

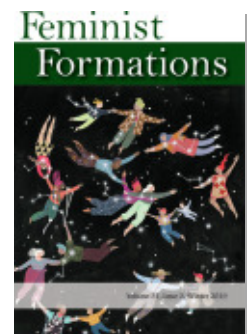


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Logic of Elimination, and Survivance

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“What a Native Looks Like”: Academic Feminist Spaces, the Logic of Elimination, and Survivance

Judy Rohrer

I write to share ways I have seen Native colleagues and their knowledges (Native, feminist, and otherwise) denied and rejected in feminist academic spaces. I also write to think through my responses to these incidents, in the moment and after the fact, as I grapple with my responsibilities as a non-Native feminist. The attempts I witnessed to eliminate/disappear/erase these colleagues fell into three broad categories: not being recognized as “real” Natives; not being seen as adequately feminist; and disappearing behind/into a near totalizing Black-white racial binary. These occurrences are homegrown demonstrations of the structural persistence of settler colonialism manifest in the logic of elimination. Overall, this paper argues that feminist academic spaces are often hostile territory for Native scholars who face attempts at elimination upon entering them. “Survivance” and “resurgence” assist these Native academics in their navigation of these territories, in their refusal of erasure, in their struggles for decolonization. Non-Natives wishing to facilitate that navigation and Native presence in the academy can learn to recognize these acts of resurgence and deepen our understanding of, and commitment to, decolonization.

Keywords: academy / decolonization / feminism / logic of elimination / non-Native

I originally wrote this paper in response to a Call for Papers for a special issue of a different feminist journal.¹ The prompt for the Call for Papers began, “How do Indigenous/Native/Aboriginal feminisms navigate the contemporary political terrain in settler colonial contexts?” As I mulled that prompt I found myself thinking less about “Native feminisms” per se and more about the treacherous

“contemporary political terrain” my Native feminist colleagues have to navigate. That in itself is interesting, since the two are not the same thing, but we clearly cannot have Native feminisms without Native feminists. Further, it is not as if “Indigenous/Native/Aboriginal feminisms” is a self-evident, unproblematic concept. Given all of this and my positionality as a non-Native feminist academic, I decided to enter this question through a backdoor, to bring it home, to think about the “homework” underlying its assumptions.²

Considering the relationship between Native³ feminisms and Native feminists, my broad point of focus is the settler colonial context that is the current US academy. More specifically, I am looking at broadly progressive, mainstream, or “whitestream” feminist spaces within the academy and focusing on three incidents that occurred in spaces familiar to the academic feminist: the hiring committee, the public talk, and the workshop/conference. I write to share ways I have seen Native colleagues and their knowledges (Native, feminist, and otherwise) denied and rejected in feminist academic spaces. I also write to think through my responses to these incidents, in the moment and after the fact (including the process of writing this paper), as I grapple with my responsibilities as a non-Native feminist. The attempts I witnessed to erase or eliminate these colleagues fell into three broad categories: not being recognized as “real” Natives; not being seen as adequately feminist; and disappearing behind a near-totalizing Black-white racial binary. These occurrences are homegrown demonstrations of the structural persistence of settler colonialism manifest in the logic of elimination.

It can be uncomfortable for non-Natives (white people and non-Native people of color) to recognize that settler colonial violences are alive and well in feminist spaces. Calling them out can position one as a “feminist killjoy,”⁴ but this interrogation is a critical step toward decolonization that can help support a more open and responsible navigation of Native knowledges, theories, and intellectuals, in the settler colonial US academy. The killjoy will insist on recognition of decolonization as “a dramatic reimagining of relationship with land, people, and the state. . . . It requires conversation. It is a practice; it is unlearning” (as quoted in *Walia 2012*). It is a “dramatic reimagining” because it necessarily has to “account for the multifarious ways in which capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and the totalizing character of state power interact with one another to form the constellation of power relations that sustain colonial patterns of behavior, structures, and relationships” (*Coulthard 2014, 14*). This is why participation in decolonization is not something non-Natives should attempt paternalistically for Native people, but a practice non-Natives need to engage for ourselves. Since this process is about deep structural change, it necessarily means relinquishing power and resources. Intersectional theorizing has taught us nothing if not that no one is free unless we all are.

This paper has three sections. The first, “The Context,” situates the academy, including feminist academic spaces, firmly within the US settler state and

part of ongoing colonization. It anchors the paper in the well-established argument that Native feminist theories and knowledges need to be centered—not dismissed, ignored, or even “included”—in all scholar-activism advocating social justice. It discusses key concepts from Indigenous and settler colonial studies including the “logic of elimination,” “survance,” and “resurgence.”

Next, “The Incidents” presents the three events that provide grist for this paper. I describe each and analyze the ways the incidents sought to eliminate my colleagues (characterizing them as not Natives, not feminists, not recognizable outside a Black-white binary). I consider my reactions to these events and how my colleagues’ responses demonstrated “survance” and “resurgence.” Picking up the challenges posed by Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013), I use a decolonial lens to examine each event.

My thinking has been built in conversation with the three colleagues involved in these incidents, making this paper just one part of a larger collaborative process of finding ways to respond to and refuse Indigenous erasure. They have read, provided feedback, and discussed their incidents, and the paper in general, with me. In fact, they have now done this twice in their support of my efforts toward publication. For reasons of academic precarity, including those discussed in “The Context,” I kept the identities of two of the scholars anonymous. I would have also done so for the scholar in the third incident, Noenoe Silva, but I have already written about that, and named Silva, in Rohrer 2016. I am grateful to these three colleagues for their engagement and also acknowledge that all the mistakes I make here are entirely mine. This is part of my journey to try to become a better decolonial accomplice.

The third section, “Ways Forward,” envisions approaches and practices that non-Native feminists could adopt in striving toward collaborative decolonization. It begins with a broad discussion of the concept of solidarity and ally models and then hones in on decolonial struggles involving Natives and non-Natives. Here, as in “The Incidents,” I quote liberally from Native studies scholars and encourage those unfamiliar with this scholarship to seek it out. I conclude the paper offering possible practices to build truly decolonial feminist spaces within the academy.

Overall, the paper argues that whitestream feminist academic spaces are often hostile territory for Native scholars who face attempts at elimination upon entering such spaces. This is because settler colonial logics are foundational to the modern academy, even (and sometimes especially) in progressive spaces. “Survance” and “resurgence” assist Native academics in their navigation of these territories, in their refusal of erasure, in their struggles for decolonization. In the face of non-Native insistence that we know “what a Native looks like” and how that bolsters the logic of elimination, this refusal demonstrates the continuance, resurgence, and multiplicity of what Native feminists and Native feminist theories truly “look like.” We non-Natives interested in social justice and liberating everyone (which is to say, explicitly not trying to “save” Natives)

can learn to recognize these acts of resurgence and deepen our understanding of, and commitment to, becoming decolonial accomplices.

The Context

In this section I set the context for my argument, fleshing out the settler colonial academy and its impact on Native scholars, discussing key concepts, and providing an overview of the importance of Native feminist theory.

Ana Clarissa Rojas Durazo (2014, 189) offers this description of the colonial violence of the academy:

In the university, conquest is digested, and indigenous peoples and people of color's lives, beliefs, cultures, languages, and remains are masticated: collected, acquired, accumulated, cataloged, and subjugated. We are morphed and manipulated and ultimately expelled into the byproduct excrement of neocolonial institutions vying to keep us all in our place.

The imagery of morphing and mastication fits well with a logic of elimination bent on eradicating the indigeneity of Native people. Dian Million (2014, 35) writes, "Academia is always a site of contestation, of struggle, a place where Native scholars have only been invited very recently, disciplined in the fields that we are supposed to use to examine our own lives and the lives of our families and communities." Here Million is describing how Native scholars are disciplined (often by disciplines) into participating in the morphing and mastication by becoming Native informants. This happens because, as Taiiaki Alfred (2004, 88) points out, it is not just that the academy functions on different premises from Indigenous cultures, but that it is "adamantly and aggressively opposed to indigenous ways."

On the quotidian level, Vine Deloria Jr. (2004, 28) compares a day in the life of a white professor and an Indian professor:

The white professor arrives at his office. He or she may get a few phone calls from students or other professors. . . . The minority professor, on the other hand, generally finds a mass of telephone calls from people who want to know the Indian word for "encouragement," who want a bibliography or books on Indian art, who ask where they can get Indian music, or who simply want to tell the professor of the nice Indians they met on their summer vacations. There will be several calls from Indians seeking assistance in some personal problem . . . who are distant relatives come to say hello. . . . The Indian professor will always be on a variety of committees so the university can claim that Indians were consulted. . . . The Indian professor's day will be disrupted countless times as he or she will be regarded as an authority on anything remotely dealing with Indians.

While elements of this experience are shared with many scholars of color, it is also crucial to apprehend the parts that are unique for Native scholars. Those of us who inhabit feminist academic spaces generally like to think of these spaces as having no relation to the above descriptions—or as challenging these violences and imbalances. We label our spaces as “decolonial” (a suddenly vogue term used mostly as free-floating metaphor) (Tuck and Yang 2012) even when they are nothing of the sort. “Decolonization as metaphor allows people to equivocate these contradictory decolonial desires because it turns decolonization into an empty signifier to be filled by any track towards liberation” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 7). As the incidents in this paper underscore, Native knowledges, feminist and otherwise, cannot easily navigate these spaces, and are often in covertly, if not overtly, hostile territory.⁵ Not coincidentally, “territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (Wolfe 2006, 388). Purportedly feminist spaces are often advertised as open and decolonial, when in fact they are territorialized by settler logics in ways similar to dominant academic spaces.

One way this happens is in the perpetuation of the idea that colonization is over. Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013, 9) note that in both women’s and ethnic studies, “too often the consideration of Indigenous peoples remains rooted in understanding colonialism (like state-sanctioned slavery) as an historical point in time away from which our society has progressed.” The teleological notion of progress toward a more just society is central to US national narratives and obscures enduring institutional oppression. If we think colonialism is over (“back in the day,” rather than here and now), we cannot apprehend it in the present and therefore continue to perpetuate it. Our theorizing becomes all the flatter for being mired in colonial frameworks. “Native feminist theories yield valuable insights and analyses for gender and women’s studies, yet are subject to conceptual and spatial erasures (Hall 2008) precisely because settler colonialism as a contemporary social order and structure has been invisibilized” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013, 13).

Many Natives do not identify with the label “feminist” because of its long association with settler colonial whiteness (Smith and Kauanui 2008; Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013; Goeman and Denetdale 2009). Contemporary expressions of colonial feminism make clear that white supremacy, white innocence, and white savior mentalities are alive and well under the feminist tent (Mohanty 2003; Trinh 1989; Riley, Mohanty, and Pratt 2008; Morgensen 2011). At the same time, Native scholar-activists assert the need for a feminist analysis in decolonial projects (Smith and Kauanui 2008; Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013; Goeman and Denetdale 2009; Green 2007). Lisa Kahaleole Hall (2009, 15) contends, for example, “Feminist theory remains integral to the process of decolonization for Hawaiian and other Indigenous women because colonialism takes place through gendered and sexualized forms that reconstitute both individual and communal Indigenous identities in stigmatized and disempowering ways.” If feminist theory

is integral to decolonization, it follows that feminist spaces should be mindfully constructed to unsettle settler colonialism. Unfortunately, non-Natives are not as good at walking our talk as we pretend to be: feminist spaces we create end up enabling and perpetuating settler colonialism. Here I am specifically interested in exposing how that works via the logic of elimination.

Patrick Wolfe's (2006) useful analysis of settler colonialism as driven by the "logic of elimination" is likely familiar to many. While genocide is most obvious, tactics to eliminate Natives can take many forms and usually do so through the course of colonization, which Wolfe observes is a "structure, not an event" (388). He writes, "[T]he logic of elimination can include officially encouraged miscegenation, the breaking down of Native title onto alienable individual freeholds, Native citizenship, child abduction, religious conversion, resocialization in total institutions such as missions or boarding schools, and a whole range of cognate biocultural assimilations" (388). These tactics are bolstered by the mobilization of interlocking systems of oppression. The biopolitics of this formulation is critical because Wolfe's analysis of elimination is not only, or even primarily, about homicide or genocide but about the colonial violences (historical and ongoing, including assimilation, cultural denigration, and appropriation) that seek to eliminate/vanish/disappear Natives as Natives.

The importance of understanding Native elimination beyond the physical violences of homicide or genocide is clear in Native articulations of their ancestral connections to place. Kanaka Maoli (Native Hawaiian) scholar, poet, activist Haunani-Kay Trask writes,

Genealogically, we say we are descendants of Papahānaumoku (Earth Mother) and Wakea (Sky Father) who created our beautiful islands. From this land came the taro, and from the taro, our Hawaiian people. The lesson of our origins is that we are genealogically related to Hawai'i, our islands, as family. We are obligated to care for our mother, from whom all bounty flows. (2000, 1–2)

Denying this connection, disrupting it, dispossessing Natives, doing violence to homelands (waters, air), all of this is part of the logic of elimination.

That these processes *seek* to eliminate Natives needs to be highlighted. The processes are not totalizing and are always resisted, as evidenced by the continual presence of Indigenous peoples in the face of centuries of colonial violence. Audra Simpson (2014, 2) reminds us, "This ongoing and structural project to acquire and maintain land, and to eliminate those on it, did not work completely. There are still Indians, some still know this, and some will defend what they have left. They will persist, robustly." This is why Indigenous scholars including Audra Simpson, Glen Sean Coulthard, Leanne Simpson, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Jodi Byrd, Noenoe K. Silva, Jean Dennison, Jean O'Brien, and many more stress the importance of always recognizing Indigenous resistance, "survivance," and sovereignty. Kauanui (2016) calls for attention to "enduring indigeneity," by which she means both that indigeneity is enduring and that settler colonialism

endures, or holds out against, indigeneity. O'Brien (2017b) cautions, "Embedded in the logic of elimination is the possibility of slippage between the *intent* of settler colonialism and its tangible outcomes, which carry the *implication* of extinction." In this paper I provide examples of persistent, resistant indigeneity in the face of academic feminist actions toward elimination.

Two of the incidents described in this paper demonstrate Indigenous "survivance" and "resurgence." I briefly discuss these concepts here and then show their mobilization in the next section. "Survivance" is a term coined by Gerald Vizenor in 1994 that has proven to be particularly useful (Vizenor 1994). More than bare survival, it also indicates continued Indigenous presence through cultural and spiritual practice, especially stories. Vizenor has called it "spirited resistance, a life force." It directly challenges the myth of the vanishing Indian and "victimry" (Vizenor with Tuck and Yang, 2014, 113). "Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction" (Vizenor 2008, 1).

Glen Sean Coultard (2014, 154) references Leanne Simpson and Taiiaki Alfred theorizing Indigenous resurgence as containing a turning away from "the assimilative reformism of the liberal recognition approach" and instead building "national liberation efforts on the revitalization of 'traditional' political values and practices." Alfred (1999, 5) stresses recovery and revitalization of traditional values as "the only lasting solution to the political, economic and social problems that beseech our people." Leanne Simpson (2011, 66, 70) writes about the Nishnaabeg concept of resurgence as having "the power to transform settler society generating political relationships based on Indigenous principles of peace, justice, and righteousness," as "visioning and dancing new realities and worlds into existence." Similarly rejecting Western political concepts and turning to Kanaka Maoli values, Noenoe Silva (1999, 209) argues, "To fully recover, we have to go beyond the nation and nationalism, which are, after all, constructs of the West. We must recuperate a definition of 'lāhui' [people, nation] that will truly provide for Kanaka control over the 'āina [land], and that will give birth to social and political institutions that are good for us." While I stretch for translations and rough equivalences for survivance and resurgence, these concepts emerge from Indigenous cosmological and epistemological frames that are fundamentally different from Western frames in their capacious temporal, spatial, and relational embrace.

It is easy to point at oppressive "settler contexts" out there in the big bad heteropatriarchal corporate academy beyond our small progressive enclaves, but non-Native feminists also have much "homework" to do on this front (Ahmed 2017). My purpose is not to play savior to Native scholars—they neither want nor need me to do that. Neither is my purpose to self-righteously condemn non-Native feminist colleagues, situating myself as super-ally. Rather, I hope that by sharing my experience and analysis, in generative conversation with Native colleagues, I can contribute to exposing persistent structures (including

discourses and practices) of settler colonialism so that we can all participate in dismantling them.

Clarissa Rojas Durazo (2014, 188) writes, “This story is about all of us at the university because we are all implicated as imperial subjects in imperial projects, and our survival depends on our ability to recognize, disentangle, and dislodge the complicated terms of our engagement.” We are all implicated and all of our survival depends on engagement, *and* a politics of accountability for non-Natives requires we decenter ourselves, educate ourselves about settler colonialism, and engage in decolonial struggle with, not for, Natives.

The Incidents

I describe three incidents below in which Native feminist colleagues were subject to the logic of elimination. These are, unfortunately, not the only times I have witnessed these processes; however, these three in particular continued to trouble me long after they had passed. My descriptions of the events are based on my recollections, my notes, and my discussions with these Native colleagues. After describing each incident, I use a decolonial lens to analyze them, including my responses, and the reactions of the colleagues who were targeted.

When my paper was rejected by the first journal I submitted it to, I was told one of the readers was uncomfortable with the paper, feeling I was “speaking for Natives.” This made me anxious and I mistakenly tried to get these Native colleagues to address this critique for me, to give me the answers, or at least hold my hand through revisions. They gently—and rightly—declined. This was not their responsibility, not their project. They supported it, but were clear that it was my work to do. Saying no to well-meaning non-Native accomplices who want “Indigenous people to teach them how to become effective allies” is a tool of survivance. So here I am, trying to do my own work and carry my own baggage.

Incident 1: The Hiring Committee

Description of Incident

I was excited about participating on my first hiring committee. The department was interdisciplinary, and we cast a wide net asking for scholars with strengths in a number of critical fields of study or interdisciplines. We ended up with two finalists—a Black woman with expertise in African American studies, and a Pacific Islander with expertise in Indigenous studies. The Pacific Islander referenced her ancestry a number of times during her job talk and campus visit.

In final deliberations of the hiring committee (which consisted of a white man, a Black woman, and three white women, including myself), an argument was made for hiring the Black candidate because she would be a “minority hire.” When I interjected that both candidates occupied “minority” categories,⁶ the response from the Black committee member was “well, [candidate name] calls herself some sort of Pacific Islander” and then she went on to discount

indigeneity as a minority category that counts. This dismissal, especially after a job talk focused on Indigenous resistance to US imperialism, was alarming.

I reasserted the Pacific Islander's specific ancestry as she had described it. This produced defensive responses from the two other white women on the committee, both of whom identify as feminist scholars. One said, "Well, I'm Irish" and the other asserted her Appalachian roots, indirectly accusing me of playing into a hillbilly stereotype (which she mimicked) by somehow not properly recognizing that identification. All three committee members went on to construct the Indigenous candidate as a privileged white girl. They mobilized her Research 1 education, current position teaching in a private elite university, physical presentation (not "looking" Native), and infantilized her based on her relative youth and femininity. The Black candidate was simultaneously constructed as sympathetic and doing recognizable, important research. She was older, butcher, and clearly Black.

Analysis of Incident

This incident demonstrates all three eliminatory moves discussed earlier, and it is a useful example of how the logic of elimination is bolstered by intersecting systems of oppression and prejudices. First, the Pacific Islander candidate is not recognized as a "real" Native. A number of things seemed to be going on here. Her indigeneity is clearly questionable since she merely "claims" to be "some sort of Pacific Islander." Here the validity of her claim is called into question. She says she is, but our suspicions should be aroused as she does not look or sound Native according to preconceived notions. Questioning Indigenous ways of knowing and being is all about "who has the power to be a knower and whether their knowledge is commensurate with the West's 'rational' belief system" (Moreton-Robinson 2006, 248). It is a key tactic in eliminating Natives.

Additionally, are we really meant to believe that "so-called" Pacific Islanders are "real" Natives? They are from a place we know little about beyond the stereotypes of "paradise." This lack of knowledge and placeholder stereotype are direct consequences of US imperialism in the Pacific. Not only is ongoing militarism and imperialism disappeared, but we are taught little about this vast region (the largest single geographic zone of our planet), and certainly discouraged from considering that it might produce Indigenous knowing subjects (Allen 2012; Diaz and Kauanui 2001; Shigematsu and Camacho 2010). Further complicating non-Native ability to recognize the indigeneity of Pacific Islanders is our certainty that we know "what a Native looks like." As Lisa Kahaleole Hall (2009, 25) points out, all Pacific Islander women are often conflated with Hawaiian women. And, since (due to cultural stereotypes) all non-Natives "know" Hawaiian women are all hula dancers, not powwow dancers, the candidate could not be an Authentic Indian. The suspect nature of her claim enabled false equivalencies to be constructed between her (tenuous) Indigenous ancestry and the white ethnic/cultural identities of the two committee members.

The counterdeclarations about being Irish and Appalachian, which were asserted in response to my reminders about the candidate's indigeneity, can also be understood as part of a posture of white defensiveness to the perceived threat of difference. Sara Ahmed (2012, 158) instructs, "Some forms of difference can be heard as assertive, as 'rocking the boat.' Some forms of difference become legible as willfulness and obstinacy, as if you are only different because you are insistent." The two counter declarations seem to say to me, "If you are going to insist on her difference, we'll show you that we are different too." In this way the claims to Irish and Appalachian identities also play into an Oppression Olympics by gesturing toward an assumed lower socioeconomic class. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2006, 246) points out, "[W]hite women are not represented to themselves as being white; instead they position themselves as variously classed, sexualized, aged and abled."

Second, while being a feminist scholar was not required for the job, the department was heavily loaded with self-identified women's and gender studies scholars with narrow conceptions of the field. They had trouble recognizing the candidate's Native feminist methodologies as having anything to do with women's and gender studies. Further, intersectional oppression played out in an infantilization of this candidate that demonstrated ageist and antifemme bias. Comments made it clear they felt this candidate was not old or butch enough to be a "real" feminist and therefore not one of them/us.

This ties into the way hiring committees everywhere tend to reproduce themselves. Sara Ahmed writes about how candidates are measured regarding their "likability" and ability to "fit in" and how this often is determined as "the kind of person you could take down to the pub." She observes, "The very desire for a shared social space can be a desire that *restricts to whom an institutional space is open* by imagining a social space that is not open to everyone" (Ahmed 2012, 39). This department had particular trouble with boundaries between institutional and social space. Those on the committee liked to assert this blurring as progressive when it actually enabled not just exclusions but abuses of power. When one does not fit within the social culture of the department for any number of reasons (in this case, being Native, young, femme, and having an R1 PhD), one is easily cast as an outsider. This can lead to discrimination, ostracization, and bullying. This is one of the ways institutional space in "feminist" departments becomes hostile territory.

Third, the Black-white binary obscured this candidate's Indigenous identity and caused her to be seen as white. The history of US settler colonialism, via the logic of elimination, is built in part on the deracination of Natives—the fewer people recognized as Natives, the fewer claims can be made by them (including, but certainly not limited to, claims to being "minority" candidates). The discussion about what counted as a "minority hire" made it clear that not only did the committee not see the candidate as a "minority," but the implication was that the institution certainly would not. My insistence on the candidate's

Indigenous status was subtly cast as racist, as it was seen as detracting from the clear minority hire, the Black candidate. The department and the institution were framed as committed to diversity and antiracism in their favoring of this candidate. Ahmed (2012, 145) writes, “When anti-racism provides a discourse of organizational pride, then racism is not recognized and is enacted in the mode of nonrecognition.” The institution, and the department even more so, took pride in being “anti-racist” and supporting “diversity.” This narrative enabled them to deny and defend themselves against any suggestion that they were exhibiting anti-Native racism. Yet their nonrecognition of the Indigenous candidate as Native did just that.

The assertions of “white” ethnic/cultural identities—Irish, Appalachian⁷—can underscore the Black-white racial paradigm and white resentment. They can be read as communicating, “we have Irish and Appalachian identities, but they don’t count, aren’t given the same attention that Black identities are.” There could be veiled, even unconscious, claims of “reverse racism” operating here—this, after all, is how whiteness reproduces itself as normative. These assertions also further construct the Indigenous candidate as white by suggesting she is a racial imposter. She looks/is white, like they do/are, but she is trying to assert a minority identity outside of Blackness, perhaps for the perks. This logic can lead to conclusions like, “she says she is Indigenous but we have our doubts. We *are* Irish and Appalachian, but those aren’t identities that count.”

For some, claims to being Appalachian can be ways to indigenize, to assert a deep belonging to place that displaces, in order to replace, Indigenous claims. While related to the Native erasure produced through the Black-white binary, the indigenization of non-Natives enables the completion of the logic of elimination through replacement. As Patrick Wolfe (2006, 389) argues, “Settler colonialism does not simply replace Native society *tout court*. Rather, the process of replacement maintains the refractory imprint of the Native counter-claim.” Non-Natives become the new “Natives.” This replacement is part of the continual reinforcement of the structures of settler colonialism; in this case, the academic structures that (re)produce whitestream feminist studies in the imperial university.

Prior to submitting this paper for publication, I shared it with the Pacific Islander candidate, who is now a colleague. I wanted to make sure she supported publication and wanted to discuss the paper generally, and the incident particularly, with her. This incident took place several years ago, and for multiple reasons (many of which again have to do with precarity), I chose not to tell her about it until this time and to mask her identity as much as possible in my detailing of the incident here. Upon reading my account, she pointed out that since she was not in the room, she had no chance of responding, unlike the Native scholars in the other two incidents I describe. She suggested that by writing about it, I was helping to refuse the logic of elimination and reclaim her

indigeneity, which ironically she otherwise would not have known had been lost (to them, not herself).

Furthermore, because the candidate was not in the room to defend herself, I was compelled to step forward, however unprepared I felt, and whatever worry I had for the consequences (I was a junior scholar and in my first year at the institution). In this instance, I was taking up Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill's (2013, 17) challenge to settlers to "become more familiar and more proactive in their critiques of settler colonialism, and to not rely upon Indigenous people to teach them how to become effective allies." Writing about it now, I am attempting to raise awareness so that non-Native readers might be more prepared for these situations. My colleague felt that discussing it furthered her ability to navigate the political terrain of feminist academic spaces. For one thing, it made her more cautious about what exists behind a "decolonial" façade. She pointed out that all of this—experiencing, thinking, writing, reading, discussing, thinking—is true decolonial work.

Incident 2: The Public Lecture

Description of Incident

I brought a leading Indigenous Studies scholar to campus to give a public talk. She historicized settler colonialism on the US continent and used her nation's contemporary deliberations over structure and governance as an example of both resistance to, and complicity with, colonial processes. During Q&A there were questions from faculty about her tribal membership, why Native nations do not work together to end poverty and alcoholism rather than worrying about blood quantum, and assertions of Native-Black equivalencies. In fact, these were the majority of the questions.

I felt embarrassed as I realized colleagues and students missed the main points of the speaker's talk and her guidance that non-Natives teach themselves about, and find ways to support, Native self-determination. At the very end of Q&A, an announcement was made about a new Native student group forming at the institution. The person making the announcement held up the flyer for the group featuring a dreamcatcher, said she was not sure of the symbolism, and asked if the speaker might explain it. The speaker flatly refused and an awkward silence followed.

During the post-event dinner, a colleague whose expertise is in Black feminist literature continued to pursue the Native-Black equivalency, talking about how both groups suffered white racial oppression and dispossession. The speaker reiterated key elements in the history of US colonization of North America, demonstrating that, while related and at points coconstitutive with settler colonialism, slavery and Black racial oppression were/are different processes. My Black Studies colleague seemed unconvinced and I turned the conversation elsewhere.

Driving the speaker back to the airport the next day, I asked about these encounters, expressing my dismay and apologies. She said that she has come to expect these types of questions and narratives, that they are not uncommon, even from faculty. I asked if they are more prevalent at one type of institution, and she said they occur at Research 1s as much as anywhere else, perhaps just more veiled in jargon. While I was stunned and upset, she was not surprised or overly distraught (I reflected back on this in the aftermath of the 2016 Presidential election when Native colleagues kept responding to non-Native shock with various versions of “welcome to the empire”). The speaker explained that for her these reoccurring situations underscore the need to continue educating people about settler colonialism and Native histories of resistance and self-determination.

Analysis of Incident

This experience played most strongly into two eliminatory processes: questioning indigeneity and obscuring it via the Black-white binary. The questions regarding the speaker’s tribal membership seemed to be not simply based on skepticism that she was Native, but also on the disbelief that tribes might constitute sovereign nations inside, but separate from, the United States. Instead of stretching to understand the complex governing structure and responsibilities of the Native nation being explained, audience members fell back on well-worn stereotypes of Indian poverty and alcoholism.

The question about the dreamcatcher furthered this calcified approach in which non-Natives are sure they know what qualifies one as Native. This causes non-Natives to compel Natives to perform accordingly and/or to take it upon themselves to school Native peoples about their own cultures. The speaker was asked to explain dreamcatchers because non-Natives are sure these are Native artifacts; centuries of stereotyped representation enable any Native to stand in for any other—and, I would suggest, non-Natives are more comfortable talking about indigeneity in terms of artifact than contemporary governance of tribal nations. Writing about queer non-Natives appropriating Native culture, Scott Morgensen (2011, 228) notes, “they found indigeneity more useful to them in the form of history.” Dreamcatchers, while originally Ojibwe and still used in that culture, are one of the most appropriated and commercialized of all Native images (Keene 2011). Further, this encounter underscores the role of Native informant, expected to share Indigenous knowledge, ironically even when that knowledge has long since been appropriated, stripped of tribal context, mashed up, and commodified.

That process of appropriation and commodification in which everyone is invited to “go Native” enables non-Natives to replace Natives, which again is the culmination of the logic of elimination. One of the most blatant examples of this elimination-replacement is the Native mascot for sports teams. However,

I have experienced it in progressive academic spaces where non-Natives school Natives about anything and everything Native. This was happening in that room with the “question” about poverty and alcoholism on reservations. The faculty member who asked this question cited some statistics and spoke with authority to make sure everyone knew that they had mastery of the subject—they “knew” what Native scholarship looks like. Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013, 17) write, “[T]oo often, non-Indigenous readers of Indigenous scholarship may come to the work with certain expectations about its ‘proper’ topics and how to consume them.” This person was also engaged in victim-blaming in framing the question in such a way as to imply “why don’t Natives save themselves and why would a Native scholar talk about anything other than reservation dysfunction?” It is easy to grasp how this then plays into the vanishing Native trope—pitiful, helpless, unable to function in a modern white man’s world.

The persistent insistence on collapsing Indigenous and Black histories is all too common and should not have surprised me. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012, 17) explain, “Equivocation, or calling everything by the same name, is a move towards innocence that is especially vogue in coalition politics among people of color.” That collapse usually buries the particularity of settler colonial processes (as well as the institution of slavery) by claiming both as “colonial” dispossession under white supremacy. This forecloses understanding Indigenous genocide and dispossession on the North American continent predating slavery by centuries, and simply recasts Native peoples as another racialized community. Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015, xix) writes, “[T]he existence of white supremacy as hegemony, ideology, epistemology, and ontology requires the possession of Indigenous lands as its proprietary anchor within capitalist economies such as the United States.” Failure to understand these processes and histories as interconnected but different does them both a disservice. As Jodi Byrd (2011, xxiv) notes,

[T]his conflation [of racialization into colonization] masks the territoriality of conquest by assigning colonization to the racialized body, which is then policed in its degrees from whiteness. Under this paradigm, American Indian national assertions of sovereignty, self-determination, and land rights disappear into U.S. territoriality as indigenous identity becomes a racial identity and citizens of colonized indigenous nations become internal ethnic minorities within the colonizing nation-state.

Sometime later, when I shared what I wrote about this incident with the speaker, she told me she had no memory of any of it and kept questioning me: “a dreamcatcher, really?” She said that not only has she come to expect these sorts of questions and misreadings, but that she quickly blocks them from her mind, “as a tool for keeping on.” She felt this was a survival strategy. I see it as a refusal to internalize the settler colonial narratives that work to erode indigeneity, narratives that seek to eliminate her as a Native scholar. She said

that continuing to give guest talks was about survivance, especially insofar as it helped to make space for other Native scholars.

As I thought more about it, I also believe she was offering resurgence through both the mode and content of her presentation. She expected to be recognized as a citizen of a Native nation, not as some caricature of an Indian,⁸ or as a “minority” seeking redress from the settler state. Both her self-presentation and the analysis of Native governance structures and processes were resurgent in advancing “the power to transform settler society generating political relationships based on Indigenous principles of peace, justice, and righteousness” (Simpson 2011, 66).

While the speaker had deliberately forgotten the event, I have carried it around with me for a number of years. I have wondered whether I should have been more interventionist, as I had to be in the hiring committee incident, or if that would have been overstepping and exerting a white savior role. I have wondered how to not fortify anti-Black racism while disrupting US “original sin” narratives that disappear colonization. I have wondered how my Native colleagues manage to continue in the face of these attempts at elimination. I have wondered why any of them voluntarily interact with non-Natives at all.

Scott Morgensen (2011, 229–30) says that if non-Natives are going to be invited into Native spaces to join in the work it will depend on “their having demonstrated a prior and sustained commitment to start and end their day *elsewhere*, in the normatively non-Native spaces where they pursue the work of unsettling settler colonialism.” That’s not glamorous, and no one thanks you for it. In fact, it often sets one up as a killjoy. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, 10) says Indigenous people make judgments about whom to trust using criteria such as, “Is her spirit clear? Does he have a good heart? What other baggage are they carrying? Are they useful to us? Can they fix up our generator? Can they actually do anything?” I recognize this from Hawai’i, where Kanaka Maoli activists will look skeptically at haoles (white people) and ask, “Are they immediately giving orders? Or are they immediately just quietly helping out?” (Kraemer 2000, 297). Along the lines of the generator question, in Hawai’i it is, “can they cook?”

I cannot cook (at least not in ways recognizable to many Kanaka), but I can write, and if I work at it (in this case, *really* work at it), I can publish. And at the same time, it is important to recognize that in an academic economy that privileges publication, this article should also strengthen my chances toward promotion and tenure. I am trying to use my academic position and white settler privilege to unsettle settler colonialism, but that is complicated, and I have to consider ways I might be reinforcing the very processes I am trying to challenge. I can also teach and develop curriculum. I can continue to read and listen. I am writing my way through thinking about it right now. This could be seen as a certain kind of emotional, political, and intellectual labor, the labor of a decolonial scholar-accomplice. My hope is that it produces something useful, particularly for other non-Natives figuring out their decolonial politics of accountability.

Incident 3: The Workshop

Description of Incident

Some years ago I introduced Kanaka Maoli scholar Noenoe K. Silva's⁹ book *Aloha Betrayed: Native Resistance to American Colonialism*¹⁰ for discussion at a feminist theory workshop with about fifty participants from across the country. The format for the workshop has a scholar in the field introduce a text (which everyone has read ahead of time), frame some questions for the author, and then open the floor to discussion. It seemed to go okay, until I opened the floor. The discussion started out with someone asking Silva for "tidbits into a Hawaiian worldview," and it didn't get much better.

Analysis of Incident

I now recognize a certain pattern to the questioning, as it is not uncommon in discussions of US settler colonialism and Indigeneity, as the previous incidents demonstrate. Questions tend to cluster in three areas:

1. How is this relevant now? ("Didn't all this happen a long time ago?")
2. How is this relevant to me? ("I had nothing to do with all that," and in that room, "How is this feminist theory?")
3. How do I know you are really Native? ("You don't look, act, or talk Native," although, given the research she did for her book, it should have been clear Silva had language skills.)

Toward the end of our time in the workshop, clearly frustrated, and after being inundated with questions of relevancy and authenticity, Noenoe Silva finally lifted her hands, palms up, straightened her back, sat forward in her chair, and said slowly and deliberately, "This is what a Hawaiian looks like. This is what the history produces." I don't remember the response of the room as I was overwhelmed by shock and panic.

What was it that produced a general inability to recognize Native survival demonstrated through the book itself, through the stories of resistance resurfaced in the book, and present right there in the room? The answer can be summarized as: "This is what settler colonialism looks like." What happened in that room is intimately tied to the naturalization of settler colonial perspectives and the US settler state. Non-Native scholars, even those of us who identify as interdisciplinary, tend not to consider indigeneity or histories of colonization in our research. We have vanished indigeneity so completely from our "worldviews" that we rarely if ever consider our place in Native America or Oceania (which were Native long before they were misnamed "America" and "Pacific"), and miss the Natives there completely, even when they announce themselves.¹¹ Even my language here is obscuring. "Missing Natives" is a kinder, gentler way of saying that we non-Natives really are actively eliminating them.

As was the case with the hiring committee, it was difficult to recognize Silva in that room because of our acculturation to what "real" Hawaiians look

(looked?) like versus an understanding of “what the history produces.” Again, histories of US imperialism in the Pacific, and in this case, the illegal US overthrow and occupation of the Kingdom of Hawai‘i, were obscure or seemed quaint and unrelated to “real” feminist scholarship. It was also difficult to recognize Silva because technologies and discourses of racialization and deracination work toward (but never totally succeed in) ensuring that the only “authentic” Native is the vanishing Native who is always already just beyond our grasp, receding with a nostalgic past. If she speaks now, in our present, in a language we understand, she cannot be a “real” Native subaltern. This is part of what Gayatri Spivak (1988) was getting at with her provocation: “Can the subaltern speak?” Rey Chow (2003, 325), building on Spivak’s and others’ writings, instructs, “What confronts the Western scholar is the discomforting fact that the Natives are no longer staying in their frames.” This adherence to the vanishing Native trope was likely also playing out in the willful misrecognition of the Pacific Islander candidate in the hiring process.

The thinly veiled innocence and patronizing nature of the questions could also signal resentment. After all, the group as a whole had agreed to read the text, to include it in our feminist theory workshop, even though it was outside the usual scope of chosen texts. Wasn’t this enough? Shouldn’t Silva be grateful? Why wasn’t she enthusiastically engaging the questions? One of the challenges Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013, 17) set for whitestream feminism is to “refuse erasure but do more than include.” They write,

[I]nclusion confers preminent hierarchy. . . . [It] can serve to control and absorb dissent rather than allow institutions like feminism and the nation-state to be radically transformed by differing perspectives and goals. Instead, feminist discourses might expect to engage Indigenous women and Native feminist theories and to be changed by this engagement in ways that are meaningful and still emerging.

I did not sense scholars in that room were interested in being changed by engagement with Silva and her work. As in the incident with the public talk, I found myself becoming increasingly angry. In retrospect, I think I was responding not so much out of shame for my feminist studies colleagues, but really for myself. I easily recognized myself in the disciplinary ways of thinking, cloaked defensiveness, and “innocent” questions. I kept waiting for Silva to get up and leave, but she stayed. She stayed, but refused to stay in the frame being built around her. She took it upon herself to school us: “this is what the history produces.” I believe that was an act of survivance. In the face of having her identity denied and eliminated—irrelevant, not really Native, certainly not feminist—Silva refused to be erased. She enacted survivance in knowing who she was, sitting tall in her ancestry, understanding the history, and refusing to perform as Native informant.

Ways Forward

At a base level, the goal is to interrupt the logic of elimination, to make incidents like these less, rather than more, common. Further, returning to the prompt in my introduction, non-Natives could work to proactively decolonize feminist academic spaces, thereby facilitating the navigation of Native feminisms in the academy. These incidents make clear that this is truly easier said than done. As suggested in the introduction, “decolonization” is currently a term too easily invoked in non-Native feminist spaces without deep understanding and practice. In this final section, I analyze ways decolonization calls for specific practices by non-Natives.

While the practices I describe could be loosely clustered under the sign of “solidarity,” it is important to interrogate that term. “Solidarity” is what Sara Ahmed (2017, 13) would call a “sweaty concept.” Ahmed first used the phrase to describe the work of Audre Lorde to students, work she found to be a lifeline for her as a woman of color scholar. “A sweaty concept is one that comes out of a description of a body that is not at home in the world . . . a bodily experience that is trying. The task is to stay with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing this difficulty” (13). Ahmed differentiates this from the way we usually think of concepts as things scholars come up with in isolation, separated from the world. As the following conversations demonstrate, solidarity is sweaty; it is a strain. For Native people the strain of solidarity occurs in the context of continual attempts at their elimination. Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012, 3) write that “solidarity is an uneasy, reserved and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict.” This is decidedly not the way most settlers think about solidarity when we try to instrumentalize it toward tidy reconciliation. I try to “stay with the difficulty” of it, first thinking about it broadly and then in the context of feminist academic spaces.

David Roediger, in his 2015 American Studies Association (ASA) Presidential address in Toronto, asked us to be “uneasy” about solidarity. He asked that we consider whether solidarity is always a good thing because of what and whom it leaves out, and because of the ways it “works across differences in kinds and degrees of oppression” (Roediger 2016, 224). He worried about the assumptions of a “good fight” that it invokes and how its “magnificence” “can hardly be realized if tethered to impossible expectations leaving us coming up forever short of an unexamined ideal” (225).

Responding to Roediger’s provocations in the ASA journal *The American Quarterly*, Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2016, 252) point out that calls for solidarity often ask “Indigenous peoples to forcefully align their interests and identities in ways that contribute to our own dispossession and erasure.” This happens largely because non-Natives tend not to understand how colonization is different from racialization, as the above quote from Jodi Byrd underscores. In an ironic example of this dispossession, of “what and whom”

solidarity leaves out, Coulthard and Simpson point out that the Mississauga Nishnaabeg, Wendat, and Haudenosaunee were not ASA conference hosts, neither were “their lands nor sovereignties figured much in the conference proceedings beyond symbolic opening gestures” (240). And so, the logic of elimination is again fortified and settler colonialism is naturalized.

There is a robust critique of “ally” or alliance-based models of solidarity because of the way such models tend to essentialize identities, fix people in binaries, and reproduce uneven, unjust power relations. Elizabeth Ellsworth (1997, 267) writes,

The notion of allies reinscribes the exclusive and fixed categories friend/enemy, oppressor/oppressed, knowledgeable/ignorant. Exclusive categories such as these ignore the complexities of social positionings and the structures of social relations. . . . Exclusive categories foreclose the possibilities of the context-specific responses.

The complexities of social positions include the fact that most of us occupy both privileged and targeted positions in a dynamic matrix of oppressions, and those positions are contextual, relational, and temporally contingent. Because of this, we ought to be wary of impulses toward “inclusion,” as Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013) articulate.

Further, we know that systems of oppression and domination work together in complicated ways that defy dualisms. Scott Morgensen (2014) asks, “how can white settler critics address how, in the Americas, white supremacy depends upon anti-blackness, Orientalism, and Indigenous genocide acting together to produce settler whiteness? How can our aspirations for decolonization effectively lead us to challenge all forms of racism and colonialism that produce white settler power and rule?” Similarly, Glen Coulthard (2014, 14) argues that we need a “radical intersectional analysis” for “authentic decolonization.”

Ally models based on exclusive categories also provide fertile ground for some occupying “privileged” positions to enact either a politics of negation or one of confession. A politics of negation is familiar to anyone who has witnessed defensive responses including “I’m not racist”; “That happened a long time ago”; “Some of my best friends are [fill in the blank]”; and “I’m Black/Asian/an immigrant. I have nothing to do with colonization.” Some of the members of the hiring committee in Incident 1 enacted just these classic responses.

While confession of one’s privileged position might potentially move one toward solidarity, too often confession and guilt become final resting places. Beenash Jafri (2012) reminds us that “recognition of oneself as a settler, while notable, does little to dismantle colonization. Over-investment in the settler subject risks re-centering the subject rather than destabilizing the settler/native binary through which the settler’s social power is constituted in the first place.” Both negation and confession are responses based on narrow personalized framings of what are actually enduring structural injustices, in this case, settler colonialism.

These personalized frameworks also lend themselves to pity and savior complexes that reinscribe unequal power relations. “Allies too often carry romantic notions of oppressed folks they wish to ‘help.’ These are the ally ‘saviors’ who see victims and tokens instead of people. This victimization . . . generally fosters exploitation” (Indigenous Action Media 2014). The audience member in Incident 2 who wanted to talk about poverty and alcoholism saw Native people as victims and, in victim-blaming mode, insisted they help themselves. The academic who asked Noenoe Silva for “tidbits of a Hawaiian worldview” likely had romanticized notions of what that looks like. Clearly, neither pity nor exploitation offers sustainable paths forward. Sara Ahmed (2004) provides an analysis of antiracist practice that helps move us out of these stifling frameworks:

The task for white subjects would be to stay implicated in what they critique, but in turning towards their role and responsibility in these histories of racism, as histories of this present, to turn away from themselves, and towards others. This “double turn” is not sufficient, but it clears some ground, upon which the work of exposing racism might provide the conditions for another kind of work. We don’t know, as yet, what such conditions might be, or whether we are even up to the task of recognizing them.

While Ahmed is writing specifically about white people and our responses to racism, the analysis works for dynamics of settler colonialism as well, challenging all non-Natives to “stay implicated in what they critique,” and to also enact a double turn towards and then away from ourselves. We can choose to stay implicated in what we critique, become answerable for what we begin to understand, resist trying to escape via confession, denial, indigenizing ourselves, or cleverly twisting discourses. Ahmed’s double turn can help mitigate against what Janet Mawhinney identifies as white people’s “moves to innocence” (quoted in Tuck and Yang 2012, 10). Tuck and Yang (2012, 10) mobilize this analysis to help think about settler practices: “Settler moves to innocence are those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all.” Decolonial coalitional politics cannot be built from positions of innocence.

Instead of thinking of ourselves in ally-victim binaries, we might consider how all of us can be “accomplices” or “comrades” in struggle. Relationships based in these concepts acknowledge differences and center relationality without creating hierarchy or expecting resolution. Again, “solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles the present grievances nor forecloses future conflict” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 3). This version of solidarity is not motivated by guilt, pity, or self-actualization, but on a structural analysis of how interlocking systems of oppression work to keep all of us from true liberation. Freedom is a place where we can fulfill our individual and collective potential, and as a place, it cannot be realized on stolen Indigenous land. This is because

“decolonization specifically requires the repatriation of Indigenous land and life. Decolonization is not a metonym for social justice” (21). This analysis keeps us accountable to each other as we struggle imperfectly forward, especially when accountability is neither easy nor comfortable.

I will end by sharing three specific suggestions to guide those interested in working toward the decolonization of feminist academic spaces:

(1) Support for the collective right to traditional lands and self-determination outside any relationship with the settler state is foundational. Mishuana Goeman (2017, 192) writes that Indigenous feminist studies “ask us to consider moves toward justice that do not reaffirm the power of the state.” As shown in the ASA conference example, symbolic opening statements recognizing Indigenous lands are insufficient, and often used to scaffold settler innocence. Reliance on institutional or governmental definitions of who counts as Native or “minority” perpetuates erasure. Coulthard and Simpson (2016, 254) write, “Our relationship to the land itself generates the processes, practices, and knowledges that inform our political systems, and through which *we practice solidarity*.” In Incident 2 and 3, the Native scholars practiced solidarity and resurgence drawn from their relationships to their homelands and ancestry.

This acknowledgement and furtherance of Indigenous land and self-determination can be put into practice in a multitude of ways, including departmental curriculum, collaboration with local tribes and Indigenous groups, public events, and student support. Again, the motivation should neither be tokenization nor inclusion, but appreciation and co-existence. Beyond working toward the decolonization of feminist spaces, we can also work to change the larger campus culture with regard to indigeneity and colonization. I offer a few examples.

In 2007, the political science department at the University of Hawai‘i successfully changed institutional policy to allow dissertations to be written in ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i (Hawaiian language) without English translation or summaries. This was a political struggle, even though ‘Ōlelo Hawai‘i had been added in 1978 as an official “state” language along with English. Also in 2007, the University of Illinois finally banned its racist mascot, Chief Illiniwek. This was a result of years of struggle by students and faculty that pushed the NCAA to declare the mascot “hostile and abusive” to Native Americans.¹² Finally, Syracuse University offers a full four-year scholarship to eligible Haudenosaunee students. Their website says, “The Haudenosaunee Promise Scholarship was established to recognize Syracuse University’s gratitude and appreciation for the historical, political, and cultural legacies of the Haudenosaunee, and to honor the bond that has developed between them” (Syracuse University 2019). Significantly, all of these initiatives were led by Native students and faculty with non-Native participation. Smaller efforts, even if they do not directly succeed, have an impact in opening space and unsettling settler colonialism.

(2) From this first point it follows that feminist spaces need to recognize differences in epistemological frames, methods and data. This means disrupting assumptions about what counts as knowledge, who we think can know, what we think can be known, and what counts as data and method. For non-Native participants, Noenoe Silva was difficult to recognize in the workshop as a feminist scholar because of their assumptions about what feminist theory looks like. Kanaka Maoli scholar Manulani Aluli Meyer connects knowing, place, cosmology, identity, and genealogy: “How one knows, indeed, what one prioritized with regard to this knowing, ends up being the stuffing of identity, the truth that links our distinct cosmologies, and the essence of who we are as an Oceanic people. It is a discussion of place and genealogy” (2001, 125). When confronted by unfamiliar modes in Indigenous/Native or settler colonial studies scholarship, non-Natives might stretch our academic frames and resist defensive denigration or dismissal, as well as inappropriate appropriation. As Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013, 21) write, “Recognizing the persistence of Indigenous concepts and epistemologies does not mean blindly copying or performing them oneself, nor does such recognition require excavating ‘authentic’ Indigenous traditions out of a distant past; instead, feminists must recognize Indigenous peoples as the authors of important theories about the world we all live in.”

In Incident 2, an audience member resisted the content of the speaker’s talk because she did not recognize it as about Native people. Instead, she seemed to expect poverty or trauma porn. As suggested earlier, many non-Natives confront Indigenous scholarship “with certain expectations about its ‘proper’ topics” (Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013, 18) because they “presume Indigenous peoples can only be the victims of change, never its agents” (O’Brien 2017a, 16). Avoiding this means recognizing our own ignorance and doing some self-education, some “homework,” per Ahmed. Ultimately, it is in our own self-interest to do this work, since “fields of thought dedicated to social transformation will be strengthened if they more critically engage Native studies and its investments in ending settler colonialism” (Simpson and Smith 2014, 11).

Building an understanding of these fields often produces critical challenges to our own research and politics. Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill (2013, 16) frame one of our key challenges: “Feminist scholarship and activism may need to set different liberatory goals, ones that do not assume the innocence or desirability of the continued existence of the nation-state as we currently know it.” Scott Morgensen (2012, 805) similarly writes, “Whereas ‘activism’ in a settler society may invest social justice in state rule, decolonization anticipates that rule’s end. Decolonization is activist, but activism need not be decolonizing.” What new “liberatory goals” might we set if we stopped appealing to, and exclusively relying on, the settler state for citizenship (immigrants, refugees), civil rights (women, LGBT, disabled, racialized communities), safety (intimate partner violence and sexual assault survivors), justice (victims of civil/criminal violations), and international protection (all of us)?

(3) Movement toward decolonization requires a “politics of accountability,” (Morgensen 2014), “a reimagining of relationships with land, people and the state” (Syed Hussan, quoted in Walia 2013). Discussing this in the context of Idle No More, Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox (2012) writes,

Relationship is fundamental to meaningful co-existence, and an antecedent to motivating change within settler society over the long term. Co-existence through co-resistance is the responsibility of settlers, and we achieve it in part by making change in our own systems and among other settlers, taking our cue from Indigenous action and direction.

This includes not trying to lead decolonial struggles, divesting power and resources, acting from responsibility rather than guilt, building reciprocal relationships (including not expecting Natives to educate us), cultivating humility (including recognizing and apologizing for mistakes), supporting community struggles, and recognizing that the work is unending. “It would be all too easy for non-Natives to merely unthink their relationship to settler colonialism rather than act in relationship to others in struggle” (Morgensen 2011, 230).

As non-Native feminists, we need to recognize our complicity and active participation in colonization in the present. Then we need to turn toward others, and we need to do this, recognizing our increasingly globalized world. “Cross-cultural feminist work must be attentive to the micropolitics of context, subjectivity, and struggle, as well as to the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes” (Mohanty 2003, 223). And still, we need to hold the most recent wave of transnational feminism, like postcolonial feminism before it, accountable to specific Indigenous struggles and the global dynamics of imperialism and colonialism. But this is not sufficient: because we are never finished, there is no ultimate resolution, and we cannot know from here what the future conditions are for decolonial work.

And so, there is no ultimate resolution or neat conclusion to this paper. Perhaps there is just a lot of homework. The prompt I started with used the verb “navigate” and while it can be done with more or less skill and awareness, navigation is continuous—a journey, not a conclusion. How “Native feminisms navigate the contemporary political terrain in settler colonial contexts” is largely dependent on how Native feminists navigate that terrain. And, how Native feminists navigate the settler colonial academy is clearly hinged to the actions of non-Native feminist academics.

I am hopeful that those of us who are non-Native feminists can learn to appreciate Native feminisms and Native feminists as central to all our work toward social transformation: “co-existence through co-resistance.” I am hopeful that feminist spaces in the academy can be transformed from hostile territory to spaces striving to be decolonial. This would mean enabling the freer navigation of Native knowledges, theories, and intellectuals. It would mean building a future in which no Native feminist would ever again be

compelled to resist elimination by having to declare “This is what a Native looks like.”

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Notes

1. I submitted the paper to that journal, they asked me to revise it twice, but ultimately decided against publication. The rejection letter explained they felt I was “speaking for native scholars,” specifically those who are centered in the three incidents in this paper. I discussed this rejection with those three Native scholars (and others) and they encouraged me to submit the paper elsewhere. They agreed that, while it would likely be welcomed by an Indigenous studies journal, its’ target audience would be best reached if it were published in a feminist studies journal.

2. The concept of feminism as “homework” comes from Sara Ahmed. She writes, “feminism is homework because we have much to work out from not being at home in the world. In other words, homework is work on, as well as at, our homes” (Ahmed 2017, 7).

3. In this paper I use “Native” and “indigenous” synonymously to refer to people who have a particular relationship to place. That relationship is both temporal—articulated as “precontact” or “time immemorial”—and spatialized through an animate homeland in genealogical and ontological kinship relation. I use “non-Native” to refer to people, who may be white or of color, who do not have this relationship to place.

4. I am using Sara Ahmed’s concept of being a “feminist killjoy,” which she explores in her blog (feministkilljoys.com) and in her scholarship. For Ahmed, feminist killjoys are seen as “getting in the way of something” (often the happiness of others), of being a problem because “you pose a problem,” of “making things tense,” of “ruining something” (Ahmed 2017, 37–42).

5. I use the terminology of “hostile territory” to perform a kind of reversal. It is language that was used to describe areas under Indian control, places hostile to settlers. Here I am using it to describe feminist spaces unwelcoming to Native scholars.

6. I usually avoid the language of “minority” as politically diminishing and increasingly anachronistic given the rapidly changing demographics of the United States. Given the constraints of the institutional context, and trying not to rock too many boats, I used the term in this case. It is also important to note that at this university it was just race that was given minority status.

7. It is important to note that neither of these identities is historically or exclusively white, but that is the way they are popularly regarded.

8. This was made clear when she started her presentation with the short video, “Shit people say to Natives” (PaperRocketProductions 2012).

9. This incident also appears in Rohrer 2016 and has been reprinted with permission from University of Arizona Press. Because I name Noenoe Silva in that previously published book, it did not make sense to try to obscure her identity here.

10. *Aloha Betrayed* (Silva 2004) catalyzed a sea change in Hawai'i historiography by striking a fatal blow to the two-headed monstrous fabrication that colonialism was/is (1) benign and inevitable, and that it was/is (2) not only not contested but welcomed by Kanaka Maoli (native Hawaiians). Up until Noenoe Silva's intervention, that historiography had done amazing work justifying and naturalizing colonization, annexation, statehood, and Americanization. The text's production within the nexus of these fields made it all the more effective. Silva used an analysis of colonialism to demonstrate how the dominant historical narrative of benign, uncontested, inevitable Americanization was part of the structure, the ongoing violence, of colonization. And her skill in 'Ōlelo Hawai'i (Hawaiian language) and grounding in Kanaka Maoli epistemological understandings allowed her to reveal overwhelming resistance to the overthrow, mostly spearheaded by women (in speeches, petitions, rallies, poetry, songs, stories, dances, and other political and cultural forms). In 2011 the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association voted *Aloha Betrayed* the first among "the ten most influential books in Native American and Indigenous Studies of the First Decade of the Twenty-First Century."

11. I am assuming there were no other Natives in that room. No one identified as such, and I am sure Noenoe would have appreciated not being the only one.

12. Anti-Native oppression and violence at UIUC has continued, some of it clearly spurred by the "loss" of "The Chief." An art installation by Edgar Heap of Birds entitled "Beyond the Chief" was vandalized nine times between March 2009 and August 2010 (<https://ais.illinois.edu/news/2010-01-01/vandalism-history-beyond-chief>). Further, the American Indian Studies program was nearly decimated in the struggle over the hire of Steven Salaita (Salaita 2015).

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