

THEORIZING ABORIGINAL FEMINISMS

CRYSTAL H. PHILLIPS
Bachelor of Arts, University of Lethbridge, 2007

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To the Stolen Generation: Never Forget

To the children of the Stolen Generation: Forgiveness is Freedom

To my children, nieces and nephews: My Inspiration

Abstract

Increasingly, Aboriginal women engage with feminist theory and forms of activism to carve their own space and lay a foundation for an Aboriginal feminism. I compile prominent writings of female Aboriginal authors to identify emerging theoretical strains that centre on decolonization as both theory and methodology. Aboriginal women position decolonization strategies against the intersectionality of race and sex oppression within a colonial context, which they term patriarchal colonialism. They challenge forms of patriarchal colonialism that masquerade as Aboriginal tradition and function to silence and exclude Aboriginal women from sovereignty and leadership spheres. By recalling and reclaiming the pre-colonial Aboriginal principle of egalitarianism, which included women within these spheres, they are positioned to create a hybrid feminism that locates egalitarianism within a contemporary and relevant context by combining it with human rights. In this way, Aboriginal feminism balances culture and tradition with principles of individual and collective rights.

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Acronyms

Aboriginal Women's Action Network	(AWAN)
American Indian Movement	(AIM)
Assembly of First Nations	(AFN)
Boarding School Healing Projects	(BHSP)
Bureau of Indian Affairs	(BIA)
Canadian Human Rights Act	(CHRA)
Federal Bureau of Investigation	(FBI)
Indian Health Service	(IHS)
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada	(INAC)
Indigenous Women's Network	(IWN)
Native Women's Association of Canada	(NWAC)
Women of All Red Nations	(WARN)

North American Aboriginal women's grassroots and intellectual activism are gaining momentum toward achieving liberation. In many ways Aboriginal women experience oppression and marginalization that motivate their anti-colonial activism and cause them to challenge "...dominant myths and political, social and economic practices that dignify, deny or perpetuate colonialism – the enforced appropriation of Aboriginal nations' land and resources and the denial of the conditions for self-determination" (Green, 2007, p. 22). In particular, Aboriginal women have created complex resistance strategies against racist and sexist colonial structures, while simultaneously striving for self-determination for both Aboriginal individuals and communities. Additionally, these decolonization strategies often fluctuate between various public, private and national spheres within Aboriginal and Canadian and/or American societies. Attempts to eliminate race and gender oppression within political, social, and economic structures through decolonization have resulted in Aboriginal women's activism resembling feminism, even though many of these women have been reluctant to label it as such. However, in the past decade an increasing number of Aboriginal women have begun recognizing the applicability and relevancy of feminism, consequently aligning themselves with it and laying the foundation for an Aboriginal feminist theory.

Language

Aboriginal theorizing, whether woman-based on traditionalism or feminism-based on post-colonial eras, reflects a tension between elucidating difference with its dangerous tendency towards essentialism and seeking contemporary resolutions to contemporary problems. Within practical daily lives, Aboriginal women tend to avoid essentializing

their actions and identities, but when placed in the spotlight within political struggles or theoretical debate, tensions erupt within discourse of difference. A prime example of this is the contentious notion, for some, that there was a pre-colonial patriarchy, a notion that highlights the tensions between theorists who stress difference and those who seek social and cultural parallels between Aboriginal and non-aboriginal gendered experiences. Aboriginal theorizing is faced with defining cultural difference from mainstream Western cultures and in particular Aboriginal women are challenged to create these cultural distinctions while engaging with womanist and feminist theory. Consequently, the contentious notion of patriarchy's existence as pre or post-colonial can result in nuances of romanticism when Aboriginal women claim that pre-colonial cultures were void of patriarchy as a way to define and maintain cultural boundaries. These romantic nuances largely occur in two ways. First, it situates all Aboriginal cultures as utopias without any oppression amongst humans or toward the environment. In particular sexism is nonexistent, which is claimed as a result of matriarchy. An absence of sexism in combination with claims of honour and respect for Aboriginal women generates imagery that places Aboriginal women on a pedestal. For obvious reasons these romantic notions are extremely problematic when framed as essential qualities of 'Indians'. Further, they frame Aboriginal peoples as noble savages, imply and idealize women as biologically nurturing and moral in comparison to men. Romantic and stereotypical images of Aboriginal cultures and peoples lock our existence in the past, while creating a static and fixed culture where contemporary versions of these essentialized ideals cannot and do not exist.

As pointed out by Val Napoleon (personal communication, 2012), employing terminology such as ‘belief’ and ‘value’ to describe Aboriginal culture implies unchanging and fixed characteristics. Instead she suggests that it could be more advantageous for Aboriginal feminism to adopt a language of cultural ‘norms’ to create spaces for dialogue on the inevitable social and normative changes that occur in culture and society. As Aboriginal feminism moves forward, questions on concepts of sacredness embedded into these notions of ‘belief’ and ‘value’ must be raised.

The key authors writing on decolonization and Aboriginal politics use the term ‘genocide’ to quantify the colonization experience of North America. While I am aware of the controversial nature of this term, I remain consistent with the language used by my leading scholars, and therefore frame my work using the word ‘genocide’ as a way to contextualize both the enormity and significance of colonization. Specifically, leading scholar Andrea Smith’s Nobel Peace Prize nominated book, *Conquest: Sexual Violence and American Indian Genocide* (2005), traces the interconnected extermination methods, such as sexual violence, environmental, and cultural genocide, used against Native American peoples. Her work, along with the works of Kim Anderson (2000), Randi Cull (2006), Jaimes*Guerrero (2003), and Dawn Martin-Hill (2003), to name a few, offer historical and current experiences from Native Americans that highlight why North American colonialism can be characterized as genocide. According to the United Nations’ *1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (article 2) genocide is defined as

any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group ... “, including:

- Killing members of the group;
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.”

For the purpose of this thesis, Native feminism draws mainly from the last two with recognition that uninformed sterilization and forced adoption of Native children in North America, which are two very significant practices falling within these categories. For literature regarding the top three categories on the above list see Woolford and Thomas (2011) for Canadian content, and see Rensink (2011), Thornton (1987), Stannard (1993), as well as Smith (2005), for US content.

In my writings I interchangeably use the terms ‘Native’, ‘Aboriginal’, and ‘Indigenous’ to refer to the original peoples on the continent of North America “... who have been conquered, colonized or transplanted against their will and then subjugated by an alien, majority culture” (McGadney-Douglass, Apt & Douglass, 2006, p. 106). This definition is open enough to avoid using terms that falsely imply that a homogenous Indigenous group exists without diversity within the group itself (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006). I intentionally and consciously interchange these terms as a way to remove the false boundaries and divisions between Native tribes and nations that have been implemented under colonial rule; however my own preferential term is ‘Aboriginal’.

As in Haunani-Kay Trask’s work (1996) the word ‘Native’ is deliberately capitalized in my work to symbolize the political meaning it has come to hold in a Western colonial country. Although originally a colonial descriptor, Native is now political, used for self-identification and to actively resist against totalizing American and Canadian rhetoric that claims “we are all immigrants” as a way to erase colonial history

and thereby Natives and our rights (Lenon, 2008; Trask, 1996). Capitalizing ‘Native’ serves as a reminder that not everyone in North America is an immigrant and that the original inhabitants have not vanished. Further, I consciously capitalize the words ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Aboriginal’ for the same reasons as stated above.

How Is Indigenous Defined and Recognized

On the surface the term ‘Aboriginal’ is easily defined as the original inhabitants to a particular place, however it, and the terms often assumed to be synonymous with it, become increasingly complex when colonial governments and politics become involved. For example, the legal category of ‘Indian’ in Canada only refers to those recognized by the Canadian government as status-Indian, which excludes Inuit and Métis people, and Aboriginal peoples who have been deemed non-status for a multiplicity of reasons; yet all of these categories are established as Aboriginal in the Canadian constitution (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006). How Indigenous is recognized according to family and tribes can be different and contradictory to how foreign governments and international organizations such as the United Nations recognize ‘Indigenous’.

Beyond the government’s definition, what it means to be Indigenous involves maintaining relations with the environment into which one is born (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003). To achieve a relational harmony, an Indigenous person exercises “...kinship roles in reciprocal relationship with his or her bioregional habitat, and this is manifested through cultural beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies that cherish biodiversity...” (ibid., p. 66). Further, if one moves away from their Indigenous homeland it is customary that they continue to practice this ‘Native Land Ethic’ with their ‘Native Spirituality’, which

derives from ritual and ceremony with the biohabitat. It is not enough to conceptualize 'Indigenous' as simply referring to a people when we understand and define ourselves in relation to the universe.

What Jaimes*Guerrero (2003) describes above is one way to define 'Native' and in an ideal world where Native peoples have not been relocated from their families and culture this definition would have a better chance of applying to many more Native peoples. However, during the 1960s between 30 to 40% of Aboriginal children were apprehended from their homes and placed into adoption programs by Canadian provincial child and welfare services (Fournier & Crey, 1997). With changed identities and ethnicities, relocation, and sealed adoption records, Aboriginal children were frequently unaware of their heritage and culture. An entire generation of children lost, during what is called the 'Sixties Scoop', makes identity politics and definitions of Aboriginal complex to say the least. My mother was part of this lost generation.

The Origins of the Thesis

When I originally set out to investigate Aboriginal feminism there was very limited literature available with only a handful of Aboriginal scholars using the term 'feminism' in their work. I set out to uncover what was important to Aboriginal women without really understanding how their views and opinions were categorized within feminist theory. It turned out they weren't really categorized at all unless to deny feminisms' relevancy to Aboriginal issues in what Verna St. Denis (2007) labels as the 'conventional position' of Aboriginal women. Approximately three quarters of the way through my literature review I realized what I was creating through categorizing the

diversity of Aboriginal women's viewpoints and terminologies. My understanding took shape when people would ask me the age-old question: What is the thesis about? I would respond with "theorizing Aboriginal feminism" and then be confronted with their follow-up question, always: What is Aboriginal feminism? I soon realized that although there was a complex relationship between feminism and Aboriginal women due to colonialism, which I discuss in chapter one, it became clear that a text book answer did not yet exist. The writings to communicate what Aboriginal feminism entailed existed, but there had not been a concrete framework that has categorized recognizable terminology for experiences of Aboriginal women in the context of our gender issues. The goal of this thesis ultimately became to answer the questions: If someone had to sit down and write a definition of Aboriginal feminism what would that look like? What would the methodologies be, and how would Aboriginal feminism fit within feminist theory generally, while standing on its own with its critiques of feminism and colonialism?

Additionally, there was the challenge of conceptualizing how Aboriginal women were simultaneously using decolonization as both a theory and a methodology in their writings. Through a close survey of the literature I came to understand how these two could be separated into distinct categories that continue to define each other. The subsequent challenge was how to construct this decolonization methodology into a paradigm that could accommodate the variance of issues for Aboriginal women depending on their tribe or nation and more importantly, to understand how Aboriginal women do this in their writings. By examining Aboriginal women's writings I have constructed a theoretical feminist framework that accommodates the variety of opinions and viewpoints without creating a homogenous essentialized voice. Aboriginal women

express their perspectives and experiences through a methodology of storytelling that has an auto-ethnographic nature whereby they describe their personal experiences with the interlocking oppression of racism, sexism and colonialism and tie them into larger institutions with an emphasis on their nations and Western nation-states. Drawing from Aboriginal women's stories, I have consciously articulated two positions in Aboriginal feminism as a foundation for theorizing. Aboriginal feminism is not a monolithic strain and as new material emerges so does the opportunity for Aboriginal women to theorize new positions within the discipline.

Literature Scope

One of the main goals for my thesis is to carve out a space for Aboriginal feminism within feminist theory and therefore the focus is on Aboriginal women, their voices and writings. When selecting Aboriginal women's scholarship the criteria I use is restricted to woman-centred approaches, woman-based issues, indigeneity, and the political boundaries of North America with some references outside to fill in any literature gaps. Aboriginal feminism is an emerging field with new material coming forth daily; therefore I consciously limit myself to these criteria to maintain a manageable scope in terms of quantity. Whenever possible I use the literature from Aboriginal women to convey their viewpoints and opinions, and I deliberately use this literature to investigate Aboriginal feminism in its autonomous development. While there are secondary analyses by non-Aboriginal authors my goal is to focus on projects of decolonization written by Aboriginal women. Further, I use literature from non-Aboriginal scholars when dealing with historical or legal analyses that support the arguments of Aboriginal women, and to

fill in any gaps in the analysis or data. As North American Aboriginal women's writings do not consult or draw from post-colonial literature I do not engage or use supplementary material from its literature. Again my thesis goal is to investigate Aboriginal women's decolonization projects and as Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua (2005) explain in chapter one; post-colonial theories decentre decolonization. Therefore, post-colonial theories are antithetical to Aboriginal feminism when its central principle is decolonization. Although post-colonialism maybe relevant in other supplementary aspects to Aboriginal feminism at this time Aboriginal women's writings must further develop before this issue can be adequately examined.

When selecting literature from Aboriginal women I consciously and deliberately chose authors who self-identify as Aboriginal, regardless of their tribal or national affiliations. Within Native American studies there are authors who dismiss and minimize the scholarship of particular Native writers claiming that "within the academy, numerous "wannabe" and "marginal" Natives with few connections to their tribes publish with the claim of writing from an Indian perspective" (Mihesuah, 2000, p. 1249). However, as previously explained, with such a large number of forced closed-adoptions for Aboriginal children in North America, having few connections to one's tribe and community is a common Indian experience that shapes a certain type of perspective, and therefore I do not overlook the various experiences of Aboriginal women that contribute to Native identity.

The literature spans the geography of North America; the sensibility of sovereignty goes beyond the colonial imagination that divides Aboriginal locality into dualities of rural reserves or reservations and urban non-Aboriginal spaces. Intertwined

with sovereignty is the urban Aboriginal resistance to cultural dislocation and identity disruption. In other words urban residence does not disconnect Aboriginal women from claims to sovereignty and decolonization. The Canadian Indian Act of 1876 gives special rights to certain Aboriginal peoples in the form of status. Through the *Act* status-Indians have been granted a form of legitimacy on writing about Aboriginal sovereignty. Academic literature reflects this, and Aboriginal women who write about reserves in terms of sovereignty and nationalism are often understood as the ‘true Indians’ of Canada. When Métis, non-reserve and/or non-status-Indian women write about community membership or urban identities their voices and theorizing are not categorized or legitimized as sovereignty issues. Additionally, this division in the literature is further complicated when Aboriginal women have been “geographically disconnected [and] culturally dislocated” (Napoleon, 2001, p. 143) by forced adoptions or colonial implemented marriage and band membership initiatives in the *Act*.

The particulars or examples I use to examine how Aboriginal feminist concepts operate and manifest themselves are mainly based on the experiences of Aboriginal women in Canada. This is intentional to simply limit the scope of this research, and fortunately there are distinctive differences between Canadian and American Aboriginal feminist initiatives that can be easily distinguished. For Aboriginal women in Canada a main focus for their activism is on citizenship within bands and nations. As a result much of the literature deals with Aboriginal peoples and constitutional law with an emphasis on how patriarchal colonialism has affected women’s leadership and political participation at local and national levels. The literature coming from Aboriginal women in the United States instead has a large emphasis on environmentalism. Leading scholars, such as

Winona LaDuke (1999, 2002, 2005) and Andrea Smith (1997, 2005, 2008), tie environmental devastation on Native American reserves to community health and Native sovereignty.

Contributions to Feminist Theory

The work in this thesis contributes to gender studies in the way that it informs readers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, that Aboriginal feminism does exist. It also encourages people to look beyond the dichotomies, of either being 'for' or 'against' feminism, that have been theorized by Aboriginal women and beyond the common stereotype: feminism is an irrelevant, colonial, white movement that attacks femininity while demanding women burn their bras and turn into men by taking over masculine roles and responsibilities. At certain points in history the face of feminism has been white and colonial, it has discriminated and excluded the voices of many women of colour, and there were women who did burn their bras and attack femininity. Feminism has also never been monolithic and has evolved and belongs to many groups of women who have found relevancy through their critiques and by building on the existing feminist theories written by women of the past and present. In this thesis I will explore this journey by Aboriginal women through their own writings on feminism.

Below, I outline how I have compiled Aboriginal women's literature to create a clearly delineated lexicon of concepts that will frame the thesis: patriarchal colonialism, Native womanism, decolonization as a theory, distorted traditionalism, decolonization as the methodology, and woman-centred sovereignty.

Chapter Descriptions

Chapter One: Native Women and Perspectives on Feminism

The first chapter gathers the many voices, opinions, and relationships between feminism and Aboriginal women. It offers a historical context given by Aboriginal women as to why feminism is conventionally deemed as irrelevant to Aboriginal cultures and struggles. This chapter also includes the debate amongst Aboriginal women themselves regarding the relevancy of feminism as a tool for theoretical and political emancipation for women's issues. From these discussions emerge the bones of an Aboriginal feminism, which is woman-centered in the way that it contains both a commitment to the health and wellness of Aboriginal communities and holds an alliance to feminine culture including women-specific concerns and issues.

As colonization of Aboriginal peoples in North America is a major organizing concept that measures the current experiences of our Nations, with terms such as pre-colonialism and post-colonialism,¹ it is no surprise that Aboriginal feminism builds on this established trend. Although Aboriginal women scholars do not always wish to solely theorize resistance in relation to colonialism, as it continues to define Aboriginal identity through this inseparable relationship between colonizer and colonized for Aboriginal feminism this is unavoidable when the founding goal is decolonization.

This chapter lays out core terms and a core method, as defined by Aboriginal scholar Jaimes*Guerrero (2003), which contribute to Aboriginal feminism's lexicon; patriarchal colonialism and Native womanism. The complex intersectionality between

¹ Aboriginal scholars often use this term to mean current colonialism instead of 'after' colonialism for they argue that it is still very prevalent and continues for Aboriginal peoples today.

colonialism, race and sex based discrimination that Aboriginal women experience in a colonial context is theorized by all of the Aboriginal women writers. This tripartite relationship of oppression is best illustrated by Jaimes*Guerrero's term 'patriarchal colonialism'. She has also created the term 'Native womanism' as a method used to reclaim pre-colonial principles. It is used by Aboriginal women to locate the agency women held before patriarchal colonialism undermined our roles as leaders and honoured citizens within our Nations. Native womanism is ultimately about restoring roles and responsibilities that Aboriginal women previously held and applying them to our lives with a contemporary context.

Chapter Two: Decolonization and Traditionalism

Chapter two theorizes the process of decolonization as removing colonial values and belief systems from Aboriginal cultures and values. This very complicated process is central to Aboriginal feminism as it challenges Aboriginal peoples to examine our pre-colonial traditional belief systems and translate them into a contemporary context that is relevant to Aboriginal peoples, principles, ways of life, and ceremonies and/or rituals. In particular the concept that Aboriginal feminists challenge is patriarchal colonialism, but they investigate the ways it shows up in our culture and ceremonies and is disguised as our own traditions. Here patriarchal colonialism has been replicated as Aboriginal in nature, which Dawn Martin-Hill (2003) terms as 'distorted traditionalism' or 'sexist traditionalism'. The process of decolonization for Aboriginal feminists is a very politically charged issue that positions Aboriginal women as challenging colonial norms and ideologies that are extremely oppressive to not only our people, but our ways of

living and existing. Again the theme for Aboriginal feminism is to tie our liberation back into the wellness of our peoples, principles, and communities.

This chapter also lays out the process of decolonization as a methodology. Drawing from the ideas of the Aboriginal writers, I organize the process of questioning traditions into three parts: the first is to determine the guiding principle or value behind the tradition, the second is to place the tradition in a context or interpretation of gender equality drawing from pre-colonial Aboriginal values of caring, honesty, kindness, and sharing, and the third, and probably most difficult, is to then adapt this tradition to a current context that applies to our lives today. This process holds the potential to remove colonial ideologies that are antithetical to Aboriginal principles and teachings, but for Aboriginal feminism it means to eliminate patriarchal colonialism using ‘Native womanism’ as a decolonization method. Additionally, this framework of decolonization is a method because it allows the content to vary and therefore can incorporate the specific concerns of each tribe or Nation.

Chapter Three: Aboriginal Women and Sovereignty

The last chapter addresses shortfalls in the process of questioning tradition, in particular the moment when ‘Native womanist’ methodology falls short of causing change, particularly in the realms of sovereignty and leadership for Aboriginal Nations. Canadian Aboriginal sovereignty movements have adopted and promoted patriarchal colonial gender stereotypes and a masculine discourse that has served to exclude Aboriginal women from political and leadership positions, and framed both their concerns and rights as individualistic and undermining to sovereignty. Paradoxically, by

ignoring the violations of Aboriginal women's rights by nation-state governments our Aboriginal leadership is adopting these colonial ideologies and allowing our sovereignty to be defined by these governments. For this reason Aboriginal feminists argue that an analysis of gender equality and sovereignty must simultaneously occur to create woman-centered sovereignty approaches to promote both collective and individual liberation. In particular the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has advocated for the inclusion of Aboriginal women's human rights into the Indian Act and after four decades of lobbying for this constitutional change they have achieved it. This advocacy group also makes a major contribution to Aboriginal feminist theory by expanding on the methodology of decolonization. With an emphasis on creating women-centered sovereignty practices the 'Intercultural Human Rights Approach' implements resistance and health strategies for marginalized Aboriginal women in the areas of law and policy. By using a human rights framework Aboriginal women have reassessed our pre-colonial traditions and found their compatibility with Western concepts of individual rights to ensure the rights of Aboriginal women are heard and enforced.

The following chapters uncover a variety of Native American women's experiences, including the ways they unite and resist patriarchal colonialism in contemporary Aboriginal and North American societies.

Chapter One: Native Women and Perspectives on Feminism

For many Native American women, feminism is a contentious and fiercely debated subject both politically and theoretically and has been widely argued by critics to be irrelevant and nonexistent (Green, 2007). However, feminism not only exists, but it is gaining momentum amongst Native women scholars and activists. It is through these debates that a variance of opinions and theories has emerged and created a dialogue for Native women. For the past several decades Native American women's debates on feminism have been framed into mutually exclusive categories – 'either for it' - 'or against it'. However, this positioning of Native women's voices in relation to feminism is inaccurate and places Native women in opposition to each other through stereotypes and misunderstandings. Native women who reject feminism as a colonial concept are charged with naïve and blind acceptance of gender domination, while those Native women who are labelled as feminists, whether self-identified or not, are often attacked by non-feminist Native women, Native men and communities who call into question the Native feminists' authenticity of 'Indianness', and their cultural, political, and national allegiances (Mayer, 2007; Mihesuah, 2003). The oppositional groupings of Native women activists are counterproductive as they share common goals and methods for eradicating colonial implemented racism and sexism. This intersectionality is referred to as patriarchal colonialism (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003). The main foundation for both Native women's feminism and an activism that resembles feminism but is devoid of feminist terminology is decolonization: Native women, who centre their theories and methods on decolonization draw from and build on past and ongoing North American genocide against Native American peoples to develop their social critique and political

activism. As a result these histories are not de-centered within Native women's theorizing because they link decolonization to a contemporary patriarchal colonial context.

This chapter explores the motivations of Native American women activists. Using decolonization as a central concept to interrogate feminisms, I offer Native women's critiques of mainstream, academic feminism sectioned into three parts: 1) our exclusion from the feminist movement and discourse, 2) cultural differences, and 3) feminism as privileged and academic. The exclusion of Native women from feminism explores a brief history of first and second wave feminism and then moves to examine the intersections of race, sex and colonialism, while linking these to exclusionary politics. The cultural difference section on critiques of feminism examines the common principles that thread through Native American cultures, such as egalitarianism and gender equality, and then ties them into collective goals for liberation. It addresses how, in this same vein, Native women defend community or collective motivations for emancipation and explain these as cultural differences that are distinct from mainstream forms of feminism. The third critique of feminism by Native women draws attention to the socio-economic differences between women and understands feminism as privileged, and reserved for those in the academy with access to formal or institutional education. This section also addresses Native women's criticisms of institutional education and its limitations regarding Native American knowledge and voices. Finally, this chapter will explicate how feminism is theorized by Native women. This section looks at the instances, opportunities, and advantages feminist theory can offer as expressed by Native women. It lays a foundation for considering how feminist theory assists Native women in creating their own Native or Aboriginal feminism that builds on intersections of race and sex while addressing the

implementation of colonialism through a decolonization framework instead of a post-colonial one. Without getting ahead of my argument, it is my intention in chapter three to apply these critiques to Aboriginal mothering discourses as an example of the de/centering of decolonization within feminisms. When decolonization is removed as the foundation all the experiences of Aboriginal women are taken out of context because they then are positioned outside of genocide. In consequence attacks on Aboriginal mothering become “assimilation” and Canadian nationalist projects rather than genocide via attacks on women’s fertility and the removal of children, and cultural genocide.

Motivations of Native American Women Activists

What is Aboriginal feminism and how does it differ from other woman-centred discourses and movements? To understand the motivations of Native women activists I will briefly offer the main organizing concepts for Aboriginal feminism. A main goal for Native American activists is the restoration of tradition and culture. By revisiting past traditions and reclaiming them to be restored in contemporary context, Native women are better equipped to decipher empowering traditions and culture from oppressive colonial ones implemented under the false label of traditionalism. In particular, this method of reclamation, best described as ‘Native womanism’, offers Native women a tool in combating sexist based traditions that have been taken up through colonialism. Native American women experience sexism and racism together, but they are also concerned with theorizing how colonialism and genocide have impacted their intersectionality of oppression known as patriarchal colonialism. Because feminism is often been associated with colonialism and has a tendency to ignore and exclude Native women’s histories and

experiences, as will be further discussed in this chapter, Native women have frequently distanced themselves from it. However, the goals and methods for Native women activists who do not identify as feminists resemble feminist strains, such as socialism/materialism and post-colonialism, especially in their critiques of second wave feminism. Additionally, there are Native women who boldly affiliate themselves with feminism by drawing from its theories and activism as tools for building their own womanist movement. For these reasons Aboriginal or Native feminism is the most appropriate term to describe the motivation and activism of Native women. Further, Aboriginal feminism draws from womanist politics that have both a commitment to the health and wellness of community and an alliance with feminine culture (Salleh, 1997). Where Aboriginal feminism differentiates itself from other women-centred discourses and movements is through its foundations of decolonization and its commitment to sovereignty and nationhood, which I examine in chapter three.

When critically analyzed it becomes apparent that Native women activists share common goals for decolonization, sovereignty, and eliminating patriarchal colonialism regardless of the names and affiliations by which these are identified. The terms that have developed to distinguish these groups of Native women activists are ‘Tribalist/Tribal Woman’ and ‘Tribal/Native Feminist’. For this thesis I will use the terms Tribal woman and Native feminist.

The major difference between Native feminists and Tribal women is defined in relation to the manifestation of patriarchy; Native feminists concede that gender domination existed prior to contact, whereas Tribal women argue that gender domination arrived with European contact (Mayer, 2007). Although the origin of patriarchy differs

according to each group, they both root the majority of their critiques of feminism in theories of cultural difference as a way to separate themselves from colonial or Western society.

Native feminists are more likely to understand and draw from feminist principles and theories and because of this have been stigmatized as assimilated and unconcerned with tribal struggles for sovereignty and collective or community emancipation. As will be demonstrated later, these are false stereotypes of Native feminists and in actuality they indeed care for their communities as their position is defined as a “multisphered concept with the family at the center, surrounded by clan identification, then tribe and tribal relationships, which can mean relationships with state and federal governments and those with other tribal and international governments” (Joy Harjo & Susan M. Williams, quoted in Mihesuah, 2003, p. 160). However, Native feminists recognize that women’s rights often get lost or overlooked in nationalist or collective struggles for sovereignty (Smith, 2005). Therefore, they place gender oppression at the centre of their analysis within these self-determination or sovereignty movements to ensure that individual human rights will simultaneously operate within a collective human rights framework. The relationship between gender politics and nationalist politics are further discussed in chapter three.

Native women who often adhere, as closely as possible, to traditional gender roles and power sharing, frequently self-identify as ‘Tribal women’. These women, who are not usually formally educated, place women’s issues into a larger framework of collective emancipation through tribal sovereignty and self-determination. Tribal women are more often “concerned about tribal or community survival than either gender oppression or individual advancement in economic status, academic, or in other facets of

society” (Mihesuah, 2003, p. 160). For this reason they set themselves apart from mainstream theories imbricated with colonialists, like feminism, and try to draw from fundamental tribal principles that they believe have survived colonialism, which are often transmitted through traditionalism. Tribal women are aware that sexism exists within their communities, but prefer to reclaim gender equality as a traditional Native principle known as gender egalitarianism, and in so doing fail to reflect on pre-colonial patriarchy and sexism.

Although Native feminists and Tribal women’s voices have been placed in opposition to each other by those who have failed to critically analyze the core of what these two schools of thought are advocating, in actuality they are both calling for a restoration of tradition and culture. They both agree that colonialism has changed Aboriginal life and culture; they both agree that sexism must be addressed; and they both agree on the need to retune traditions.

The method or way of retuning tradition and culture through a Tribal women or Native feminist framework is to revisit our past traditions and reclaim them to be restored in the present. The method that best resembles that process is called ‘Native womanism’. The term ‘womanist’ or ‘womanism’ derives from the 1982 acclaimed novel *The Color Purple* written by African American author Alice Walker. Walker’s explanation that “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” has developed a set of “womanist politics that are characterized by a preference for feminine culture, while having a commitment to the holistic community wellness” (Salleh, p. 104, 1997). Without getting too far ahead of my argument, womanist politics are seen as appropriate for Native women activists because it positions their gender concerns within a community context

and removes the feminist versus sovereignty stigmatization that is placed on Native women who advocate women's rights, which I elaborate on in chapter three. Native American scholar Jaimes*Guerrero (2003) has adopted this womanist principle, and uses it with a Native perspective to create a method for reclaiming traditions that empower Native women. Jaimes*Guerrero explains that Native womanism is the "...re- visioning of a pre-patriarchal, pre-colonialist, and pre-capitalist society..." (p. 67) using 'historical agency' that can assist Native women in restoring the gender balance through women reclaiming their roles and responsibilities. Historical agency is a tool that allows our peoples to revisit history without relying on colonist accounts and to realize that women did indeed have agency, and therefore did not require liberation from the oppression of their domestic roles (ibid.). With this type of re-visioning, matrilineal and matrifocal practices could be restored along with the respect and honour Aboriginal women previously held. This method of reclaiming situates equality into a tribal and traditional paradigm from which both Tribal women and Native feminists draw.

Tribal women and Native feminists must reclaim traditions to address sexism within their communities, governments, and social structures because sexism has been implemented on mass scales through colonialism. Native women experience an intersection of oppressions and sexism as a piece of this larger domination (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003; Mayer, 2007; Smith, 2005). This intersection of oppression is theorized by Jaimes*Guerrero (2003) as patriarchal colonialism: the double burden of racism and sexism experienced by Native American women. This definition is broad because to understand how patriarchal colonialism functions one must also understand a general history of Native American peoples without universalizing them. Native

American communities are not homogenous and they differ from tribe to tribe depending on culture and tradition and how those relate to a specific environment or land. For example, a Plains Cree ceremony will incorporate different environmental elements in comparison to a Coastal Salish ceremony based on geographical differences. However, there are similar or shared principles we see threaded amongst Native American tribes and a common principle is the respect and autonomy women shared with the community pre-colonialism. With the introduction and implementation of European values, patriarchy or the male domination over women was structured into colonial governing policies (Smith, 2005). Women were no longer autonomous in the sense that they were unable to hold political positions or formally influence decisions relating to tribal matters. Further, European attitudes devalued women and their responsibilities, while hypersexualizing and objectifying them. These are a few examples of how Native women experienced sexism from colonizing forces. In addition to sexism is racism where Native women were dehumanized through paternal colonial policies and practices, such as those embedded in the 1876 Indian Act in Canada, where all Native peoples became wards or dependents on the state.

Government policy and religion impose European views and practices of sexism on North American peoples. These attitudes have become adopted into Native ideologies and reproduced in a Native form where women are excluded from male-dominated politics and governing bodies, which are defended as a 'traditional' practice (LaRocque, 2007). For Native American women, patriarchal colonialism is a reality experienced both internally and externally to Native communities, despite this experience, feminism has

not offered a clear and consistent resolution to Native women's oppression. To understand why, we must first review the development of feminism over the last century.

Critiques of Feminism

In terms of feminism there are Native women scholars and activists who consciously avoid identifying themselves under the umbrella of 'feminism' as a way to distinguish their allegiances to community and nationalist goals (Mayer, 2007). In their understanding, the terminology of feminism has connotations tied to colonialism and racial privileging that do not necessarily reflect the political positions or interests of Native women. Instead Native women offer critiques of feminism to communicate the variety of positions that have developed amongst Native women and where they stand in relation to feminism. The major criticisms against North American feminist strains are sectioned into the first and second waves of feminism. First wave feminism is charged with the exclusion of Aboriginal women from obtaining the vote in North America, and racist acts arising from maternal feminism such as Canadian suffragette Nellie McClung launching an attack on Aboriginal women's reproduction (Sanders, 2001). Second wave feminism is criticized by Native women for universalizing gender oppression under the label 'sisterhood', where feminism is thought to largely reflect a white woman's agenda with unity based on shared gender oppression as the signifier for liberation of a certain type of woman. Additionally, feminism has historically tended to ignore the past and ongoing colonial experiences of genocide for Native women, while allowing the white, middle class, heterosexual female reality or perspective to surreptitiously operate as the standard (LaRocque, 1996). Native women's concerns relevant to families and

communities are rarely or never included in the feminist movement or discourse (Tohe, 2000). Overall the feminist movement has largely ignored the challenges and struggles of Native women, causing a majority of them to dismiss it as irrelevant to our concerns; feminism itself has been developed by white women and continues to be widely unconscious of our existence as activists, scholars, and political women (LaRocque, 2007; Lindberg, 2004; Mayer, 2007; Tohe, 2000). In the following section I give a brief survey of North American feminism in the twentieth century and how it directly affected Native women.

Critiques of Feminism: Historical Context

North American feminism can be divided into three waves beginning in the late nineteenth century through to the present twenty-first century. The first wave began in the late nineteenth century and spanned into the early twentieth century with a primary focus on women being recognized as persons and citizens with physical and legal rights, and independence from male kin (Sanders, 2001). In order to exercise these rights, women lobbied for the right to vote and to own property. Rights gained with respect to the vote and property through the first wave did not extend to Native women in either the United State or Canada. In particular, it was not until 1960 that status-Indian women in Canada were allowed to vote in Federal elections without being stripped of their Indian status (Barker, 2006). While this was also the case for status-Indian men, women held fewer electoral and property rights within their own communities from the nineteenth century through to 1951 when modest amendments were made to the Indian Act.

The racial exclusion of non-white women in the first wave feminist movement constituted an attack on their fertility and reproduction. First wave feminism was grounded in an ideology of maternalism (Sanders, 2001). Therefore, first wave feminists often claimed that their role as mothers made them morally superior to men, which would allow them to purify politics if given access to this public sphere. However, this moral superiority of mothers only applied to white, middle-class women, and Canadian suffragette Nellie McClung linked this maternal superiority to reproduction (Devereux, 2005). As a leading figure in the eugenics movement, McClung claimed that it was the responsibility of the state to ensure that good breeding or genetics were passed on, and the role of the white mother of Western European descent as a superior breeder was crucial (Devereux, 2005). The first wave of feminism not only excluded Native American women, but in Canada it blatantly attacked any non-white women's reproduction.

The second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960s and lasted through the 1980s but peaked in the late 60s and early 70s. This wave addressed gender inequalities within the public sector and the workplace, the private sector or the family, as experienced through sexuality and pornography, and women's reproductive rights (Luxton, 2004; Thornham, 2001). The movement called for a unity of women based on the shared experience of sexism, which overlooked the multiple ways, such as race, class, sexuality, disability, and colonialism, that women experience oppression beyond sexism (Thornham, 2001). Again Native American women's experiences and concerns were excluded from the feminist discourse (Tohe, 2000). For example, in terms of reproduction, the twentieth century Western debate between pro-choice and pro-life groups excluded the Western history of sterilization for Native American women (Smith,

2005). Our reproductive rights have been subject to public health policies rooted in genocide. During an American Indian Movement (AIM) activist rally in Washington D.C. in 1972, secret documents pertaining to involuntary surgical sterilization of Native women were retrieved from the Bureau of Indian Affairs' (BIA) office (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992). In 1974, a report from Women of All Red Nations (WARN) was published concluding that the BIA's supposed Indian Health Service (IHS) had sterilized "as many as 42 percent of all Indian women of childbearing age... without their consent" (ibid., p. 326), during the late 1960s and early 1970s. In Canada these types of sterilization programs also existed:² "An extreme example of oppression and paternalism in northern health care was the sterilization of Aboriginal women in the early 1970s, reportedly without their full consent" (Browne & Fiske, 2001, p. 128). Additionally both British Columbia and Alberta passed provincial eugenics legislation for sterilization of people deemed mentally defective during the late 1920s to the early 1970s (Boyer, 2006). With high populations of Aboriginal peoples in these provinces combined with targeting social groups based on social class, ethnicity and gender, Aboriginal women were prime candidates for these sterilization programs; "In Alberta, 2,822 officially approved sterilizations took place; of these, 64 percent were females and 25 percent were Aboriginals even though Aboriginals only accounted for 2.5 percent of Alberta's population at the time" (Cull, 2006, p. 148).³ In 1937, Alberta amended their sterilization

² Available literature on the sterilization of Aboriginal women in Canada is limited. Only a handful of sources exist. Karen Stote's forthcoming PhD work out of the University of New Brunswick entitled *An act of genocide: Eugenics, Indian policy, and the sterilization of Aboriginal women in Canada* traces similar sterilization trends of Native women in the United States; these data can be consulted to compensate for the lack of Canadian resources on the topic.

³ Available data are unclear. Boyer (2006) cites Grekul et.al (2004) who concludes that Aboriginal cases comprised 6% of sterilization in Alberta. They derive these numbers using a data base of the 861 files saved after Alberta destroyed the remainder of the 4,785 original case files. An accurate number of the data

act to remove the requirement for consent from next-of-kin if the patient in question was considered to be mentally defective rather than mentally incapable (Boyer, 2006). In other words, if Aboriginal women were institutionalized they could be sterilized without any consent if the eugenics board, comprised of four people, authorized the procedure (Boyer, 2006). The changes to the consent process resulted in the sterilization of 74% of all Aboriginal patient cases presented to the board (Grekul, Krahn & Odynak, 2004). These genocide tactics on Native women's fertility often get lost in the pro-life versus pro-choice debate where the basic right for Native women to reproduce is unacknowledged and overlooked. In particular, Nellie McClung's racist based maternal and eugenic initiatives are rarely linked to first wave feminism's reproductive oppression of Aboriginal and non-white women. Further reproductive oppression is perhaps the strongest and clearest example of patriarchal colonialism that has been experienced by Native American women in contemporary times.

In summary, the exclusion of Native women's history and experiences from first and second wave feminist activism and discourse has resulted in Native women adopting terminology that is consciously devoid of feminist rhetoric to prevent false unities on the basis of gender, even though they may be engaged in activism that resembles feminist principles, theories, and praxis. For Native women gender discrimination cannot be adequately theorized without including race and colonialism in the analysis.

on sterilizations of Aboriginal women is not given. Cull (2006) presents statistics based on the total number of approved sterilizations for all the years the law was in effect; it is not clear if the 25% figure is derived from the 64% of women.

Critiques of Feminism: Intersections of Race, Sex, and Colonialism

Gender inequality is neither the only nor the most important discrimination Native women experience and feminism has yet to include a decolonization analysis that captures how Native women experience patriarchal colonialism. It is not enough for feminism to theorize about the intersections between racism and sexism when it overlooks the ways colonialism has implemented these oppressions, ignores how white women or settler women have benefited from colonialism, and ignores how North American colonialism is a current genocide against Native American peoples, all of which directly affect Native women's colonial experiences.

The way colonial-implemented oppressions function together for Native women indicates that rallying against a single source of domination does not adequately capture the intersectionality between domination and marginalization for Native women. For example, physical and family violence against Native women is multilayered. The problem with organizing healing projects around this violence is that while it is experienced on an individual interpersonal level in our communities, it stems from state-sponsored violence as a genocide tactic for assimilation of Native peoples in boarding schools and other institutions (Smith, 2005, 2007). By linking state-sponsored violence with interpersonal gender violence in this analysis a template is created for Native women to theorize the connections between racism and sexism and how they both function together to serve colonialism and white supremacy. Further, traditional definitions of violence within feminism have not been able to capture and theorize it with a decolonization analysis (Monture-Angus, 1995; Smith, 2005).

Not only have Native women been excluded from feminist theory and discourse, white women and/or colonial women have benefitted from the oppressions of Native peoples. For example, white women have been able to own the lands that Native peoples were forcibly removed from (Lindberg, 2004), and feminism for the most part has ignored this history. Upon realizing the limitations of feminism Trask (1996) has concluded that “[t]he feminist failure of vision here is a result of privilege –an outright insensibility to the vastness of the human world – because they are white Americans” (p. 911). For more radical nationalist Native women activists like Lorelei Means, an AIM member who grounds her perspective primarily on race, “We are *American Indian* women, in that order. We are oppressed first and foremost as American Indians, as people colonized by the United States of America, *not as women*” (quoted in Jaimes & Halsey, 1992, p. 314, emphasis in original). During Wounded Knee, a controversial standoff between AIM members, who were mostly Native women, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the Pine Ridge tribal council in 1973, Native women requested financial assistance from feminists, but were informed that the money would come with conditions of placing sexism as their first priority (Langston, 2003). In response to the strings of obligation AIM activist Janet McCloud says

You join us in liberating *our* land and lives. Lose the privilege *you* acquired at *our* expense by occupying *our* land. Make *that* your first priority for as long as it takes to make it happen. *Then* we’ll join you in fixing up whatever’s left of the class and gender problems in your society, and our own, if need be. *But* if you’re not willing to do *that*, then don’t presume to tell us how we should go about our liberation, what priorities and values we should have (quoted in Jaimes & Halsey, 1992, p. 314, emphasis in original).

Until colonial or settler women recognize their role as beneficiaries from North American colonialism, Native women may not be inclined to align themselves to feminism.

For feminism to become applicable for Native women, it must include the colonization and marginalization of Native men because their roles function with women's to create the whole Native nations or communities. The traditional complementary gender roles Native women and men used for survival became obsolete with the introduction of a capitalist surplus economy, as only labour resulting in capital became valuable (Sacks, 1974). With a political desire to inhabit North America and with settler populations increasing so did the demand for land, resulting in the introduction of the reservation systems in the United States and Canada (Medicine, 1993). The reservation systems allowed Native people to live on the land, but they could neither benefit from its resources without state regulation nor own the land. Without the use of the land for resources, and in some cases the inability to move off or leave the reserves for hunting, populations became dependent on the state for subsistence, which further devalued traditional Native women's work and destroyed Native male roles (Medicine, 1993; Tohe, 2000). The marginalization of Aboriginal men and their roles becomes increasingly complex as they are subjected to colonial genocide tactics, such as the introduction to addictive substances, and inadequate employment and education opportunities (McGadney-Douglass, Apt & Douglass, 2006). These conditions have contributed to large scale poverty that exists for Aboriginal peoples and is a prevailing social condition that facilitates violence against women. However, Native feminist LaRocque (2007) emphasizes that violence against Aboriginal women by men, and societies' acceptance of it, cannot be solely explained by poverty, colonialism and sexist attitudes or behaviours. She stresses this point because "male violence continues to be much tolerated, explained or virtually absolved by many women of colour, including

Aboriginal women, usually in the defence of cultural difference, community loyalties or nationalist agendas, or out of reaction to white feminist critiques” (p. 61). The oppression of Aboriginal men cannot be used to ignore the issue of violence rather it needs to be contextualized within a colonial analysis that reveals how emasculation has placed extra demands on multi-generational Aboriginal women to assume the providing and caregiving roles (McGadney-Douglass, Apt & Douglass, 2006). It then becomes crucial to regain healthy Aboriginal men through decolonization, as the most important of the male roles is to be the helper and supporter of women; in turn this will support and sustain the community as women are the root of the family (Turpel, 1993). This is a prime example Native women offer in explaining how the culture differences and equal opportunity in the feminist sense do not necessarily translate into liberation on a collective community level. In other words, gender emancipation for Native women is only addressing liberation for one group of individuals, and this is problematic when the survival of the community as a whole requires liberation for all peoples.

Critiques of Feminism: Cultural Differences

In the same vein as above, Native women have rejected certain elements of feminism based on cultural differences. Again, not all Native communities or tribes are homogenous but the principle of gender egalitarianism is a common thread that appears in a majority of tribal traditions or cultural values for Native American nations. Therefore, the feminist claims that patriarchy is universal neglects to both recognize and take our histories and our cultural difference of egalitarianism into account.

Contrary to feminist claims that male dominance is universal, a few Native scholars or Tribal women have claimed that Native women did not experience political exclusion or violence prior to colonialism and European patriarchal attitudes (Allen, 1986; Jaimes & Halsey, 1992). According to these theorists, Native communities were structured on egalitarian principles where women and men governed gender relations with equality and the sexes all shared in economic, ritual, and social responsibilities. Women were viewed with respect and high regard, making it normal for women to hold authority, high status, and autonomy, but this did not overshadow the important status of men, as both contributed differing qualities that were not ranked in juxtaposition to each other (Allen, 1986; Medicine, 1993; Tohe, 2000). These fundamental cultural differences on gender relations reject the need for feminism, when feminism is seen as a reaction to gendered power inequality (Green, 2007), which is argued to not exist in traditional Native cultures. For this reason the feminist concept of equality is then seen as another colonial ideology⁴ being imposed on Native communities.

The egalitarian structure of many Native communities did have patrilineal/patrilocal practices, but these were limited and the majority of peoples were matrilineal/matrilocal where community, individual identity, and kin structures were based on women's heritage (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992; Mihesuah, 2003). These matrilineal/matrilocal structures place women as the root or centre of the family, and they are considered as the backbone of the nation because "family structures centered upon the identities of wives rather than husbands – men joined women's families..." (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992, p. 318). Men were also expected to relocate to their wives' community,

⁴For this thesis I use the Collins English Dictionary definition for ideology: "a body of ideas that reflects the beliefs and interests of a nation, political system, etc and underlies political action".

women owned the property, and the community identity was based on membership through one's mother (ibid.; Tohe, 2000). By virtue of this family structure, women did not rely on men for economics, such as a home, food, or childrearing support, making them less vulnerable to remaining in situations of abuse, violence or domination (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006).

Although this family structure did protect women and children, as Native women we should also be careful about making universal claims of romanticism that position *all* Native tribes as utopias that honour and respect women by virtue of matriarchic organization (LaRocque, 1996). There is evidence of male domination existing prior to contact, and the romantic image of equality that places Aboriginal women on a pedestal where the honour and respect bestowed upon them also excludes them from any labour, obscures the reality that both women and men toiled hard to ensure their collective survival (ibid.). In traditional cultures the "... 'stay-at-home mom' would have been a very cold and hungry woman" (Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006, p. 5). Romantic tendencies aside, the roles of Native women were respected and revered in these traditional contexts, something feminism has often overlooked.

Critiques of Feminisms: Feminism as Academic

Colonial strains of feminism are deemed irrelevant and are criticized for being largely academic. However, when Native feminists place decolonization struggles at the core of their arguments and analysis feminism does indeed become applicable when it comes from our viewpoints and grounded experiences. Literature written by Aboriginal and minority women that is critical of the interlocking effects of sex, race, and colonial

oppression has surfaced, allowing feminism to evolve and create more inclusive politics that attempt to encompass a variety of these concerns. Much of this literature was created when Aboriginal and communities of colour stressed their rejection and denial of feminist theory and activism. In addition these women had to contend with feminisms' unwelcoming nature at the time: "The denial, inability, or resistance on the part of some feminists to address racism is a real issue that affects Aboriginal and minority women within the feminist movement and larger society" (St. Denis, 2007, p. 48).

It has been through African American and African Canadian women's scholarship that the interlocking matrix of gender, race and class comprise significant contributions to feminist theory. Moreover, this conscious-raising within feminism did not desist there, as international workings between Western women and women in developing countries began to inform the feminist praxis; "Most western feminists have learned that global economics and political justice are prerequisites to securing women's rights" (Freedman, 2002, as cited in St. Denis, p. 48). Acknowledging positions of privilege and marginalization and the ways academia functions as a systemic institution that promotes these oppressions provides a theoretical starting point for Native women and communities of colour.

Because feminism has traditionally been so academic Mayer (2007) and Trask (1996) feel it often privileges theory rather than experiences and uses theory to inform its praxis. Mayer believes that "while theory may be enlightening for some readers, it does not give comfort to women whose daily lives are lived challenged with unimaginable pain and despair" (2007, p. 29). Academic theories that are devoid of daily realities experienced by Aboriginal women further remove feminism's relevancy outside the

institution. Although feminism is believed to be "...a women's academic movement that seeks to inform others of women's oppression through various theories and activities" (Ouellette, 2002, p. 26), it is very important to also recognize that within the institution feminism gives voice to women's marginalization that is often forgotten or overlooked (Mayer, 2007). Furthermore, Tohe (2000) brings attention to the fact that over the past twenty years Native women have made accomplishments in politics, occupations and educational spheres and when we enter the Western world feminism becomes an issue as "we must confront and deal with the same issues that affect all women" (p. 109).

Having Aboriginal representation within academics is indeed important, but some Aboriginal women feel that their voice must still comply with the institution's framework for how knowledge is perceived and legitimated. Rather than using theories to explain experiences, Aboriginal women often use the traditional methods of storytelling (LaRocque, 1996; Lindberg, 2004; Mayer, 2007; Trask, 1996). However these types of personal stories are seen as subjective and in direct opposition to objective academic theorizing (LaRocque, 1996). Further, when the voices of Aboriginal women have been silenced for so long their own theories, knowledge, and perspectives become understood as myths that are "...some figment of the cultural imagination" (Jenkins & Pihama, 2001, p. 294). It should be noted that storytelling is a feminist research method within academics and does challenge the institution of objectivity, but it does not address the ways that Aboriginal knowledge and voices functions as myth. Aboriginal voices are present within the institution, however the same non-Aboriginal institutions and people control it by reducing or eliminating alternative forms of expressing knowledge (Mayer, 2007). Although colonial forces are prevalent within the academic institution, some

Aboriginal scholars acknowledge their continued use of storytelling as a method to theorize and communicate the lived truths that women experience.

Thus far I have examined the major critiques of feminism from Aboriginal women, ranging from a discussion on the historical exclusion of Aboriginal women from feminist discourse and theory, to cultural differences pertaining to gender relations, and the ways feminism is perceived as academic and inaccessible to Native peoples. In the following section I explore the complex relationship between Native women and feminism, where Native women's criticisms hold validity, and also where their stereotyping of feminism detracts from forming an educated analysis of how feminism can be appropriately applied to Native experiences and decolonization struggles.

Defining Feminism within Native Scholarship

A majority of Native women scholars and activists have assumed that feminism is a singular, colonial, and racist body of scholarship born from white women who have nothing to contribute to strategizing against sexism for Native women. These accusations are complex because they do contain both validities and inaccuracies. However as Native feminist Verna St. Denis (2007) makes clear, this stereotyping of feminism overlooks its evolutionary process:

...defining feminism is an on-going process involving responding to changing political and social contexts and issues. Unless those Aboriginal women who claim that feminism is not relevant acknowledge this dynamic history and practice of feminism, the engagement, like some, becomes mired in a stereotypical response where feminism is portrayed as merely an expression of a liberal political agenda and is not acknowledged as a body of scholarship and activism (p. 35).

Most frequently Native women's dismissal of feminism focuses, consciously or unconsciously, on principles of Liberal feminism. Liberal feminism has been targeted for its individualism, emphasis on access to education, access to public sector and acquisition of property in conjunction with critiques of family relations, particularly marriage. Discerning feminism's relevancy requires an educated understanding of its progression resulting from critiques and responses to them. However this 'feminism as irrelevant' conventional standpoint is, for some, a reflection of socio-economic factors where Native women have limited access to adequate education in order to both understand and debate the situations where feminism is applicable (St. Denis, 2007). There also remain Native scholars (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992; Lindberg, 2004; Ouellette, 2002) who continue to argue for feminism's irrelevancy claiming that feminism is constructed by and for white women, who have "...little or no understanding of colonial history, Aboriginal histories, or race oppression" (LaRocque, 2007, p. 53).

Many of the criticisms against Liberal feminism from Aboriginal women parallel those from post-colonial and Third World feminists, such as assumptions of universalizing gender oppression and exclusion of non-white women's experiences from the discourse. Although parallels exist between these two theoretical constructs, as Lawrence and Dua (2005) discuss post-colonial feminism follows in the suit with post-colonial and anti-racist theories by neglecting to both recognize and theorize North America's previous and ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples. Nor do these theories investigate the complex relationship that communities of colour have with colonization in particular through being settlers on land stolen from Aboriginal peoples (Lawrence & Dua, 2005).

Theoretical leadership in the critiques of post-colonial and anti-racist theories is provided by Lawrence and Dua (2005) and I rely heavily on their work as they clearly articulate a comprehensive review of leading post-colonial and anti-racist literature. According to Lawrence and Dua (2005) post-colonial and anti-racist theories have created foundations in the ways that racism is articulated, particularly through “migration, diasporic identities, and diasporic countercultures” (p. 130). These theories most often ignore the existence of North American Aboriginal peoples unless to locate them in the past, thereby failing to address or even acknowledge our current presence and the ongoing colonization we experience by the American and Canadian state. Consequently, post-colonialism is not an appropriate theoretical framework for Aboriginal feminism to solely draw from when it re-establishes and perpetuates colonialism as “...reducing Indigenous peoples to those slaughtered suggests that Indigenous peoples in the Americas no longer exist, renders invisible their contemporary situation and struggles, and perpetuates the myths of the Americas as an empty land” (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p. 129).

Authors Lawrence and Dua (2005) explain that another pitfall in post-colonial and anti-racist scholarship is how it often correlates the emergence of European modernity with the enslavement of African peoples. This particular claim creates an image where the history of racism begins with the arrival of slaves to North America, but ignores the genocide and colonization of Aboriginal peoples that occurred before. Further, Lawrence and Dua (2005) explore how exclusion of Aboriginal histories and genocide from anti-racist and post-colonial theories “distorts our understanding of “race” and racism, and of the relationship of people of color to multiple projects of settlement” (p. 132). In other

words, ignoring past and present Aboriginal histories and experiences with colonialism allows people of colour to maintain a blameless ignorance, whether consciously or unconsciously, in their own participation as settlers on Aboriginal stolen lands. Lawrence and Dua (2005) emphasize that people of colour have their own marginalized histories with slavery and settlement projects, which are important issues that should be explored within anti-racist and post-colonial theories. However, by making slavery the defining moment of European modernity and North American racism it again excludes and erases Aboriginal peoples. Additionally, when we are included in post-colonial and anti-racist theorizing our struggles and experiences with colonization and decolonization are not understood as foundational, but as supplementary. Consequently it is not surprising that when Aboriginal peoples are present within anti-racism and post-colonialism we are theorized within a pluralist framework.

Frequently decolonization politics are thought to be the same as anti-racist politics (Lawrence & Dua, 2005). For this reason decolonization gets shifted into a pluralist anti-racism paradigm where it becomes one element within larger anti-racist agendas. This shift causes decolonization to become decentred as pluralism “...while utopian in intent, marginalizes decolonization struggles and continues to obscure the complex ways in which people of color have participated in projects of settlement” (Lawrence & Dua, 2005, p. 131). For Aboriginal peoples to articulate our experiences and struggles with racism and colonialism there has to be a theoretical framework that places ongoing colonization and decolonization projects as fundamental.⁵ Decolonization is the central

⁵ Further consideration of post-colonial theory is merited. However it would be best left until the field of Aboriginal feminism has developed sufficiently to both engage and apply this form of decolonization analysis, laid out in this thesis, on an international level. Such authors as Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Haunani K. Trask (1996) are pioneering the way for international

organizing concept for Aboriginal feminism to investigate how patriarchal colonialism and Aboriginal sovereignty, addressed in chapter three, are experienced and articulated by Aboriginal women.

In summary, to include a gender analysis within a post-colonial one, as post-colonial feminism does, without including the contemporary struggles of Aboriginal peoples, especially in respect to decolonization projects, post-colonial feminist theories also fail to exclusively meet the needs of Aboriginal women. However, this is not to discredit the theoretical and activist work done by post-colonial feminists, or by African American or Black feminists who are often associated with post-colonialism because of their emphasis on anti-racism, especially when their relationships with Aboriginal women were crucial in the development of Aboriginal feminism. Salish/Cree author Lee Maracle (2006) briefly explained at the “Native feminisms: Without Apology” conference that there were few Native feminists in 1973, with major opposition to their existence. Through interactions with other women of colour, in particular Audre Lorde, Native feminists were able to establish themselves as activists and scholars. The criticisms or shortcomings of feminisms that Aboriginal women explore are not solely done in a negative context based on rejection. Instead many Aboriginal feminists recognize the plurality of strains that feminism has to offer⁶, which have been developed to communicate women’s experiences and subordination in patriarchal societies, while offering recommendations and advocacy on ways to dismantle oppressive structures and

Indigenous feminism to theorize issues of decolonization that have been and continue to be overlooked by post-colonial theories.

⁶ Such as cultural, post-modern, post-structural, post-colonial, standpoint, third world, conservative, material, lesbian, ecology, African, and Chicana or Mexican American for example.

improve their conditions with respect for the agency and autonomy of women (Green, 2007).

The organizing principle for feminism is to eliminate patriarchy, but beyond that a universal agenda cannot be determined because such a variety of oppressions and marginalizations exist for women. The diversity of concerns from women has created much debate within feminism, which St. Denis (2007) believes to manifest in a controversial manner. As a result a myriad of political ambitions have been able to survive when they remain in the forefront for they are often subject to continuous dialogue, constituting key feminism's internal criticisms that have forced, and continue to force, the movement to redefine itself. This constant reconsideration and reformulation in feminist theory and praxis allows space for Aboriginal women to both, express feminism's shortcomings for their lived experiences and priorities, as well to create the possibilities for dialogue on shared goals (Mayer, 2007; St. Denis, 2007).

Significant to this debate lies the distinctions between the value of Liberal, individualist feminism, which has been largely rejected, and socialist/materialist and post-colonial feminisms, which have been embraced as a way forward for Native women's activism and theorizing. As socialist feminism focuses on collective emancipation, state powers and state patriarchy, it is a framework that is compatible and harmonious with an Aboriginal analysis of colonial patriarchy, while post-colonial feminisms offer the intersectional frameworks that can be advanced through understanding the multiple oppressions of Aboriginal women.

In the final section of this chapter I introduce the discussion of decolonization to establish a foundation for subsequent chapters.

Native/Aboriginal Feminism

A recent addition to feminist theory and activism, one that has come into being as a result of constant evolution and redefinition, is Native or Aboriginal feminism.

At the core of Aboriginal feminism is decolonization. Decolonization is a multi-faceted concept that requires a recognition and understanding of the past and ongoing genocide against Aboriginal peoples in North America (Lawrence & Dua, 2005).

Overlooking this North American genocide fragments a holistic analysis for Aboriginal peoples since without it our experiences and struggles are inadequately theorized. In the case of Aboriginal feminism decolonization is framed through decolonization struggles that are placed at the centre of the analysis. Native feminists are then positioned to both challenge and strategize around domination resulting from the intersections of colonialism, racism, and sexism (Smith, 2005). This interlocking form of domination is patriarchal colonialism (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003, p. 65). Decolonization is also a process where negative and harmful colonial ideologies are analyzed and replaced with pre-colonial traditional Aboriginal ones. This process involves the method of 'Native womanism' whereby our past stories and traditions of Aboriginal women as respected and empowered must be brought forward and applied in a contemporary context.

When Native feminists, whether they are self-identified or labelled as such, employ decolonization methods by challenging patriarchal colonialism and advocating for women's rights they are frequently disciplined by their tribal communities and fellow Native scholars. These women are accused of renouncing their own cultural values and traditions and replacing them with Western ones. Without getting ahead of my argument,

in the following chapter I further explore the ways Native women are disciplined when they employ decolonization methods to question how patriarchal colonialism has surreptitiously appeared in Native traditions. Further, Native feminists are implicated as ‘assimilated’ and accepting of individualist, imperialist, capitalist ideologies by Native peoples who reject feminism. Here feminism is seen as corresponding with colonial notions of the American and Canadian nation-state that situates Native communities as sub-parts rather than sovereign nations (Smith, 2005); just as Native feminism is seen as an afterthought to mainstream white feminism. Native peoples then become viewed as minorities in the larger populations of North America instead of as citizens from their own individual nations. This attack on Aboriginal nationhood and sovereignty from the nation-state is what Aboriginal opponents of Native feminists accuse them of partaking in. However, Andrea Smith (2007) refutes the negative claim that feminism undermines Native sovereignty, because it simultaneously positions Aboriginal women into mutually exclusive oppositional categories

...there is not necessarily a relationship between the extent to which Native women call themselves feminists, the extent to which they work in coalition with non-Native feminists or value those coalitions, whether they are urban or reservation-based, and the extent to which they are “genuinely sovereignist”(Smith, 2007, p. 95).

Native feminists are accused of rejecting broader Native decolonization goals of sovereignty and nationalism, in exchange for ‘civil rights’ and liberation of the individual, but this argument has the tendency to overshadow the multiple positions regarding feminism articulated by various Native women. For instance, Madonna Thunderhawk, co-founder of Women of All Red Nations (WARN), takes an unconventional approach to understanding feminism by avoidance of stereotyping it and

limiting her theoretical framework of resistance to colonialism and sexism. Conversely, her co-founder Lorelei Means views oppression as stemming from racial, colonial relations without an emphasis on gender. In other words, Thunderhawk is open to a gender analysis as a separate category within decolonization projects, where Means's approach locates gender oppression within decolonization. The concepts offered by these two women are compared in Smith's (2007) work to highlight their similar positions on land rights and decolonization in relation to Native women's marginalization, even though their approaches differ with one deploying gender as a separate category the other weaving gender into a larger context. In chapter three I will further discuss the frequency where Native women's gender oppression is ignored and overshadowed by Native sovereignty discourse in Canada. This discussion shows that although there are similar positions on Native women's oppression and sovereignty, without a concrete gender analysis in a decolonization context Native women's marginalization often becomes overlooked.

The decolonization methods used by Native women to resist sexism in community and mainstream society are complex and diverse and cannot be neatly packaged into dualistic concepts of feminist and non-feminist when their motives are linked to larger projects of sovereignty and reclaiming pre-colonial traditions and principles (Smith, 2007). Smith further argues that theorizing and denying the existence of Native feminism in a sovereignty and nationalist framework is limiting the political approaches and strategizes available for Native women to address sexism within a decolonization framework (ibid.).

Although Native feminism attempts to be inclusive in addressing the interlocking matrix of race, sex, and colonial oppression, it still leaves some Native women with the challenge of discussing the Native voices and concerns with feminism. Métis scholar Emma LaRocque (2007) finds it difficult at times to engage with Native feminism when so much of Native women's struggles have been situated under blanket terms that homogenize group experiences into a collective umbrella, which most frequently deals with status-Indian issues. Yet, LaRocque continues to interact with feminism and identifies with bell hooks' (1984) definition of it

Feminism is the struggle to end sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminist is neither a lifestyle nor a ready made identity or role one can step into (bell hooks, as cited in LaRocque, 2007, p. 56).

As feminism is not possessed by any one particular group and is founded on ending gender-based oppression, collaboration between various groups with common goals can be a resource for Native peoples. Instead of exploiting differences between feminists and Aboriginal peoples, LaRocque explains that feminists can be some of our best allies in that we both use methods of deconstruction and reconstruction. Additionally, individual and community Aboriginal activists are employing similar feminist principles when they work to eliminate Aboriginal dehumanization. In this sense, LaRocque (2007) believes that feminism offers multiple theoretical tools for Aboriginal peoples to examine the role and lived reality of patriarchy. Further, feminism is not based on blaming or complaining about one particular policy, incident, or man, but rather it is about analyzing and understanding systemic social and political relations that privilege men and disadvantage women on the basis of sex (ibid.). Feminism offers building blocks for Native women to

create our own strains of feminism that include our histories and experiences relevant to gender inequality. This is part of the decolonization process where rejection of all forms of colonial ideologies without a thorough assessment is both impractical and unfavourable. In the case of Aboriginal feminism it must undergo the challenge of investigating which theories are compatible with decolonization projects.

In spite of the existing socio-economic and cultural differences between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal women, feminism indeed remains advantageous for building our analysis and goals for gender equality. Feminism cannot be solely attributed to white women when Aboriginal women have fought in the past and continue to fight for human rights even if these movements do not carry the name and language of feminism (Smith, 2008). For St. Denis (2007) critical opinions and debates amongst Aboriginal peoples and feminism are beneficial and constructive in creating strategies for eliminating patriarchal colonialism. Aboriginal scholar Mayer (2007) believes that the creation of dialogues among and within tribes and with non-Aboriginal women will foster survival of Native culture. These dialogues would represent the traditional ways of sharing knowledge for survival and creating relationships with Native women in hopes of bridging unity amongst tribes and for rural and urban peoples as well. By using past traditions for knowledge sharing in a contemporary context Lorraine Mayer (2007) is employing the method 'Native womanism' as a way to empower Native women within feminist dialogues. Further, by exchanging our knowledge, Native women can learn how colonial impacts are internally manifesting themselves within our communities and relationships, as well as the external ones, but more importantly we may learn new tactics to combat them (Mayer, 2007). Additionally, a reciprocity of knowledge could open up dialogue

between all women to address cultural misconceptions and give a platform for relationships to be developed. It is important to create space for these dialogue amongst ourselves even when we are in conflict with each other because it is precisely the paradoxes and contradictions that we disagree on that can "...be used as a justification by dominant institutions to ignore Aboriginal claims for justice" (2007, p. 50). We need our Aboriginal viewpoints to be diversified so that our examinations and approaches for liberation cannot be used against us to further our marginalization. In response to this LaRocque (2007) calls for the feminist/academic communities to decolonize themselves regarding the interpretation of Aboriginal women's work and intellectual positions and because our multiple positions are divided, complicated and layered, feminism has to build new theoretical approaches and methods to critically think through the current issues challenging Aboriginal women.

Additionally, in order for feminism to be relevant to Native communities, Native women are asserting that Western women need to consider our claims for culture equality, to take responsibility for the role they have with our colonial problems, and to do this by developing solutions for the social and economic issues we face in Native communities, as Native peoples (Turpel, 1993). Strategizing decolonization theory and praxis with Native women is a starting point, but it is necessary for feminists to listen to Native women's voices, take direction, and be present in a supportive capacity (Trask, 1996), while allowing Native women to exercise their political and cultural agency. Feminists can also support Native nations by ensuring their cultures and political structures are given equal legitimacy with the colonial perspective that dominates Western culture (ibid.). Despite the colonial barriers, Aboriginal women have identified

that there have been instances where feminist organizations have supported Aboriginal women's activism for equal membership rights.

So far, resulting from the critiques and positions on feminism by Native women the categories of 'Tribal woman' and 'Native feminist' have emerged. Most often these two have been situated in opposition to each other as either for or against feminism, and they each stereotype and make uneducated accusations about the other's position.

However, what they do both agree on is the need for the restoration of cultural traditions where Aboriginal women were respected for their differences, and held positions of authority and leadership. For Tribal women these traditional viewpoints are thought to stop discrimination against women, rather than calling for foreign concepts of gender equality via (white) feminism. Conversely, for Native feminists it is problematic to blindly reclaim our traditions without critically analyzing their relevancy or whether they have been affected by patriarchal colonialism.

In summary, I began this chapter asking: what is Aboriginal feminism and how does it distinguish itself from women-centred politics and movements? The key elements that comprise Aboriginal feminism all centre on decolonization. By placing decolonization at the root of their analysis Aboriginal feminists are able to theorize and mobilize against patriarchal colonialism. This oppression has been surreptitiously weaved into our cultures and political institutions, and in particular has been manifesting itself through traditionalism. By claiming cultural relevancy patriarchal colonial traditionalism has been allowed to operate largely unquestioned in Native communities, cultures, and institutions. Aboriginal feminism is equipped to critically question the origins of these traditions through a decolonization approach and in the following chapter I will be

investigating Native women's viewpoints and offering an in-depth analysis on the issues surrounding traditionalism and gender equality.

Chapter Two: Decolonization and Traditionalism

Drawing from the theories developed in the previous chapter, this chapter's main focus is to investigate why Aboriginal feminism needs to question concepts of traditionalism as axioms or given truths and how by doing this we are engaging in a process of decolonization. For this chapter the decolonization project concentrates on the removal of harmful and antithetical colonial ideologies from Native perspectives and worldviews and replacing them with contemporary versions of pre-colonial Native principles and worldviews, while interrogating traditionalism. Further, the colonial ideologies in question arise from patriarchal colonialism, as defined in the chapter one. Aboriginal feminists must be aware and critical of how patriarchal colonialism has both created and promoted negative images of Native women in order to silence our voices and remove us from political and leadership positions.

The chapter begins with a brief definition of colonialism in order to contextualize the process of decolonization whereby Native peoples assess and evaluate our pre-colonial and colonial principles. This framework is then linked to the amalgamation of patriarchal colonialism within culture and tradition and explores the construction of negative Native female images and femininity as a method of marginalization. The chapter moves into the manifestation of the constructed Native womanhood through examples of ideological shifts within the gender complementary system. Through Native women's writings the most prevalent of these examples are examined. In the subsequent section I will pull these overarching theories about Native women's femininity and patriarchal gender roles into a context of exclusion from Canadian political and leadership spheres, which establishes the foundation for discussions on discourse and

sovereignty in the following chapter. I have deliberately chosen to focus on a Canadian context for reasons of length and research, as including an entire North American context is not feasible in this thesis project.

The structure of this chapter is partitioned into two major sections; the first, as described in the above paragraph, will contextualize Native women's oppression through colonization, and the second will explore the methods that Native women use to address and remedy these systems of oppression. The second section is divided into two parts and the first examines how negative stereotypes of Native women function for Tribal women and Native feminists. The second part addresses the ways Native women activists approach and remedy these stereotypes through their own pre-colonial claims of traditionalism. These strategies are situated into four main categories: 1) feminism as a traditional concept, 2) feminism as useful political and theoretical tools, 3) Native women's organizations as traditional and 4) the reasons required for Native women to question traditions and the ways to go about it.

Section One

Colonialism and Decolonization

The definition of colonialism used by Jaimes*Guerrero (2003) is the control of a dependent group of people by a foreign power which has yet to establish itself as indigenous to the environment. The dependent peoples are recognized as a nation(s) while the colonists seek to undermine this through domination over the existing inhabitants, land, and natural resources.

Colonial domination over North America's original inhabitants has also included a radical ideological shift where the colonizers change the values and ways Native peoples think. In this way colonialism has implanted European culture and values onto Native peoples, most notably through missionary work such as residential schools, state administered forced adoption and child apprehension programs, and state marriage policies to name a few examples. Further, the process of colonialism has shattered, traumatized, and fragmented Native values and belief systems, creating openings for Western or European values to be forced upon the peoples (Martin-Hill, 2003). These European values must be critically assessed as to whether they are compatible with contemporary Native values and belief systems notwithstanding the fact that these foreign values have also become incorporated into the cultural values and Native traditions. This mental or ideological amalgamation of values has caused uncertainty for Native peoples as to what our pre-colonial values are and now requires Native peoples to assess both European beliefs as well as our own (Monture-Angus, 2008).

A goal for Aboriginal feminism is to decolonize from oppressive and harmful values brought into our cultures through colonialism. For Aboriginal feminism there is an emphasis on gender decolonization that is to be achieved by using 'Native womanism' to recall pre-colonial values in attempts to eradicate the patriarchal colonialism that Native women experience.

Decolonization is a mental process that requires Aboriginal peoples to "...liberate ourselves from the ideological constraints of the colonial mentality that plagues present day Indigenous political and governing structures and Indigenous thought" (Simpson, 2006, p. 25). Removing the colonial mentality and ideologies that are antithetical to

Indigenous cultures and thought is the first step of decolonization, but these must then be replaced with Aboriginal ideologies. It is a return to traditionalism or "...a re-traditionalization of our thinking and our living based on individual Indigenous cultural and intellectual traditions" (ibid) that will complete the process of decolonization. To be traditional is to understand and live authentically or as closely as possible to the lessons or ways that have been originally taught to us (Monture-Angus, 1999). This return to tradition requires "...our people to be culturally rooted, physically and spiritually strong, capable of living independently in natural environments, and capable of maintaining and nurturing the relationships that support Indigenous kinds of governance" (Simpson, 2006, p. 26). To accomplish this type of physical and spiritual restoration, we need to open our minds and hearts with a spiritual awakening and revolution to release the domination, fear, and shame colonialism inflicts.

Decolonization is a major goal for Aboriginal peoples but in order to draw from our individual cultures and intellectual traditions we must first be able to distinguish what our true cultural values and traditions are. Since our peoples have been subjected to foreign European values over time these have become adopted and espoused as Aboriginal cultural values. This has created confusion amongst Aboriginal peoples as to what are our pre-colonial and core fundamental values. Additionally, the confusion Aboriginal peoples are experiencing around cultural values is increasingly problematic because it has made our traditions vulnerable to interpretation by those within our communities who seek power from exploiting and oppressing their own people. As Monture-Angus (1999) recognizes "The spirit of colonialism now also sadly vests in

some Aboriginal people and Aboriginal colonialism” (p. 32) and there are Native people who interpret our values and traditions to gain control

The fragmentation of our cultures, beliefs and values as a result of colonialism has made our notions of traditions vulnerable to horizontal oppressions --- that is, those oppressed people who need to assume a sense of power and control do so by thwarting traditional beliefs (Martin-Hill, 2003, p. 108).

The adoption of patriarchal colonialism as a traditional value in Aboriginal cultures has been used to silence and exclude Aboriginal women from political and governing positions and this is particularly concerning for Aboriginal feminism, and all the more problematic when pre-colonial and colonial patriarchal values and practices are upheld in supporting one another.

Native Women’s Femininity and Womanhood

One result from the amalgamation of colonial ideologies into Native cultures is the distortion of our traditional values. A very prevalent form of this distorted traditionalism is patriarchal colonialism which subordinates Native women through structures of sexism and racism as explained in chapter one. The origins of patriarchal colonialism and its continuation in Western and Native cultures are tied to the colonial creation of negative Native female imagery and femininity.

Native women’s femininity has been manipulated into false and sexualized dichotomies to serve European interests where women are associated with land and profit (Anderson, 2004; Mzinegiizhigo-kwe Bédard, 2006). When European settlers described the American landscape they would often use Native women’s bodies as a metaphor to convey the richness and bounty (Anderson, 2004). In doing this women’s bodies became

part of the landscape representing the new and ‘virgin land’ as open for possession, consumption, and exploitation. The link between land and body served to both create and establish Native women’s femininity as an archetype grounded in profit, and men’s sexual pleasure (ibid.). The Native female archetype manifests into a sexualized dichotomy where Native women are portrayed as either the ‘Indian Princess’ or ‘Dirty Squaw’ (ibid.). Although both of these archetypes are hyper-sexualized, it is the ‘Indian Princess’ who receives honorary status for her willingness to help the colonizer and is rewarded with marriage and assimilation into his culture. The ‘Dirty Squaw’ emerged as Indigenous groups began to resist colonization because, as Kim Anderson (2004) explains, this negative female imagery proved useful to the colonizer.

The “uncivilized” squaw justified taking over Indian land. She eased the conscience of those who wished to sexually abuse without consequence. She was handy to greedy consumers. Dirty and lazy, she excused those who removed her children and paved the way for assimilation into mainstream culture. She allowed for the righteous position of those who participated in the eradication of Native culture, language, and tradition (p. 229).

Further, using negative images of Native womanhood as justification for colonizing the Native peoples also became a measuring tool for white femininity, where all that was ‘good’ and desirable was opposite of the constructed Native women’s femininity. This type of ‘othering’ of Native women’s femininity is still very present in Western culture and according to Janice Acoose (1995) Native women continue to be conceptualized in a “...very male-centred white-european-christian, and now a white-eurocanadian, ideology...” (p. 43). However, these stereotypes are particularly damaging because they serve to inform Western institutions with the stereotypical dichotomized images of Native women based on gender and racial notions of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ (ibid.).

Additionally, these demeaning images of Native women are very present in the contemporary Western cultural imagination as they are perpetuated and publicized by media through Western movies and Hollywood. The justification of colonialism using these stereotypical images is part of larger dehumanization ideologies for they are the same ones used as a rationale for violence against Native women.

The misogynistic European stereotypes of Native women as uncivilized and promiscuous became a rationalization for indoctrinating Native peoples with Christian law and doctrine through missionary work and residential schools with a particular emphasis on gender relations (Martin-Hill, 2003; Smith, 2005). These Christianized gender ideologies exalted women for their supportive roles in the private domestic sphere, while excluding them from leadership positions in the public realm. In many Native communities these Christian gender roles have been adopted and rebranded as ‘traditional’; excluding women from ceremonies and placing cultural restrictions on their behaviours (Martin-Hill, 2003). This type of sexism resulting from colonialism has developed into a “complex multi-layered “colonial” version of traditionalism [which] justifies the subordination of Indigenous women” (Martin-Hill, 2003, p. 107). Tradition is now used as a buzz word to both subordinate and silence women.

Native scholar Dawn Martin-Hill (2003) explores the creation of the ‘traditional’ silent and obedient Native woman and calls her ‘She No Speaks’.

Who is She No Speaks? She is the woman who never questions male authority. She never reveals her experiences of being abused by the man who is up there on that stage, telling the world about the sacredness of women and the land. While New Age women – the middle-class white women who seek out Indigenous spirituality – flock to soak up the traditional man’s teachings, She No Speaks serves him coffee. She is the woman who knows about sexual abuse, since it happened to her from her earliest memories. She is quiet, she prays, she obeys, she raises the

children, she stays home, she never questions or challenges domination – she is subservient (p. 108).

This is the quintessential definition of a patriarchal colonial ‘traditional’ Native woman and this particular image has only been exacerbated by racist and sexist colonial cultural stereotypes. The sexism that exists in Native communities’ works in a feedback loop with larger Western society where sexism has been instilled through colonialism and where pre-colonial patriarchy persisted; it is adopted and rebranded as traditional or relative to Native cultures, and is then confirmed and maintained by mainstream society.

The fragmentations of Aboriginal values and belief systems have allowed for the imposition of harmful gender ideologies particularly regarding Native women. These ideas have become implemented into the cultures and have been adopted as traditional. In the next section I explore the ways these negative images and patriarchal colonialism manifest themselves within the complementary gender system and the vast confusion it has caused amongst Aboriginal peoples regarding what is actually traditional.

Balance Within Complementary Gender Roles

As explained in chapter one, many Native American cultures were structured on complementary gender systems where gender roles and responsibilities were interdependent and respectful of each other (Anderson, 2000; Martin-Hill, 2003; Simpson, 2006). These gender structures have become known and referred to as a ‘balance’ in Native women’s writings and they signify a large culture difference between Western and Native societies. However, more recently Native women have noticed the impacts of distorted traditionalism and patriarchal colonialism within our communities and belief systems, causing them to question complementary gender roles and

responsibilities. As distorted traditionalism is a mental shift in ideologies at times the subtle and surreptitious shifts in gender attitudes amongst Native peoples have been difficult to address.

The 'balance' occurring between genders largely relegates Native women's roles to the domestic sphere, which is not necessarily problematic in itself, but attitudes towards Native women's responsibilities and roles can be (LaRocque, 2007). Native women's domestic roles as mothers and women have become devalued or essentialized whereby women are expected to perform domestic duties by virtue of their sex, and because it becomes women's work it is considered less important than masculine type roles and responsibilities. A dilemma occurs now that the balance of our gender roles are based on domination and subordination, rather than complementarity, and "balance" has become the new buzz word for keeping women in domestic and nurturing roles" (p. 55). Native women have performed these roles and responsibilities from pre-colonial times, however while the role itself does not change expectations and values associated with it do. Further, there is similar occurrence in ceremonies where women's exclusion based on complementary gender systems have taken on a new negative meaning as the attitudes surrounding them have certainly altered (Deerchild, 2003).

Below I draw on the most prominent examples of attitude shifts, as identified in Native women's writings, to convey how patriarchal colonialism manifests itself through distorted traditions. These examples include the transformation of pre-colonial reverence for women's bodies to post-colonial 'pollution' with menstruation, the universal attire of Aboriginal peoples to the mandatory skirt wearing for women, the connection women's bodies have to the earth and creation to the exclusion of women from the drumming

circle based on masculine superiority, and the essentialization of women's bodies and motherhood through traditionalist claims.

Examples of attitude shifts.

From reverence to pollution.

Traditionally, the gender complementary belief⁷ system viewed women and their bodies as revered and respected for their ability to give life and nurture as mothers (Anderson, 2000). Resulting from women's life-giving ability, ceremonies were created to reflect the sacredness of women's bodies. The most common of these ceremonies were tied to women's menstruation beginning with a puberty ritual and continued with moon lodges where women would retreat when they were menstruating.

Diné, or Navajo, scholar Laura Tohe (2000) experienced a four-day puberty ceremony where as a young woman she was taken in by the women of the community and given care and advice. The ceremony is a celebration of a girl's transition into a woman, and every day for three days she rises at dawn to run, shout and greet the sun and earth. On the fourth morning her entire family runs with her as a joining and celebration of her transition. The final evening also includes the spiritual blessings of the family and community to welcome the girl as a new woman.

Similarly, in Anishinaabe culture female puberty is a time of celebration where young girls are taken in by the women of the community and taught the importance and value of their bodies. According to Renée Mzinegiizhigo-kwe Bédard (2006) these

⁷ A caution when using this type of language as 'belief' often contains embedded notions of sacredness, which make it difficult to examine the cultural norm at issue when it is termed as a 'belief'. Further, to question this 'belief' is then to question something sacred and limits potential discussion of cultural practices as oppressive.

puberty ceremonies are also linked to larger Anishinaabe teachings on values of respect, reverence, responsibility, and reciprocity and the many ways these are manifested through being a woman.

Women's moon lodges have a variety of functions ranging from rest, relaxation and female bonding, to sacred space for prayer when women are exerting a phenomenal amount of power (Anderson, 2000). In traditional or pre-colonial understandings of menstruation, women were believed to be in a state of heightened spiritual space and therefore to hold large amounts of power. Their exclusion from specific ceremonies during this time was recognition of their powerful state, but also an understanding that this power had the potential to draw away or disrupt energy. Because menstruating women had this special ability to draw energy, at times during other ceremonies a moon lodge was, and often still is, set up for women to "...pray that any negativity could be filtered through their blood and back into the ground so that it could be neutralized through Mother Earth" (Anderson, 2000, p. 74).

Since the imposition of patriarchal European ideologies following contact this recognition of the sacredness of women's bodies has shifted to mean pollution, contamination, sin, and inferiority (Anderson, 2000). The missionaries, who established churches and interacted with the communities, taught Aboriginal women the patriarchal religious notion that menstruation was a curse. Further, their influence with notions of contamination were compounded through residential schools as "...in the 1930's, almost 75 per cent of all Native children in Canada between the ages of seven and fifteen were attending them" (Anderson, 2000, p. 75).

The stories of female Native adults who as children attended these schools describe menstruation as a humiliating, degrading, and shameful experience. During menstruation they were subjected to intrusive inspections of their undergarments and bed sheets, and upon any bleeding on these materials the girls were punished through physical violence, in one case the nuns shaved a girl's head for her unpreparedness of her period (Anderson, 2000). These extreme and dehumanizing examples, which are horrifically common amongst residential school attendants, trace the ideological shift surrounding women's bodies. Additionally, Martin-Hill (2003) argues that residential schools were a key source in the transformation of Aboriginal traditional laws and practices to Christianized traditional laws that have become disciplinary and degrading towards women.

The influence of Christian patriarchal traditions on Aboriginal culture has resulted in more extreme examples of punitive measures used against women, but there also exist less obvious ways that women are dishonoured for their bodies. Some examples are, the scolding and removal from a ceremony for a menstruating woman by a male Elder, or the removal of a girl from a ceremony to be left alone in a hostile community while her entire family returned to the ceremony (Martin-Hill, 2003). In a less extreme situation Métis scholar Emma LaRocque (2007) explains this shift in attitude with an example of a childhood experience; she was instructed to avoid walking over her father and brother's hunting/trapping supplies, which she internalized as being the underlying moral reason that 'girls brought bad luck'. She then explains the cultural defence as restricting women's actions due to menstrual taboos and spirituality, that during menstruation women are most spiritually powerful and this power can disrupt other energies when used

without precaution. However, she was premenstrual and although her family could be preparing her actions for when she entered puberty the message she received was that women were bad luck. The shift from power to contamination that has influenced many Aboriginal peoples raises alarm for LaRocque in this instance and for her this only highlights the need for Native women to question if these taboos are solely linked to spirituality or if they arise from deeply seeded patriarchy.

The skirt.

Another common taboo linking biology, gender, and spirituality that has come under criticism deals with traditional beliefs about feminine attire, which compel Aboriginal women to wear skirts during ceremony as a method for connecting with the earth and communicating women's power to produce and nurture life (Deerchild, 2003; LaRocque, 2007). This tradition has been accepted in many Aboriginal communities and ceremonies without question, to the point where some women have been reprimanded and removed from ceremony because they were not wearing skirts (Martin-Hill, 2003). However, LaRocque discredits this gender myth by arguing that these 'traditional' gendered appearances were absent in some pre-colonial Aboriginal communities, in fact she claims that colonial accounts show very few difference, amongst Aboriginal tribes and nations, for Aboriginal attire altogether. For LaRocque it is offensive to indicate that her spirituality is compromised or that she is less connected to the earth based entirely on her clothing. Moreover the notion of a universalized 'womanhood' does not exist in Aboriginal cultures, nor would it be structured in the Western duality of feminine and

masculine (LaRocque, 2007). Again, as Native women we need to continue questioning if these seemingly oppressive taboos are indeed linked to our traditional spiritualities.

Exclusion from the drumming circle.

Dakota/Ojibwa artist Lita Fontaine follows this pattern of Native women questioning traditions and spiritualities through her work. From an interview with Fontaine, Rosanna Deerchild (2003) offers us another example of patriarchy spreading into our ancient philosophies, ceremonies, and gender roles through the story of the drum. The story explains that

long ago there was no drum among our peoples. Then the spirits gave a vision to a woman. She was gifted with the drum and told it was the heartbeat of Mother Earth. She returned to her people with the first drum. They were overjoyed with such a beautiful gift. As part of the vision the spirits told her that, although she would bring the drum to the people, it was the men who would carry the drumstick. It was the men who would play the heartbeat for the people. Because in that way they would remain connected to Mother Earth and so understand their relationship to women (p. 97).

Patriarchal attitudes have shifted the meaning of this story; before women did not play the drum because they already shared a connection with Mother Earth based on their life-giving and nurturing parallels, now women are excluded from playing the drum based on sexist men-only rules. It is often difficult to see the attitude shift because both pre and post-colonial men are responsible for playing the drum. The manifestation of the tradition has not changed, but the meaning behind it has been skewed and forgets that it was a woman who gave the drum to men. Because women deserve respect for their life-giving and nurturing abilities akin to Mother Earth, women and men were expected to stand in

equality around the drum, not with women excluded and standing behind the drumming circle in the name of sexist traditionalism (Deerchild, 2003).

Essentialization of motherhood.

The balance of the complementary gender roles valorize Native women's nurturing/mothering, and has also become the quintessential marker for culture difference between Western and Aboriginal cultures. So much so that this valorization has begun to function as a stereotypical racialized gender ideology where Native women are essentially feminine, and maternal, and these expectations are authenticated through claims of cultural tradition, and biology (LaRocque, 2007). Because these portrayals of Aboriginal women as mothers and healers are widely publicized by policy makers, communities, writers, and academics these roles become very popular and common stereotypes, and they can create problems for women who do not meet or practice these expectations. For instance LaRocque (2007) takes issue with Kim Anderson's (2000) "Aboriginal ideology of motherhood" (p. 171) which recognizes the innate physicality of women as lifegivers and therefore as those who produce the next generation, the future, the nation. Aboriginal women birth the people, but they also have the responsibility to raise and nurture them and reverence is given to women for both their ability to birth and nurture. However biologically producing children is not a fundamental requirement for Aboriginal women to assume roles of caregiving. LaRocque explains that this ideology idealizes motherhood to such a degree that it has become synonymous with womanhood. To achieve womanhood or femininity one must participate in the practice of mothering, whether it be biological, adopted, extended kin, or even internationally. This type of

moralizing of mothers can be dangerous when it essentializes women into these roles based on the idea that all Native women are biologically nurturing; should we act out of accordance then we are no longer ‘good’ or ‘real’ Aboriginal women. Further, LaRocque (2007) criticizes Anderson for essentializing womanhood as motherhood, when “Many women today choose not to be mothers, and they neither have desire nor appreciate being forced into what is essentially an heterosexist framework, even if a feminine one” (p. 63).

The above examples not only illustrate how patriarchal colonialism has affected Aboriginal gender roles and the ways that Native women are using these roles as empowering but also how they are also questioning them and traditions as a process of decolonization.

The main focus of this chapter is to explore why Aboriginal feminism needs to question concepts of traditionalism in order to investigate where patriarchal colonialism is operating in our cultures. So far we have explored the fragmentation of Native cultural belief systems as a result of colonialism and analyzed the way patriarchal colonialism has become integrated on an ideological level through negative female imagery, and the gender complementary system. The next section links how these ideological changes manifest themselves for Aboriginal women in the political arena and serve to entrench patriarchal values and norms, by maintaining Aboriginal women’s positions in supportive and domestic roles, with Aboriginal men occupying and benefitting from leadership, policy making, and political roles. In the following chapter, I will explore how Aboriginal women’s exclusion from leadership and politics based on distorted traditionalism extends into Aboriginal sovereignty and nationhood movements.

Political exclusion of Aboriginal women.

The exclusion of Aboriginal women from political and leadership positions is tied to sexism, but the sexism that exists in Native communities' works in a feedback loop with larger Western society. Whether sexism was absent or present prior to colonization it has been reinforced, reinterpreted and strengthened through colonialism. Sexism has been instilled through colonialism, it has then been adopted and rebranded as traditional or relative to Native cultures, and is then confirmed and maintained by mainstream society. The sexist exclusionary process begins with colonial contact where European men refused to "...engage in economic-political negotiations with Native women designated by their nations for that role" (Smith, 2008, p. 172). Smith believes this refusal removed Native women from the political leadership and negotiation sphere and influenced Native nations to devalue Native women's leadership as it was unrecognized as important. Exclusion of women from leadership and negotiations then becomes normalized and legislated through such documents as the Indian Act, and over time it becomes adopted as traditional and confirmed by the colonial government's refusal to include Native women during negotiations.

Currently, as Aboriginal women we experience political domination in multiple spheres with exclusions from Aboriginal and Canadian constitutional developments, policy, and legislation, leadership within Canadian government bodies and in the higher levels of national Aboriginal organizations (LaRocque, 2007). For example the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), previously known as the National Indian Brotherhood, is the main Aboriginal organization both recognized and funded by the Canadian state and continues to be male dominated, as does Aboriginal governance (Sunseri, 2000).

Although a recognized Aboriginal organization, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) has been continuously denied participation in constitutional forums by the Canadian government citing that they only represent half of the Aboriginal population and therefore could not be a national representative (Krosenbrink-Gelissen, 1991). However, representatives from the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Council of Canada, the Inuit Tapirisat of Canada, who had female representatives but did not include women's issues, and the Métis National Council, who only formed days prior to the First Minister's Conference of 1983, were all invited to participate on Aboriginal constitutional talks. NWAC was allowed into the conference as an observer (Krosenbrink-Gelissen, 1991). This pattern of exclusion continued with NWAC being denied a seat at the table during the constitutional negotiations in 1992, known as the Charlottetown Accord.

After repeated exclusion from constitutional and political negotiations NWAC employed a strategy to gain access by appealing to the principles of Native gender complementary systems. In an effort to create sexual equality by adhering to concepts of traditionalism, where Aboriginal women were considered equal with men based on their roles as mothers, NWAC linked traditional mothering ideology with Indian folk or traditional law instead of state law (Fiske, 1993).

Just as distorted traditionalism exalts servitude and relegates Aboriginal women to the domestic sphere, so it has severed the pre-existing connection between the private and public realms, replicating colonial views that the personal or home issues are separate and non-political. The combination of this notion of separate spheres with negative female imagery and the idealized traditional silent and subservient woman, 'She No Speaks'

continues to exclude Aboriginal women from leadership positions. Consequently, the move to politicized motherhood for sexual equality was unsuccessful and NWAC was excluded from constitutional negotiations in 1992, forcing their voices and issues into a human rights framework based on constitutional laws which include individual and collective rights.

The move to appeal to human rights sparked the main criticism from AFN where they accused NWAC of ignoring the collective rights of Aboriginal people, and thereby undermining collective liberation or sovereignty movements to focus special status onto the individual rights of women (Sunseri, 2000). This accusation overlooks the historical context of Aboriginal women's displacement from their Native communities based on sex discrimination and marriage laws in the Indian Act prior to 1985 that I will be addressing in the subsequent chapter. Further, this focus on Aboriginal women's rights was in response to the constitutional talks during the 1980s where NWAC's position proclaimed that sexual equality between Aboriginal women and men must be constitutionally protected and stand above Aboriginal self-government to ensure that Aboriginal women's rights were not violated through sex discrimination at band council levels (Krosenbrink-Gelissen, 1991). This theme continued when NWAC "argued the collective rights of Aboriginal women related to gender equality were not protected and integrated into the Accord" (Sunseri, 2000, p. 148) during the 1992 Charlottetown Accord talks.

Section Two

In the following section I will be exploring how Native women are addressing the negative Native female imagery, distorted traditionalism, and exclusion from politics. Firstly, I will explain how stereotypes around Native women function for Tribal women and Native feminists. Secondly, I will explore the ways that Native women activists address and remedy these stereotypes through their claims of traditionalism with 1) feminism as a traditional concept, 2) feminism as useful political and theoretical tools, and 3) Native women's organizations as traditional. Lastly, I will examine the reasons that require Native women to question traditions and the ways they might go about it.

Stereotypes of Native Women

Unfortunately deeply ingrained sexist images of Native women have not only been internalized by Native men, but also by Native women. It seems to me that stereotypes have been internalized by many and reappear in gendered political discussions. In consequence one finds that Tribal women are represented as embracing patriarchal colonialism, while Native feminists are accused as selling out to gender equality. These charges and stereotypes represent extremist attitudes that generalize the positions of Native women even when they only actually account for a small number of Native women. However inaccurate they may be, these stereotypes are most effective in punishing Native women who speak out against patriarchal colonialism by discrediting their character and thereby silencing their complaints.

Tribal women have been accused by Native Feminists of blindly accepting and promoting distorted or sexist traditionalism as a method for falsely advocating women's

equality and collective Native sovereignty (Mayer, 2007). These Tribal women are generalized as suppressing women's equality and placing the goals of sovereignty above individual rights as a way to avoid further fragmentation of community through liberation struggles. For this reason, these stereotyped Tribal women are deemed as anti-feminist and anti-woman, and any of their characteristics that remotely resemble 'She No Speaks' are seen to automatically regard them as oppressed and blinded by patriarchy. For example, in some tribes Aboriginal women are known for their gentle manner and soft spoken voices, which are traits that remain valued (Mayer, 2007). When Tribal women's voices are delivered in a gentle or 'soft spoken' characteristic, it has caused stereotypes to flourish, as gentle is positioned as being synonymous with nurturing (Mayer, 2007). This stereotype is further exacerbated when gentle and nurturing are applied in the context of 'She No Speaks' where domestic responsibility and silence are the markers of oppression.

The attack against Tribal women as being both unwilling and unable to question tradition is entwined with Native feminists' criticism of the gender complementary systems where Tribal women are perceived as oppressed if they accept domestic and caregiving roles. This type of harmful stereotyping in the name of feminism is neither new nor original, but is most often attributed by Tribal women to Liberal feminism's attack on the feminine and anything related to such. Although this is not the goal of Liberal feminism, their opponents misrepresent liberal emphasis on equality in the workplace and public sphere as an attack on the domestic realm and family.

Inaccurate interpretations of Liberal feminism have found their way into more extreme versions of Native feminism and continue to be applied to Tribal women, who

consequently feel their roles and responsibilities as mothers and homecare workers are undervalued and ridiculed. It is most important to recognize that Tribal women who do act as caregivers and find empowerment from gentle qualities and caregiving responsibilities should not automatically be labelled as oppressed and surrendering to male domination. Nor should we “ignore the possibility of different cultural worldviews with equally different interpretations of power” (Mayer, 2007, p. 34). Some Tribal women do feel that their power derives from the home and mothering, but the fact that they speak out through activism and exercise their agency and voices noticeably highlights the misjudgement they receive from Native feminists who believe that Tribal women are simply advocating for strict obedience to tradition because they have internalized patriarchal domination (Mayer, 2007).

As in any group of women there will be a variety of political opinions and as so there *are* Native women who represent ‘She No Speaks’, advocate distorted traditionalism and sovereignty, and believe that gender equality should not be a priority as it takes away from the whole of Native peoples’ struggles. However, this is *one* position, and Native feminists cannot and should not universalize any and all Native women who draw upon traditional paradigms as advocating sexism, nor should they all be grouped under the label Tribal women. As found within the works of Andrea Smith (2005) and M.A. Jaimes*Guerrero (2003), the unfair overgeneralization of Tribal women does nothing to capture what is really occurring, as the majority of Tribal women are recalling pre-colonial traditions using ‘Native womanism’ with a focus on women’s equality within community interests and sovereignty movements.

These many Aboriginal cultures to embrace and respect qualities of gentleness has come to also function as a stereotype similar to the 'noble savage' myth. In combination with negative images of Native women this noble savage construct has caused issues for Aboriginal women in politics and academics (Mayer, 2007). Aboriginal women who speak out against the racist and sexist oppression that our women experience find their passion sometimes gets perceived as an anger or rage against colonialism, which can shatter the noble savage or gentle Tribal woman construct. Deviating from the gendered stereotypical images of 'natural', 'native' and 'gentleness' can discredit these women and call into question their authenticity as 'Native', as well as their rights to speak on behalf of their communities. Further, the combination of passion and activism can also serve to label Native women with a stereotype of 'angry feminist'. This rhetoric functions to punish Native women, whether feminist identified or not, who advocate against patriarchal colonialism in the interest of maintaining oppressive culture and tradition.

The feminist stereotype within Native communities is a powerful one. Native women who speak out against patriarchal colonialism and the rhetoric of traditionalism that is used to silence and marginalize women, are often stigmatized as feminists and disciplined with violent intimidations, withholding of funds, and denial of access to social programs (Green, 2007). Because feminism is understood by many as a Western, White liberation movement, Native women often fear being labelled as 'assimilated' if they engage in women's rights activism or vocalize their identification with feminist theory and praxis (St. Denis, 2007). Those Native women activists who challenge patriarchal colonialism are then labelled as 'outsiders'. This label functions to silence and discredit Native women; their judgements and criticisms made against culture values are deemed

both inappropriate and insignificant unless they are from inside the culture (Saul, 2003). For this reason ‘outsider’ then functions as a type of nationalist rhetoric used against Aboriginal, Indigenous, and Third World women accuse those who subscribe to feminism as betraying their nation and community. Additionally, ‘outsider’ operates as a tactic that promotes and maintains structures of oppression by keeping women from learning how feminism seeks to challenge patriarchy and misogyny (Green, 2007; LaRocque, 2007). For Native women activists, whether identifying with feminism or not, being labelled as such carries the same weight and punishment as ‘outsider’. These women are viewed with contempt because:

The implication is that the Native feminist has sold her soul for affiliation with white feminists by buying into the ‘rights’ of female-centered ‘Individualism’ that many Native people abhor, claiming that our oppression comes from being a collective group of ‘Indians’ (Mayer, 2007, p. 30).

The stigmatization for Native women who support women’s rights is that they have abandoned their communities and traditions and are attacked as man-hating, bra-burning women who wish to dominate and oppress men. Additionally they are charged with placing women and men in opposition to each other, creating community fragmentation, while taking the main focus away from the collective struggle for self-determination and placing it solely on individual women’s liberation (Mayer, 2007).

If stigmatizing Native women as anti-traditional and assimilated, feminists does not work to discredit them, another popular stereotype that functions in rural and urban communities is ‘She No Speaks’ counterpart ‘Villainous Woman’ (Martin-Hill, 2003). She is “touted as a master manipulator with a golden tongue who has malicious intent against all Native peoples” (ibid., p. 111), and as a woman who originates from the early

missionaries and Indian Agents. Her legacy lives on because her ability to lead still threatens people today the way it did for the early colonizers. When labelling strong Native women as ‘outsiders’ and ‘feminists’ does not achieve silence, then ‘Villainous Woman’ serves to discredit them from the inside of the community. However, all these stereotypes groups are still charged with the same offense: taking away collective emancipation and replacing it with individualism as the ultimate threat to community integrity.

In reality many of these Native women are activists in response to the racist and sexist attitudes within colonial or Western society, and in a lot of cases have to address the erosion of Native women’s cultural rights through “trickle-down patriarchy” (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003) from colonial governments into local band governments. Patriarchy has seeped into Native governing bodies through “...male-dominated tribal politics under the guise of “tribal sovereignty” that is at the expense of Native women” (ibid., p. 67). These colonial sexist attitudes and behaviours are adopted and protected under claims of traditionalism, culture differences, and sovereignty, and deployed to call into question the authenticity of Native women who challenge them with claims for human rights.

Although stereotyping occurs about and between Native women activists, there still exists a unity between them as they recognize that they have similar goals for gender equality, but have different approaches of achieving this. For many of these women it has become clear that traditional claims will not achieve gender equality because they have been distorted, and therefore they must shift their strategies and for some this includes adopting feminist ones. Here is where we see the breakdown of blanket statements of

feminism or anti-feminism amongst Native women because they choose their appropriate methods of resistance to patriarchal colonialism based on what the situation calls for, rather than choosing based on political correctness. However, feminism is adopted by some Native women, who even claim it as an original Native principle.

Feminism as a Traditional Concept

Although many Native women who, with articulated informed and conscious reasons, avoid or reject the label ‘feminist’, there are also Native women who do embrace the label, and there are some Native women who reclaim it as an original concept borrowed from them by settler women (Allen, 1996; Smith, 2007; Tohe, 2000). Some of these Native women who embrace this label not only adamantly use the word ‘feminist’ as a self-descriptor but also call themselves ‘feminists without apology’ (Smith, 2008). They actively take on or reappropriate the label ‘feminist’ because they refuse to allow their gender politics to be policed through stereotypical associations between ‘feminism’ and ‘white’. They recognize that a rejection of feminism reinforces

connotations of whiteness [which] allows white women to determine the meaning of the word rather than allowing Native women to define it. Such a move allows white women to define both feminism and the way gender politics should and could be addressed rather than more directly challenging the politics they carry on in the name of feminism (ibid., p. 130).

Feminism as Useful Political and Theoretical Tools

In order for Native women to change the feminist landscape they must challenge these associations between feminism and colonialism. The first and most basic way to do this is to engage with feminist theory and politics, thereby occupying a space where

feminism cannot be solely attributed to whiteness or white women. However, this engagement does not necessarily require Native women to take ‘feminist’ as their identity and there are Native women who choose to use feminist theory and praxis as a set of politics or tools that can be selectively employed (Smith, 2008). This type of engagement with feminism is well-informed or educated in the sense that these Native women understand that a plethora and range of feminist theories exist instead of stereotyping them to a monolithic political form.

Although certain Native women, in particular Tribal women, may not feel comfortable with the term ‘feminist’ they do maintain that gender equality is an original Native principle that was borrowed from them to inspire white or colonial women (Langston, 2003; Smith, 2008; Tohe, 2000). These Tribal women reappropriate the concept of gender equality as traditional and some of them claim that to be sexist is to be assimilated (Langston, 2003). Tribal women echo Native feminists when they feel that attributing feminism as an exclusive colonial set of politics and labelling it as a white movement is erasing our history of gender equality where Native women did have independent action and shaped their own identities (Langston, 2003).

For Aboriginal feminism and Native feminist activists to reclaim feminist or gender equality principles as Native knowledge is to apply the method ‘Native womanism’; it is using our present agency as Native women to see the agency we held in the past. This has the potential to inspire and help us plan our agency for the future where we use gender equality as a Native principle to help remove sexism. Thus, when some Tribal women say that feminism is white, colonial, and irrelevant to Native experiences with sexism they do not mean that Native activism fuelled by principles of equality are

anti-women by virtue of denying the label ‘feminist’ or the colonial strains of feminism. Instead Native feminism or gender equality as an original principle means to draw from traditional values and concepts that were structured into governing bodies. Again this is why it is imperative that traditionalism is deeply explored and scrutinized to ensure that sexism is not operating through traditionalism.

Native Women’s Organizations as Traditional

The third component to Native women’s activism from a traditional paradigm is the belief that women’s contemporary organizing parallels women’s traditional societies in a pre-colonial context. The creation of separate Native women’s activist groups are framed by some Tribal women as a way of resuming and reclaiming “the time-honored practice of establishing the political equivalent of traditional women’s societies” (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992, p. 329). For Tribal women, our principles for Native women’s equality will resurface through taking back the power women held pre-colonialism. Although these groups, such as Aboriginal Women’s Action Network (AWAN), Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC), and Women of All Red Nations (WARN), are formed for empowerment through traditionalism it cannot be overlooked that they are also created in response to sexism within larger Native American organizations.

One of the more popular examples of sexism draws from the 1973 American Indian Movement’s (AIM) occupation at Wounded Knee in South Dakota as a resistance movement to the corruption of the Pine Ridge reservations tribal council (Langston, 2003). The resistance to the commonplace murders, arson, and assaults carried out under the orders of tribal chair Dick Wilson, was led by Native women and female elders who

called in AIM to help strategize for Wilson's removal. Fewer than 100 men were involved in the ten-week 350 person occupation. Women engaged in arms distribution and acted as primary negotiators with the bodies of the American government. Although women comprised the majority of activists involved, it was the men who received the most media attention, which focused on the men and failed to emphasize the role of Native women's activism during this movement. The media ignored the significant role that Native women played, as they did not and would not interview women (Smith, 2008). Rather, the media reproduced the stereotypical Native warrior from the colonial imagination, which could be sensationalized into a cowboy versus Indian construct. The men easily obliged this role, even though in the years following this sexism it was recognized as "...many male leaders, such as Dennis Banks, acknowledged that women were the real warriors. John Trudell has reflected on the time, saying "We got lost in our manhood" (Langston, 2003, p. 128). Although these particular Native male activists acknowledge that sexism had occurred during Wounded Knee their statements really minimize their accountability for this discrimination. In reality, it was Native women who made up more than two-thirds of the participants and were carrying arms, negotiating, and running the medical centre during the occupation (Langston, 2003). The simple explanation offered by Trudell minimizes the violence and danger these women's lives were in, as well as their hard efforts being overlooked by media, and is inadequate at best.

The sex discrimination that Native women experienced during Wounded Knee inspired Madonna Gilbert/Thunderhawk, Lorelei Decora/Means, and Janet McCloud to the form Women of All Red Nations (WARN), a society with a focus on issues pertaining

to Native women and their families. WARN was founded when it was dangerous to be affiliated with AIM. Following Wounded Knee “within the next two years, 250 mostly traditionalists were killed on the reservation, and sixty-nine AIM supporters, a third of them women” (Langston, 2003, p. 127) by Dick Wilson’s orders.⁸ Although WARN and Native women’s activism often advocate for family rights and services, the matter of land and sovereignty taking precedence over women’s issues in combination with sexism in the Native rights movement caused Janet Mccloud to form the Northwest Indian Women’s Circle in 1991, and Winona LaDuke to co-found the Indigenous Women’s Network (IWN) in 1985, the latter of which continues to operate today.

During the time that the Native women’s organizations Northwest Indian Women’s Circle, WARN, and IWN were formed the existence of sexism within larger Native organizations was downplayed for three major reasons. First, Tribal women were silent about sexism to avoid being linked to the women’s movement at a time when feminism and whiteness were seen as inseparable (Smith, 2008). In this era it was especially dangerous to be labelled as an ‘outsider’, ‘assimilated’, or ‘feminist’ with harsh punishments looming for those who were. In this context, Tribal women did not wish to be racially separated from their own sovereignty movements, and Native feminist discourse had yet to be carved out within feminism. Second, Tribal women minimized sexism to avoid feeding the stereotype that Native communities and organizations are hyper-sexist in comparison with non-Native ones (Smith, 2008). This stereotype comes from early colonial propaganda that portrayed Native males as brown savages from who Native women must be rescued and was used to justify colonial interferences in Native

⁸ These numbers are both debated and controversial but are the most accurate ones I have found to date. Wounded Knee of 1873 was extremely violent but there are debates as to whether the violence following was attributed to the resistance or as a social epidemic in itself.

communities (Smith, 2005). Third, Tribal women were silent about sexism because of its fluid nature: not all women would experience it, nor does it occur all the time (Smith, 2008). For these women, sexism was hard to identify and address because it was constantly moving and taking on a new face, while being directed at different women. The downplay of sexism in Native organizations by Tribal women is most likely why they have been charged by Native feminists as blindly accepting sexism.

The Aboriginal women's response to sexism as a method to silence women within Vancouver based Native organizations was the creation of the grassroots organization Aboriginal Women's Action Network (AWAN) in 1995. AWAN follows in step with the Native Women's Association of Canada in that they both challenge the same issue of ingrained sexism that has been adopted by our political leaders and systems. While using feminist principles with an Aboriginal cultural lens, the non-profit organization AWAN formed to address the exclusion of Aboriginal women's voices from both feminism and aboriginal politics and organizations, violence against women, and sex discrimination in Canadian and aboriginal policy (Blaney, 2003). The organization deals with the racist and sexist experiences of Aboriginal women in mainstream culture and in their own communities, and is motivated by this to create and understand Aboriginal feminism. Additionally, until fairly recently, Aboriginal women have been excluded from informal and formal education, resulting in the simultaneous silencing of our voices in leadership, academics, and policy forums (ibid.). This maintenance of structural privilege operates to limit Aboriginal women's knowledge production and prevents inclusion of their viewpoints in decolonization initiatives. As feminism has frequently overlooked the concerns of Aboriginal women, it has then become crucial for AWAN to develop a

medium for educating their members with skill building in the areas of research, writing, interviewing, organizing and distributing press releases to express their voices and viewpoints.

The Aboriginal Women's Action Network parallels what the Native Women's Association of Canada had previously identified: patriarchy has been operating in our communities for so long it has become understood as traditional. For AWAN "Resisting this ingrained sexism is central to the work of the Aboriginal Women's Action Network" (Blaney, 2003, p. 158). Part of resisting ingrained sexism is to question and scrutinize Native tradition to understand whether they are liberating or oppressive to Native women. The last and crucial method Native women use in response to distorted traditionalism, 'She No Speaks' and exclusion from politics is questioning traditions.

Questioning Tradition

If we don't question, investigate and examine our traditions we run the risk of allowing patriarchal norms to operate as original cultural principles. We also run the risk of passing on practices of exclusion and exploitation of Native women to our children and future generations if we are not certain that they do not exist in our traditions. As Aboriginal peoples we must be certain that we have not adopted colonial negative Native female images and their influences on Native cultures by questioning if our Native communities have "...reinvented fragments of a "traditional woman" from dehumanized Eurocentric images of Indigenous women as subservient sexual objects: silent, loyal and mindless?" (Martin-Hill, 2003, p. 109). This is such a crucial question because as Native peoples we need to be informed of where these 'traditional' concepts of Native women

are stemming from. We must also question if we are recreating a colonial version or image of Native women and branding it as 'traditional' to serve the patriarchal ideologies that have seeped into our communities (Martin-Hill, 2003). If we do not question these traditions regarding Native women then we cannot dismantle the patriarchal values that deliberately exclude women from government and leadership roles as shown best through the Native Women's Association of Canada example.

For Native peoples there are deterrents against the investigation into our traditions. Most commonly the reason stems from an ethic of non-interference where questioning is just not done. However, defiance of this taboo by Native women has taken on a new and surreptitious meaning where to question is the first part of dismantling patriarchal power structures. Native women who have staked an interest in removing these power structures experience cultural and spiritual backlash for their activist work in this area.

It appears that when questioning tradition a major concern is that the emphasis will be placed on Western notions of individualism without maintaining a balance with the collective. As collective and cultural survival is considered to be a pre-colonial Native principle there is a fear that this will be lost or disregarded when questioning these long-held traditions; moreover to question is understood by many to be disrespectful and inappropriate (Deerchild, 2003). Further for many Aboriginal communities "to suggest that colonialism, racism and sexism exist in our societies, much less our sacred spiritual practices, is almost taboo" (ibid., p. 104). This manifests as an ethic of non-interference where traditions are not to be questioned or changed (LaRocque, 2007). Native women who do suggest that patriarchy or sexism is hiding itself in traditions and claims of

cultural relativism are punished with labels of ‘feminist’, ‘assimilated’, and ‘outsider’ to silence their voices and maintain the existing power structures. The term ‘feminist’ is synonymous with ‘outsider’ for those Native women activists who are branded as feminists, whether self-identified or not. Those who do question tradition will often experience cultural backlash with the label of ‘outsider’ who does not understand her culture, resulting in her alienation and loss of support from community members (Mayer, 2007). Additionally, a very serious consequence claimed against those who examine tradition is that they will bring bad fortune onto themselves for displeasing the spirits (Deerchild, 2003). Questioning traditions then comes with a heavy punishment of spiritual and cultural ostracization and excommunication in these various ways.

For Native women to question tradition does not necessarily equate rejection or defiance of culture, nor does it mean to change *all* Native traditions and ceremonies. Instead the questioning tradition process involves three parts: the first is to determine the guiding principle or value behind the tradition, the second is to place the tradition in a context or interpretation of gender equality drawing from pre-colonial Aboriginal values of caring, honesty, kindness, and sharing, and the third, and probably most difficult, is to then adapt this tradition to a current context that applies to our contemporary lives today. For Aboriginal feminism this process parallels ‘Native womanism’ where we assess our traditions of the past and bring them forth into a contemporary adaptation in the present. Patriarchal colonialism operating as traditionalism is a contemporary issue and because it is contemporary it requires a methodology or approach to eliminate it that is also contemporary; traditions from the past that are not adapted or contextualized will not

hold the same relevancy or be effective. Therefore questioning and analyzing tradition must include a gender analysis.

Feminism is a contemporary liberation theory that can be selectively applied to Aboriginal women's concerns and struggles. Feminism should not be dismissed as irrelevant through false and romanticized claims to the past. It is recognized that during pre-colonial times most Aboriginal cultures did have political and governing social structures that did indeed promote and protect gender equality. Yet, we must also recognize that we cannot romanticize our cultures by claiming that universally all Aboriginal women experienced gender equality. Colonialism is most certainly a major factor in creating our current oppressive circumstances. However, none of this changes the reality "...that we currently live under structures that proscribe or marginalize our lives" (LaRocque, 2007, p. 54). As Aboriginal women we cannot gloss over the colonial realities we live in today with arguments to reject all colonial strains of feminism and return to a nostalgic and traditional past where male domination supposedly never existed and then expect that power and equality will be returned to us through reclaiming traditions. We exist in a contemporary context that is influenced by mainstream cultures; we should not replace this with a radical decolonization theory that locks us in the past, nor should it be replaced with ideas that our cultures currently exist in isolation from mainstream society.

As Aboriginal people we have and continue to experience interactions with mainstream Western culture and social practices; we are not isolated Indigenous cultures. Our identities and subjectivities as Aboriginal people are partly comprised from these Western cultural institutions, and we as "Aboriginal people live for the most part in a

western capitalistic and patriarchal context; it is the social, economic, and political context that irrevocably shapes our lives, and denying this or minimizing these conditions will not change it” (St. Denis, 2007, p. 47).

We can easily make uneducated opinions and dismiss feminism altogether with the illusion that we are isolated peoples who do not interact or influence Western culture and vice-versa, but ultimately all we are doing is pretending and theorizing something that does not reflect our actual lived experiences, which is ironically what we charge feminism for doing to us. It is valuable to be conscious of the knowledge and history of the West to understand ourselves, and in order to determine where feminist theory holds relevancy for Aboriginal women and our communities. Again this will depend on the community and culture itself.

The process of questioning traditions is powerful because it recognizes that “culture is not immutable, and tradition cannot be expected to be always of value or relevant in our times” (LaRocque, 1996, p. 14). As people and context change, ceremony and traditions have to change with them to maintain their significance so people can still draw strength and meaning based on their substance and values, not because they are called or performed by someone who is labelled traditional (Martin-Hill, 2003). When we ignore the need for change and fluidity within our traditions and cultures we fall prey to the imagined colonial idea that we are a homogenous, fixed and static people; never changing and always existing in the past (Mayer, 2007). These myths contribute to the confusion and difficulty in deciphering authenticity of tradition and reclamation of knowledge that is believed to essentially belong to us. Without a process for bringing the past into a contemporary context we get tend to get lost in the past, which is actually

blinding us from the seeing the extraordinary courage and cultural survival that is already occurring daily through our own adaptations (ibid.).

Further, myths and complexities involved when questioning traditions are also happening at a time where Native women are

caught within the burdens and contradictions of colonial history. We are being asked to confront some of our own traditions at a time when there seems to be a great need for a recall of traditions to help us retain our identities as Aboriginal people. But there is no choice – as women we must be circumspect in our recall of tradition. We must ask ourselves whether and to what extent tradition is liberating to us as women (LaRocque, 1996, p. 14).

I agree with LaRocque that we must face a difficult task by examining our traditions in a context of gender equality but recalling of tradition does not mean we have to abandon all of our spiritual practices based on their corruption of Native versions of sexism. Drawing from the attitude shifts in the example section we can reclaim our traditions without removing them. For instance, some Aboriginal women have reacted to their exclusion from the drum based on sexist attitudes by joining men and drumming along side with them (Deerchild, 2003). These women recognize that sexism is occurring and they reclaim their rightful place around the drum and not behind it. This does not parallel the original message where men played the drum as the heartbeat of the people and thereby were connected to Mother Earth, which gave them an understanding of their relationship to women. This understanding of their relationship to women has been changed and so the tradition must change with it. That does not mean we stop drumming the hearts of the peoples because some Aboriginal men have lost the original teaching of the drum, but instead Aboriginal women are picking up the drumstick both literally and metaphorically.

Additionally, Fay Blaney (2003) believes we should also be creating new ceremonies that are relevant to the contemporary experiences of Native women (Blaney, 2003). For example the Aboriginal Women's Action Network (AWAN) has adopted Tobique activist Shirley Bear as a "role model, and we emulate the feminist ceremonies she has developed" (p. 167). For each tribe and community the change, adoption or creation of ceremonies will all depend on that specific culture, but Martin-Hill (2003) believes a key goal is to restore the creative and sacred female energy back into our ceremonies. This energy is more commonly referred to as the female principle (Jaimes*Guerrero, 2003), and it does not solely dwell in women, but is an energy within all people that is noticeably out of balance in many Aboriginal communities.

Obviously, it should go without saying that we should not incorporate every single feminist value and theory into our culture and traditions, in the same way we should not dismiss all of them either. Feminist theory can help Indigenous women make sense of some of our experiences, however Patricia Monture-Angus (1999) cautions the use of these theories when their empowerment may not function the same way for all women. Aboriginal women should understand feminism to see its validity, but the answers or truths being sought must derive from one's own experiences and not solely from the experiences of feminism (ibid.). Mayer (2007) echoes this when she argues that Native women must critically assess our traditions with our experience and knowledge of colonial tactics to make educated decisions about what constitutes oppression and what does not. We must be prepared to look through feminism with a cultural lens, but we must also not allow that cultural lens to overshadow the importance of gender equality as a traditional value.

By employing Dawn Martin-Hill's (2003) concepts of 'She No Speaks' and 'Villainous Woman' in combination with negative stereotypes of Aboriginal femininity and womanhood I have created an analysis on the ways patriarchal colonialism has affected Aboriginal women's gender roles and responsibilities in both the private and public realms. In resistance to these forms of discrimination Aboriginal women have redefined their relationships to feminism by using 'Native womanism' to reclaim it as an original principle, and therefore as an effective and useful tool when theorizing about oppression and activism. Additionally, Aboriginal feminism's decolonization projects have motivated Aboriginal women to form a process for questioning traditions to investigate whether or not they have been contaminated with patriarchal colonialism by finding the original principle behind the tradition. Finally, Aboriginal women must then decide if and how to apply these principles in contemporary ways, while finding relevancy to our experiences. However, what happens when questioning our traditions is not enough? What are the instances where questioning tradition is required, but for example the calling for a return to pre-colonial egalitarian traditions is not enough to gain the access to political and leadership positions? There has to be a method or route to eliminate discrimination that Aboriginal women experience when it is not enough only to question or engage in conscious raising.

Chapter Three: Aboriginal Women and Sovereignty

By applying ‘Native womanism’ Aboriginal women question traditions embedded with patriarchal colonial concepts, thereby engaging in decolonization, the foundation to Aboriginal feminism. In the previous chapter we saw how the Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) called to pre-colonial traditional gender concepts of egalitarianism, via mothering roles, to gain access to political and leadership positions. These calls to pre-colonial traditionalism were rejected as well as their inclusion for constitutional negotiations and forums. It was not enough to question tradition and apply it in a contemporary context without a resolution or way to enforce it. Consequently, NWAC has adapted their strategies into a human rights framework, and have adamantly stated that to prevent patriarchal colonial forms of discrimination against Native women constitutional negotiations must include the abolishment of section 67 of the Canadian Human Rights Act (CHRA) that exempts the Indian Act from its application. More specifically, section 67 prevented any complaint against Aboriginal governments, authorized under the Act, from being subject to the CHRA. Aboriginal women who advocated for women’s rights in this way were demonized, punished, and ridiculed as anti-Indian, anti-traditional and destructive to Aboriginal sovereignty, and the removal of section 67 was to precisely stop these types of discriminatory attacks that are based on culture and tradition.

In 2008, section 67 of the CHRA was repealed after decades of lobbying by Aboriginal women’s groups and a three year moratorium was granted to First Nation governments to “allow them to adjust and further study how the application of the CHRA will affect their respective communities” (NWAC, 2011, p. 1). This time period has

ended and on June 18, 2011 the CHRA applies to First Nation governments. The success of the CHRA amendment is directly linked to Aboriginal women's activism, which can be described as applying principles of gender egalitarianism in a contemporary and relevant way. Using human rights framework is more often associated with mainstream feminism however this is one way that Aboriginal women adapt their strategies for resistance to patriarchal colonialism. This chapter surveys the ways Aboriginal women have been excluded from sovereignty negotiations and leadership through a masculine nationalist discourse that is fuelled by stereotypes of Aboriginal femininity and womanhood discussed in the last chapter. Additionally, I review how this masculine sovereignty discourse serves to replicate colonial infringements on Aboriginal sovereignty through patriarchal colonial tactics against Aboriginal women.

The chapter is laid out into distinct categories divided into three sections. The first part of section one lays the foundation for the chapter by linking the process of decolonization as fundamental to sovereignty and self-determination agendas. Further, this section is comprised of four parts that as a whole juxtapose Western or Euro-Canadian and Aboriginal definitions of sovereignty where Aboriginal women theorize the major differences between them to establish how pre-colonial traditional forms of sovereignty are not being employed for many Aboriginal nations. The purpose of laying out these definitions and concepts is to show the ways Aboriginal women use them in their feminist theorizing.

Section two combines the theoretical frameworks of the previous chapter to advance an understanding of how patriarchal colonialism employs distorted traditionalism within Aboriginal sovereignty movements. The whole of the section is

founded on Aboriginal sovereignty discourse in Canada, and explains the ways Aboriginal women's rights are ignored, silenced, and attacked by a totalizing masculine discourse formed during the 1970s. Through examples on Aboriginal women's roles and responsibilities within nationalist movements, and the interconnected relationship between sovereignty, reproduction, and child apprehension, I show how patriarchal colonialism and distorted traditionalism function in relation to sovereignty.

Aboriginal women assert that sovereignty and gender politics must both be combined to ensure that Aboriginal women's rights are included within collective rights. However, as self-determination agendas have yet to combine with woman-centered ones, it is difficult to envision what this looks like in its entirety. The last section draws from examples given by Native activists on projects where sovereignty and gender politics occur simultaneously and ensure that both individual and collective rights function together. The second part of section three builds on these examples with a discussion on Aboriginal feminism's significant contributions to feminist theory.

A caveat is in order before turning to the substance of this chapter. This chapter's main focus is on sovereignty and self-determination of Aboriginal peoples and therefore these concepts are specifically theorized in accordance with Aboriginal issues, particularly those including gender politics. An extensive amount of political theory and literature on concepts of sovereignty, self-determination, nation-state, and nationalism exists (for examples see Alfred, 1999; Anaya, 1996; Burrows, 2002, 2010; Knafla & Westra, 2010). The purpose of this chapter, however, is not to explore the underlying philosophies giving rise to these concepts or their broad application in political and social theory, but to understand how they are more specifically applied to Aboriginal

sovereignty and in doing so how they implicate gender politics. The work reviewed here, therefore, seeks to address shortcomings of sovereignty and self-determination movements within a gender analysis.

Section One

Decolonization and Sovereignty

The process of decolonization, that is, the removal of colonial ideologies imposed onto Aboriginal belief systems, has been specifically applied to gender politics by Aboriginal women (Napoleon, 2005; Maracle, 1996, 2006; McIvor, 2004; Mercredi & Turpel, 1993; Monture-Angus, 1999; Simpson, 2006; Sunseri, 2011), at the same time as many Aboriginal women advocate for sovereignty or self-determination. Within this broad spectrum of political positions, strategies for decolonization range from an extreme, idealism of the past to a more nuanced accommodation of enduring political and ethical principles to contemporary social and political relations. The most extreme or radical approach to decolonization and Aboriginal sovereignty is explained by Devon A. Mihesuah (2003)

The complete return of traditions, which also means that whites will disappear, bison will return, dead Natives will arise, and the tribes will no longer use any material goods or political, religious, social, or economic ideas brought to the New World by foreigners (p. 167).

Radical decolonization is a form of nostalgic romanticization of the past and can be called, at best, impractical. This type of decolonization is impossible and instead of attempting to return to the past Aboriginal peoples need to focus our energies on retrieving our foundations and principles in our traditions and teachings and applying them to modern or current cultures and context. For Aboriginal women this could mean

using ‘Native womanism’ to explore and reclaim our agency, for example. As Aboriginal communities we have to move forward to understand how our cultures exist in the present without becoming locked in the nostalgia of the past. Although the impracticality of radical decolonization appears self-evident we must recognize that there are Aboriginal peoples who feel this is a rational form of decolonization and therefore this theorizing cannot go unnoticed.

A more attainable goal of decolonization is one in which Aboriginal communities become self-sufficient through sovereignty and economic independence. Sovereignty would allow internal governance without inference from state or federal governments (Monture-Angus, 1999). This form of decolonization is also referred to as self-determination by Aboriginal peoples (Mihesuah, 2003). For Sunseri (2011) decolonization is a process where “...colonial relations between Indigenous peoples and, in the case of Canada, the Canadian state and mainstream society are interrupted and new relations are built that recognize the Indigenous right to self-determination” (p. 93). What these new relations look like or manifest themselves as will be entirely dependent on the Aboriginal nation itself (Monture-Angus, 1999; Sunseri 2011). Further, while new relations may be created to foster self-determination for Aboriginal nations, a conundrum exists in the cultural definitions of self-determination and sovereignty.

Common Definitions of Sovereignty

As explained by Val Napoleon (2005) self-determination is most commonly defined as a broad and complex concept based on international standards that apply to both individual and collectives or groups: “As a collective principle, self-determination is

usually articulated politically or legally according to international law and various political ideologies. As an individual principle, self-determination is articulated best in terms of agency, conceptions of autonomy and relationships” (p. 31). This highly theoretical definition shows that collective and/or state/nation levels of self-determination are most often used in accordance with or defined by international legal standards. These standards are rooted in Western interpretations and, as pointed out by Sunseri (2011), reflect a Euro-centric position.

The formation of sovereign nationhood and national identity has overwhelmingly been theorized as solely fuelled by Western modernity (Sunseri, 2011). This Euro-centric position dismisses and ignores Indigenous nations and national identities formed pre and post modernity and which Indigenous groups continue to practice. Sunseri (2011) rejects this Eurocentric model along with the notion that all forms of nationalism outside of a nation-state model are mere imitations. Nonetheless, she does concede that certain aspects of Western nationalism are incorporated into Aboriginal nationalisms, but there are also cultural components, varying depending on the tribe or nation itself, that pre-date modernity and colonialism. For example, Sunseri explains that de-colonial nationalism is a derivative of Western nationalism in the sense that it is founded on opposition to the West and therefore is exclusively tied to it. However, this decolonialism also sets itself apart from the nation-state by claiming distinct cultural differences and sovereignty. De-colonial nationalism shares a complex relationship with the West because it is reactionary to colonialism and in this way is inseparable from it, but it is also not an imitation of the Euro-centric nationalist model.

We see that radical decolonization cannot work because we cannot return to the past, but we also see from Sunseri's work that our own forms of Aboriginal nationalism are inseparably linked with nation-states. In short we cannot simply remove ourselves from dialogue and discussion with the Canadian or American state. For this reason there are Aboriginal scholars, such as Alfred (1999), Ladner (2000, 2003) and Simpson (2006) for example, who are decolonizing and reimagining nations and national identity beyond imitations of Western nationalism (Sunseri, 2011). However, according to Sunseri these scholars do not place themselves in rigid categories as being either for or against the West; rather they have surveyed the concepts of nationalism and incorporate Western concepts where they see appropriate. This process then creates a hybrid form of nationalism or sovereignty that allows Aboriginal people to adapt our values or beliefs into a contemporary context that changes as our cultures and circumstances change. It is important to note that decolonization is about removing the harmful and shameful ideologies integrated into Aboriginal ones, but this should not be mistaken as a process for rejecting any and all Western ideologies. Instead awareness of our own cultural principles and concepts of sovereignty as well as outside ones has the potential to allow us to see a variety of compatibilities and enrich our theoretical tools for creating contemporary Aboriginal sovereignty templates.

Fears of Aboriginal Sovereignty

Different cultural understandings of sovereignty and self-determination have caused resistance and fears amongst non-Aboriginal peoples. More specifically, the creation of sovereign Aboriginal nations raises concern that if Aboriginal nations were to

achieve self-determination it would result in “...potential loss of territorial integrity, internal political instability, violent chaos, and secession” (Napoleon, 2005, p. 33) within the encapsulating nation-state. As common concepts of sovereignty are rooted in individual property rights and the establishment or maintenance of nation-states, it is frequently assumed that if Aboriginal self-determination were to occur Canada’s land mass would be pulled apart acre by acre and divided amongst Aboriginal nations (Monture-Angus, 1999). Moreover, it is feared that these nations would become separate nation-states with their own military and economy, thus fragmenting Canadian land use and access. For these reasons Monture-Angus (2008) explains that

[s]overeignty is a word that has gotten Indigenous nations into a lot of trouble. It threatens states. This occurs simply because there is an assumption in western thought that there is a single form and system of knowing and therefore sovereignty must have a single meaning. And that meaning is now enshrined in international standards (p. 158).

Because common understanding of sovereignty are grounded in Western thought, Aboriginal peoples’ attempts to decolonize ourselves and form sovereign nations are complicated and paradoxical. Indigenous nations require a process of decolonization whereby the current concepts of decolonization, sovereignty, and statehood must be abandoned because they no longer hold the same relevancy and meaning that is necessary for the creation of communities (Napoleon, 2005). These antithetical definitions of sovereignty and self-determination are founded in colonial or imperial structures, and these have evolved from European colonialism into the formations of dependent, capitalistic nation states bound through international law. This evolution is still permeated with imperial structures but has achieved a post-colonial label indicating that we are somehow past colonialism when we are actually rooted in it (Napoleon, 2005).

The idea that self-determination is liberation from colonial dependency is a contradiction when the concept itself originates from colonialism, imperial structures, and their ideologies. Consequently, these Western concepts of self-determination and sovereignty are being taken up by Indigenous peoples, which only serve to recreate imperialism, and therefore undermine the actual political movements for real liberation from colonialism and/or imperialism.

The manifestation of this paradoxical relationship between Indigenous nations and the colonial state is very well exemplified in Canada where colonial policies through the Indian Act continue to dictate how sovereignty is exercised. More specifically, the *Act* controls the guidelines for Nation citizen membership through blood quantum; how much 'Indian' blood a person has in them. This blood quantum is measured through family members that the Canadian government recognizes as being 'Indian'. These membership formulas laid out in the *Act* serve to undermine the nation itself: "The membership model is simply incapable of developing or encouraging the kind of reciprocal relationships necessary for strong social and political cohesion" (Napoleon, 2005, p. 41). In other words, it is problematic to build a nation based on policies of blood quantum and ethnicity rather than collective rights and shared community vision. We cannot adopt or continue to perpetuate colonial membership policies and call the resulting governance Aboriginal sovereignty, especially when these policies reflect patriarchal colonialism that has also been adopted in the name of sovereignty; a core issue for Aboriginal feminism that is addressed later in the chapter.

Another example of this paradoxical relationship between Aboriginal nations and the Canadian state is with the limitations of territory or nation boundaries. Creating

Aboriginal sovereign nations with territory and land use is extremely difficult when the boundaries of the land have been determined by the Canadian government through existing Treaties and the reservation system. The location of reserves and their agricultural use was and continues to be dependent on the Canadian government, and therefore, as Monture-Angus (1999) contends, these reserves are in fact colonial created institutions, not Aboriginal ones, and to ground our power structures within them is to entrench colonialism. To exclusively base self-determination of Aboriginal peoples on the reserve system as a legitimate claim to sovereignty "...will be unsatisfactory to urban or Métis groups. It should be unsatisfactory to Indians. After all the reserve is *not* a good Indian idea" (Monture-Angus, 1999, p. 30).

By assuming Western notions of sovereignty and self-determination Aboriginal nations are actually undermined and instead recreate colonialism under an Aboriginal identity. As pointed out, these rigid Euro-centric definitions of sovereignty only encompass territorial boundaries, individual property rights, and aspirations for the creation of nation-states. For Aboriginal nations to achieve true self-determination sovereignty must be based on Indigenous cultural interpretations. Although each Aboriginal nation will have its own understanding of sovereignty dependent on its cultural protocols and belief systems, common principles or threads derived from Aboriginal epistemologies and are woven into sovereignty ideologies. The following section explores these key principles based on the writings of Aboriginal women.

What is Aboriginal Sovereignty?

According to Monture-Angus (1999, 2008) Aboriginal sovereignty is a multi-layered concept based on individual and collective forms of responsibility and relationship. The first component of sovereignty is the responsibility to live healthy for ourselves as individuals, for our families and our communities. The second aspect of Aboriginal sovereignty stays within the theme of family but shifts to include the responsibility of healthy living in relationship to land. These components occur simultaneously; they are not prioritized over each other but exist in fluidity to create an Aboriginal concept of sovereignty.

For Mohawk author Monture-Angus (1999) sovereignty is living out the responsibility to both care for and carry ourselves as Aboriginal peoples, families, and communities and to do this in a healthy way. This type of sovereignty derives from a holistic paradigm that Anishnabe people explain as living “...the “good life” in our communities. This includes all four aspects of life – mental, emotional, physical and spiritual” (p. 30). In this way Monture-Angus (2008) explains that individual Aboriginal citizens are reclaiming the power to determine their being, as healthy Aboriginal people. They are also using the same power, which comes from their agency to be healthy, as they strive to be responsible to that identity as a healthy Aboriginal person. Through her interactions with a variety of Aboriginal peoples from multiple Nations, Monture-Angus explains that similar concepts of holistic sovereignty exist.

To achieve the ‘good life’ for the collective or the whole Nation there must be an emphasis on individual members being healthy and responsible for in order to achieve healthy self-determining nations, the individuals of these nations must be self-disciplined

enough to carry out what is required of them. For Aboriginal sovereignty the individual and the collective are intrinsically linked and therefore cannot be fragmented by dismissing one for the other. In other words it is detrimental to the whole of the collective to ignore or minimize the need for healthy individuals. As explored later in the chapter, this raises questions for women, and feminist scholars in particular when Aboriginal women's rights are ignored and undervalued for collective interests, which are mainly represented by Aboriginal men.

The second component to Aboriginal sovereignty is the responsibility and relationship to land for both individuals and the collective. Again the actions required to live out this type of connected sovereignty becomes an identity for many Aboriginal peoples.

Sovereignty, when defined as my right to be responsible, is really a question of identity (both individual and collective) more than it is a question about individual property rights. Identity, as I have come to understand it, requires a relationship with territory (and not a relationship based on control of that territory) (Monture-Angus, 1999, p. 36).

I think what Monture-Angus (1999) is referring to here is what author Jaimes*Guerrero (2003) refers to as the *Native Land Ethic*,⁹ which involves maintaining relations with the environment that one is born into. To achieve this type of harmony an Aboriginal person exercises "...kinship roles in reciprocal relationship with his or her bioregional habitat, and this is manifested through cultural beliefs, rituals, and ceremonies that cherish biodiversity..." (ibid., p. 66). Further, if one moves away from their Indigenous homeland they are still expected to practice this 'Native Land Ethic' with their 'Native Spirituality': the cultural ceremonies and rituals that cherish the environment. Having connected

⁹ The challenge for urban Aboriginal women is to retain the principles underscoring the land ethic and to retain or establish ties to a specific land territory through kinship. More studies need to be done on this issue.

relationships with a bioregional habitat is a main basis of identity for Aboriginal peoples; these connections manifest themselves as responsibilities. Additionally, this relationship between people and land derives from a common principle found in Aboriginal worldviews that bases this relationship on the idea that everything in the universe is both related and interconnected. The result of this interconnected worldview has shaped human and nature relationships to be rooted in reciprocity. The reciprocity between land and people is in sharp contrast with Western concepts of nature based relationships founded on control, domination, and exploitation.

The importance of fostering healthy relationships with the land and people goes beyond a simple ethic of responsibility to the land or bioregional habitats. Caring and following through with these responsibilities is crucial not solely because they are the right things to do, but instead because Aboriginal worldviews see everything as interconnected and related, which then situates the entire universe as familial (Allen, 1986). Many Aboriginal worldviews contend that all of creation derives from the same source and as such all of it shares common traits that a family would share from being related. Thus, if humans have intelligence and consciousness then it is assumed that by relations all things in the universe possess these traits as well. In this way nature and land are not something to be dominated and exploited because they are considered to be family.

The ability to conceive of the universe as intelligent and interconnected is linked to Indigenous concepts of time and space. Within tribal thought time exists as cyclical and space as spherical, which contrast to Western concepts of time as sequential and space as linear (Allen, 1986, p. 59). This tribal paradigm understands time and space as

connected to each other without placing significance, fragmentation, or static properties on the natural universal reality (ibid.). Therefore the universe is not viewed as fixed or stable, but rather is constantly moving and changing. As all manifestations of this reality are intelligent and fluctuating, the universe is then considered to be alive and breathing (ibid.). Salish/Cree author Lee Maracle (1996) also sees the universe as alive and focusing on the earth she understands

The Earth was seen as a living entity, not as an object of conquest and exploitation... we studied plant and animal behaviour and aligned ourselves to it... Culturally, the Earth itself was the only being we were required to accommodate (p. 41).

For Hawaiian author Haunani-Kay Trask (1996) the sky is seen as the Father and the land as the Mother with humans being her children. Cree author Rosanna Deerchild (2003) echoes this Mother Earth principle, while tying it back to Native women. It has always been women who are the root or origin of the family, and are therefore the true leaders of the nation for Aboriginal peoples (Deerchild, 2003; see also Jaimes & Hasley, 1992) but the original mother has always been understood as the earth. Mother Earth gives life to all species that live on her and she is believed to be the one who "...feeds us, clothes us, shelters us..." (Deerchild, 2003, p. 101) and therefore deserves the highest respect. In this way by viewing the earth as alive and related to the people, very different approaches to interactions with land are formed.

However, it needs to be stressed that not all Aboriginal people share in this worldview by virtue of their Aboriginal heritage or their essential being. Additionally, gendered ideologies resulting from colonialism have negatively framed women and mothers, and there are Aboriginal peoples who may not respect the land because of the gendered association between mother and earth. This is most unfortunate, but there still

remain Aboriginal peoples who espouse the pre-colonial traditional interconnected principle and the relationship and responsibility with land. This is a major focal point in pre-colonial Aboriginal worldviews and will often be included in movements of sovereignty that stem from traditional pre-colonial viewpoints.

As shown in the previous two parts of this chapter there are different interpretations and definitions of sovereignty, and as such cultural definitions of what sovereignty includes is not always understood by Canadian governments. For this reason Aboriginal cultural meanings of self-determination are frequently overlooked or invisible to outsiders (Monture-Angus, 1999). More specifically the right to be responsible in this type of Aboriginal context with relationship to the land and the right to be healthy and to heal ourselves from colonial abuses are generally not incorporated to Western concepts of sovereignty and land ownership. Further, Aboriginal peoples are in the process of articulating the major cultural differences between North American cultures, within and amongst our own Nations. These types of conversations are indeed only beginning; in the words of Monture-Angus “Final solutions cannot be fully articulated as the walk has just begun” (1999, p. 35). However, conversations about sovereignty that include gender politics and human rights are being articulated and despite the appeal of this view of sovereignty and its compatibility with Aboriginal women as members of the sovereign nation, patriarchal colonialism persists in resisting Aboriginal feminism and women-centered sovereignty.

Section Two

Section two addresses the ways patriarchal colonialism and distorted traditionalism operate within Aboriginal sovereignty movements. The section is divided into two parts with two subparts that offer an in-depth analysis on the discourse of sovereignty by Canadian Aboriginal leaders on a national level. The ‘National Discourse of Sovereignty’ part explains how masculine discourse has been adopted by Aboriginal leaders and functions to silence the concerns of Aboriginal women by labelling them as both individualistic and threatening to the collective success for self-determination.

The first subpart on the roles of Aboriginal women in patriarchal colonial definitions of sovereignty shows that masculine discourse espouses ‘She No Speaks’ as the true Indian women: domestic and silent. If Aboriginal women speak out they are demonized as ‘Villainous Woman’ who seeks to destroy sovereignty and Aboriginal peoples for her personal gain. Most frequently when women are included in the sovereignty movements ‘She No Speaks’ is present and accords them two positions: reproducers and producers.

The second subpart of this section reviews the major attacks on Aboriginal women via patriarchal colonialism and links them to sovereignty. I then provide three examples on Aboriginal women’s discrimination and struggles that directly related to gender oppression and self-determination.

Aboriginal Sovereignty, Patriarchal Colonialism and Distorted Traditionalism

Aboriginal feminism has particular apprehension when cultural interpretations for sovereignty become intertwined with claims of cultural difference that reject all Western

ideologies as colonial. Frequently, this type of reasoning leads to sovereignty concepts that rely on Aboriginal 'tradition', and as explained in chapter two these traditions are potentially rooted in patriarchal colonialism masquerading as Aboriginal. The negative gendered format for Aboriginal nationalism and sovereignty replicates the exclusion of Aboriginal women from political and leadership roles through arguments of sexist traditionalism where 'She No Speaks' remains the ideal Aboriginal woman. This blackballing or 'old boys club' continues to place Aboriginal women in positions of vulnerability and oppression that silence our voices from expressing our experiences of discriminatory gender politics (LaRocque, 2007).

It is frequently argued by Aboriginal leaders, mainly male ones, that women's issues are individual rights issues and therefore they fragment the collective sovereignty movement. Rather than addressing women's concerns, such as the existing discriminatory gender relations within communities, membership discrimination, and limited access to political and leadership positions, within sovereignty debates and conversations, these leaders dismiss women's rights with claims that they will be dealt with once sovereignty is achieved. However, when Aboriginal nations function with distorted or sexist traditionalism, they repeatedly continue to employ forms of patriarchal colonialism that have been imposed on Aboriginal nations by the Canadian government. For example see Silman (1987) regarding the Tobique First Nation's acceptance of sexist discrimination in the Indian Act. This patriarchal colonialism has manifested itself through Canada's Indian Act (and the United States of America's Indian Civil Rights Act) very specific attacks on women through legislation and policies regulating women's reproduction, membership, and child apprehension, which are also attacks on Aboriginal sovereignty.

These tactics both remove and halt future nation members from existing and thereby decrease the nations' populations until the nations no longer exist. This form of patriarchal colonialism is so embedded that it is replicated by Aboriginal nations in the name of self-determination.

For Aboriginal feminists it is clear that a gendered analysis must be included in sovereignty and self-determination conversations and policy creation: it is required to remedy the attacks on Aboriginal women, which are direct attacks on Aboriginal sovereignty. For these reasons, as explained above, Napoleon (2005) argues that it is imperative for the self-determination process to extend beyond the arguments of culture difference, relativity, or traditionalism to include particular concepts that will ensure "...legitimate aboriginal governmental entities are subjected to human rights standards extending from the core values of freedom and equality" (p. 43). Currently, there are Aboriginal governments in the Canadian courts arguing that it is an infringement on Aboriginal tradition, culture, and sovereignty to force colonial concepts of human rights onto Aboriginal governing practices (for examples see *Sawridge Band v. Canada (F.C.)*,¹⁰ 2006 FC 1218, and *McIvor v. Canada (Registrar of Indian and Northern Affairs)*, 2009)¹¹.

¹⁰ *Sawridge v. Canada* challenges the reinstatement for membership to Aboriginal women and their children who were displaced through discriminatory legislation in the Indian Act (Fiske & George, 2006). The bands involved, three Alberta First Nations Sawridge, Tsuu T'ina and Ermineskin, refuse reinstatement for members under the claim that Aboriginal membership is a constitutional and treaty right that would be violated should these Nations be required to grant membership based on Canadian criteria instead of their own traditional customs for citizenship.

¹¹ This case was originally heard in British Columbia and is continuing challenge, to be heard at international courts after Supreme Court review was denied. It is against the ongoing discrimination of the Indian Act regarding the right to status and entitlement to pass status to the next generation, which will be discussed below.

In the next part I review how the development of an Aboriginal masculine national discourse on sovereignty has positioned Aboriginal women's rights as dangerous, anti-Aboriginal, and undermining to collective rights. As a result Aboriginal women occupy very specific sexist roles and responsibilities in sovereignty movements as biological reproducers of the nation members and as producers of national culture.

National Discourse of Sovereignty

During proposed amendments to the Indian Act in the 1970s a nationalist discourse emerged from male Aboriginal leaders in national organizations and band governments (Barker, 2006; Sunseri, 2000). The discourse used by these Aboriginal men was based on masculine and absolute authority that mimicked European hegemonic power systems so that these Aboriginal men were also criticizing for being anti-Indian and colonialist. In this way Aboriginal leaders were able to distinguish their bands and nations as sovereign in relation to the state by mimicking the Canadian state itself, but they also created a dichotomy where they were separate based on race and nation. This nationalist discourse also included a gender dichotomy that allowed Aboriginal men to exclude Aboriginal women and femininity from their sovereignty definitions. Aboriginal sovereignty became defined as "...an absolute, as wholly unchallengeable, as sacred, as hyper-masculine, with Indian men representing themselves as final authorities over Indian politics, both politically and culturally" (Barker, 2006, p. 148). Consequently, by framing definitions of sovereignty as both masculine and absolute this type of national discourse functions to illegitimate any opposing definitions and brands them as anti-Indian.

Another strategy used by Aboriginal male leaders was to solidify a definition of sovereignty that situated collective and individual rights in direct opposition and as mutually exclusive (Barker, 2006). Aboriginal leaders framed themselves as representing the collective rights of the nation where all relevant political issues and concerns would be addressed under sovereignty (Barker, 2006). This included the patriarchal colonial concerns brought forth by Aboriginal women, however Aboriginal men deliberately ignored the existing gender relations in Aboriginal communities under the justification that to do so was necessary to secure collective self-governing rights for the nations (Sunseri, 2000). Joanne Barker (2006) explains that “Because gender has been understood to be subordinate to sovereignty, Indian women have been perceived as putting their own selfish, personal interests before those of the collective” (p. 137). To put it differently, when Aboriginal women disagreed that sovereignty could address and remedy their gender concerns when the masculine definition of sovereignty itself is operating through patriarchal colonialism, Aboriginal organizations and band governments interpreted this claim as individualistic, anti-Indian and anti-sovereignty. By framing individual rights as antithetical to Aboriginal traditions and cultures it allowed Aboriginal leaders to target women’s issues as being both inauthentic and colonial.

Often Aboriginal women’s goals for individual human rights or their rights for self-determination and autonomy are framed as fragmenting the community goals of collective rights for sovereignty (Napoleon, 2005). However, pitting individual and collective sovereignty or self-determination against each other is counterproductive according to Aboriginal feminism. Instead of creating a mutually exclusive dichotomy, these two should be understood as interrelated for “...the manifestation of a person’s self-

determining autonomy is through relationships with others. Individual self-determining autonomy is not threatened by the collectivity, but is constitutive of it” (Napoleon, 2005, p. 36). In other words, individual autonomy cannot be understood in isolation because the process of becoming autonomous or an individual is an internal one where a person develops their own internal laws, but that process itself is defined and shaped by social interactions. Therefore, individual autonomy must be conceived through a social lens since it is the social that creates it.

The analysis of individual autonomy through a social lens is often times misconstrued by Liberal feminist theory when an essential component to it is that women are not solely defined by their relations to others, but have the ability to define themselves as individuals. On the one hand, this has the potential to overlook the ways that individuals are defined and tied to their social relations. Conversely, there exists the potential to ignore that individuals are socialized with values and principles reflective of the social group they originate from and therefore cannot be completely defined without factoring their social ties and relations. On the other hand to ignore the existence of the individual within the social collective or group is to misconstrue the way the individual and the collective both co-exist and define each other. In the case of sovereignty, male Aboriginal leaders have attempted to silence Aboriginal women or ‘individuals’ for the greater good of the collective, ultimately ignoring how these two function simultaneously when it is individuals who make up the collective.

In the same vein, by placing Aboriginal sovereignty and women’s rights in direct opposition to each other Aboriginal leaders have been allowed to justify Aboriginal women’s disenfranchisement and disempowerment within our communities (Barker,

2006). The concerns of Aboriginal women have been framed as threatening and dangerous to Aboriginal sovereignty. For example, when NWAC and other Native women's groups recommended that discriminatory legislation in the Indian Act be removed, Aboriginal men argued that any amendments to the *Act* would undermine true Aboriginal sovereignty as the *Act* itself guaranteed the sacred rights of governance (Barker, 2006). This move placed any amendment for gender equality as debilitating to true Aboriginal sovereignty. Again this stems from situating gender rights and sovereignty as oppositional; "The idea that by affirming Indian women's rights to equality, Indian sovereignty is irrevocably undermined affirms a sexism in Indian social formations that is not merely a residue of the colonial past but an agent of social relationships today" (Barker, 2006, p. 149). Sexism is still very prevalent in Aboriginal communities; patriarchal colonialism is not situated in the past but exists and informs the present social and legal structures that govern status and non-status Indian women. For this reason Aboriginal women contend that sovereignty movements must include a gender analysis that questions the sexist attitudes and behaviours that are currently operating within Aboriginal organizations and band governments. These sexist attitudes are also exemplified through the roles that Aboriginal women are given either through idealistic or stereotypical portrayal during sovereignty movements.

Frequently, when Aboriginal women participate in nationalist movements they are distinguished as both producers and reproducers of the culture and the nation. As reproducers of the nation women are literally responsible for the biological reproduction of nation members or citizens and are very much esteemed for this role. As producers of the national culture Aboriginal women are often known as 'mothers of the nation' or

‘keepers of the fire’ where they influence and teach younger generations about cultural knowledge and protocol (Sunseri, 2008). These roles of producer and reproducer come with prestige and honour for Aboriginal women, as they create and nurture the future generations of the ‘pure’ culture.

Aboriginal women’s roles in patriarchal colonial definitions of sovereignty.

Reproducers of nation citizens.

The roles for Aboriginal women in nationalist movements can be empowering, but most often when reproduction is so closely linked with national boundaries women’s sexuality and reproduction become controlled and scrutinized. Sunseri (2011) argues that the formation of nationalist movements often require well-laid out ethnic and nationalist boundaries to determine who is and who is not part of the nation. As women are the reproducers of the nation they are also considered to guard national boundaries, for they choose who passes on the genetic membership. Women’s bodies become controlled and regulated to ensure that they are producing pure bloodlines. This is particularly relevant for Aboriginal nations in Canada when membership to these nations is dependent on amounts of blood quantity (Sunseri, 2011). Aboriginal women’s bodies and reproduction become subject to a form of racial purity by eliminating impure or tainted blood lines. In other words the continuation of the nation in this case depends on who women are reproducing with in terms of the amount of Aboriginal blood quantity they possess according to the *Act* (Sunseri, 2011).

Producers of the national culture.

In nationalist discourse Aboriginal women, as producers of the national culture, are frequently epitomized for their roles and responsibilities as mothers and care-givers. This discourse employs claims from the Aboriginal gender complementary system where Aboriginal women are valorized for their domestic roles. In this duality, Aboriginal women are relegated to the domestic sphere and are excluded from politics and leadership positions in the public sphere all done under the guise of distorted traditionalism. However, according to LaRocque (2007) and Sunseri (2000) for some Aboriginal communities this type of distorted traditionalism has been the cornerstone for creating nationalist politics, movements, and identities. In order to achieve juxtaposition between Aboriginal cultures and mainstream colonial society, often the valorization of Aboriginal women and their domestic roles are used as markers of difference. In this way gender roles shape and contrast the heterogeneous characteristics between the two cultures, while they also function as an de-colonial tool in cultural reconstruction (LaRocque, 2007).

Again Aboriginal women are excluded from politics and leadership position as ‘She No Speaks’ is used as a maker of difference and valorized as a mother and producer of the national culture. This type of nationalist discourse for Aboriginal women’s roles serves to entrench patriarchal colonialism, by maintaining Aboriginal women positions in supportive and domestic roles, with Aboriginal men occupying and benefitting from leadership, policy making, and political roles (Barker, 2006; LaRocque, 2007). Additionally, the nationalist discourse maintains systemic inequality and offers no

support for Aboriginal women to be involved in policy making at local or national levels to create any change.

Sovereignty cannot override women's rights and buying into the discourse that demoralizes individual rights and all forms of feminism as anti-Indian is only affirming the patriarchal colonialism that operates as distorted traditionalism. Emma LaRocque (2007) finds it detrimental to dismiss women's rights and all feminisms because of their past exclusionary practices in exchange for compromising "...the integrity of my sexuality and my body [which] will not be sacrificed for race, for religion, for 'difference', for 'culture' or for 'nation'"(p. 67). To dismiss feminism and its strategies for combating patriarchy colonialism in the interest of promoting and maintaining ideologies of 'cultural difference' is to dismiss Aboriginal women's rights. This is especially true when this 'cultural difference' discourse subscribes to essentialist, heteronormative, caregiving/mothering domestic roles that perpetuate the violation of human rights and pre-colonial concepts of self-determination, all done in order to build Aboriginal nations.

In the next part I examine the largest assaults on Aboriginal women through patriarchal colonialism and link them to sovereignty in order to demonstrate how they are inseparably connected. I provide three examples of women's struggles to illustrate my argument. The first example is membership policy and rules dictated by the Canadian Indian Act, where Aboriginal women were displaced from their natal communities through marriage laws. The second example is the disproportionate rates of violence against Native American women. And the final example is the disruption of Aboriginal children within Aboriginal communities through state-sponsored sterilization of women

and the apprehension of children. By ensuring that Aboriginal children cannot be either physically produced or raised in their communities as nation members the state ensures that eventually there will be no more nation members to claim territory and sovereignty.

Examples of attacks on sovereignty and Aboriginal women.

Membership policy and rules.

Through the Indian Act the Canadian state has been able to remove Aboriginal women and their children from membership in their communities based on marriage. The legal removal of Aboriginal citizens from their nations is a direct attack on Aboriginal sovereignty, as the colonial government is dictating who qualifies for membership based on patriarchal colonial criteria that do not reflect pre-colonial Aboriginal membership practices. However, status-Indian men benefit from entrenched patriarchy in the *Act* because they are offered opportunities for leadership through elected band council, the form of governance regulated by the *Act* (Barker, 2006). Thus, status-Indian men, as the ‘natural’ citizens of the nation “...contributed to the normalization and legitimization of Indian male privilege within band governments – land and resource access and use, social benefits and services, and social politics” (p. 133). With so much power and privilege at stake, male Aboriginal leaders were oppositional and unsupportive to any proposed amendments to Section (12) (1) (b) of the *Act* that removed citizenship to status-Indian women and their children. It is crucial to note that there has been a history of colonialism attacking Aboriginal sovereignty, but this has been accompanied by male Aboriginal leaders and band governments that have fought and continue to fight for these practices

directly, in the name of tradition, or indirectly through a generalised opposition to amendments to the *Act*.

In Canada, under Section (12)(1)(b) of the 1876 Indian Act, any Indian woman who married a non-Indian or outside of her tribe prior to 1985 was automatically stripped of her status, as well as the status for her minor children (Fiske & George, 2006). The legal removal of “Indian-ness” meant that both the woman and her minor children were not allowed to inherit family land or property from her natal reserve, were unable to reside on the reserve, were unable to be buried on-reserve, and were denied their rights to services provided by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) also known as Department of Indian Affairs at the time (*ibid.*). The goal of this shift from matrilineal to patrilineal principles was part of an assimilation tactic where Native women would assume the identity of their husbands, as colonial patriarchal values became prescribed for settler women (*ibid.*), and their children’s heritage and identity would be traced through a male line. Native women were then unable to claim their own heritage and culture, while excommunication also meant this culture would not be taught or transmitted to their children. This had a dual impact; social isolation for the individuals estranged from their community and population loss for the nations. If this were to happen over the long term eventually there will not be any more status-Indians or Indian cultures to share (Rebick, 2005). Further, Indian women who married other Indian men had their status and membership moved to his community or band, but if an Indian man lost his status through participating in voting, acquiring a university degree or joining the military, for example, his wife would also lose her status (Fiske & George, 2006).

The sexist discrimination Native women were experiencing prompted them to challenge Section (12)(1)(b) with Jeannette Lavell taking this case to the Supreme Court of Canada, where in 1971 the Section was ruled as being non-discriminatory against women, even though Indian men's status was provided to their non-status wives, thus privileging a patriline (Rebick, 2005). During the same year Mohawk activist Mary Two-Axe Early formed the group Indian Rights for Indian Women to protest the gender discrimination of the *Act*; and six years later a group of Maliseet women from the Tobique reserve in New Brunswick brought forth this issue of sex discrimination in their community to the international stage (ibid.). Tobique activist Sandra Lovelace, whose husband was not Indian, agreed to be complainant and brought the case to the United Nations in 1978. Subsequently the *Act* was found to violate the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and also to be contrary to the proposed Canadian Constitution. As a result the Canadian government changed Section (12)(1)(b) in 1985, (in legislation now commonly known as Bill C-31), to accommodate the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982 (Rebick, 2005). However, these deeply entrenched patriarchal membership policies continue to exist; 1985 amendments to the *Act* also gave bands the authority to determine band membership, and some chose to deny women whose Indian status had been reinstated. This bias was anticipated when Canada, in 1980, offered bands the option to override the section, and only 19 percent of bands actually overrode the section (Fiske & George, 2006). The engrained sexism continues today, and bands in Canada are disputing membership claims in the court systems on the argument that they are sovereign nations and Canada cannot interfere with their policies (ibid.).

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and band councils based their concepts of sovereignty solely on the *Act*, which was argued to be the affirming legislation to Aboriginal rights for self-government (Barker, 2006). To refute Aboriginal women's claims for membership rights, the AFN claimed that to amend the *Act* would jeopardize the sacred rights for self-government protected in this legislation. Further, Indian men in the sovereignty movement argued that any amendments to the *Act* that forced band councils to adhere to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms were an infringement on Aboriginal sovereignty because to do so would impose foreign colonial concepts of individual rights onto traditional concepts of collective rights. This claim was also used against Aboriginal women who strived for these amendments as they were demonized as undermining Aboriginal sovereignty by imposing non-Aboriginal ideologies onto Aboriginal traditions.

For Aboriginal women patriarchal colonialism has been legalized by the *Act*, where "...the privileges for status-Indian men within band governments and reserve lands and resources" (Barker, 2006, p. 154) are protected, and women's rights continue to be violated. Although it is a victory for the Indian women and children who have had their status reinstated, the amendments to the *Act* have done nothing to substantively change Aboriginal women's economic, social, or political positions in urban or reserve communities (ibid.). Nor have these amendments empowered Aboriginal women to reclaim pre-colonial traditions and customs where women held agency and power within community government. The *Act* itself is founded in patriarchal colonialism and to add

Indian women and children,¹² who were displaced by discriminatory marriage and membership legislation, back into the *Act* is not an entirely effective solution for Aboriginal women. Barker (2006) refers to these amendments as “Additive Reforms” that cannot offer real change for Aboriginal women’s social and economic positions when the patriarchal colonial social relations and legal structures have not changed.

It is extremely dangerous for Aboriginal sovereignty to be founded on the *Act*, a clearly discriminatory piece of legislation. When a document such as this prescribes blatant discrimination against Aboriginal women, while it elevates the privilege of Indian men, it becomes clear that sovereignty cannot remain in the domain of masculine authority. Aboriginal feminism insists that to remedy these types of human rights violations sovereignty needs to incorporate a gender analysis to avoid replicating colonial practices of patriarchy (Smith, 2005; Sunseri, 2000).

A similar situation is occurring in the United States that also finds sovereignty problematic for Native American peoples when gender-based discrimination occurs within tribal governments without recourse or an appeal process. For example, in 1978 Julia Martinez (Santa Clara Pueblo vs. Martinez) sued her tribe under the Indian Civil Rights Act for gender discrimination when the tribe had prescribed that “children born from female tribal members who married outside the tribe lost tribal status whereas children born from male tribal members who married outside the tribe did not” (Smith, 2007, p. 99). The outcome of this case saw the Supreme Court rule in favour of the tribal government claiming that federal governments could not intervene with tribal

¹² In an open letter to the Canadian Members of Parliament Sharon McIvor (2010) argues that although Bill C-3 extends status rights to approximately 45,000 people it sustains gender discrimination as descendants of out marrying women have fewer rights than those of out marrying men.

membership as it would be an infringement on sovereignty. This case set precedence for tribal governments to impose or continue using gender-based discrimination under the rights of sovereignty. In this way sexism is entrenched and women's rights are dismissed from tribal self-determination and removed from Native survival discourse from colonization.

Violence against Aboriginal women.

The argument that by excluding gender equality from Aboriginal sovereignty or self-determination movements and claiming that women's individual rights will be addressed through the restoration of traditional gender balance is similar to a Marxist argument that claims when people reach collective class equality then individual equality will naturally happen. Additionally, this type of reasoning ignores the gender division of labour and how sexism operates for Aboriginal women in contemporary ways, such as through gendered violence. The disproportionate rate of violence against Aboriginal women is a direct attack on sovereignty when it prevents individual nation members from achieving the health required for a strong collective or nation. Andrea Smith (2007) believes that the decolonization needed for sovereignty movements cannot happen without an analysis of gender violence, especially when it is was the method used to appropriate the land by settlers:

It has been through sexual violence and through impositions of European gender relationships on Native communities that Europeans were able to colonize Native peoples in the first place. If we maintain these patriarchal gender systems, we will be unable to decolonize and fully assert our sovereignty (Smith, 2007, p. 100).

Ignoring this sexual and domestic violence against Aboriginal women in the interests of collective sovereignty is to deny the individual human right to self-determination, which means to dehumanize Native women and undermines sovereignty in itself. According to Monture-Angus (1999) pre-colonial traditional ideologies of sovereignty included the right for Aboriginal individuals to be healthy, which means to be sovereign, or to be free from violence as a right. As sovereignty requires healthy individuals in order to have healthy collectives that can take care of themselves, eliminating violence against Aboriginal women is not only a women's issue but an Aboriginal sovereignty issue; these two are inseparable. Collective self-determination must mean that all individuals have a basic right to a certain quality of life, free from violence of colonialism, racism/sexism and poverty, as well as from violence of other humans, even if those other humans are one's people or relations, or are themselves suffering from colonial conditions (LaRocque, 2007).

Unfortunately, the reality is that Aboriginal women in Canada are five times more likely to be murdered than non-aboriginal women (Amnesty International, 2004) and "Indian women suffer death rates twice as high as any other women in this country [USA] because of domestic violence" (Smith, 2007, p. 98). The fact remains that Native women in North America are not 'surviving', but are being dehumanized, and this systemic oppression is being ignored for collective emancipation. For these reasons "Aboriginal women have the greatest stake in self-determination, both as part of a people struggling to decolonize and as individuals struggling to enjoy basic human rights" (LaRocque, 2007, p. 62). As Aboriginal definitions of sovereignty that do not include patriarchal colonialism are imperative for Aboriginal women, Theresa Nahanee (1993)

believes that the goal for sexual equality cannot be merely reduced to individual versus collective rights. Further, I think when Aboriginal women are positioned as responsible for raising the future generations and are described as both the backbone of the nation and mothers of the nation it stands to reason that healthy individual women will result in collective healthy nations.

Disruption of current and future nation members: sterilization and child apprehension.

As shown throughout this section Aboriginal women's rights and concerns are consistently overlooked or silenced in support of sovereignty and collective rights. Additionally, Aboriginal men's rights are framed as representative of collective rights, as they are seen as the natural citizens of Aboriginal nations (Napoleon, 2005; Sunseri, 2000). While Aboriginal women's rights and concerns are overlooked due to their characterization as individualistic, they are further ignored because Aboriginal men are argued to be disproportionately marginalized by colonialism in comparison to women and this becomes framed as a collective and monetary issue. Following the strikingly similar argument to the Sami peoples indigenous to Northern Europe, many scholars claim that Indigenous men suffer more from colonialism when their roles are more drastically changed as their traditional skills in economic production, such as hunting for example, are rendered ineffective (Eikjok, 2007; Smith, 2007). However, to compare economic productivity between Indigenous men and women places the emphasis on monetary values and systems but neglects to analyze or understand the numerous ways that Indigenous women have been stripped of their rights and marginalized under

colonization (ibid.).¹³ More specifically, involuntary reproductive sterilization of Aboriginal women in North American, and the removal of children from Aboriginal communities have been both overlooked and absent from nationalist discourse and sovereignty. There appears to be a disconnection or disassociation between the discontinuation and removal of Native children and sovereignty of Native nations.

As discussed in chapter one, involuntary sterilization of North American Aboriginal women is a clear example of patriarchal colonialism due to the racist and sexist targeting, as well as colonial ideologies of paternalism, toward Aboriginal women. Under the 1937 amendment to Alberta's Sexual Sterilization Act, "patients" considered unfit for intelligent parenthood were placed in consideration for sterilization by the eugenics board (Boyer, 2006). Aboriginal peoples, particularly mothers, in North America were stigmatized as inadequate and incompetent parents (Cull, 2006; Mzinegiizhigo-kwe Bédard, 2006) and were therefore easy targets for sterilization programs. This discontinuation of Aboriginal children is a genocide tactic against Aboriginal women's fertility and is part of a larger assimilation agenda that also forcibly removed children from their parents and communities.

Both the United States of America and Canada initiated an attack on Aboriginal parents stigmatizing them as uncivilized and unable to care for their children (Anderson, 2000; Lavell-Harvard & Corbiere Lavell, 2006; Mzinegiizhigo-kwe Bédard, 2006). By labelling Aboriginal women as ignorant and incompetent mothers it serves to blame them

¹³ Although similar concerns with feminism, regarding the division of public and private spheres as well as issues of production and reproduction, exist, to compare and contrast them at this stage of development for Aboriginal feminism would decentre decolonization. At the risk of erasure of specificities of Aboriginal experiences, excluding a holistic analysis that directly ties the impacts of colonialism on Aboriginal men and patriarchal colonialism for Aboriginal women, again fails to provide an adequate theoretical framework. For further discussion of colonial impacts on gender roles and colonization see Rauna Kuokkanen (2007).

as the source for “... their children’s social and medical problems... as opposed to the dramatic changes in their lifestyles and the dire social conditions experienced since colonization” (Cull, 2006, p. 143). This is then used as justification to forcibly remove children from their homes and communities to prevent Aboriginal children being influenced by their mothers and heritage (ibid.). By removing children from their cultural influences the Canadian government hoped that segregated and residential schools would assimilate them into mainstream Euro-Canadian culture (Titley, 1986). In the mid 1800s a system of church operated residential schools was established that peaked in enrolment in the 1930s with approximately one in three Aboriginal children between the ages of three and fifteen attending (Fournier & Crey, 1997). However, it became evident that these schools failed as Aboriginal children were rejecting the Euro-Canadian identity, while upon return to their reserves and bands they were alienated from their families and communities (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Further, the schools did not provide role models or parenting skills to the children, creating intergenerational issues for families of the children who survived residential schools (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

For effective assimilation of Aboriginal children to occur, the government decided integration into mainstream society via public schools was required (Titley, 1986) and began forcibly removing children from their homes and communities to be placed into foster care. During the 1960s the residential school system began its termination, which coincided with the apprehension initiatives of Aboriginal children by provincially operated child and welfare services known as the ‘Sixties Scoop’¹⁴ (Kulusic, 2005). In this way forced child removal by child and welfare services continued where

¹⁴ Currently there are two ‘Sixties Scoop’ class-action lawsuits filed in Canada. The first was approved in Ontario in 2010 and the second in British Columbia in 2011 (Fournier, 2011). Additionally, a law firm in Saskatchewan is gathering plaintiffs for filing purposes.

the residential schools left off and according to Randi Cull (2006) the ‘Sixties Scoop’ has been minimized in Canadian media and public discussions in comparison to the residential schools, even though it “...marks one of the darkest times in Canadian history” (p. 145). The federal government amended the Indian Act in 1951 to increase provincial control over the health and welfare of Aboriginal children (Cull, 2006). With this increased control also came newly designated funds that were

the primary catalysts for state involvement in the well-being of Aboriginal children, ... as Ottawa guaranteed payment for each child apprehended... [it was] not necessarily findings of abuse and/or neglect, although the stereotype of the Aboriginal mother being “unfit” served to justify the legitimize state intervention. When there was no funding, there was little, if any, interest or concern about the children (Cull, 2006, p. 145).

With provinces receiving funds for children apprehended into state custody the rates of children being removed skyrocketed from less than one percent of Aboriginal children in care in 1955 to 30 to 40 percent in the late 1960s when they comprised less than 4 percent of Canada’s national population (Fournier & Crey, 1997).

The mass removal of Aboriginal children by provincial child and welfare service agencies is referred to as the ‘Sixties Scoop’ when the highest number of status-Indian children were taken; one in four (Fournier & Crey, 1997). However, the forced adoption continued until the 1990s and the recorded number of status-Indian children taken does not necessarily reflect the actual scope of the removal because some Aboriginal children were non-status, and in some cases the ones who did have status were illegally stripped of it upon adoption. For example, my own mother’s ethnicity was changed from Aboriginal or Indian to Japanese, as the child and welfare agency was finding it difficult to acquire a white family who would adopt a Native child. My mother’s name was changed and her case file sealed until the 1990s to prevent any repatriation for her or birth family. Not

only is my mother part of this stolen generation, but both she and her children were raised under the belief that we were a completely different ethnicity and culture. It made it difficult for our family to claim allegiance with our Aboriginal nation as we did know we were Aboriginal or what nation we belong to. The displacement is further intensified as our natal community does not reinstate membership to Aboriginal women who were stripped of their status nor their descendants; a clear example of colonial patriarchy and First Nations collusion with it.

In the United States the rates of child apprehension are also alarming. In 1974 the United States' Association of American Indian Affairs estimated that

...between 25 and 35 percent of all native youth were either adopted by Euroamericans, placed in non-Indian foster homes, or permanently housed in institutional settings, while another 25 percent were “temporarily” placed in government or church-run boarding schools each year (Jaimes & Halsey, 1992, p. 326).

During this period Native American children were sent in both directions across the Canadian and United States border for adoption. In Canada it was common practice to export Aboriginal children to the United States with children being individually ‘sold’ for \$5,000 to \$10,000 by the provincial child welfare services to private adoption agencies (Cull, 2006). The initiative was to separate Aboriginal children from their culture and kinship networks by making them unidentifiable by legal name changes, relocating them to other provinces and across the US border, and placing them in white, middle-class, nuclear families.

The forced adoption and sterilization programs in North America affect Native women initially, but attacks on women who are the backbone of the nation, the carriers of culture, and the mothers/nurturers are blatant colonial attacks on *all* Native peoples and

nations. In this way it is in the best interest of the collective nations and cultures to approach individual women's rights with dignity and respect especially with "...matters as crucial as citizenship, identity, or personal safety and integrity. It is not deliverance if some people's rights within any decolonizing or liberation movements are sacrificed" (LaRocque, 2007, p. 69). Gender discrimination is a process of colonization; to deny membership to the women and children who were forcibly removed is to reproduce this colonization, and to deny basic human rights for Aboriginal women actually undermines sovereignty rather than affirming it (Smith, 2007). It needs to be understood that attacks on Native women are also attacks on sovereignty and to rectify this there has to be acknowledgement of the impacts of colonization and the relationship between patriarchal colonialism and sovereignty (ibid.).

Section Three

The previous section exemplified how patriarchal colonialism operates through sovereignty discourse and continues to launch very specific assaults on Aboriginal women, and therefore nations, through relocation, violence, and genocide tactics of reproductive oppression and relocation of children from Aboriginal nations to non-Aboriginal homes. Aboriginal women make it clear that sovereignty politics must include a gender analysis to ensure that the discrimination Aboriginal women experience is both recognized and remedied by subjecting Aboriginal governments and entities to human rights standards derived from values of freedom and equality. However, as gender politics and a woman-centred analysis have not been included in Aboriginal self-determination agendas it becomes difficult to envision what they might look like. Instead

Native activists offer examples where sovereignty and gender analysis occur simultaneously and ensure that both individual and collective rights function together. The second part to this section builds on these examples with a discussion on what significant contributions Aboriginal feminism offers to feminist theory.

What does a Sovereignty and Gender Analysis Look Like

Aboriginal feminists argue that attempts at decolonization and sovereignty without simultaneously incorporating a gender analysis or women's issues can be hazardous for Aboriginal women (Barker, 2006; Napoleon, 2005; Smith, 2007; Sunseri, 2000). Without a focus on women's issues there is nothing to ensure that gender inequality will be remedied once collective sovereignty is achieved (Sunseri, 2000). Andrea Smith (2007) argues that instead of attempting to achieve sovereignty first and gender equality second, if Aboriginal women were placed in the centre of analysis then both individual and collective rights can simultaneously occur. This also has the potential to avoid replicating patriarchal colonialism, however it must also include a process of decolonization that addresses sexist and racist ideologies that have been adopted under distorted traditionalism. Additionally, it is imperative for Native womanism to be employed as a method to recall pre-colonial traditions based on gender equal principles that are empowering to women to debunk distorted traditions. By combining these methods it is possible for Aboriginal women's issues to be effectively and holistically incorporated into sovereignty agendas.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (2011) identifies the same problems with fragmenting sovereignty and human rights and has created an 'Intercultural Human

Rights Approach’ to implementing gendered analysis. In the areas of law and policy development for Aboriginal peoples this approach “...view[s] the right of self-determination and individual human rights of First Nations people as interdependent and complementary which reinforce one another, consistent with international human rights theory and law” (p. 7). Further, the ‘Intercultural Human Rights Approach’ is intertwined with the method of questioning traditions laid out in the final part of the previous chapter where I examined how Aboriginal feminism has created a process for decolonization of patriarchal colonialism using ‘Native womanism’ to question traditions. The third component to this process of questioning traditions was to apply the identified pre-colonial tradition to a contemporary context, and I now give an example of what this looks like through the ‘Intercultural Human Rights Approach’.

NWAC is a national organization focused on law and policy development for Aboriginal women (NWAC, 2011) and therefore their methodology can be theorized as a form of Aboriginal feminist activism. The ‘Intercultural Human Rights Approach’ encompasses four components

1. Grounding all policy and legal analysis in an understanding of pre-contact gender relations when Aboriginal citizens, female and male, were valued equally and lived in self-determining communities.
2. Identifying the negative impacts on individuals, families and nations of colonization and assimilation policies including the negative impact on gender relations that accompanied colonization.
3. Conducting an analysis of current realities (informed by the first two elements) and identifying areas requiring for change to meet all the equality needs and rights of Aboriginal women (e.g. as women, as indigenous, as disabled, etc.) and in a way that reflects the cultural diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their varying economic and social situations. This can involve collecting relevant socio-economic statistics, analyzing current social conditions and analyzing the impacts of legislation that lead to gender inequalities.

4. Developing and implementing strategies and solutions informed by the first three elements. These strategies and solutions may require sameness of treatment in some cases and in others, equality may require gender-specific measures, indigenous-specific measures and/or measures specifically developed for indigenous women or women with disabilities or other needs (p. 8).

The first component will require the questioning traditions process, while the remaining three are an example of how to apply these traditions to our contemporary lived experiences and develop strategies to remedy them. By combining and recognizing that individual and collective rights are interconnected and therefore sovereignty agendas should reflect this pre-colonial principle, NWAC has positioned itself as both an innovative and leading Aboriginal women's group in Canada.

Despite Native women's activism being framed as either women's issues or collective sovereignty issues, there are additional groups in the United States that bridge these intersections (Smith, 2007). There is the Sacred Circle, "a South Dakota based national American Indian resource centre for domestic violence" (ibid., p. 100), which produced the *Sovereign Women Strengthen Sovereign Nations* pamphlet to educate people on the similarities and differences between tribal and Native women's sovereignty. Founded in 2002, the Boarding School Healing Projects (BHSP) works in coalition with the "American Indian Law Alliance, Incite!, Women of Color Against Violence, Indigenous Women's Network, and Native Women of Sovereign Nations of the South Dakota Coalition Against Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault" (Smith, 2007, p. 101) and these groups seek accountability and repatriation from the USA government for the boarding school abuses. Unlike Canada's residential school project, where abuse has

been documented and accountability has been demanded from the Canadian government and churches, this has not happened in the US and that is what BSHP is moving toward.

The problem with organizing healing projects around violence is that it happens on an individual interpersonal level in our communities, but it stems from state-sponsored violence as a genocide tactic for assimilation of Native peoples in boarding schools (Smith, 2005, 2007). By linking state-sponsored violence with interpersonal gender violence in their analysis a template is created for Native women or women of colour to theorize the connections between racism and sexism and how they both function together to serve colonialism and white supremacy. These are a few examples of Native women contributing de-colonial sovereignty issues on community and national levels, while maintaining a gender analysis at the centre. Many Native activists will explore where feminism can or cannot contribute to Native experiences, but they neglect to examine where Native women's activism and theories can contribute to feminist theory. Despite this popular approach to feminism by Native activist, both Andrea Smith (2005) and Emma LaRocque (2007) break away and apply the theorized experiences and worldviews of Native women as contributions to feminist theory.

Aboriginal Feminists Contribution to Feminist Theory

Sovereignty and self-determination are focal points for Native feminists and activists and by placing de-colonial struggles at the core of their feminist politics Native women are also questioning the legitimacy of the nation-state governing model and in turn the authority of Canada and the United States (Smith, 2005). Activists and scholars often question the actions of governments, but tend to avoid questioning their legitimacy.

For instance African American civil rights movements have traditionally focused on obtaining individual rights and integration into mainstream culture (Langston, 2003) and anti-racist groups have appealed to their collective allegiance to America with slogans like “We’re American too” in attempts to stop the hate crimes developing after the 9/11 attacks (Smith, 2005). This solidarity to America is understood by some Native women activists as approving the genocide and colonialism of Native peoples, as America would not exist without this holocaust (ibid.). In Canada this type of legitimizing of nation-state authority happens through the homogenizing language that claims “We are all immigrants” as a means of erasing colonial history (Lenon, 2008) and silencing the sovereign nations of the First Peoples.

Another example of where de-colonial struggles contribute to feminist theory derives from the innovative BHSP, which connects state and community violence with repatriation, as discussed above, however they additionally question the concept of repatriation as a whole (Smith, 2005). The capitalist and colonial mindset that views monetary compensation as sufficient is antithetical to Indigenous mind sets that want access to and control over land and resources: “No matter how much financial compensation the U.S. may give, such compensation does not ultimately end the colonial relationship between the United States and Indigenous nations” (Smith, 2005, p. 103). By removing financial compensation for restoration, and replacing it with a campaign where “neo-colonial economic relationships between the U.S. and people of colour, Indigenous peoples, and Third World countries” (ibid.), are altered, a powerful sovereign platform can be developed. This is not to say that financial compensation or economic development on Indigenous lands and access to these resources is unnecessary. As

Monture-Angus (1999) contends, “It is hard to be sovereign when you cannot even feed your own children from your own resources” (p. 36). Indigenous groups do require land and resource access but it must go beyond financial compensation and allow for relationships between nation-states and nations that foster different perspectives on economics, health, and sovereignty. Authors Lawrence and Dua (2005) also note that relationships between Aboriginal peoples, land, and sovereignty are frequently left out of anti-racist and post-colonial theorizing, and until theorizing “...takes seriously both the collective character of Native traditional life and the importance of specific lands to the cultural identities of different Native peoples, it will have little meaning for Native peoples” (p. 127). In other words acknowledging the link between the harmonious relationships with land or the ‘Native land ethic’ in conjunction with cultural ceremonies and rituals or ‘Native spirituality’ is essential in order to inform post-colonial, anti-racist and feminist theorizing of Aboriginal worldviews and create real inclusion politics. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly this inclusion of our worldviews makes these theoretical strains relevant to our experiences with land and sovereignty. In the case of Aboriginal feminism, having inclusive politics creates an opportunity for Aboriginal women to develop and synthesize a theoretical framework that brings these overlapping connections between land and humans to feminist theory. As many Aboriginal women have argued, our cultures and worldviews do offer legitimate alternatives to mainstream “...over-industrialized, over-bureaucratized, corporate controlled societies” (LaRocque, 2007, p. 68) where Aboriginal values go beyond capitalist exploitation of peoples. Our beliefs and traditions, the true ones that still carry our principles and the ones being re-

invented, can also offer models for inspiration on ways to create attitude and behavioural shifts toward women-centred ideologies for equality and appreciation.

Aboriginal feminism has created an intricate yet accessible methodology for assessing patriarchal colonial ideologies within our traditions and in combination with NWAC's process for identifying resistance strategies in the areas of law and policy these Aboriginal feminist approaches hold potential for colonialized women. Globally, decolonial sovereignty movements tend to use women as markers for culture difference and tradition, therefore regulating their bodies and participation in public life (Martin-Hill, 2003; Sunseri, 2000). Patriarchal colonialism, genocide, and the need for decolonization processes are not isolated to North America, and Aboriginal feminism contributes to feminist theory by building a template for human rights that can be applied to Indigenous women on an international scale.

Over several decades Canadian Aboriginal women have fought for the elimination of gender and racial discrimination. When claims for pre-colonial egalitarianism have not been taken seriously as a tradition fundamental to Aboriginal principles of caring, honesty, kindness, and sharing, Aboriginal women have been forced to alter their strategies for resistance to patriarchal colonial forms of discrimination. Through innovative adaptations that include the reintroduction of individual and collective rights as mutually interactive into a human rights framework, feminist principles of equality, and gender-based decolonization methodologies, Aboriginal feminists have fought to dismantle negative gendered stereotypes and the masculine nationalist discourse that have all joined to exclude us from our roles within politics and leadership. By challenging and building solutions to this discrimination in conjunction with identifying our true pre-

colonial practices Aboriginal women are setting the stage for sovereignty agendas that reflect who we are as the First Nations of North America.

Implication and Conclusion

Implications of Aboriginal Feminism

The implications of this work will continue to develop along with new material and emerging global theorizing of Aboriginal feminism. This work offers contributions to feminist theory by decentring mainstream feminisms, and creates a framework from which international Indigenous feminism can draw.

Andrea Smith (2011) highlights the importance of an international Indigenous feminism. She identifies an emerging trend: Native scholars tend to follow feminist theory by either engaging in order to show how racist white feminism is, or rejecting it altogether. She identifies a dilemma for all feminism, indigenous or not; the politics of inclusion presumes feminism is identified by white women and this presumption in turn decentres Indigenous feminism rather than critiquing or reconstituting mainstream feminism (p. 57). Following Andrea Smith, the next step for my own work will include drawing from literature that "...move[s] from a politics of inclusion to a politics of re-centering" (ibid.). The politics of inclusion merely tacks Aboriginal feminism onto mainstream feminism, but this does nothing to decentre its whiteness and/or its imperialism. Nor can Aboriginal feminism be best understood by attempting to interrogate it through an established dominant feminism that is influenced by post-colonial theories. For these reasons, I have consciously avoided viewing Aboriginal feminism through a post-colonial lens, for to do so risks decentring projects of decolonization in favour of moving toward scholarship that centres Aboriginal feminism. Additionally, Smith (2011) raises the question: "if we were to situate Native women at

the center of feminist theory, how would feminist theory itself change?” (ibid.). To answer this question will require interrogating a large and multifaceted body of literature that includes studies from various Indigenous feminists originating from various indigenous groups located around the globe.

While analyzing the writings of Aboriginal women in North America it became clear to me that the literature emphasized two particular topics of importance: territory and mothering. These large topics require further consideration in a future analysis on their connections to Aboriginal feminism. However, I offer a brief synopsis and ultimately pose the question of the compatibility between Aboriginal feminism, ecofeminism and Aboriginal mothering to illustrate the theoretical trajectory of Aboriginal feminism.

Aboriginal Environmentalism and Ecofeminism

Aboriginal feminism offers a way forward for Indigenous women’s issues that are particular to our cultures, especially in the areas of environmentalism and sovereignty, which academic feminism has traditionally overlooked. Further, environmentalism and sovereignty have been typically excluded as a ‘woman’s issue’ from feminist theorizing according to Aboriginal women scholars, such as Lawrence and Dua (2005), Lindberg (2004), and Trask (1996). However, Aboriginal feminism can find compatibilities with the feminist strain ‘ecofeminism’, which has evolved over the past 40 years to expand environmental concerns linked with sex and race and more recently includes colonialism. Further, ecofeminism has transformed to include a new strain of decolonization feminist politics that integrates environment into the race, sex, colonial framework. In addition,

ecofeminism has evolved into a totalizing theoretical movement that encompasses the many concerns resulting from colonialism, globalization, and imperialism, with particular interest in gender. For these reasons it is considered by some as the defining movement of the third wave of feminism (Sturgeon, 1997). The new face of ecofeminism is almost unrecognizable from its original North American emergence in the late 1970s and early 1980s, as the writings and focus have shifted to include political ecology, ecological economics, environmental ethics, and women's studies on a local and global front (for examples see anthologies by Eaton and Lorentzen [2003], and Salleh [2009]).

Relationship to territory and ecosystems is a vital component of Aboriginal culture and religion that is often excluded within sovereignty definitions between Canada and Aboriginal nations, as described in chapter three. Aboriginal feminism offers a methodology for decolonization by reclaiming pre-colonial traditions, which includes Aboriginal interconnected principles and traditional ecological knowledge. These principles are imperative to reclaim pre-colonial environmental principles of respect for bio-habitats and to use sovereignty claims of Aboriginal lands as a tool to discontinue environmental degradation.

According to Andy Smith (1997), most environmental disasters in the United States occur on or around Indian lands, and in some instances are directly linked with harmful effects on women's reproductive health. For this reason strategies and initiatives are required to eliminate the environmental form of patriarchal colonialism. Smith (1997) echoes Jaime's Guerrero (2003) argument that links the subordination of women and ecology with colonialism and contends that 'Native womanism' has a role in preventing this. Undoubtedly, there are intersections between Aboriginal feminism and ecofeminism

but further analysis is needed to understand the extent of this relationship and the ways these two can combine to offer decolonization strategies on an Indigenous global front.

Aboriginal Mothering

The act of mothering functions simultaneously in multiple ways where mothers are recognized and theorized as fostering a nation, promoting cultural survival, and are highly political agents who largely contribute to the creation and promotion of distinct culture difference and identity (Anderson, 2000; Simpson, 2006; Sunseri, 2008).

Aboriginal mothering exemplifies Aboriginal feminism for its activism, consciously and subconsciously, uses 'Native womanism' to bring back the empowerment mothering held in the past into contemporary times. Further, Aboriginal mothering operates as a resistance strategy against genocide and promotes self-determination through human rights.

Traditional Aboriginal mothering is a multi-layered holistic process that encompasses extended kin and community members into a caregiving model. Aboriginal women are then known as 'mothers of the nation' those who raise and care for the people based on extended kinship (Sunseri, 2008). Pre-colonialism this type of mothering was very much based on the basic survival of the community where each person held a role to be accomplished for the greater good of the nation. As Aboriginal women have been responsible for the mothering or caregiving of community members during pre-colonial times, reclaiming or reasserting mothering as a traditional practice is part of distinguishing a distinct cultural identity and maintaining cultural practices (Fiske, 1993). Culture is indeed important to Aboriginal women, but the components of Aboriginal

mothering in a current colonial context include caring for the community as a means of survival.

Mothering then becomes a site of resistance to genocide and colonialism as any act of caregiving is to further the survival of Aboriginal peoples and functions to minimize the effects of cultural genocide and extermination policies of sterilization and forced adoptions (Sunseri, 2008). The ability to remain Aboriginal and resist assimilation is a political act undertaken by mothering. For Monture-Angus (1999) mothering is the first step to self-determination for our peoples; it begins at home by providing safe environments for our children to grow as healthy individuals and practices the right to keep our children and the right to raise them as Aboriginal. Additionally with such negative Native female imagery and the exalted passivity of 'She No Speaks', discussed in chapter two, it is crucial to create positive images of real Aboriginal women and Sunseri (2008) argues that mothering offers empowered images, roles, and modeling for Aboriginal women and children. For these reasons, Aboriginal mothering exemplifies the major components of Aboriginal feminism as a decolonization theory and methodology that moves towards women's empowerment and liberation.

Environmentalism and Aboriginal mothering are both separate and distinct but they also intertwine with each other on areas of health and wellness and in religion and spirituality where the earth is conceived as 'Mother'. Here post-structural ecofeminism offers an analysis for the 'Mother Earth' concept to avoid the feminization of nature and helps to reconceptualize concepts of nature, women, and Indigenous identity and stereotypes, for examples of this see, Gaard (1993), Griffin (1990, 1997), King (1990), Sturgeon (1997), and Wilson (2005). The compatibilities between Aboriginal feminism,

mothering, and ecofeminism have yet to be fully theorized and only a small body of literature exists for this intersectionality.

Aboriginal feminism has created a decolonization theory and methodology that can accommodate the changing realities and issues for Indigenous women internationally. The future of Aboriginal feminism and its contribution to feminist theory include a decentring of whiteness and/or imperialism, and limitless decolonization praxis as globalization and environment concerns are expanding. By having a resistance movement that empowers Indigenous women to reclaim cultural knowledge and practices, Aboriginal feminism has the potential to create a path toward individual and collective self-determination for Indigenous groups.

Conclusion

In my quest to locate an Aboriginal feminism as a foundation to theorize gender, colonial, and sovereignty issues, I have gathered the voice and writings of Aboriginal women predominately in North America. Additionally, my own subjectivity or position within the thesis has been minimally stated which is a conscious decision in order to provide this theory as objectively as possible without disrupting the voices of Aboriginal women. In doing so, I have conceptualized one strain of Aboriginal feminism centred on decolonization that can be defined as auto-ethnographic in nature and that consists of two main positions: 'Tribal Woman' and 'Native Feminist'. As such, Aboriginal women's activism and resistance to forms of patriarchal colonialism in multiple political, social, and economic structures has produced an organic liberation movement. Although expressing itself in various forms and under different pseudonyms, such as 'Tribal

Women', 'Tribalist', and 'Womanist', whether critique and proposed remedies are sought through a colonial, culture, and gender scope, the core quest for human rights remains the same. From the literature I conclude that Aboriginal feminism does indeed exist; it continues to evolve and incorporate new challenges and concerns through conversations between Aboriginal women. Furthermore, by constructing a decolonization theoretical framework using 'Native womanism' to combat practices of patriarchal colonialism, I argue that Aboriginal feminism can include the diversity and fluctuations of Aboriginal women's lived experiences. This has the potential to prevent totalizing Aboriginal women as homogenous, while still tracing patterns of common experiences with patriarchal colonialism, such as distorted traditionalism's 'She No Speaks' and 'Villainous Woman'. As shown in chapter three, when decolonization methods of questioning distorted traditions fail to generate real and meaningful emancipation, Aboriginal women adapt their resistance strategies by integrating a human rights approach resulting in a hybrid, contemporary Aboriginal feminism. Consequently, Aboriginal women are better positioned to build woman-centered self-determination initiatives that seek to eliminate and reconcile patriarchal colonial practices that disregard human rights.