

# Relational dialogues with “tradition”: Beyond colonial imaginary

Takeo Suzuki  
Project Researcher, Doshisha University

# Purpose

- Nuanced understanding of Indigenous resurgence in Canada
  - as autonomous knowledge production with decolonial potential
  - against easy labelling as reactionary “separatist”/“traditionalist”<sup>(1)</sup>
- Recognition as a starting point for decolonization

(1) Poelzer and Coates 2015: 31-45

# Background

- Canadian “politics of recognition” (1970s~)
  - Continuation of colonial deprivation
  - Limited recognition of Indigenous ways of living and thinking<sup>(2)</sup>
- Contemporary “resurgence” of Indigenous peoples (1990s~)<sup>(3)</sup>

(2) Coulthard 2014

(3) Alfred and Corntassel 2005

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Oka Standoff by Mohawks, 1990

# Taiaiake Alfred

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- Mohawk political thinker
- *Peace, Power, Righteousness* (1999)
- *Wasáse* (2005)

- Resurgence ≠ nonreflexive reaction against “West”

“.....cultural revival is not a matter of rejecting all Western influences, but of separating the good from the bad and of fashioning a coherent set of ideas out of traditional culture to guide whatever forms of political and social development—including the good elements of Western forms—are appropriate to the contemporary reality.”

(Alfred [1999] 2009: 52)

- Political leadership based on “stewardship principle” <sup>(4)</sup>  
human    $\leftrightarrow$    land    $\leftarrow$    external power (Creator)  
  ≠ property

(4) Alfred [1999] 2009: 84-5

# Indigenous feminists' take on “tradition”

- Lack of women's point of view <sup>(5)</sup>

“The leaders, after all, are nothing without the people (and especially women) standing with them”

(Monture-Angus 1999: 15)

- Need to disarticulate traditions from the “racist, sexist, homophobic, and religiously fundamentalist discourses and ideologies” <sup>(6)</sup>

(5) Monture-Angus 1999: 14-5

(6) Barker 2011: 216

# Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

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- Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist
- *Dancing on our Turtle's Back* (2011)
- *As We Have Always Done* (2017)

## Gendered “Tradition” of Sweat Lodge Ceremony

[https://www.lakeheadu.ca/sites/default/files/events/\\_Sweat%20Lodge%20Ceremony%20Oct%20.jpg](https://www.lakeheadu.ca/sites/default/files/events/_Sweat%20Lodge%20Ceremony%20Oct%20.jpg)

“Women should wear long skirts”

“Women who are on their moon time must not participate in the Sweat Lodge Ceremony or handle ceremonial items”

“The question I have been asked over and over again ..... is if I wear a skirt to ceremony”

(Simpson 2017: 138)

- Related self-determination: on wearing/not wearing skirt

“We were forced to wear skirts in residential schools, at church ..... Under colonialism the skirt has been and still is in many cases a tool of oppression. My body remembers this.

I believe that my Ancestors and the spiritual world are aware of this. .... I believe that they are benevolent and that ‘tradition’ can change and adapt to the needs of the people. ”

(Simpson 2017: 140)

- Related self-determination: on menstruation

“[Spiritual power] isn’t tied to menstruation for me. Further, I don’t consent to discussing the intimate cycle of my body as a prerequisite for participating in a ceremony, particularly when men are not asked to do the same. …… I don’t feel respected when I’m honored as a ‘life giver’ and not as an intellectual. …… this regulation …… prevents me from relating and attaching to the spiritual realm.”

(Simpson 2017: 141)

<https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com/images/I/614RJBkpwZL.jpg>

- Unlearning from the “tradition”: “queer normativity” (7)

Elders remember queerness “as something that wasn’t a big deal, as if it were a normal inconsequential part of life”

(Simpson 2017: 123)

(7) Simpson 2017: 128-38

# Concluding remarks

- Multidimensionality
    - land ethics, anti-patriarchy, queer normativity
  - Relationality
    - in knowledge itself (what): with the land and ancestors
    - in producing knowledge (how): with communities and elders
- \*Not just “what” knowledge to create but “how” to create it<sup>(8)</sup>

(8) cf. Smith [1999] 2012

# Images

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