on the other hand, sees humans as sharing a relationship with the land. The term *nishinabe akin*, which means "the land to which our people belong," shows a connection with the land, and duties that come with that relation. The term *dinawaymaaganinaadog*, which means "all our relatives," also shows a relationship between humans and other life forms. The understanding, acceptance, and respect of this relation with the land leads to a more symbiotic relationship with the land, as opposed to the parasitic relationship that has been shown to result from adopting the Western paradigm.

This brings me to my second point. In adopting the Western paradigm of globalization, certain aspects of Indigenous philosophy are lost. For instance, food, which is considered sacred and a source of wisdom, is commodified by globalization. Varieties of crops that are unique and central to Indigenous cultures<sup>10</sup> are genetically modified for larger markets, causing strains on the original variety (as seen, for example, in the case of wild rice). Trees are sapped beyond measure and no attention is paid to how this affects consequent productions or future generations.<sup>11</sup> This goes against the right of a people to define and determine their food, and decide how to produce or take care of it, otherwise known as food sovereignty. To capture what is engrained in this right, let us consider the seven pillars of food sovereignty. The first six pillars were developed at a forum for food sovereignty in Mali, while the seventh was added by members of the Indigenous circle during the

People's Food policy. The pillars of food sovereignty are as follows:

1. To focus on food for people, that is, put people's need for food at the center of policies developed instead of seeing it as a commodity.
2. To build on knowledge and skills of the past and equally develop technologies that promote local food production.
3. To work with nature, that is, reject approaches to food that undermine nature.
4. Value food providers.
5. To localize food systems, that is, reduce the distance between food producers and consumers.
6. To put control locally, that is, place control in the hands of local food providers and reject the privatization of nature resources.
7. Food is sacred, that is, see food as a gift and reject any approach that modifies the natural state of food.<sup>12</sup>

From the foregoing discussion on the seven pillars of food sovereignty,<sup>13</sup> we come to see how adhering to the Western paradigm of globalization infringes upon the rights of people to healthfully and culturally appropriate food. Considering these strains, varieties that are culturally significant and sacred to Indigenous people are wiped out. This is another reason why I think Indigenous people should be at the forefront of the environmental fight. For not only is it a struggle to preserve the environment but also a struggle to preserve a way of life and autonomy.<sup>14</sup> As LaDuke puts it, "environmental justice work that links the intricate culture of the people to the water, the turtles, the animal relatives. . . ." <sup>15</sup> It can be inferred that any environmental changes that detrimentally affect life forms equally affect the Indigenous cultures which are linked to them. However, this struggle will not be one imposed upon Indigenous people in the form of a top-to-bottom approach,<sup>16</sup> but rather one that is internally generated and solely based on what Indigenous people consider to be important and the reasons why they consider it important.

In brief, I have argued that even though McKibben's argument for the tactical and moral significance of the location of Indigenous people in the environment fight may be correct, I also think that, more importantly, the inherent right of a culture to self-protect and flourish outweighs any instrumental considerations.

**NOTES**

1. The link to the article is found in the list of references.
2. Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*.
3. Having to change from the traditional meals consisting of eating fish to eating foreign spaghetti which led to an increase in diabetes.

4. Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, 16–18.
5. Not taking beyond what you need.
6. This can be likened to the approach humans have taken in dealing with the environment, which has ultimately led to the environmental issues we are experiencing today.
7. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, 1-5.
8. *Ibid.*, 7.
9. *Ibid.*
10. And reserved solely for subsistence farming.
11. LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life*, 20.
12. This list of the pillars of food sovereignty was adapted from Food Secure Canada (FSC).
13. Food Secure Canada 2013.
14. Winona LaDuke, "The People Belong to the Land," 23–25.
15. LaDuke, *All Our Relations*, 12.
16. Not a struggle that is imposed because of their location or how it affects the environment in general.

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an article titled "Idle No More Rises to Defend Ancestral Lands—and the Planet," environmentalist Bill McKibben claims that Indigenous people are on the front lines in the battle against climate change. Yet he fails to acknowledge that it is unfair that this responsibility should rest on Indigenous people's shoulders. Nor does he fully explain how Indigenous people are involved in the fight against climate change.<sup>1</sup>

However, McKibben's recognition of the vital role Indigenous people play in climate activism is accurate for two reasons: 1) Indigenous knowledge and practices have been shown to recover or safeguard biodiversity that has been threatened by climate change; and 2) their spiritual teachings express a mutually beneficial relationship with the environment—an approach societies can adapt to and promote when creating climate resilience. In this paper, I reveal the tensions in McKibben's claims in light of Audre Lorde and contemporary Indigenous thinkers who offer an instructive method of understanding the importance of marginalized knowledge and traditional values. Failing to think critically about Indigenous people and the knowledge they have practiced for generations will result in losing resilient characteristics that are critical for our society to adapt if we are to survive and recover from climate change.

McKibben details how Canadian Indigenous activists have organized mass protests against Stephen Harper's minacious Bill C-45 that would allow environmental safeguarding practices to be forgotten when mining in the tar sands—practices and limitations the Indigenous people knew were instrumental in protecting our surrounding lakes and rivers from becoming contaminated with carcinogens. Since then, all Indigenous tribes in Canada have refused the Canadian government permission to mine their land.<sup>2</sup> According to McKibben, "[These tribes] are legally and morally, all that stand in the way of Canada's total exploitation of its vast energy and mineral resources, including the tar sands, the world's second largest pool of carbon."<sup>3</sup> The physical location of most Indigenous people's land and the political power that accompanies their placement is a critical component to their role in climate activism.

An example of the critical role of Indigenous peoples' locations and their particular knowledge of their environment can be seen in Australia. The knowledge that the various Australian Aboriginal groups possess on how to best take care of their territory and the deep concerns raised in 2019 about the changes they noticed in their environment were entirely ignored by the Australian Liberal government. "Aboriginal people have generations of knowledge about managing the landscape of Australia," Budawang Elder Noel Butler from the Yuin Nation in New South Wales explains.<sup>4</sup> Aboriginal people practiced "cool burns," essentially controlled low-intensity fires that balance the various plants and trees growing in a specific region. Sometimes referred to as "cultural burns," these fires are smaller, cooler, slower moving, and closer to the ground than the managed wildfires the Australian government has been practicing since the end of WWII.<sup>5</sup> Cultural fires burn slow enough, and in such a controlled fashion, that the majority of animals have the opportunity

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## *Indigenous Critiques of Western Conceptions of Nature: Exploring the Value of Indigenous Knowledge in Relation to Climate Change*

Katherine E. Richard  
UNIVERSITY OF WINDSOR

Indigenous people from Australia, New Zealand, Africa, as well as North and South America have had their land stolen and colonized by European settlers since the late 1400s. For hundreds of years governments have not only committed genocide against native peoples, but have allowed their lands to be abused, violated, and damaged to a catastrophic extent. We are now recognizing the degree of our negligence and see that we are in the middle of a global climate crisis that has the potential to eradicate the conditions necessary for human life on the planet. Today, many Indigenous groups have been trying to protect the land, rivers, and people from cataclysmic environmental damage created by irresponsible companies that have yet to be held accountable for their destructive practices. In

to seek refuge from the flames. The wildfires in Australia can be seen as a result of climate change, but also as a devastating example of how Indigenous knowledge has been ignored and replaced by Western mismanagement.

The United Nations published an article in September 2019 detailing just how critical Indigenous people's geographical placement is when considering the protection of the environment. Displaced tribes and native people now find themselves situated on biodiverse land that must be maintained in order to preserve a healthy biosphere. Because of their geographic positions, Indigenous people are now safeguarding 80 percent of the world's remaining biodiversity. "Although Indigenous people constitute less than 5% of the world's population," they are responsible for preserving our world's most precious resources, thereby playing a key role in climate protection.<sup>6</sup>

How, then, as McKibben claims, does the geographical location of Indigenous people, as well as their traditional knowledge or belief system, build climate resilience? Climate resilience has been defined as the capacity for a social-economic system to absorb environment fluctuations caused by climate change while maintaining function.<sup>7</sup> A system that can adapt, reorganize, and invent new technologies that promote desirable outcomes while maintaining the sustainability of the ecosystem leaves society better prepared for future environmental changes. This is the only viable social-economic system that climate scientists have suggested as the solution to reversing the damage already created by excessive carbon emissions.<sup>8</sup>

Indigenous people have suffered under capitalist colonial values in countries across the world. I agree with McKibben's claim that contemporary Indigenous people find themselves once again at the forefront of a battle, yet I want to acknowledge that this is a battle they did not ask for nor deserve. American philosopher Audre Lorde explores in *Sister Outsider*<sup>9</sup> how people of color or minorities are expected to be patient cultural ambassadors who provide white people the tools to think critically about race or the unique problems people of color face. This role as "oppressor educator" demands that the person be charitable when engaging in conversations with groups of people who may have done little thinking about racism. "There is a constant drain of energy" on the part of the "teachers"<sup>10</sup> who are expected to act as a "woke" resource library that can be consulted whenever privileged groups feel inclined.

When people of color refuse to take on this role of "oppressor educator," they are often accused of evading an assumed responsibility.<sup>11</sup> Essentially, the responsibility of educating the ignorant falls onto the shoulders of the minorities to "hold white people's hands" through the process of unlearning biases, recognizing privilege, becoming an ally, etc. When people of color do not feel comfortable or are unable to perform these roles, they may be accused of leaving the oppressor "helpless" in their pursuit of learning how to change. Yet people of color are not obligated to teach about race simply because they are a person of color. No minority should be expected to serve as a gateway into allyship, and Indigenous peoples should

not be expected to carry the burden of climate activism alone. "To place the additional burden of educating those who benefit from settler colonial privilege is not a step toward reconciliation,"<sup>12</sup> just as expecting Indigenous people to "fight the battle against climate change," as McKibben frames it in multiple articles he has written, is deeply concerning.

In other articles written by McKibben, he fails to acknowledge that Indigenous people should not have to fight this battle—that the responsibility should not rest on the oppressed shoulders to rectify the climate disaster mega-corporations and governments have created. He writes, "The climate fight is led by Indigenous communities, and it's because they've faced the most trauma . . . they've seen the damage that gets done,"<sup>13</sup> and points to Indigenous activism as a ray of hope. He uses his platform to bring attention to the excellent work done by Indigenous activists in North America, but lacks Lorde's critical awareness of the burden this responsibility bears. McKibben uses this activism in his work to point to when talking about hope for social change, but does so without philosophical critical reflection. He almost suggests that the crisis is being handled by Indigenous groups, allowing the reader to relax and feel as if the problem will be taken care of. He could mention that this moral duty should not be considered an "Indigenous people's problem" and that the Western world needs a shift in paradigmatic thinking. He also fails to include Indigenous people and their activism from anywhere outside North America—a blind spot in his research. He claims that Indigenous people are at the front lines against a global crisis, but does not discuss Indigenous organizing throughout other continents.

Additionally, despite McKibben's good intentions, I find the phrasing of his point—"Indigenous people are at the forefront of this battle"—to be problematic for other reasons. Stereotypical images of Indigenous people as warriors may be conjured in the backs of his readers' minds. Metaphorical language like this can be found in multiple articles of McKibben's and presents this pervasive false image of Indigenous people as antagonistic, hostile, or adversarial. These negative stereotypes can have harmful consequences for the quality of McKibben's arguments, diminish McKibben's good intentions, and can also result in perpetuating damaging stereotypical images.

However, McKibben is correct to identify the value Indigenous knowledge can provide when attempting to recover biodiversity that has been threatened by climate change. McKibben is also correct to gesture towards the emphasis Indigenous cultures place on the responsibility of people to be mindful of their relationship with the land. Indigenous knowledge paired with a new attitude focused on how to take care of our environment is an approach societies can adapt to and promote when rebuilding communities. Indigenous knowledge and traditional values can become the foundational principles our society utilizes to combat climate change and formulate climate resilience.

Most Indigenous societies have already been functioning in a social-economic system that promotes sustainability and deep respect for our environment. This connection



that emphasizes taking care of the land while facilitating a mutually beneficial relationship with the environment is a tool society ought to practice going forward. For example, scholar-activist Kyle Powys Whyte (Neshnabé Potawatomi) writes on how deep the connection shared between Indigenous teachings and the environment runs. He details how many Indigenous people have taken a position against environmental destruction and have condemned climate destabilization, especially extinctions, as morally unacceptable.<sup>14</sup> Indigenous communities across North America are no longer able to relate to their once-local plants and animals that are significant to their religion, culture, heritage, language, or ancestral knowledge because environmentally damaging conditions have either gravely endangered their populations or have exterminated them entirely.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, as Indigenous scholar Robin Kimmerer describes in her chapter, "Counsel of Pecans," the American government's "divide and conquer" method used on her ancestors was antithetical to their traditional custom of togetherness and community.<sup>16</sup> As discussed in "Counsel of Pecans," President Andrew Jackson was responsible for the tragic Trail of Tears beginning in the 1830s, the forced relocation of 100,000 Indigenous people from their ancestral land in the southern states to land that was deemed "undesirable" on the west bank of the Mississippi river. This mass migration approved and enforced by both federal and state law displaced entire communities over the course of twenty years (1830–1850).<sup>17</sup> Tribes such as the Choctaw, Seminoles, Creek, Chickasaw, and Cherokee living in Georgia, Florida, Alabama, North Carolina, and Tennessee were forced to march across state lines to their newly designated "Indian Territory." Kimmerer writes, "Indian Removal policies wrenched many Native peoples from our homelands. It separated us from our traditional knowledge and lifeways, the bones of our ancestors, our sustaining plants"<sup>18</sup> with disastrous implications for these communities.

The American government's motivation behind forcibly removing hundreds of thousands of people from their land was twofold: 1) white colonizers wanted to eradicate "Indians" who refused to accept a European or "white" lifestyle, and 2) European settlers wanted Indigenous land for cotton and tobacco farming.<sup>19</sup> The "Indian Problem," as articulated by George Washington, was not resolved through integrating Natives into settler lifestyles. Washington predicted that the Indigenous people would abandon their culture, knowledge, languages, and societies once they were forced into white colonies. His goal was to "civilize" the Natives through Christianity or through the adoption of Anglo-European economic practices such as the individual ownership of land and property.<sup>20</sup> However, many tribes refused to accept their colonizers' impositions and chose to remain independent from the United States.

The sovereign land the Indigenous people belong to was highly sought after by white settlers looking to establish plantations dedicated to mono-agriculture. Settlers knew the southern states were characterized by their ideal growing conditions for high-value crops such as cotton, tobacco, indigo, and sugar cane. State government officials

(often aspiring plantation owners) petitioned the federal courts to forcibly remove the Indigenous people from this highly valuable land until eventually Jackson signed into law the Indian Removal Act in 1830.

This great displacement caused irreparable damage to American Indigenous culture and knowledge after the colonization of their ancestral land, and similar narratives can be heard from Indigenous peoples across the world. As stressed by Kimmerer, a deep connection and symbiotic relationship with nature is often found in Indigenous spiritual belief systems; particular environmental knowledge is generated from observing and listening to patterns in nature, and this knowledge is passed down and practiced throughout generations. Familiar knowledge of an environment cannot be shared or practiced by the next generation if the Indigenous people are transplanted to a foreign land. "So much was scattered and left along that trail [Trail of Tears]"; knowledge and familiar traditions were lost when the Indigenous were forced off their homelands.<sup>21</sup> As Kimmerer notes, not only were thousands of lives lost once her people were removed from their land, but invaluable teachings, oral stories, customs, and environmental knowledge were lost as well. Furthermore, these teachings can be unique and distinct to each particular tribe, depending on its traditional locality. Kimmerer retells the Native creation story of Skywoman; the relationship shared between Skywoman (a woman who brings seeds from the heavens to feed the animals, who then courageously save her from drowning) is a tale meant to illustrate how integrated our lives and the environment around us truly are. Skywoman teaches us the origin of the people and our interconnectedness with nature. This teaching belongs to a set of what Kimmerer characterizes as "Original Instructions" that aids in the development of one's moral compass that can help us better understand our positions historically and morally.<sup>22</sup> Kimmerer reflects upon this teaching and finds herself asking, "Skywoman seems to look me in the eye and ask, in return for this gift of the world on Turtle's back, what will I give in return?"<sup>23</sup> This teaching provides a framework for understanding just how polluting rivers, burning forests, and damaging our entire ecosystem, as we have been doing throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, is an immoral and shameful response to the gift Skywoman granted us.

In a similar vein, the Anishinaabe's specific method of crafting canoes from birch-bark is now a dwindling, nearly forgotten art due to the recent decline of birch trees in the Minnesota area. Indigenous scholar and activist Winona LaDuke believes the birch trees are disappearing because the Indigenous people have "neglected [forgotten, or lost their] teachings" due to mass displacement and have been unable to manage the birch tree population.<sup>24</sup> With their traditional knowledge lost, the tree population suffers.

Many Indigenous people have dedicated themselves to preserving or salvaging what remains of these sacred plants and animals. For instance, the Anishinaabe people have become the leaders in the conservation of North American wild rice. The Nibi (water) and Manoomin Symposium invites "tribal rice harvesters in the Great Lakes, Indigenous scholars, paddy rice growers, representatives

from mining companies, state agencies, and university researchers interested in studying genetic modification of rice together” with the goal of conserving this precious resource for generations.<sup>25</sup> Again, recognizing one’s moral duty to act as a custodian for our lands introduces a change of paradigmatic thinking.

Some may argue that Indigenous knowledge or traditional values “has no place at the table,” so to speak, when discussing technologies that may reverse the aftermath of rising temperatures. Why should contemporary scientific institutions consider ancient knowledge when engineering modern cities built to withstand the effects of climate change? Scientists in the West like to think of their knowledge as “un-mediated” or “as pure fact,” while they claim to take a God’s-eye-perspective on their experiments. Can knowledge only be generated in a very narrow way? Is there only one kind of science we can use to truly understand the world?<sup>26</sup>

These traditions reject anyone whom they deem incapable of taking up an epistemological position from a “nowhere” view void of subjectivity. Donna Haraway and Lorraine Code among other contemporary epistemologists believe that this concept of objectivity has the potential to disproportionately marginalize minorities in that only men own the currency of objectivity.<sup>27</sup> Particularly, Code criticizes traditional scientific knowledge production and wants to incorporate diverse demographics and geographic locations in contemporary knowledge production by utilizing a feminist approach to epistemology such as Haraway’s concept of situated knowledge. Situated knowledge rejects the idea that the sciences which attempt to naturalize knowledge are neutral, objective, and geographically or demographically universal. Instead, this detached neutrality carries within itself the seeds of oppression and obliteration.<sup>28</sup>

When knowledge does not take the usual form academia has taught us to accept, it is rejected on the grounds that the standpoint has nothing to offer. If knowledge is not communicable through statistics, scientific reports, or academic papers, but instead is shared through oration, it is regarded as anecdotal folklore, no matter what information is being shared.<sup>29</sup>

Why does the majority of the population refuse to trust the work of Indigenous scholars, researchers, and scientists, who may present their work in alternative ways? As Lorde points out, oppressors are quick to consult minorities on topics of race,<sup>30</sup> but do not trust their knowledge on other topics as legitimate. As more researchers challenge the traditional definition of science, we must genuinely and critically consider Indigenous knowledge as science if we are to make change during this global crisis. Traditional knowledge often values a more nuanced, contextual, and holistic view of reality from observation, experience, and thought—not just “sterile” lab experimentation.

As well, we have seen Indigenous knowledge save endangered rice, fish, and plants when taken seriously and applied in appropriate ways by Indigenous people. In 2006, there was a catastrophic burn in a Warddeken Indigenous protected area in the Northern Territory of Australia. Forty

percent of the valley burned, when less than half of the land scorched by fire actually required treatment. Six years later, Indigenous rangers from Warddeken Land Management, supported by Bush Heritage Australia, were finally permitted the ability to treat their land with their own traditional practices, including the application of cultural burning. That year only 23 percent of protected land had been burned, with 19 percent of controlled burns taking place during the coolest (and best) time of the year.<sup>31</sup>

In spite of the birch tree deforestation and land displacement, the White Earth Land Recovery initiative led by LaDuke has rebuilt the community’s own viable economy while repairing their ecosystem. They have kept their traditional knowledge alive and have been able to sustain themselves with regenerative agriculture programs developed on their reservation in North Minnesota. Nearly all of the creatures that originate from this land, minus the Buffalo, have either been fully returned or are on their way. LaDuke states that this is “a pretty good testament” and sign of the resilience of an ecosystem when Indigenous knowledge of the land has been practiced.<sup>32</sup>

In conclusion, McKibben’s claim that Indigenous people play both a tactical and moral role in climate change is accurate, but his claims need to be considerate of what Lorde tells us. It would be a mistake to assume that climate activism is the sole responsibility of Indigenous groups, as it would be egregious to assume all people of color should play the role of race educator. Yet when Indigenous people voice their knowledge about endangered biodiversity, their voices may not be recognized as credible. Not only do many Indigenous people identify as protectors of the environment, but they have developed principles which can help societies rethink their connection with nature. By discrediting “the wealth of knowledge in all its different forms, treating it as worthless because it doesn’t look like what we expect, we are merely perpetuating a colonial tradition of treating people not like ourselves as less than human. And that might cost us more than we expect.”<sup>33</sup> Failing to practice and implement Indigenous knowledge will result in losing the only chance at climate resilience our global community has if we are to survive and recover from climate change.

**NOTES**

1. Bill McKibben, “Idle No More Rises to Defend Ancestral Lands—and the Planet.”
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Jens Korff, “Cool Burns: Key to Aboriginal Fire Management.”
5. Ibid.
6. “Values of Indigenous Peoples Can Be a Key Component of Climate Resilience.”
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*.
10. Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, “Indigenous Philosophy and Nature,” 115.
11. Kali Holloway, “Black People Are Not Here to Teach You: What So Many White Americans Just Can’t Grasp.”

12. Sullivan-Clarke, "Indigenous Philosophy and Nature."
13. Shannan Lenke Stoll, "Where Bill McKibben Finds Hope Amid the Climate Crisis."
14. Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now: Indigenous Conservation and the Anthropocene."
15. *Ibid.*, 211–13.
16. Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, 11–21.
17. Trail of Tears," <https://www.history.com/topics/native-american-history/trail-of-tears>.
18. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 16.
19. "Trail of Tears," *History.com*.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 13.
22. *Ibid.*, 9.
23. *Ibid.*, 8.
24. Winona LaDuke, "People Belong to the Land," 23.
25. Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now," 211.
26. Chi Luu, "What We Lose When We Lose Indigenous Knowledge."
27. Lorraine Code, "Feminist Epistemologies and Women's Lives," 221.
28. *Ibid.*, 227.
29. Chi Luu, "What We Lose When We Lose Indigenous Knowledge."
30. Andrea Sullivan-Clarke, "Indigenous Philosophy and Nature," quoting Lorde 2007, 115.
31. Bridie Smith, "New Generation Returns to Care for Country."
32. LaDuke, "The People Belong to the Land," 24.
33. Chi Luu, "What We Lose When We Lose Indigenous Knowledge."

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## Preliminary Remarks on the Undergraduate Submissions and Course Syllabus

Shay Welch  
SPELMAN COLLEGE

In fall 2019, I taught my advanced course in Native American philosophy at Spelman College. Spelman College is an all-women's historically black college (HBCU). Because I require most of the core philosophy assignments in this class to be delivered through creative performances—in accordance with methods of a Native paradigm of performative epistemology, rather than with methods of a Western paradigm of written epistemology (see syllabus)—I have my students write a research, conference-style paper at the end of the semester. This is the only course in which I have the students work all semester on one long paper. The reason why I allow them to write a paper for the semester is that this is their only interaction with Native American philosophy. The students (very reasonably) struggle greatly with the creative construction and presentation of philosophical claims and, over time, have convinced me to allow them to write at least one paper so that they are able to do a core assignment that is in accordance with their training in the Western academic style. The students are required to construct their own research topics as a result of the readings.

There are a few requirements for their paper. First, they must write within a Native philosophical paradigm; while the papers are written within a Western, analytic style, which allows them to write consistently with all of their other courses and to fall within the rubrics for the major's student learning outcomes, they must write using only Native analyses of philosophical concepts such as personhood, agency, relations, etc., and they must constrain their arguments to be in accordance with all foundational Native philosophical principles. Second, they must use Native studies/feminism/philosophy/theory sources almost exclusively. Third, they must treat the philosophical material as a current working philosophical framework that can be applied to our lived experience, just like the other theories covered in our Western philosophy courses. And finally, they must construct a personalized

research topic that connects with them in light of the conceptual issues raised in the readings. The students do research on their own throughout the semester and regularly check in with me to adjust and tweak their research topics as they do more research.

I selected the following two papers from this class as well suited to, and interesting for, submission to the newsletter at an undergraduate level. I also think these two papers highlight the meaningful thematic intersections that can arise between Native and Indigenous philosophy and Black feminist philosophy. While the students here do not explicitly engage Black feminist philosophy since they are required to draw from Native research, they have extensive personal and theoretical familiarity with the analyses and principles of these frameworks through courses within the philosophy major and women's studies program. My suggestion to students for how to engage philosophical material in an original way is for them to question how the material can be applied to, or will change when applied to, the Black woman's experience. I believe that the themes the students chose reflect their perspectives regarding how Native philosophy is relevant to their lived experience.

The purpose of including undergraduate papers in the newsletter is to provide examples of how Native and Indigenous philosophy can be taught and undertaken by students in their philosophical training. This course is open to all students and can satisfy the general humanities requirement, but given its advanced level, this course is undertaken mostly by philosophy majors and minors and will satisfy one of the following core requirements: metaphysics, epistemology, non-Western philosophy.

### Syllabus

#### Native American Philosophy PHI 325 (Abbreviated)

#### Required Texts:

Cordova, V. F. *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*. University of Arizona Press, 2007.

McPherson, Dennis, and J. Douglas Rabb. *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal*. McFarland Press, 2011.

Norton-Smith, Thomas. *The Dance of Person & Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy*. State University of New York Press, 2010.

Waters, Anne (ed.). *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays*. Wiley-Blackwell Publishing Co., 2003.

#### Catalogue Description:

The purpose of this course is to orient ourselves with a philosophy that asks the same sorts of questions that Western philosophy has posed but that approaches these

questions from a different worldview articulated through a set of alternative concepts and values. Questions such as "What is there?" "What do we know?" and "What is good?" are reexamined from the Native framework of values.

#### Course Description:

This course will be taught in a manner similar to Introduction to Philosophy. The purpose of this course is to orient ourselves with a philosophy that asks the same sorts of questions that Western philosophy has posed but that approaches these questions from a different worldview articulated through a set of alternative concepts and values. Questions such as "What is there?" "What do we know?" and "What is good?" will be reexamined from the Native framework of values. We will begin the course with *The Dance of Person & Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy* by Thomas M. Norton-Smith. This book will show how the Native philosophical framework differs from the Western framework and explain why and how Native philosophy is a legitimate philosophical perspective. Then we will read anthologies and monographs, which will introduce you to specific ways of addressing the basic questions of philosophy. The purpose of this course is to introduce you to unique value systems to show that they are 1) legitimate and philosophically complex and 2) crucial conceptual tools to add to our own knapsacks of philosophical skills, which will give you more concepts with which to work and will broaden your comprehension of and respect for differing perspectives more generally.

Design: There is no lecturing in this class; all classroom discussion derives from the student's ability to develop and lead discussion.

#### Class Expectations:

*Final Paper:* 25% of the final grade

Paper requirement: You will be working towards a 12-page, conference-quality paper.

Bibliography and paper outlines are required and are part of the overall grade.

Annotated bibliography must contain 20 well-chosen pieces (book chapters or articles) and the final paper must contain 12 of these in addition to your in-course materials.

*Oral Presentations:* 25% total

There will be three creative, performative presentations that present your philosophical ideas and responses to the material read. These presentations are broadly oral in honor of the Native American Communicative and Intellectual style. These presentations will be a blend of proper philosophical analysis content presented with an attempt at narrative/storytelling, which includes song, dance, games, play, poetry, spoken word, and metaphorical/cosmological storytelling. The presentations should be about 10 minutes in length. You must be very prepared for these presentations. About half of the score will derive from presentation preparedness.

Presentations must be accompanied by a summary of the overall argument and an outline of the argument claims, along with a description of how you chose to convey these ideas through your particular creative framework.

Presentations will be worth 50% and written part will be worth 50% of overall grade.

*Class Participation:* Class discussion is worth 25% of the final grade. This grade includes your engagement with both your fellow classmates and myself. This explains why attendance is required. However, your mere presence will not suffice for a quality grade in this area. The grade in this area is determined by both the quantity and **quality** of your comments and questions. This makes class preparation the biggest determining factor of your final grade. This is because your ability to use the concepts and arguments in the material accurately and effectively in classroom discussion is how I determine what your participation grade indicative of participation quality is determined.

*4th Hour Justification- Summaries: 25%*

You must provide a one-paragraph summary of the main argument of the next day's reading. The summaries are **due no later than 10 pm on the previous day**.

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## *Procedural Knowing to Facilitate Healing after Collective Trauma*

Spencer Nabors  
SPELMAN COLLEGE

In this paper, I argue that after collective trauma, communities can learn procedural knowledges in order for healing to take place. Healing is an experience that is often called for after trauma. While trauma can be experienced individually, it is often the case that trauma is communal and experienced by a whole group. I argue that collective trauma actually pushes communities to learn or create ways of knowing that can facilitate collective healing. While healing through procedural knowing may not occur in the same way for every individual, it is a collective process due to the ways in which procedural knowledges are communal.

A Western analysis of knowledge typically understands knowledge as justified true belief. This generally means that knowledge is understood in a propositional way which shows up as "S knows that P." "S" refers to the subject and "P" refers to the proposition that is known. In *The Dance of Person and Place*, Thomas M. Norton-Smith explains that propositional knowledges deal with knowing-that. Native American conceptions of knowledge are particularly different in that they deal with knowing-how.<sup>1</sup> Procedural knowledge is an experiential form of knowing where individuals come to know through their own bodies.<sup>2</sup> In the Native American tradition, knowledge is not gained through propositions but through experiences. Procedural knowledge must also be taught through activities and actions so that another individual may learn through

participation. Lee Hester and Jim Cheney also explain that it is difficult to *verbally* explain procedural knowledges as they must be experienced.<sup>3</sup> For example, when learning how to drive a car, verbal explanations are helpful, but one must sit behind the wheel and perform the action in order truly to learn.

Of course, the epistemological differences between the Western and Native American worlds do not negate the existence of other forms of knowledge. This means that while Western epistemology understands knowledge in a propositional way, there is still procedural knowledge in the Western world, such as the above example of driving a car. This is also true for propositional knowledge in Native American epistemology. Norton-Smith explains that a big difference between propositional and procedural knowledge is lifespan.<sup>4</sup> Procedural knowledge in Native American epistemology is understood as knowledge that is carried with individuals through their lifetime. This is because this form of knowledge is experiential. On the other hand, in Western epistemology, propositional knowledge is understood as knowledge that is eternal as it is designed to outlive us. For example, the propositional knowledge statement "dogs are mammals" is understood as being true whether a knowing subject is alive or not. Propositional knowledge claims are thought to outlast an individual lifespan as the knowledge itself is not tied with lived experiences.<sup>5</sup>

In *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System: Dancing with Native American Epistemology*, Shay Welch further explains procedural knowledge. She maintains that any fair analysis of Native American epistemology must understand procedural knowledge as more than just "know-how" knowledge.<sup>6</sup> She maintains that with procedural knowledge, one must be an active participant in coming to know. There is a creativity involved in the "doing" that creates procedural knowledge. This is because embodiment is central in Native American epistemology and procedural knowledge. Given that procedural knowledge involves lived experience, the body is a key part of this form of knowing. Individuals come to know through their bodily experiences. For example, when a new mother is learning how to breastfeed, she comes to know with and through her body. Or, when a child is learning to ride a bike, they learn through bodily movement.

Further, procedural knowledge is not only relegated to skill. Procedural knowledge encompasses all actions that cause an individual to come to know. Welch maintains that Native American epistemology does not attempt to transform procedural knowledge into propositional knowledge claims. There is no venture to change know-how knowledge into know-that claims.<sup>7</sup> Procedural knowledge need not be forced into a propositional statement. Welch also emphasizes that the word "procedural" is important in that it insinuates that there is a performance aspect to this kind of knowledge. Welch calls this system a "performing-knowing system" because procedures *are* performances as "procedure" is an adroit term. Given that this form of knowledge is phenomenologically embodied, it is constantly evolving as individuals have new and different experiences. Therefore, she adopts the phrase "procedural

knowing” to denote a process, rather than using the term “knowledge.”<sup>8</sup>

Procedural knowing is communal, as our embodied experience is of being related to our environment. In their article “A Native American Relational Ethic: An Indigenous Perspective on Teaching Human Responsibility,” Amy Klemm Verbos and Maria Humphries explain that relationality plays a major role in Native American communities. They explain that learning occurs in a communal manner because knowledge is passed down from generation to generation. The relational values of the community apply to knowledge production as no knowledge *belongs to* an individual.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, while procedural knowing may seemingly come from individual experiences, the knowledge is communal. The foundation of relationality in Native American communities means that experiences happen relationally. While a specific experience may only happen *to* an individual, the experience occurs *in* community because of the emphasis on relationality in the Native American worldview.

Furthermore, learning is a communal process in Native American education. In “American Indian Epistemologies,” Gregory Cajete explains that community is a foundation in Native American knowledge production. Cajete explains, in the same way as Norton-Smith and Welch, that Native American knowledge is procedural and experiential.<sup>10</sup> This means that learning is done through action and performance. Cajete explains that Native American learning, education, and knowledge production is done in and with community. This ultimately means that in Native American epistemology, knowledge is both procedural and communal.<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that an experience may be individual, the procedural knowledge is still communal due to the fact that knowledge production is a communal process.

Community is one of the most important aspects of the Native American worldview. It is true that communal knowledge as an epistemic process is readily erased and invalidated by the academy in the Western world as knowledge production is understood as an individual process. Welch, when discussing her aim to account for an epistemology in the Native American worldview, explains that everything that one comes to comprehend is so due to their communal understanding. This is because knowing itself is a communal process.<sup>12</sup> Knowing can never be individual because everyone is positioned in a particular community which helps to facilitate their own understandings. In Native theories of how we come to know, an individual is inextricably tied with their community, which means that they cannot come to know outside of the collective. A knowing agent is socially and epistemically positioned within a specific community which impacts how the agent comes to know.

Native American epistemology understands that there are polycentric perspectives. In *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal*, Dennis McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb explain that every person holds knowledge but no person holds all of the knowledge.<sup>13</sup> Every person has a perspective and all of the perspectives together create the whole of knowledge. In this way,

knowledge must be communal because no individual can hold knowledge completely.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, it is the case that procedural knowledge must be communal. This is because learning and knowledge production is always a communal process. Despite the fact that experiences might seem to be an individual phenomenon, community is the foundation of the worldview, meaning that experiences occur while one is positioned within a community. Finally, the whole of knowledge is held by the community and cannot be wholly understood by one individual.

I argue that communities can collectively learn new ways of procedural knowing after communal trauma in order for healing to take place. My argument assumes the unified survival of the traumatized community. Procedural knowing is typically understood as a practical form of knowing, which means that it typically has a clear purpose. Healing is the purpose and the goal after collective and communal trauma. I argue that trauma pushes individuals and communities to search for practices that will help to facilitate healing. Procedural knowledge as understood through the context of Native American epistemology shows that knowledge is practical and experiential. Healing that takes place after collective trauma must be an experience in which the whole community takes part. Understanding knowledge as practical means that healing is possible with procedural knowing. Healing must be the practical goal of the procedural knowledge that the community all takes part in producing and doing. It is also important that the procedural knowing that attempts to move towards healing must only be done within the community that collectively experienced the trauma so that individuals or groups who did not experience this trauma cannot impede on the healing.

Of course, it is true that healing cannot take place overnight. However, I argue that procedural knowing can help to lead towards healing after communities go through collective trauma. In Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, she explains the process of planting the three sisters: corn, beans, and squash.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, planting is a procedural knowledge as it is a practical experience that involves knowing. Kimmerer explains that not only is the planting a communal procedural knowledge process, but wisdom and lessons can also be gained through the planting of the three sisters. She also argues that the planting allows the individual to feel closer with the earth and to feel more connected with the plants and with the community. The planting of the three sisters can show that procedural knowing is able to move an individual and a community. The procedural knowing of planting helps to build up the community because of the wisdom that is gained. Kimmerer’s explanation of the three sisters shows that procedural knowing can have a good and practical impact on the community as a whole.<sup>16</sup> Understanding that lessons and wisdom can be gained through communal procedural knowing is important in order to further understand that healing is possible through procedural knowing. While the planting of the three sisters may not specifically be a healing type of knowledge, it is a way of procedural knowing that can *facilitate* healing. Many non-Native communities also find that planting can be healing individually and communally.

Ceremonies and rituals, similar to the planting of the three sisters, involve procedural knowing in that they are practical and experiential. Welch explains that when rituals are in harmony with the environment, they can aim towards specific goals such as healing.<sup>17</sup> Welch argues, through explaining Indigenous dance as politically radical, that procedural knowing can be a site of healing. Welch explains in her discussion on Native dance that the procedural knowing that facilitates healing works to counteract trauma that occurred in Native American communities.<sup>18</sup> She maintains that using procedural knowledge to help heal trauma is actually a way of furthering Native American epistemology. When procedural knowing is used to facilitate healing, Native American epistemology as a whole is strengthened because healing becomes a part of the knowing process.<sup>19</sup> This ultimately means that knowledge production can actively involve an aspect of healing.

The fact that procedural knowing is embodied plays a major role in helping communities to heal after collective trauma. Qwo-Li Driskill explains in "Theatre as Suture: Grassroots Performance, Decolonization, and Healing" that embodied performance and procedural knowing helps individuals to learn what healing feels like.<sup>20</sup> Knowing what healing feels like makes it easier for individuals to "do" healing with their bodies. Procedural knowing involves the whole individual, meaning that their body is involved in the knowledge process. Trauma happens to the whole individual. This means that healing must involve the whole individual as well, so their flesh must be involved in the procedural knowing in order for healing to truly occur. When embodied knowing has the goal of achieving healing, the individual's body comes to know healing and start to reverse the collective trauma that occurred.

The healing process that procedural knowing can help to facilitate occurs within the community. Of course, as outlined previously, despite the fact that the experience may seem individualistic, the communal foundation means that the healing of the procedural knowing is a collective process. Given that the trauma that occurred was communal and collective, the most beneficial way for healing to occur is in a communal and collective manner as well so that the healing is unified and impacts all. Therefore, the procedural knowing that facilitates healing is a communal type of knowing and knowledge production. The fact that the trauma happened to a community as a whole helps the community to create procedural knowing for healing *collectively*. Given that trauma can impact individuals in many different ways, communal practices of healing allow for different healing styles that can reach each person. While healing may not occur in the same way for all individuals in a community, the process of healing through procedural knowing is ultimately a collective one.

Rebecca Wirihana and Cheryl Smith explain in "Historical Trauma, Healing, and Well-Being in Maori Communities" that communal trauma is passed down from generation to generation.<sup>21</sup> They argue that performances and actions can facilitate healing when they are an emotional release. Procedural knowing processes can be developed to offer a therapeutic feeling to a community. After collective trauma, communities have an opportunity to create

practices to release the pain that they experienced.<sup>22</sup> A practical and embodied way of expressing emotion is a form of procedural knowing that helps to offer a release from communal and collective trauma that has occurred. A communal procedural knowledge that offers an emotional release can create an intergenerational process of healing.<sup>23</sup> This allows the community to deal with the emotions that the trauma brought as a collective.

I argue that when collective trauma occurs, communities are *pushed* into creating procedural knowledge for healing to take place. Trauma causes individuals to develop practices in order to deal with the hurt with which the whole community deals. When relationality is a core value, the community is pushed to work collectively to help each other when faced with pain and trauma. Given that knowledge production is a communal process, it logically follows that after collective trauma, knowledges would be created as a community for healing to take place. Procedural communal knowing having practical goals means that when communities come together in an attempt to reach healing, they can create ways of procedural knowing in order to benefit one another and help the collective. Hurt pushes individuals to take actions to deal with the pain that they have. Therefore, communal trauma pushes the collective to take actions as a community to recover. Collective action is taken after communal trauma to form procedural knowledge to move the community towards healing.

Performances of procedural knowing also create the space that is necessary for healing to occur. When collective trauma occurs within a specific community, the procedural knowledges that are formed for healing must also be done within that community. I argue that there is a level of epistemic isolation necessary for procedural knowledges to have a healing aspect. This isolation gives the community protection from the dominant culture. Epistemic isolation refers to only communicating with and learning from one's own social group. There are many benefits for a traumatized community's being epistemically isolated when it comes to producing procedural knowledge for healing. The community must not be with the traumatizer in order for true healing to be possible for the collective. When the community is epistemically isolated from the traumatizer, they do not have to deal with a privileged group minimizing or doubting their trauma. I argue that communal procedural knowing that has a goal of achieving healing requires epistemic isolation from those who played a role in the traumatizing so that the community does not have to prove that they faced trauma or that they need to heal. When the community is epistemically isolated, space is created for healing to occur.

Given that trauma is carried with the body, it is important that procedural knowing for healing must allow the body to tell its truth about the trauma. The damage done by trauma occurs to the flesh and down into the bones. Therefore, healing practices must involve the flesh and the bones as well. Welch explains that Native dancing finds and shows truths that are within the body.<sup>24</sup> Embodied procedural knowing that attempts to move a community towards healing allows the body to recall the memory of the trauma and tell its own truth. The performance of embodied procedural

knowing gives individuals and the community as a whole the opportunity to tell their own story of hurt and pain that was experienced. When this embodied re-membering is done with the community, the trauma that exists within bodies can be dealt with collectively. Damages to the body can be dealt with when the community uses their bodies to search for healing. This embodied procedural knowing that is used to move towards healing is resistive towards the trauma that occurred.

I further argue that “doing” healing as a community helps to expedite the healing process. If an individual is to search for healing on their own, they are not in relation with individuals who can help them. Additionally, when trauma occurs collectively, other individuals are aware and familiar with the struggle. This familiarity aids individuals in attempting to help one another reach healing. It is still possible that an individual can create procedural knowledges on their own to try and reach a point of healing. However, when procedural knowledges are created in and with community for the purpose of healing, individuals can heal collectively from trauma that occurred. This maintains the relational aspect of the trauma, allowing the community to heal in a unified way. Further, this communal aspect of procedural knowledge with a goal of healing is helpful in that it brings the community together. It is often the case that communal or collective trauma attempts to tear individuals apart from one another or create a divide. When procedural knowing and healing is done with the community, the collective is brought together and the goal that the traumatizer may have had to break up the community is ruined.

In conclusion, communities create ways of procedural knowing after collective trauma in order to reach a place of healing. Given that procedural knowledge is practical, it can have a purpose or goal of healing. Wisdom and lessons can be gained through certain procedural knowledges, which can help to facilitate the process of healing the community. Ceremonies and rituals, when experienced by the whole community, can lead towards healing and counteracting trauma, which ultimately strengthens the epistemological system. When trauma is passed down from generation to generation, the procedural knowing must be a transgenerational way of releasing emotions that were caused by the collective trauma. Additionally, the procedural knowing is an embodied experience which allows for the body and flesh to be healed from the trauma. Procedural knowing for the purpose of healing helps to teach bodies what healing feels like. Communities must also be epistemically isolated for healing to occur in the best way. Further, communal procedural knowledge for the purpose of healing helps to bring the community together and reverse the goals of trauma. Communities are pushed towards creating ways of procedural knowing as a collective after trauma occurs to the whole in order to reach healing for the entire community.

**NOTES**

1. Thomas Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person & Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy*, 56.
2. Shay Welch, *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System: Dancing with Native American Epistemology*, 31–50.

3. Lee Hester and Jim Cheney, “Truth and Native American Epistemology,” 319–34.
4. Thomas Norton-Smith, *The Dance of Person & Place*, 60.
5. Ibid.
6. Welch, *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System*, 47.
7. Ibid., 30.
8. Ibid., 33.
9. Amy Verbos and Maria Humphries, “A Native American Relational Ethic: An Indigenous Perspective on Teaching Human Responsibility,” 1–9.
10. Gregory A. Cajete, “American Indian Epistemologies,” 69–78.
11. Ibid., 70.
12. Welch, *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System*, 13, 17.
13. Dennis H. McPherson and J. Douglas Rabb, *Indian from the Inside: Native American Philosophy and Cultural Renewal*, 120.
14. Ibid., 120.
15. Robin Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*, 129.
16. Ibid., 129.
17. Welch, *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System*, 37.
18. Ibid., 64, 69.
19. Ibid.
20. Quo-Li Driskill, “Theatre as Suture: Grassroots Performance, Decolonization and Healing,” 155–68.
21. Rebecca Wirihana and Cheryl Smith, “Historical Trauma, Healing and Well-Being in Māori Communities,” 197–210.
22. Ibid., 199.
23. Ibid., 202.
24. Welch, *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System*, 96.

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## How Reconnecting with the Land May Help Heal Trauma in Native American Communities

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Before the Western invasion of their land, Native Americans were bound to their homelands through cultural ties. Indigenous lands were seen as more than a geographical land space. Instead, they were communities in which individuals lived in harmony with nature. As a result, the land encouraged the facilitation of knowledge. For Indigenous Americans, living with the land is a critical part of their identity. However, through centuries of violence and systemic oppression, Native Americans have lost access to their homelands through forced removal, and thus have lost part of their identities.

Furthermore, the loss of identity with Indigenous cultures prevents many Native Americans from engaging with traditional cultural ceremonies. While in this essay I argue the stripping of Native Americans from their homelands is a contributing factor to the development of generational trauma in Indigenous communities, I also will claim that a modified reintroduction to Native Americans spaces—one that takes into consideration the fact that many Native American lands have been stolen or inaccessible—may contribute to the healing of trauma and prevent the transmission of pain and loss to the next generation. This essay will focus on the importance of land in the native communities as a space to develop knowledge through ceremonial performances.

Conceptually, living within the land is the concept that one is living in harmony with their moral obligations to the earth. The earth and the individual live in relation to each other as equals as opposed to human beings being thought of as above the earth and in control of plants and animals. From the Native American framework, there is an expansive concept of persons.<sup>1</sup> The expansive concept of persons is rooted in the belief that trees, animals, and spirits are nonhuman persons that are as worthy of respect as humans. According to Brian Burkhart in *Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Futures*, in order to live within the land, you must live within a locality.<sup>2</sup> Living within a locality is living within nature, meaning that the individual lives in harmony and balance with the land itself. Living in a delocality, however, is the opposite of living in a locality; the human maintains an attitude that they are separated from nature, and not only

believes that humans are separate, but holds further that some humans are seen as above nature, and therefore they do not have a moral obligation to protect and provide for it. The notion of bounded space is the space within living in a locality; when an individual lives in a locality, they are bounded to a particular space in which they are equal to the land.<sup>3</sup>

I argue that it is better to live in a locality like the Indigenous American framework as opposed to the Western framework of living in a delocality. This is because living within the land is important to understanding our identity. Home is not where the heart is, but rather it is where we live. Where we live has a critical impact on our identity: regardless of who we are, many of us strongly identify with where we live and often define who we are in accordance to where our childhood memories are located. The text *Culture, Tradition, and Globalization: Some Philosophical Questions* by Asha Mukherjee states, "The sense of belonging, the common sedimented experiences and cultural forms that are associated with a place, are crucial to the concept of a local culture."<sup>4</sup> Thus, living within the land, or living in a locality, is crucial to understanding the identity of the individual. For humans and nonhumans alike, our needs and desires are shaped by the area in which we live in. It is not possible to exist without having some relationship to the land. This is why a person's identity is tied to where they live, as this is their home. Unfortunately, though, the Western framework is conceptually tied to the idea of living with in a delocality, as previously mentioned. This delocality results in humans having no sense of place. Without a sense of place, it is difficult for individuals to maintain an identity, because everything is around them is in flux—an attachment to the land does not exist. Living in a locality allows for a person to have an established identity. Particularly, Native Americans have been stripped of identity with the land due to Western civilization colonizing the land, making it difficult for Native Americans to have bounded space, which is essential to their framework.

Moreover, delocality results in binary relationships. Binary relationships are those in which there are only two options: something either A or non-A. Binary frameworks lead to some humans determining the values of nonhumans and humans. The binary system derived from delocality results in Westerners viewing anything aside from themselves as worthy of unlimited consumption. The view that white men have dominion over everything else is why the land and the Indigenous people that lived on the land have been mistreated and exploited for centuries. In "The American Indian as a Miscalc Ecologist," Calvin Martin argues that Westerners lack a land ethic, that is, a moral obligation to the land, especially a human-to-land ethic.<sup>5</sup> I argue this lack of land ethic leads to all nonhumans having instrumental value. As discussed by Burkhart, instrumental value is based upon how useful a nonhuman person is to the human, whereas intrinsic value is where value is placed on nonhumans because it is essential to the nonhuman. Native Americans have always had a land ethic, and have thus seen that everything in nature has value. This ideology leads to Indigenous Americans having a moral obligation to provide for the land, as it provides for them. In different Native American tribes, the land has been particularly generous to

them. It provides space for ceremonies, food, and shelter. Land is critical to Native American identity, resulting in living in a locality. Living within the land creates an ethical reciprocal relationship between humans and nonhumans alike.

Moreover, another concept essential to living within the land is the concept of communalism. Communalism bases itself on the belief that others, and our relationship to others, is more important than us as individuals. It focuses on the “we” instead of the “I.” Unlike Western culture, Indigenous Americans believe that in order to be a person, and have an identity, there must be a community. An individual is part of the community, and there is a reciprocal relationship between members of a community and the individual; in other words, the individual benefits from the community, and the community also benefits from the presence of the individual. The text *How It Is* by V. F. Cordova discusses how a Native worldview has a conceptual framework, that is the basis to ideology and values. One of these values, communal reality, is critical to the Native American conceptual framework because it determines the values and way of living a particular group of people believes in.<sup>6</sup>

Communalism, however, is not simply defined by the people of a particular group. As previously mentioned, Native Americans believe in the expansive concept of persons; thus communalism includes the people, nonhuman persons, and the land itself. The land itself is an integral part of community. In “‘People Speaking Silently to Themselves’: An Examination of Keith Basso’s Philosophical Speculations on ‘Sense of Place’ in Apache Cultures,” Martin Ball discusses how oral traditions in Apache culture use the land to embody past traditions by associating stories and events with places and landforms.<sup>7</sup> I agree with Ball in the sense that oral tradition does have the ability to connect individuals to the land. However, I add that the land provides Native Americans the opportunity to engage in the act of place-making; since the land provides place-making, the traditions and persons living within the land are all engaged in the concept of communalism. The development of communalism through the land encourages Indigenous people to live within a locality, as they are able to be more in touch with the community, and the community helps to create the individual’s identity. Moreover, the land that has provided Indigenous Americans the ability to practice traditions also has supported their well-being. Native American tribes that are located in particular geographic regions have a communal reality that is centered in a particular region. For example, being located by a river is influential to the community because the people have a reciprocal relationship between the river and the people. Geographical landmarks are part of the Native American conceptual framework; thus they help create the community.

Unlike the predominant Western belief that the individual is more important than the group, most Native American communities support the opposite theory, that the group is more important than the individual. The individual’s need should be aligned to the community’s needs. The community itself serves as a means of teaching and learning in Native American culture. In Native American cultures, the children

learn the ways of respect and tradition from the elders: this helps develop their individual values to be centered on the community’s values. When the community is intact, there is a creation of balance and harmony. Each person and nonperson in the community has a subjective experience that is considered valid and thus the entire community is comprised of multiple truths. The individual is influenced by the truths of their community, in which their own truths are formed and help form their identity. Because in turn the community is formed of multiple truths, all truths are considered to be of equal value. Individualism, on the other hand, creates a false need for competition and hierarchy, thus destroying the possibility of true community.

Communalism from living within the land results in the creation of traditions. Traditions are one of the ways in which an individual can find its identity, or internal sense of place. Native Americans have a special regard to traditions that is not typically held in Western culture. In *Yuchi Ceremonial Life: Performance, Meaning, and Tradition in a Contemporary American Community*, Jay Miller argues that the Yuchi people have maintained their relationships with family by upholding their traditions with the three sacred grounds that they use for their ceremonies. I argue, however, that the land has a critical relationship with Native American values. Without the land, there would not be a community for Indigenous Americans to create traditions because most Indigenous American traditions are rooted in place-making. Thus, the framework that the land and people are equal provides a reciprocal relationship in which community is developed. This community is essential to a Native American person’s identity, which can only come from living in relation to the land. The concepts of living within the land and communalism are therefore related, because in order to have a community, you must be living within the land.

Given that living within the land and communalism create a sense of reciprocity between the people and the environment, I suggest that reconnecting with Native American lands can heal trauma in the Native American community. Native Americans have experienced historical violence from European colonizers since Europeans arrived in America. European colonists who believed in the idea that they were above the land also believed that they were above humans who were of a darker complexion and practiced different beliefs. Because of their hierarchal framework, they were able to justify the false belief that Native Americans are savages. Because the colonists endorsed a false, racist ideology, they were able to falsely justify the belief that Native Americans needed to be “civilized” if it was not moral to kill them. The brutal process to ensure “civilization” involved the forced removal of Indigenous Americans from their homelands. Removing Native Americans from their homelands ensured that they were unable to traditionally practice their sacred ceremonial practices. The process of removing Native Americans from their homelands resulted in generational trauma that is still occurring today. Molly Castleoe, in “How Trauma Is Carried Across Generations,” discusses how trauma is passed down from parent to child. The transmission of trauma from parent to child is known as vertical transmission.<sup>8</sup> It can occur from societal problems such as oppression of a

particular group. The children must address the trauma in order to heal from it and to prevent passing it on to their children. In the Native American community in particular, studies have been done to attempt to understand where the trauma lies and what effects it has on the community. For example, the “Split Feathers” study by Carol Locust studied children who were taken from their traditional homelands. The effects were devastating. Children who had been removed had experienced

1. The loss of identity,
2. The loss of family, culture, heritage, language, spiritual beliefs, tribal affiliation and tribal ceremonial experiences,
3. The experience of growing up being different,
4. The experience of discrimination from the dominant culture,
5. A cognitive difference in the way Indian children receive, process, integrate, and apply new information in short a difference in learning style.<sup>9</sup>

It is important to note that while this study is based primarily on the separation between adoptive children and their communities, children who experience a separation between their identity often suffer from the same symptoms as mentioned in the “Split Feathers” study. This trauma that has manifested has resulted in Native Americans being far more likely to commit suicide<sup>10</sup> and also abuse substances to cope. In “Native Americans and Alcohol: Past, Present, and Future,” William Szlemko, James Wood, and Pamela Thurman discuss how Native Americans are more likely than other ethnic groups to abuse alcohol and experience fetal alcohol syndrome. While Szlemko and colleagues argue that this is a result of historical trauma (historical trauma is considered to be a collective theory of trauma that causes emotional harm to an individual or collective after a traumatic event), I argue that in regards to Native American people, the historical trauma stems from the inability to reconnect with homelands and engage in traditional practices. This disconnect, like most trauma, is often swept under the rug, and as a result many Indigenous people engage in harmful practices in order to cope. I will claim that this trauma can be addressed and healed by reconnecting with homeland, thus living in the land, and communalism.

Traditional homelands have provided Native Americans the ability to gain procedural knowledge. Procedural knowledge is knowledge that is gained through action. Actively participating in practices that successfully and respectfully complete a goal is how procedural knowledge becomes truth. Native Americans have traditionally engaged in finding truth by engaging in procedural knowledge through connecting with their homelands. This is why their homelands are considered sacred spaces. These sacred spaces are part of their identity. Procedural knowledge is much more effective than its contrasting method of knowledge, propositional knowledge. For example, many parents learn how to take care of their children by actively engaging in child-rearing practices. While reading parental books can certainly help, most people would agree that procedural knowledge has a lasting impact in knowledge building. Propositional knowledge is the Western method of knowledge. Propositional knowledge exists within a binary system, in which something is either true or it is

false, and there is no room for ambiguity or subjectivity. As a result, propositional knowledge fails to consider moral aspects to finding truth; it also does not take into account the subjective experience of persons. While something can be true in part, the method of discovering this truth can be immoral and damaging to the environment and the people who are part of the environment. For example, the unethical studies of birth control in Indigenous communities were without consent and often resulted in the forced sterilization of women. While they discovered the side effects of birth control, the studies themselves are inherently unethical. In fact, many discoveries in Western sciences are true in the sense that they are scientifically accurate; however, the methods to discovering the truth were not respectful and resulted in trauma that has not properly been redressed.

Since discovering truth is done in the Native American framework by engaging in procedural knowledge, it is often done by engaging with the land or living within the land. This allows Indigenous Americans to discover their place in the world, what their moral obligations to the land are, and how they can best live a life in which they fulfill their moral obligations to the land as well as the people. I am arguing here that Indigenous Americans’ ability to engage in procedural knowledge and thus find truth regarding their identity is applicable to healing trauma. Trauma can only be healed in Native American communities if they can discover their truth. Being able to exist within the land allows this, and by discovering their truths, they are able to effectively heal some of the trauma regarding who they are as a people, and how they can best morally engage with the world, with human persons and nonhuman persons alike. Uncovering this truth can help Native Americans heal and have an identity with Native American values and culture. This will prevent the effects that were experienced by children in the “Split Feathers” study and help mitigate the trauma from being passed onto the next generation.

Now that I have established that Native Americans should engage in the concept of living within the land in order to engage in procedural knowledge to find truth, and thus heal from trauma, I will continue my argument by adding that the methods to engaging in the land should be done with the community, thus engaging in communalism. While certainly there is individualistic healing of trauma that might be specific to a particular person’s trauma, I argue that communalistic healing is also important and comes from engaging in the land. Often, when Indigenous people engage in their beliefs for healing trauma, it is in the form of a ceremony. Traditional ceremonies are important in Native American culture. Traditional ceremonies often involve engaging in the land and community members engaging with each other. Practicing ceremonies as a community can heal trauma more effectively than by an individual alone. This is because a Native individual cannot function without a community. Community provides the individual with people who have experienced similar trauma—the trauma of being forcibly removed from their original homelands. This provides a sense of familiarity and allows all people in the community to have a sacred space. Ceremonies that focus on the healing of trauma are also more beneficial as a community because they allow Indigenous Americans the space to practice traditions

that reflect on their Native American tribal values. This is psychologically more beneficial for Indigenous Americans. By engaging in ceremonial practices with a community, in their original bounded spaces, Indigenous people are able to feel comfortable with their identities and also take pride in them. Additionally, since Native Americans already believe in “we” over “I,” there is more value placed upon engaging in ceremonial practices as a group instead of only as an individual.

It is important to understand what kinds of ceremonial practices may be helpful for Native Americans in order to help redress trauma and promote healing. Ceremonies are a form of social practice. According to Shay Welch in *The Phenomenology of a Performative Knowledge System: Dancing with Native American Epistemology*, social practices are performances. Performances are part of developing procedural knowledge, because procedural knowledge involves performing an action respectfully to complete a goal. Welch discusses how Native Americans have often relied on ceremonial dances to engage in procedural knowledge and social performance to engage in truth. Welch argues that Native American dancing is regarded as essential to Native epistemology. I argue that because Native American dancing is crucial to Native epistemology, it can be useful for healing trauma in Native American communities. Since the social performance of dancing involves the embodiment of Native American values, truth, and procedural knowledge, it has the ability to heal trauma. Dancing can be used to embody trauma and can be a method of accepting that generational trauma has occurred, and can, in addition, provide a bounded space within an original homeland for working through and understanding generational trauma. Dancing is typically a part of Native American ceremonies. The social performance of dancing as a community thus can help Native Americans establish an identity with Native American culture and promote healing.

Another social practice that helps to connect Native Americans to their original homelands, and help Native Americans heal from trauma, are Native American rituals. According to *Legends of America*,<sup>11</sup> some tribes have used peyote, a plant, during ceremonies, to promote physical and spiritual healing. These ceremonies are guided by healers, known as roadmen, that guide the individual through their life. This is a communal practice as it involves more than the individual in order to be effective. Native American trauma should typically be addressed in a communal fashion in order to be beneficial for the individual. The ability to engage in these practices is thus important for Native Americans to effectively heal from trauma as a collective; however, these rituals also need to be done in Native American original homelands. The original land spaces are able to provide Native Americans with their identity and help promote healing spaces in which Native Americans can unlearn and cope with trauma.

Specifically, “Historical Trauma, Healing, and Well-being in Māori Communities” by Rebecca Wirihana and Cherry Smith highlights how reconnecting with cultural heritage has been helpful for healing from trauma in Indigenous communities. Maori cultural heritage includes the ability

to use songs and chants, which are considered a formal speech, as well as dance. Wirihana and Smith argue that Māori communities benefit from being able, verbally and physically, to express their emotions. The grieving process at Tangihanga, a traditional funeral ritual site, allows Indigenous people to express trauma through their tears and remorse. I am arguing that these practices allow Indigenous people to heal from trauma because they are able to engage with the land in a sacred space as a community. The act of performance serves as a method of achieving truth and thus identity, and therefore is able to heal trauma in the individual.

Since Native Americans strongly value living within the land and being in harmony with the land, there is little doubt that the forced removal of Native Americans from their sacred spaces inhibited their ability to fully engage with the land to their best ability. Native Americans have been forced to assimilate to varying degrees in order to survive under Western colonization. Western culture also introduced Native Americans to alcohol and other substances. The suffering of Native Americans at the hands of Western colonizers thus has created a vertical transmission of generational trauma—passed from parent to child. I have argued that in order for this trauma to be redressed, Native Americans can heal by being able to reconnect with their homelands. Their homelands have long provided the ability for Native Americans to have balance and harmony. These homelands have also provided the space to engage in traditions and social practices that involve being able to exist within the land. The ability to engage with the land allows Native Americans to gain procedural knowledge, and procedural knowledge leads to Native Americans engaging in the action of performance to uncover the truth. These truths are essential to having a Native American identity. I have also argued that the loss of Native American identity is part of why Native American people have dealt with generational trauma for centuries. Additionally, it is best that this trauma is redressed through communalistic practices because communalism has always been essential in the Native American conceptual framework. Communalism can create a sense of balance and harmony with other humans as well as nonhuman persons. Communalism also provides Indigenous Americans with an identity. Many Native American tribes have found ceremonial practice as a community beneficial as well. While it is certainly not possible to undo the historical colonization of Native Americans by Europeans, living with the land as a community to heal from trauma is a step in the right direction.

On the other hand, however, some might claim that Native Americans do not need to practice ceremonies that are particular to their tribal affiliations that connect them with their homelands. Unfortunately, many Native Americans cannot connect with their homelands because Westerners have forcibly removed them from their land. According to the US Department of Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health, only roughly 22 percent of Native Americans currently live on reservations.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, most cannot engage in ceremonies with the land at all, or in the same way that they could have prior to European invasion. This could lead to a loss of identity and, as a result, trauma,

which could cause the vertical transmission of trauma to continue for Native Americans.

In response to this, however, I admit that there is no denying the fact that Native Americans have been pushed off of land that is significant to them and instead some might live on reservations. However, reservations are still land, and still count as a type of bounded space. In fact, while many people of Native American heritage do not live on reservations and Indigenous people might not be able to reconnect with the same land as before, reservations are still places where tribal ceremonies can be held. These ceremonies would have the ability to help Native Americans heal from the trauma of displacement. Reservations also allow Native Americans the space to live within the land as a community. There can still be beneficial connection with the land that occurs even after Western intervention, which is why I argue that while the most ideal scenario involves Native American people returning to their original homelands, it is highly unlikely that this will occur. Therefore, Native Americans will have to engage with the land that they currently have and use it to provide space for ceremonies and healing to the best of their ability.

Even still, there is also the argument that Native Americans reconnecting with their heritage through ceremonial social practices could potentially result in Native people experiencing more trauma. This is because Native Americans would be engaging in social practices that have been affected by Western culture, and when confronting trauma there is a possibility that an individual can experience negative effects.

I do not disagree with the notion that confronting trauma and experiencing the pain from it can be triggering for individuals. However, I would argue that it is necessary in order to heal from trauma. There can be differentiations in the intentions behind trauma: some trauma can be repeated from the intention to further harm, and other methods of confronting trauma can be used to heal and deconstruct it. To face trauma as a community can create a sacred, safe space where it is acceptable to embrace emotions regarding displacement and abuse. Additionally, I admit that Native Americans may not be able to engage in their ceremonial practices towards promoting healing in the same way as they could prior to Western interference. Pretending that they can would be as if I were erasing the fact that Native Americans have been oppressed, or that trauma in and of itself is entirely erasable. I am not claiming either of these notions.

In summation, Native Americans have strong ties to their homelands, which has led to land-specific performances and practices. The destruction of identity through forced removal of Native Americans by Westerners has also led to the development and transmission of generational trauma between adults and children. If Native American people are able to reintegrate with their land, they would also be able to engage in traditional ceremonies that help to establish a sense of cultural identity and belonging. One of the many causes of trauma stems from a lack of identity, and thus reestablishing a healthy relationship with the self can allow for the healing of generational trauma. While this healing

certainly is not an easy task, and can force an individual to confront potentially triggering subjects, Native Americans' confronting their trauma can be a very positive experience overall. While ideally, it would be best for Native Americans to be able to reconnect with their own lands, I acknowledge that it is highly unlikely that they will be able to do so given most lands were stolen. However, I argue that Native Americans have the ability to claim new lands and still heal from trauma. The healing of generational trauma through living with the land and the development of communalism has the capability to redress some of the trauma that Native Americans have faced. While it is not possible to undo the historical trauma that Native Americans have experienced, it is possible to cope with the effects of trauma as a means to collectively work towards preventing the vertical transmission of trauma from parent to child.

#### NOTES

1. See Thomas Norton Smith, *The Dance of Person and Place: One Interpretation of American Indian Philosophy*, 77–94.
2. Brian Burkhart, *Indigenizing Philosophy through the Land: A Trickster Methodology for Decolonizing Environmental Ethics and Indigenous Future*.
3. *Ibid.*, 177–88.
4. Asha Mukherjee, "Culture, Tradition, and Globalization: Some Philosophical Questions," 54.
5. Calvin Martin, "The American Indian as Miscalc Ecologist," 243.
6. Viola F. Cordova and Kathleen Dean Moore, *How It Is: The Native American Philosophy of V. F. Cordova*, 49.
7. Martin W. Ball, "'People Speaking Silently to Themselves': An Examination of Keith Basso's Philosophical Speculations on 'Sense of Place' in Apache Cultures," 460–78.
8. Molly Castelloe, "How Trauma Is Carried Across Generations."
9. Carol Locust, "American Indian Adoptees."
10. Cordova and Moore, *How It Is*, 50; Vincent Schilling, "Centers for Disease Control Release Suicide Stats. Native American Women Top the List with 139 Percent Increase."
11. Kathy Weiser, "Native American Rituals and Ceremonies," 2.
12. "Profile: American Indian/Alaska Native."

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