Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies

OLLI, SPRING 2 2022

Agenda

Introduction to Native American & Indigenous Studies

Week 1 – Keywords: Indigeneity/Indigenous, Native
Week 2 – Keyword: Land
Week 3 – Keyword: Sovereignty
Week 4 – Keywords: Nation, nationhood
Week 5 – Keywords: blood, tradition
Week 6 – Keywords: colonialism, decolonization
Week 7 – Keyword: Survivance
Week 8 – Keyword: Knowledge
Week 9 – Keywords: Literature, Art
Week 10 – Keywords: Queer, 2-Spirit or, previously (derogatory), berdache
Week 11 – Keyword: Resistance
Week 12 – Keyword: Race

New Mexico Desert (2011)
oil/panel, 40" x 80"

Kay WalkingStick (b. 1935)
Cherokee Nation

As We Have Always Done

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

- The combination of **living decolonial queer politics in intimate spaces and everyday acts of resurgence** can be a force for dramatic change in the face of the overwhelming domination of the settler colonial state, particularly on microscales. This kind of thinking has inspired diverse nation-based principled action, particularly among Indigenous youth, all over Turtle Island.
- The generative and emergent qualities of living in our bodies as political orders represent the small and first steps of aligning oneself and one's life in the present with the visions of an Indigenous future that are radically decoupled from the domination of colonialism and where Indigenous freedom is centered.
- This embodiment draws us out of the politics of distraction and away from continually positioning ourselves and structuring our movements in a response to the politics of distraction. We then become centered in our Indigenous presents, rather than centered in responding to the neoliberal politics of the state.
- My Ancestors are not in the past. The spiritual world does not exist in some mystical realm. These forces and beings are right here beside me—inspiring, loving, and caring for me in each moment and compelling me to do the same. It is my responsibility with them and those yet unborn to continuously give birth to my Indigenous present.
- ***biidaaban*** – The prefix *bii* means the future is coming at you; it also means the full anticipation of the future, that you can see the whole picture. *Daa* is the verb for living in a certain place or the present. *Ban* or *ba* is a verb used for when something doesn't exist anymore or someone who has passed on. *Biidaaban*, then, is the verb for when day breaks, the actual moment daylight appears at dawn, not as a prolonged event but the very moment

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- **Embodiment** allows individuals to act now, wherever they are, city or reserve, in their own territory or in that of another nation, with support or not, in small steps, with Indigenous presence.
- These acts reinforce a strong sense of individual self-determination and freedom and allow individuals to choose practices that are meaningful to them in the context of their own reality and lives.
- On an individual level, people are taking it upon themselves to learn their own nation-based Indigenous practices. This can mean everything from becoming vitally attached to land and place; to learning language, songs, dances, stories, and artistic practices; to renewing ceremonies; to engaging in land and place-based practices and ethics; to revitalizing our systems of politics, governing, caring, education, and service; to reclaiming birthing, breastfeeding, and parenting practices and death rituals; to regenerating the responsibilities and positions of the 2SQ community.
- At first glance, these acts seem to have the most transformative power within individuals. But as I've witnessed this unfolding in various manifestations, these individual everyday acts of resurgence are starting to also become organized and collectivized, and it is in relationship to each other that we can enact and renew our political and governing practices.
- I am interested in thinking about how to build upon these place-based resurgent mobilizations to build a network of resurgent struggle. Everyday acts of resurgence tie us to original creative processes that create networks across time and space and generate doorways for new theoretical understandings to emerge. They are the kinetics in Edna's creation story. They are the how.

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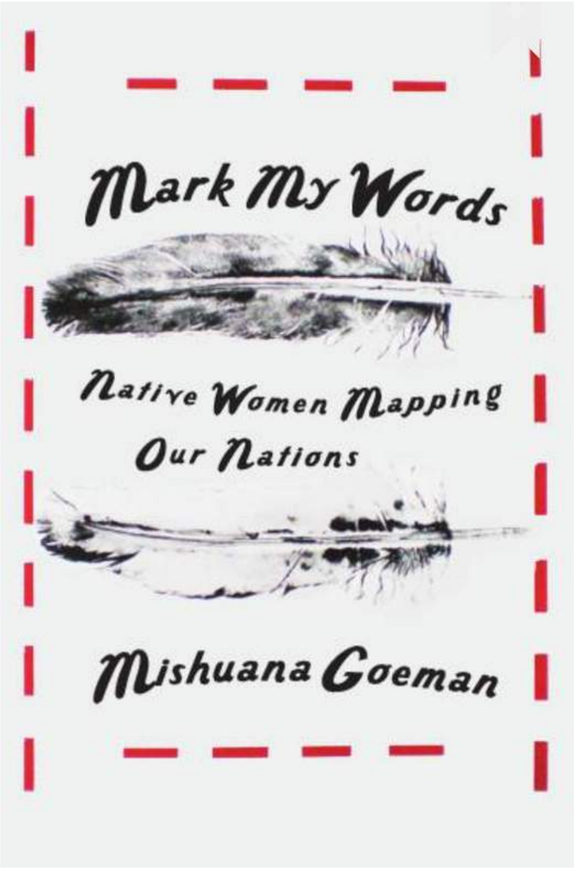
- I am thinking here of the Dene students at Dechinta, spending significant time on the land with elders mastering Dene thought through the practice of Dene bush skills.
- I am thinking here of the Onaman Collective regularly hosting language immersion houses, building canoes and snowshoes, making maple syrup, and fund-raising to buy land for a permanent cultural camp
- The Ogimaa Mikana Project in Toronto restoring original names and inserting Nishnaabemowin into the urban spaces of downtown cores.
- I am thinking of the Kwi Awt Stelmexw language institute for Skowmish immersion.
- I am thinking of the tireless peer-to-peer work on sexual health and addictions done by the Native Youth Sexual Health Network.
- I am thinking of young moose-hide tanners in Denendeh whose work might start out as individual everyday acts of resurgence but then grow as they connect with hunters, expert hide tanners, tool makers, story, and Ancestors and as they embody and generate theory.
- I am also thinking of the resurgent organizing and daily embodiments of Indigenous practices taking place on the land around occupations such as the Unis’tot’en Camp and the ongoing blockade at Grassy Narrows.

Questioning colonial spatiality

- American, Canadian, and Mexican wealth and power dynamics are only possible by consistently shifting policies that deal directly with Native peoples while simultaneously erasing their histories and knowledges or even such policies' effects on Native people's everyday reality.
- (Re)mapping our nations, both the nation-state and Native nations, requires us to engage in past modes of knowledge production as well as to examine how it informs policies and laws— and yes, even our own resistance to colonialism and imperialism. We must recognize how the injustices that coupled a mapping of the Americas materializes in all our lives— Native and non-Native alike— on a daily basis. What we now know as Wall Street was once a tribal center, and, as such, is disputed space in a settler context.
- In addressing claims to the right to **spatial justice**, many Native activists and writers have suggested asking, *whose land is it that is deemed public by interests that have always been about the privatization of land and bodies? How might we (re)map the social, historical, political, and economical in these moments to include a critique of colonialism and imperialism?*
- The geographic language employed in our work toward spatial justice has the potential potency of unpacking neoliberal accumulations of private wealth, but recognition of colonial restructuring of land and bodies must be recognized. Complicating the history of spatial restructuring in settler societies not only enables us to perceive the Americas as layered with complex histories and enduring struggles, but also permits us to imagine forms of resistance that do not perpetuate violence.
- Ultimately, we must question our mental and material maps. *What geographies have we been taught and then normalized that hinder a movement toward spatial justice?*



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- Mapping, storytelling, and continuation have always been a part of our grounded normativity, even shattered grounded normativity. Vizenor defines survivance as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry.”
- Within Nishnaabeg thought, stories throughout time have always been a renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry, and so to me, the lens of resurgence resonates more than the lens of survivance. I don’t experience a division between “tribal” and “new.” I don’t just renounce. I refuse and I continue to generate.
- Tools do not necessarily define process, and while we have added “new” tools for storytelling within our embedded practices, we can also remain rooted in our deeper philosophical and aesthetic understandings to generate meaning. There is no hybrid. Mobility shatters and refuses the containment of settler colonialism and inserts Indigenous presence. This is an asset.
- Mobility and the diplomacy and community building inherent in it are a practice of many Indigenous nations. We’ve always moved throughout our territories and through the territories of others with the practice of diplomacy, moving with the consent of other nations. Most of us have lived or will live in a variety of places throughout our lives, and we travel back and forth maintaining connection wherever possible and whenever we have the means. This in my mind does not necessarily dilute our Indigeneity, nor does it dilute our demands for a land base. In resurgence practice we should be working to strengthen the connections between our communities and building upon our strengths rather than falling into the colonial trap of urban versus reserve.

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- ***Everyday acts of resurgence*** are one mechanism that can be used to build a more united resurgence movement that strengthens nationhood and works outside of the colonial spatial constructs the Indian Act has created to keep us divided, particularly when everyday acts are collectivized and done in relationship or community with other Indigenous people. Indigenous makers—those who live Indigenous practices inside of Indigenous spaces—hold onto these practices.
- When we start to link up with other individuals and communities engaged in everyday acts of resurgence by refusing the divisions of colonial spatialities, networks, or constellations, emerge.
- The Indigenous artistic community is a site where this has always occurred, and I'd like to think about these contributions as a mechanism for moving from individual acts of resurgence to collective ones.
- The use of Indigenous aesthetics in artistic practice is one mechanism Indigenous creators use to code their work, to "disrupt the noise of colonialism," to speak to multiple audiences, and to enact affirmative and generative forms of refusal. It is also an everyday act of resurgence and a practice in and of itself that becomes collectivized when Indigenous peoples recognize the shared code.
- In my own writing, I rely on Nishnaabeg aesthetic principles to speak to multiple audiences through my own artistic and intellectual practices. At a talk by Monique Mojica at Nozhem Theatre in Peterborough, Ontario, she talked extensively about Kuna aesthetics: ***repetition***, ***duality***, ***multidimensionality***, and ***abstraction***. This resonated with me because I saw those aesthetic principles and theory underlying all kinds of things in Nishnaabeg thought, from ***ceremony***, to ***storytelling***, to ***art making*** of all kinds, and I recognized that I was already using them in my practice and wanted to deepen this practice.

The Ghost Dance Movement, 1889

- The Numu (Northern Paiute) prophet Wovoka experienced his first vision on New Year's Day 1889, when a solar eclipse darkened the skies throughout the West. After traveling to heaven and seeing all the dead people living there "happy and forever young," Wovoka reported, God told him to go back to earth and tell all the people to be good and love one another, and promised that if they "faithfully obeyed his instructions they would at last be reunited with their friends in this other world, where there would be no more death or sickness or old age." Wovoka then began to preach to the Numu of the Smith and Mason valleys in western Nevada. Although at the time he claimed no healing bo'ha, he demonstrated the power of his prophecy in ways common to Numu shamans: weather control and invulnerability. He predicted and took credit for rains that ended a prolonged drought, and this success won him an instant following on the nearby Walker River Reservation. The first dances probably took place in the spring of 1889, with only local Numus attending. News of the religion spread quickly, and when the second dance was held, many visiting Indians were there, including some from Fort Hall.
- Ceremonially, Wovoka's Ghost Dance was very similar to the 1870 religion, but there were important differences in intent and effect between Wovoka's doctrine and that of Wodziwob. David Aberle has argued that the 1890 doctrine was as much "redemptive" as "transformative." A redemptive movement seeks to find "a state of grace in a human soul, psyche, or person" and is defined by a search for a "new inner state." While on one level the intent of the 1890 Ghost Dance was clearly transformative—it purported to bring a renewal of the earth and reunification of all people—its impact on Indian communities and individuals was often redemptive.45 Wovoka preached a gospel of peace, love, and accommodation that, by eliminating many of the causes of internal discord, served to strengthen Indian communities. And as such his religion survived in modified forms well into the twentieth century.

The Ghost Dance Movement, 1889

- Wovoka's doctrine was distinct but had a very important similarity with the earlier movement: both left plenty of room for interpretations as diverse as the religious traditions and historical experiences of the peoples who accepted them. Mooney pointed out that on the basic foundation of Wovoka's vision, "each tribe has built a structure from its own mythology, and each apostle and believer has filled in the details according to his own mental capacity or ideas of happiness, with such additions as come to him from the trance."
- Agent Fisher observed that the dance as practiced at Fort Hall was "not the same as the 'ghost dance' now being carried on by the Sioux and other eastern tribes." He added: "Scarcely any two tribes have the same ideas as to what they must do to bring about the desired result." (Fisher, unfortunately, did not provide a detailed description of the ceremony at Fort Hall.)59 Such doctrinal flexibility meant that the religion could be interpreted both as a message of universal peace and brotherhood and as an inspiration for militant resistance. Moreover, as the experience at Fort Hall demonstrates, individuals of the same group could hold substantially different understandings of the meaning and use of the doctrine. Likewise, there is conflicting evidence concerning the ultimate fate of the whites in the prophecy: Would they be destroyed? Would they survive along with Indians in the new paradise? Would Indians and whites become one people? Unlike the 1870 movement, the 1890 Ghost Dance supported numerous versions of the prophecy, several of which included the violent destruction of the whites.
- It is clear that Fort Hall Indians practiced the Ghost Dance religion and continued their roles as missionaries and interpreters well after the Wounded Knee massacre in December 1890, an event that many historians have viewed as the brutal conclusion of the Ghost Dance fervor.

The Ghost Dance Movement, 1889

- Divisions between the physical and spiritual were never clear in Newe belief systems, and the increasing acceptance of white medicine may have in fact had its basis in shamanic belief. The old dichotomy between less skilled shamans, whose abilities were based on practical knowledge, and the powerful bo'hagande, or "singing doctors," who dealt with spirit loss and object intrusion, paralleled a widespread Indian distinction between "white" and "Indian" diseases.
- It was not necessary for Shoshones and Bannocks to reject their own healing methods wholesale in order to accept Western scientific cures for some ailments. The shamans remained the doctors of choice in serious cases of suspected soul loss or object intrusion. Only as succeeding generations were educated to believe in the Western scientific conception of medicine did physicians surpass shamans as the doctors of choice on the reservations. Agents, Christian missionaries, and medical doctors all did their part to destroy the shamans' power, but none achieved complete success.

Toward Radical Resurgent Struggle

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

- How do we organize in the present to ensure we are creating a generation of Indigenous peoples who are intimately attached to their lands, skilled in the practices of grounded normativity, and have direct experience in building and maintaining our political processes, education systems, and wellness practices, for example?
- There is an assumption that if I act nicely, calmly, and happily, Canadians will support me because it is the right thing to do, because it feeds into Canada's international narrative of themselves as being a champion of human rights and the benevolent empathic state that cares about the oppressed.
- At the beginning of ***Idle No More***, Dene scholar Glen Coulthard wrote, "If history has shown us anything, it is this: if you want those in power to respond swiftly to Indigenous peoples' political efforts, start by placing Native bodies... between settlers and their money, which in colonial contexts is generated by the ongoing theft and exploitation of our land and resource base."
- Networks of planned, rotating actions can be organized to respect local self-determination but require face-to-face communication networks of trusted relationships, which Idle No More lacked. Bodies on the land within the context of grounded normativity also doesn't necessarily mean blockades and protests— it does mean thinking through new strategies and tactics and placing our action within the practices and ethics of grounded normativity.
- It's also important we think through our conceptualization of direct action, from the so-called protest tactics of nonIndigenous social movements to ***ways of organizing and mobilizing that are inherently Indigenous***. Placing Indigenous bodies on the land in any Indigenous context through engagement with Indigenous practices is direct action. Anything we do that affirms the bodies, minds, and experiences of Indigenous women and 2SQ people as the embodiment of Indigenous political orders is direct action. ***Everyday acts of resurgence are direct action***.

Toward Radical Resurgent Struggle

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- Trauma-based mobilizations in Canada from the organizing that preceded the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to the decades of organizing that preceded the national Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women have been successful in at least one of their main goals: compelling the state into apologizing and setting up commissions and inquiries as a mechanism to account for past injustices. There is no doubt in my mind that this may bring healing and solace to some survivors and the families of those victimized. My comments here are not meant to diminish the anguish of survivors or their families nor the sacrifice, commitment, and struggle of the families and community organizations that have acted out of love to try to bring justice and healing to their own lives and to our communities.
- I worry, though, that Indigenous grief can be managed, exploited, and used by the state to placate Indigenous resistance. I worry that while these movements have been excellent at forcing the state to enact its own mechanisms for accountability, these mechanisms have never brought about accountability for Indigenous peoples because they are processes that are partly designed to uphold the structure of settler colonialism.
- What happens when Indigenous peoples, particularly Indigenous women and 2SQ people, write ourselves, represent ourselves, and enact ourselves as revolutionaries fighting a transformative campaign against colonialism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and capitalism through everyday acts of resistance and resurgence, rather than allowing ourselves to be framed and represented in ways that articulate and amplify us as helpless victims?

Toward Radical Resurgent Struggle

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson

- I used a deer story in chapter 4 to talk about Nishnaabeg internationalism. In this story, the deer, collectively, as a nation of people, are faced with wrongdoing in the form of physical violence and exploitation.
- The deer refused and organized on their own terms. They didn’t need the Nishnaabeg, just like the Nishnaabeg don’t need settlers. It seems consistent with the concept of Biiskabiyang, a turning inward toward the essence of, in this case, the deer nation.
- They retreated and focused on rebuilding and recovering first, shifting the power away from the Nishnaabeg. They made the Nishnaabeg recognize them and our own neglect.
- There is also a thread of flight, of fugitivity, in this narrative because in their refusal and flight out of violence they liberated themselves into a physical reality that was entirely consistent with the one they deserved and wanted for themselves.
- In their flight, they turned inward. This is consistent with the idea that focused rebuilding using Indigenous processes enacts an Indigenous presence that has the ability to give life to an Indigenous future and changes not only the actors involved in the focused rebuilding, but the power dynamics between the deer and the Nishnaabeg, or between the Nishnaabeg and the state.

Next week…

Keyword: Race

- Introduction, Conclusion from *Who is an Indian?* by Maximilian C. Forte
- Selections, *African Cherokees in Indian Territory: From Chattel to Citizens* by Celia E. Naylor
- Selections, *Lumbee Indians in the Jim Crow South: Race, Identity, and the Making of a Nation* by Malinda Maynor Lowery
- Selections, *The Black Shoals* (monograph) and *Otherwise Worlds: Against Settler Colonialism and Anti-Blackness* (edited collection) by Tiffany Lethabo King, Jenell Navarro, and Andrea Smith