Analyzing Epistemic Oppression in Western Feminism Against Indigenous Women and Feminists' Ways of Knowing

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Table of Contents

Abstract

In this thesis, I look at the relations between Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing and Western feminism. In anticolonial feminist literatures, Western feminism is generally understood as a way of practicing feminism that has its specific principles and practices considered as hegemonic. It is said to center on a way of knowing that shares commitments with Western positions of cultural, economic, and epistemic dominance which results in decentering, devaluating and excluding 'non-western' ways of knowing (Khader 2018; Green 2017; Berenstain et al. 2021). More specifically, Indigenous women and feminists state having trouble formulating their views in their own terms to Western feminists (Suzack 2010; J. Green 2017; Moreton-Robinson 2000; Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill 2013). Indigenous women and feminists' criticism of Western feminism presents me with this problem: How to explain that Western feminism' principles and practices are said to fail to account for the persistent exclusion and devaluation of Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing despite the numerous changes the field underwent to better account for historically excluded voices, issues, and contributions? I argue that Indigenous feminists' exclusion and devaluation of their contribution by Western feminists can be analyzed as a case of epistemic oppression. Epistemic oppression refers to a persistent infringement of a community's ability to contribute to knowledge production (Dotson 2014, 116). First, I analyze specific Indigenous feminists' critique of Western feminism as disclosing persisting exclusion and devaluation of their knowledge, their contributions, and their voices from Western feminism. Second, I interpret the oppression disclosed by Indigenous feminists using the theoretical framework of epistemic oppression offered by Kristie Dotson. Finally, I illustrate my argument by providing an analysis of the Quebec

feminist movement and its relationships with Indigenous women and feminists in Quebec to show how epistemic oppression concretely operates. My approach is grounded in contributions in comparative political theory working to deparochialize writings in Western political theory, meaning to unsettle, multiply and/or adapt frameworks to decenter the Western 'canon' by diagnosing and challenging the dominance of Western orientations in political theory (Williams 2020; Tully 2020). My thesis aims to contribute to establishing adequate dialogical conditions between Western political and feminist theory, and other traditions, especially Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing.

Résumé

Dans ce mémoire, j'analyse les relations entre les savoirs des femmes et féministes autochtones et le féminisme occidental. Le féminisme occidental est généralement compris dans les littératures féministes anticoloniales comme étant une façon de pratiquer le féminisme qui possède des principes et pratiques considérés comme hégémoniques. Il est compris comme adoptant des modes de connaissance partageant des engagements avec les postures occidentales culturelles, économiques et épistémiques dominantes qui décentralisent, dévaluent, et excluent les modes de connaissance non-occidentales (Khader 2018; Green 2017; Berenstain et al. 2021). Je m'intéresse à la problématique formulée par les femmes et les féministes autochtones qui expriment éprouver de la difficulté à formuler leurs points de vue dans leurs propres termes aux féministes occidentales. Cette critique du féminisme occidental par les féministes autochtones pose le problème suivant : comment expliquer que les principes et les pratiques du féminisme occidental ne parviennent pas à rendre compte de l'exclusion persistante et de la dévalorisation des modes de connaissance des femmes et des féministes autochtones, malgré les nombreux changements que ce

mouvement a entrepris pour mieux rendre compte des voix, des questions et des contributions historiquement exclues? Je soutiens que l'exclusion et la dévaluation des contributions des femmes et féministes autochtones par les féministes occidentales peut être analysées comme un cas d'oppression épistémique. L'oppression épistémique se comprend comme l'atteinte persistante à la capacité d'une communauté à contribuer à la production de connaissances (Dotson 2014, 116). Premièrement, j'analyse des critiques de femmes et féministes autochtones spécifiques comme révélant une exclusion et une dévaluation persistante de leurs connaissances, leurs contributions et leurs voix par le féminisme occidental. Ensuite, j'interprète l'oppression révélée par les femmes et féministes autochtones en utilisant le cadre théorique de l'oppression épistémique proposé par Dotson. Finalement, j'illustre mon argumentation en proposant une analyse du mouvement féministe québécois et de ses relations avec les femmes et les féministes autochtones au Québec afin de montrer comment l'oppression épistémique s'opère concrètement. Mon approche s'inscrit dans les contributions en théorie politique comparative qui travaillent à décloisonner les travaux en théorie politique occidentale. Elles visent à déstabiliser, multiplier et/ou adapter les cadres conceptuels de cette discipline pour décentrer le « canon » occidental, et ce, en diagnostiquant et questionnant la domination des orientations occidentales au sein de la théorie politique (Williams 2020 ; Tully 2020). Mon mémoire vise à contribuer à l'établissement de conditions dialogiques adéquates entre la théorie politique et féministe occidentale et d'autres traditions, en particulier les savoirs des femmes et féministes autochtones.

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Introduction

What is Western Feminism?

Feminism is a site of important critical insights that influenced transformations in multiple academic, cultural, economic and political contexts. As a research paradigm, an ideology and a set of social movements, it encompasses many sites and conceptual frameworks that can be in tension with each other (Dhamoon 2013, 89). In fact, some feminists expose dominant tendencies within feminism that often result in the imposition of views that prioritize certain women's experience at the expense of others.[1] In particular, Western feminism[2] is purported to center a way of knowing that shares commitments with Western positions of cultural, economic, epistemic dominance, resulting in the decentering, devaluating and excluding of 'non-Western' knowledge (Khader 2018; J. Green 2017; Berenstain et al. 2021). In this research, I mobilize the term 'Western feminism' to refer to hegemonic tendencies in feminism[3] that overlook and devaluate 'non-Western' contributions, in particular those of Indigenous women and feminists. For example, the feminist single-axis analysis using the binary categories of gender tends to evacuate what Rita Dhamoon calls the question of differences among women that "challenge the idea of a universal notion of sisterhood and women's experiences" (Dhamoon 2013, 21). Third World, decolonial, postcolonial feminists and Black feminists, among others, interrogate

[1] See Dhamoon, Rita. 2013. 'Feminisms'. In *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* for a detailed overview of the contributions, areas of common ground and contestations in feminism.

[2] The term Western refers to a geographical space but more than that, it refers to dominant structures and processes of power consolidated for and by the elimination and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. From the times of colonization of the Americas and the Caribbean by the Europeans, to the constitution of contemporary settler nation-states, which Western powers imposed themselves over Indigenous peoples by multiple political, economic, sexual, spiritual, cultural and epistemic means. I will use the term 'Western' since it is the term used by Indigenous theorists, decolonial thinkers and comparative political theorists.

[3] While each term has its specific designation, *Western feminism* is often used interchangeably with other terms such as *Eurocentric feminism*, *white feminism*, *hegemonic feminism*, *English-speaking feminists* and *mainstream feminism*.

the limits of using a universalizing binary conception of gender as a vector of feminist transformations (Narayan 2008; Mohanty 1984; Spivak 1998; Hill Collins 2002; Lugones 2010a).

Western feminism undergone numerous changes and transformations over the last 30-40 years, which allowed the development of better frameworks and practices (Evans and Chamberlain 2015). For example, the three-waves metaphor, although it is criticized for establishing inaccurate oppositions between feminist generations and frameworks, and for drawing a linear historical account of feminism based on written texts that excludes non-Western sources and methods (Dhamoon 2013, 89), illustrates the idea that Western feminism transforms and improves to be more representative, plural, and inclusive of diverse experiences.

Despite the numerous changes in the field, Western feminism faces persistent criticism. Notably, many Indigenous women and feminists[4], critique and some even reject, Western feminism in settler colonial contexts because they argue that it reproduces Eurocentric [hetero]patriarchal systems (St. Denis 2017, 48).[5] Critiques expose how Western feminism, as a site and practices of knowledge production, reinforces participation, collusion, and cooptation in settler colonial-heteropatriarchal structures and processes.

Many Indigenous political theorists and scholars of Settler Colonial Studies understand settler colonialism as a structure and a process, or a "structure made of

[4] I focus on Indigenous women and feminists' critiques of Western feminism because a separate study would be necessary to account for the specific factors constitutive of Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA realities.
[5] Note that this book this edited book by Joyce Green, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism,* was first published in 2007, but that it was republished in 2017 and that the relevant critique is retained.

processes," (L. B. Simpson 2011a, 46) that dispossesses and eliminates Indigenous bodies and polities for land acquisition (L. B. Simpson 2017a; Burkhart 2019).

Patrick Wolfe understands it as following a logic of elimination that includes multiple strategies, policies and modes of operation such as:

> Encouraged miscegenation, the breaking-down of native title into 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 (Wolfe 2006, 388).

Indigenous women and feminists'[6] critique concerns the difficulty they have formulating their views in their own terms specifically to Western feminists in settler colonial contexts (J. Green 2017; Suzack 2010). This presents me with the problem I will investigate in this thesis. My research seeks to explain how Western feminism's principles and practices are said to fail to account for the persistent exclusion and devaluation of Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing despite the numerous changes the field underwent to better account for traditionally excluded voices and concerns. I argue that Indigenous feminists' exclusion and devaluation of their contributions by Western feminists can be analyzed as a case of *epistemic oppression*.

Defining Epistemic Oppression

Before introducing the concept of epistemic oppression, I provide a short literature review on how the term *epistemic* is employed in the study of settler colonialism. In analytic philosophy and social epistemology, the term relates to knowledge and the study of knowledge production. In the fields of social epistemology, feminist philosophy and political theory, the term is often used in relation to concepts such as (in)justice, violence,

[6] As I will detail in the second chapter, I distinguish Indigenous women who challenge colonial gender oppression and Indigenous feminists because their approaches are complementary but different.

harm and ignorance (Kidd et al. 2017; Medina 2017). There is an emergent literature in social epistemology and political theory mobilizing concepts such as epistemic in/justice and epistemic violence to discuss how settler colonialism disrupts and erases Indigenous knowledge production.

For example, Yann Allard-Tremblay discusses forms of epistemic violence experienced by Indigenous people, such as the silencing and the distorting of Indigenous peoples' voices created by the imposition and universalization of rationalism as a standard for knowledge production (Allard-Tremblay 2019, 9). Robert Nichols provides a comprehensive analysis of a specific case of how Indigenous peoples fight against the imposition of knowledge practices that contribute to their oppression; he analyzes how Indigenous scholars worked to rehabilitate oral tradition as a valuable, significant and legitimate form of knowledge in order to fight for epistemic justice. He defines this concept broadly as attempts to redress the historical processes of hindering Indigenous peoples' capacity to formulate and communicate their experiences in their own terms (Nichols 2020). Daniel Sherwin is also concerned with Indigenous struggles for epistemic justice in relation to comparative political theory. The author problematizes the complicated relationship between goals to deparochialize political theory and Indigenous struggles for epistemic justice that can involve a form of refusal and resistance to interacting and engaging with Western works and initiatives in political theory (Sherwin 2021).

Epistemic oppression refers to a persistent infringement of a community's ability to contribute to knowledge production, which is also understood as persistent *epistemic exclusions*: "[it is] a persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources that hinder one's contributions to knowledge

production." (Dotson 2014, 115) Kristie Dotson created the term *epistemic oppression* following Miranda Frickers' conceptualization of epistemic injustice, which refers to "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower." (Fricker 2007, 1) The concept of epistemic injustice allows to examine how we can be victims of a wrong that affects our ability to produce and share knowledge. She theorizes two types of epistemic injustice, one testimonial and the other hermeneutical. The first refers to an interactional character; stereotypes and prejudices towards social groups affect the individuals who make up these groups in their ability to be credible in their testimony, for example. The second refers to a structural character; dominant groups produce knowledge by and for their own needs, according to their own understanding of the world, thus requiring marginalized groups to translate, transform, and adapt their testimonies to be understood. They can also lack concepts adapted to their reality. Fricker's theory is particularly concerned with the consequences experienced by individuals and the required ethical commitments to alleviate the harm that these phenomena cause to individuals.

For this reason, I engage with Dotson's notion of epistemic oppression that allows to reveal a more structural analysis. This concept is particularly well-suited for study in the settler colonial context, as it allows me to examine how the structures and processes of the colonial context produce oppression at the level of epistemological systems rather than of individuals.

Kristie Dotson refers to two types of epistemic oppression. The first is *reducible* to sociopolitical and historical conditions. It is reducible to these conditions because it is mainly caused by epistemic power relations obtained via differentials of social positions that infringe on a group's capacity to adequately use their epistemic resources to participate

in knowledge production. To address reducible epistemic oppression, a given epistemological system must adapt to new realities and concepts, redress its harmful epistemic practices (inefficient epistemic resources) and improve its conceptual and methodological frameworks to account for historically marginalized experiences (insufficient resources). The second type of epistemic oppression is *irreducible* to sociopolitical and historical conditions. This persistent epistemic exclusion is caused by the features of the epistemological system. An epistemological system refers to all the conditions that allow for or hinder the production of knowledge. It includes operative, instituted social norms, values, principles, practices, habits, and attitudes that orient and structure the production and communication of knowledge. Dotson qualifies this term as a holistic concept that encompasses multiple elements that constitute a framework allowing for knowledge production. She qualifies it also as an *epistemological framework* and *overall epistemic lifeways* (Dotson 2014, 121).

An epistemological system is fluid and transformative, however, it implies that there are several shared meanings and practices that solidify a certain underlying structure conditioning the production of knowledge, across otherwise heterogeneous discourses within that system. There can be discordances within a given system and it does not mean that there are fixed borders delineating it. All these conditions shape and determine the resilience of the system, that is, its capacity to absorb disturbance without redefining the system's structure (Dotson 2014, 120). These conditions will make it more or less difficult to operationalize substantial shifts in the principles, values, practices, etc., that constitute

the given system. I will consider Western feminism and Indigenous ways of knowing (including Indigenous feminists' contributions) as distinctive epistemological systems.[7]

Dotson is not preoccupied with *proving* the existence of epistemic oppression: "I do not use 'real life' examples mainly because my focus is not to demonstrate the actual existence of epistemic oppression itself. Rather, mine is a pursuit of an adequate conceptualization of epistemic oppression." (Dotson, 2014,134)

Therefore, my inquiry is motivated by the objective to substantiate this theory in 'real life' concerns. Inspired by Berenstain et al.,[8] article, I aim to demonstrate how Western feminism's epistemological system produces epistemic oppression because it is anchored in colonial epistemologies. They show how colonization is made possible by the imposition of systems of meaning and interpretation that results in reducing, precluding, and excluding Indigenous systems of knowledge that ultimately disrupt multiple aspects of their societies such as governance, culture, and sexuality: "Dispossessive practices create and are reinforced by settler knowledge systems that generate epistemic oppression." (Berenstain et al. 2021)

I suggest that Western feminism's persisting lack of engagement with and exclusion of Indigenous women and feminists' contributions is a case of *irreducible* epistemic oppression. I combine Indigenous women and feminists' characterization and critique of Western feminism with my analysis of irreducible epistemic oppression to detail how

[7] As I will show in the first chapter, Indigenous thinkers use many terms such as *ways of knowing*, *ways of knowing-being*, *frameworks*, *lifeways*, *traditions*, *worlds, and worldviews*, among other terms, to refer to their ways of producing knowledge that encompass different practices and modes of engagement with knowledge, which are not just rational or cognitive but also spiritual, embodied, place-based, social, cultural, and more. I use interchangeably the terms "ways of knowing" and "epistemological systems" since both terms refer to a fluid account of a knowledge system.

[8] Kristie Dotson is a co-author of this critical exchange in which she shares that colonial epistemologies produce epistemic oppression because they fail to detect their own limits (Berenstain et al. 2021, 9). I will engage with and further this argument in this thesis.

Indigenous women and feminists' discourses and critique do not catalyze expected transformations within Western feminism; the difficulty of proceeding in a meta-inquiry, or self-reflexivity, e.g., to become aware that one's epistemological system has significant limits (Berenstain et al. 2021, 9), prevents generating an adequate response to Indigenous women and feminists' discourses, experiences, and critiques.

I want to articulate the notion of irreducibility to demonstrate that the critique of the persistent lack of engagement is, in my view, a marker that detects epistemic oppression produced by Western feminism. This diagnosis allows me to then examine how epistemic resources are inadequate to account for Indigenous women and feminists' experiences. As a Western feminist, I use a tool that is built in Western ways of knowing for the goal of investigating, through an immanent critical approach, its transformative potential. I demonstrate the plausibility of this argument by showing that Quebec feminists, while they expose oppressive aspects of Quebec feminism such as the use of the colonization narrative, pursue the normative goal of rendering the movement more inclusive to marginalized experiences, including Indigenous women's contribution. However, I reveal their framework's irreducibility to Indigenous feminists' contributions caused by their epistemic resources inadequate to challenge their conceptual roots anchored in settler sovereignty.

Commitments To Deparochializing Western Feminism

I am a Western feminist trained in Western traditions. I seek to 'understand' from my perspective Indigenous women and feminists' testimonies without reproducing oppressive patterns. Therefore, my approach is grounded in contributions in comparative political theory working to *deparochialize* writings in Western political theory, meaning to unsettle,

multiply and adapt frameworks to decenter the Western 'canon.' For instance, the edited book *Deparochializing Political Theory* (Williams 2020) diagnoses and challenges the dominance of Western orientations in political theory. James Tully's chapter in the book examines how to establish adequate dialogical conditions between Western theory and other traditions, including Indigenous intellectual traditions. He shows that Western political theory is a dominant tradition founded and practiced in ways that hide the spatial-temporal contexts of production which (re)imposes (not necessarily voluntarily) interpretations, judgements, principles, and understandings over others in an oppressive manner. Therefore, there is a necessity to recontextualize its production, for instance by putting the focus not on the "prescriptive search" of meaning but rather on the "ethical practices of openness and receptivity to the otherness of others that enable participants to understand one another in their own traditions." (Tully 2020, 26) This inquiry aims to find the best conditions to engage in "genuine dialogue" with other traditions, including Indigenous ways of knowing, to create true mutual understandings and work towards correcting the imposition of power and dominance in knowledge production.

To decenter Western knowledge, Brian Burkhart argues that the landscape of the conversations between Indigenous and Western knowledges must change by recentering them around Indigenous ways of knowing in order to challenge *settler guardianship*. This concept characterizes how Indigenous people are forced to 'translate,' or adapt their experience and knowledge to the settler ways of knowing, for instance, by using settler concepts in order to speak about Indigenous experiences and knowledges and to be understood, which reinforces and maintains the exclusion, and the assimilation of their voices and experiences (Burkhart 2020, 45). He argues that the landscape of the

conversations must transform in order to force "an acknowledgment of and conversation around Indigenous lived experience on its own terms before the broader conversation is allowed to continue." (Burkhart 2020, 45)

To borrow Tully's and Burkhart's reflections, I am interested in examining the epistemic factors that shape the 'landscape' or the 'terms of the conversations' between Indigenous and Western knowledge production, with a focus on *feminist* knowledge production. Given my concern for engaging with Indigenous voices in their own terms, without subjecting them to settler guardianship, I take Indigenous women and feminists' ongoing critique as revealing and challenging how Western feminism persists in consolidating and contributing to oppression in a settler colonial context. My argument specifically looks at the 'terms of the conversation' between Indigenous feminism and Western feminism to argue that Indigenous feminists' critique of exclusion and devaluation of their contribution by Western feminist theory can be analyzed as a case of epistemic oppression.

To do so, I must recognize that the two traditions are sustained by a horizon of understanding that allows for making sense and creating meaning from their own context. A horizon of understanding "discloses the other and their way of life as meaningful in [one's tradition's] terms." (Tully 2020, 28) One problem is the risk of misunderstanding each other and re-imposing, consciously or not, one's terms over another's. In colonial relations of power, the risk to reimpose and reify colonial dominance over Indigenous knowledges is high. To this end, Tully asserts that there must be a critical practice within a tradition to raise the issues related to self-awareness – this includes bringing aspects of one's background, elements of their horizon of disclosure/meaning and center them in the

dialogues they wish to establish with the other tradition, in order to establish a 'genuine dialogue.' I therefore follow these ethical, methodological and epistemological principles to establish a dialogue between Indigenous women and feminists' knowledge and Western feminism.

Following this commitment, because I mobilize a concept was originally conceptualized from Western ways of knowing, I must be vigilant in how I justify and then apply this set of knowledge to my inquiry. I think the theory on epistemic oppression can help uncover and understand aspects of Western feminism's background and horizon of understanding, which can ultimately create adequate conditions for a genuine dialogue. In particular, I make sense of Western feminism's knowledge production, including its practices of conceptualizing and sharing knowledge and its capacity for self-reflexivity about the limits of its horizon of meaning. To expose these three dimensions of Western feminism's epistemological system will allow me to engage in continued critical examination when engaging with Indigenous women and feminists' work.

My contribution is explicative and interpretative. It does not seek to evaluate Indigenous women and feminists' claims, as if I was adopting a view from nowhere, but rather to take them as they are and interpret them with the conceptual framework of epistemic oppression in order to examine critically Western feminism. The Indigenous critique offers the problem that needs to be acknowledged and theorized from within Western ways of knowing – the object of my critique is Western feminism, not Indigenous claims.[9] This approach is coherent with and follows works in comparative political theory

[9] The explanation and interpretation of those claims are always to some extent critical in that they require my own critical uptake of these claims in engaging with, and making sense of, them. Yet, to avoid settler guardianship, my critical intervention is grounded in Indigenous women and feminists' claims to reflect on Western feminism.

that do not aim to evaluate prescriptively other traditions' contributions from Western values and standards, but rather to engage in internal or immanent critical work in order to establish less oppressive dialogical relationships with Indigenous ways of knowing. Following Tully's approach, to reiterate, my inquiry consists of putting aside, not rejecting prescriptive standards in judgement and principles, to leave space for understanding others' concerns "as they experience and articulate them in the terms of their own traditions without assimilation or subordination." (Tully 2020, 27) My focus is not on the ethical dimension of dialogical relationships but rather on the parameters and conditions that precede and allow the engagement in dialogues between traditions; this is why my contribution consists of employing the notion of epistemic oppression (rather than epistemic injustice) to show that the current setting between Indigenous and Western feminisms, is not conducive to a 'genuine dialogue.'

Chapter 1 Settler Colonialism, Western Ways of Knowing and Epistemic Oppression

Introduction

In this first chapter, I explore the epistemic dimension of settler colonialism. I explain how knowledge production carries a particular function in the elaboration and maintenance of colonial structures and processes of power. I juxtapose colonial with Indigenous ways of knowing to expose the epistemic dimension of settler colonialism and its impact on Indigenous women.

Cheryl Suzack explains that colonial and heteropatriarchal structures and processes of power impose ongoing violence and harm against Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA people, and overshadow this violence, making them even harder to report (Suzack 2010). Heteropatriarchy as a component of settler colonialism has been imposed on Indigenous communities, which creates an antagonism within Indigenous communities because it puts Indigenous women and feminists in a position in which they are seen as criticizing their communities, therefore lacking solidarity and commiserating with colonial structures of power. Also, the imposition of this heteropatriarchal structure on Indigenous communities makes it even more difficult to study specific issues related to Indigenous women because, by its very nature, heteropatriarchy tends to overlook or devalue the importance of examining issues related to gender: “feminist research and politics often appear to be irrelevant to the concerns of Indigenous communities and may even seem to be implicated in ongoing colonial practices.” (Suzack, 2010, 2) Women and feminists therefore have the responsibility to shed light on the realities of Indigenous women and to reiterate the necessity to give attention to their contributions and their concerns.

In this chapter, I show how the epistemic dimension of colonial and heteropatriarchal structures and processes of power contributes to this erasure and reinforcement of violence against Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA people. I also demonstrate the relevance of using the concept of epistemic oppression in the examination of knowledge production in settler colonial settings.

Indigenous Thinkers' Analysis of Western Ways of Knowing

I now turn my attention to discussing some fundamental differences between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing[10] as reported by Indigenous thinkers to analyze how the imposition of Western frameworks operates in colonial contexts. This allows me to expose how knowledge production (including values, beliefs, habits, principles, concepts and practices)[11] dismisses and eliminates Indigenous peoples' knowledge production activities or ways of knowing.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith understands the term 'Western' as referring to uses throughout history framing categories of analysis and understanding that objectify, downgrade and erase Indigenous forms of knowledge. Western knowledge builds from:

> The imaginary line between 'east' and 'west' drawn in 1493 by a Papal Bull, [allowing] for the political division of the world […]" and a way for colonial and imperial powers to make sense of what they saw and to represent their new-found knowledge to the West through the authorship and authority of their representations (Smith 2006, 93).

However, I borrow Serene Khader's caveat:

> The West is not internally homogenous and that geopolitical relations in the contemporary world do not map clearly onto a Western/non-Western binary.

[10] *Western*, *colonial*, *white*, *modern*, *Eurocentric*, and *settler* are terms often used interchangeably by Indigenous scholars to refer to dominant structures and processes of power consolidated for and by the elimination and dispossession of Indigenous peoples.

[11] All these participate in the formation of knowledge; practices can generate knowledge, values can direct what idea or principle will be worth focussing on, etc.

> [The term 'Western' refers] to commitments associated with Euro-American positions for cultural, economic, and military dominance (Khader 2018, 18).

Linda Tuhiwai Smith carries out a genealogy of Western knowledges starting from the Enlightenment to discuss how Western systems of knowledge have served throughout history to impose colonial and imperial domination over Indigenous peoples. For example, Western science objectifies Indigenous forms of knowledges, technologies, and social and political forms of governance as "discoveries" that "were commodified as property belonging to the cultural archive and body of knowledge of the West." (Smith 2006, 93) The distinction between "civilized" and "savage" used in 18th century philosophy allowed for the creation of a comparative analytical grid to classify the differences between the newly "discovered" territories and populations in the "non-Western" worlds.

Along with this objectification and commodification, a process of universalization of Western knowledges and Western cultures sought to reaffirm themselves as the center and most legitimate forms of knowledge (Smith 2006, 96). As such, Brian Burkhart, anchoring his philosophy in decolonial concepts, understands the coloniality of power[12] as a strategy and a mode of operation of Western knowledge meant to assert the domination of lands through epistemic strategies and practices such as the erasure of Indigenous knowledge

[12] Decolonial thinkers (including among others, Enrique Dussel, Aníbal Quijano, Walter Mignolo, Gloria Anzaldúa and Maria Lugones) show that Western colonial strategies of power and domination are eminently epistemic. This epistemic domination is what, throughout history, maintained in place global Western colonial white supremacy. Decolonial thinkers tackle what they call the *coloniality* (of power). In Walter Mignolo's terms, coloniality refers to the energy driving the beliefs, attitudes and desires of actors that built an apparatus of management. Quijano explains how, at the beginning of regimes of settler colonialism, authorities repressed Indigenous ways of knowing, being and living, to impose a mystified image of their production of knowledge and meaning (Quijano 2007, 23).
Drawing on Quijano's notion of coloniality, Maria Lugones refocuses on gender to propose a decolonial feminism. She argues that coloniality introduced a system of heterosexual gender binaries used for exploitation, that is, the coloniality of gender (Ruíz 2021, 5). The civilizing mission used hierarchical gender dichotomy between men and women to control bodies through exploitation, sexual violence, control of reproduction and systemic terror (Lugones 2010, 744).

and the process of 'discovering' 'other' ways of knowing. This creates the *colonial difference*, that is, the creation of an 'oppositional other', the 'Indigeneity,'[13] the dichotomy between the 'civilized' and the 'uncivilized' peoples. These processes allow for the imposition of a universalizing framework that forces the replacement of localized, diverse ways of knowing that are anchored in land as a place: "the spatiality of place (the ontology of land itself) must be uprooted in order to implant these delocalized ideologies onto Indigenous, non-European localities." (Burkhart 2019, 25)

This process of universalization is made possible by Western frameworks' *epistemological-ontological divide*, or to put it simply, a division that ruptures the abstract or the theoretical from the praxis. Vanessa Watts explains that this divide is based on the premise that rationality and thought are reserved for humans and that all other objects and beings have an essence and are interconnected with humans but they do not benefit from the same degree of agency. This creates a hierarchy between humans over land, other objects and living beings that serve colonial enterprises and disrupt Indigenous societies and governance that are fundamentally based on conceptions of *Place-Thought* including non-hierarchal relationships and interconnectedness between humans, land, objects and living beings:

> Over time and through processes of colonization, the corporeal and theoretical borders of the epistemological-ontological divide contribute to colonial interpretations of nature/creation that act to centre the human and peripherate nature into an exclusionary relationship (Watts, 2013, 26).

[13] As Meissner and Whyte show, Indigeneity includes a "particularly fluid notion of identity that, at times, biological and/or visual theories of race can mask." (Meissner et Whyte, 2017, 152) Indigeneity can be a person's claim, a person's acceptance to a community, related to racial but also social, cultural and political groups of belonging. It relates to a person's status and responsibilities and does not reduce to a binary understanding of gender (Meissner et Whyte, 2017, 152).

Western forms of knowledge have therefore been imposed on Indigenous peoples in many ways by using this distinction between humanity, land, other beings and objects for colonizing projects.

The imposition of Western ways of knowing is concretely put in place by multiple colonial measures and strategies. Linda Tuhiwai Smith enumerates some, such as colonial education (missionary and secular schooling) that imposed knowledge, language and culture, along with the denial and interdiction of Indigenous knowledges, languages and cultures. Moreover, she extends her critique to academic knowledges, demonstrating that they are grounded in world views that are antagonistic and estranged from other forms of knowledge, making them incapable of engaging with these other forms of knowledge: "disciplines are grounded in cultural world views which are either antagonistic to other belief systems or have no methodology for dealing with other knowledge systems." (Smith, 2006, 97) For Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Marie Battiste, the imposition of Western ways of knowing in a setter colonial regime is a form of 'cognitive imperialism'[14] because it imposes a singular colonial mode of education on Indigenous peoples that does not engage at all with Indigenous intellectual traditions as a way to maintain the colonial order in place (Simpson 2011, 32).

Even more, the imposition of Western ways of knowing on Indigenous communities disrupted Indigenous women's and 2SLGBTQQIA people's subjectivities, roles and responsibilities within their communities (Starblanket 2020, 132), notably through the imposition of Western binary gender categories. Gina Starblanket argues that a central part

[14] For Marie Battiste, cognitive imperialism is defined as "the imposition of one worldview on a people who have an alternative worldview, with the implication that the imposed worldview is superior to the alternative worldview." (Battiste 2000, 192)

of settler colonialism involves a continuing assault upon those who symbolize or represent the colonial difference (Starblanket 2020, 123). Audra Simpson argues that Indigenous women's presence, roles, and bodies have been particularly targeted because they differ from the colonizers and Western women: "their bodies have historically been rendered less valuable because of what they are taken to represent: land, reproduction, Indigenous kinship and governance." (A. Simpson 2016, 16) Heteropatriarchal binary categories of man and woman have been imposed through violent policies such as the heteropatriarchal disposition of the Indian Act[15] making Indigenous women a separate legal and social category. In particular, section 12(1)(b) in the Indian Act stipulated that Indigenous women having an Indian status and their children were enfranchised, meaning that they would automatically lose their Indian status when marrying a non-Indigenous man. Non-Indigenous women who married Indigenous men would, on the contrary, be granted status.[16] Other colonial measures and processes such as residential schools that ripped children from their traditional gender roles and erased Indigenous 2SLGBTQQIA people, and the Sixties Scoop[17] disrupted Indigenous women roles and ways of knowing (Hunt 2018, 24). Indigenous women and 2SLGBTQQIA people are also highly at risk of violence[18] and are overly represented in carceral populations (Walsh and Aarrestad 2018, 130).

[15] The Indian Act is a legislative document written in 1876 meant to regulate Indigenous peoples by imposing wardship on them giving way to "punitive rules, prohibitions and regulations that dehumanized" Indigenous peoples. The Canadian government underwent numerous amendments to the Indian Act to attenuate its major problems but it still keeps the same framework (Joseph 2018, 15).

[16] It is based on the principle that women were under the possession of their fathers and then their husbands.

[17] During the 1960s, a series of child welfare practices led to the largest number of Indigenous children being adopted out of their community, in many cases without the consent and even knowledge of their families (Vowel 2017, 181).

[18] The final report on Murdered and Missing Indigenous Girls and Women (2019) reveals persistent and deliberate human rights violations and abuse against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGTQQIA people. It

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

Engaging with discourses on resurgence and resistance, Indigenous scholars and activists examine how to reappropriate their own ways of knowing to counter the colonial imposition of a system of universalizing knowledge (Starblanket 2020, 122). While there is not one monolithic or singular Indigenous way of knowing, methodology, or epistemology, Indigenous thinkers share views on knowledge production as fundamentally holistic, place-based or context-based, and relational. I mostly use the term *ways of knowing* because this formulation can refer both to principles and knowledge production practices. It refers not only to frameworks or paradigms of thought but also to *practices* involved in knowledge production activities. For instance, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson employs the term *ways of knowing* to refer to multiple practices involved and used in Nishnaabeg knowledge production. She includes partaking in ceremonies, singing, dancing, storytelling, hunting, fishing, gathering, observing, reflecting, experimenting, visioning, dreaming, ricing, and sugaring (L. B. Simpson 2017a, 29). She states:

> The transformative power of knowledge is unleashed through movement, kinetics or action, our embedded practices and processes of life; that is, one has to be fully present and engaged in Nishnaabeg ways of living in order to generate knowledge, in order to generate theory (Simpson, 2017, 28).

For Simpson, theory is (re)generated with the support of and through embodied practice that is always contextual and relational (L. B. Simpson 2017b). Similarly, for Margaret Kovach, the basis of Indigenous knowledges is interdependent, collective and relational and includes all sorts of lives as sources of knowledge as well as a wide variety of ways to

calls for transformative changes (Calls for Justice). It reports a disproportionate rate of violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people: murder, disappearances, sexual, domestic and family violence, physical assault and robbery (Audette 2019).

seek knowledge—not only in cognitive reasoning but also in spiritual and physical activities (Kovach 2021, 6).

Indigenous conceptions of Place-Thought, such as in Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe traditions, consider place and thought as inseparable. Land is considered as being alive, living. Frameworks of understanding and interpretation derive from the land or the place because there are considered an extension of their original historical events:

> When Sky Woman falls from the sky and lies on the back of a turtle, she is not only able to create land but becomes territory itself. Therefore, Place-Thought is an extension of her circumstance, desire, and communication with the water and animals – her agency (Watts, 2013, 23).

This passage explains that agency is present not only in humans but also in all sorts of objects and living-beings. This framework does not create hierarchies but rather networks and ecosystems of responsibilities. Other thinkers also emphasize the relationship to land. Brian Burkhart conceptualizes the method and framework of *decolonial phenomenology* to counter settler guardianship. He shows that Indigenous ethical frameworks based on practices and forms of knowledge are informed by relationship to place. Likewise, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Glen Coulthard theorize grounded normativity (Coulthard and Simpson 2016, 254) to reject the colonial impositions of meaning: “grounded normativity houses and reproduces the practices and procedures, based on deep reciprocity, that are inherently informed by an intimate relationship to place.” (Coulthard and Simpson 2016, 254)

Indigenous resurgence and resistance movements aim at the reappropriation and revitalization of their ways of knowing and being to fight against colonial oppression. For Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, an important dimension of Indigenous ways of knowing

is the rebuilding of their own 'theories' to dismantle colonialism and the fighting of 'cognitive imperialism', through stories and storytelling that build their theoretical framework and onto-epistemological context necessary to interpret and learn (L. B. Simpson 2011b). Coherently, she employs storytelling to anchor theoretically her contributions within the ways her community generates knowledge.

As I will detail in the second and third chapters, Indigenous women and feminists resist and subvert colonial gender oppression and efforts of erasure and domination. They counter misrepresentation and marginalization. For example, they engage in living in accordance with their own understandings of Indigeneity to re-humanize and re-establish the viability of their cultures by engaging in egalitarian practices and reversing hierarchal binary thinking. They demonstrate that interlocking systems and processes of colonialism and heteropatriarchy are imposed upon Indigenous people and how, further, they are internalized and reproduced within Indigenous communities (Starblanket 2020). The goal of these approaches (decolonial phenomenology, Place-Thought, grounded normativity, and Indigenous women and feminists' knowledges and contributions to these approaches) is to take Indigenous experiences as they are, and to bracket settler frameworks to resist assimilation and ultimately transform the terms of the conversation between Indigenous people and settlers or the settler states.

Examining Epistemic Oppression in Settler Colonialism

In this last section of the chapter, I explain the relevance and usefulness of employing the concept of epistemic oppression to analyze settler colonialism. Epistemic oppression, to recall, refers to the persisting hindrance of a person or a community from producing and sharing their knowledge to participate in knowledge production. Kristie Dotson argues that

there are social and political forms of oppression and that these forms can produce epistemic forms of oppression (Dotson 2014, 116). She also argues that there are epistemic resources and epistemic features of epistemological systems that produce oppression. While Dotson does not give a precise account of epistemic resources, it broadly consists of everything that enables people to participate in knowledge production, such as the ability to adequately use epistemic resources and to rely upon fair standards for effective and accurate communication. Epistemic resources refer to a multiplicity of tools that help create sense about one's experience, build knowledge from it, and share it with an epistemic community to participate in knowledge production.

To recall, the first form of epistemic oppression is *reducible* to sociopolitical and historical conditions. It is reducible to these conditions because it is mainly caused by epistemic power relations obtained via differentials of social positions that infringe on a group's capacity to adequately use their epistemic resources to participate in knowledge production. This form of epistemic oppression can be produced because of two main factors: either *inefficiency* or *insufficiency* in epistemic resources. Epistemic resources that are *inefficient* participate in producing oppression because of the way they are applied. Revealing and analyzing inefficient epistemic resources is very useful because it can target malfunctions in the overall epistemological system that can be redressed to reduce to a degree epistemic exclusions.

As such, the settler colonial context creates relations of privilege and power between Indigenous people and Westerners. These differentials of power create social identities and positions affected by prejudices and stereotypes. This makes them epistemically disadvantaged because their contributions are perceived as less valuable and

struggle to be listened to or understood. For example, Stark and Starblanket report experiencing exclusion and devaluation of their contributions on topics such as the political significance of relationships compared to their male colleagues working on the same topics and areas. They argue that their contributions concerning the disruption of colonial, anthropocentric, and patriarchal relations that have been formulated for years are rendered more significant if they are recognized by men: "Whether it is due to the stigmas surrounding feminism in Indigenous communities or the patriarchal nature of the academy generally, Indigenous women's analyses of relationship are often read more cautiously than those of men." (Starblanket and Stark 2018, 187) This example clearly characterizes how occupying a disadvantaged social position (Indigenous women in academia) can affect one's epistemic agency, that is, one's capacity to build and share knowledge. Their testimonies do not receive the right amount of authoritative value because of epistemic power that advantages their male colleagues or Western women who receive less skepticism when sharing their contributions. This epistemic power fosters inefficiency in epistemic resources (less credibility granted to Indigenous women) and vice versa since it reinforces the differential between both because of low credibility and value assessments.

Then, *insufficient* epistemic resources can cause epistemic oppression by preventing someone from being able to reflect on specific experiences. In this instance, the epistemic resources themselves are being questioned, not their application. The exclusion results from the incapacity of the larger epistemic community to understand one's experience because their shared epistemic resources are insufficient. This lack is mainly caused by sociohistorical factors that advantage knowledge produced by and for more dominant groups (Dotson 2014, 128). Epistemic agents in privileged and powerful positions create

an interconnected system of shared conceptual resources that can reflect and speak for their experiences and needs. This interdependence of epistemic resources creates conceptual gaps in epistemic resources, making them ill-adapted to account for marginalized or less privileged knowers. For instance, Western epistemologies have imposed their gender binarism and their racializing colonial conception of 'Indigeneity' that have erased the nuances, particularities and subtilities of Indigenous conceptions of gender and Indigeneity. Thus, Indigenous individuals who want to speak about their experiences and their views on these 'concepts' have difficulty doing so because dominant resources do not reflect their experiences.

The second type of epistemic oppression is *irreducible* to sociopolitical and historical conditions. This persistent epistemic exclusion is rather caused by the features of the *epistemological system* more than sociopolitical and historical factors. The *irreducible* form of epistemic oppression is caused by features of an epistemological system that render *inadequate* epistemic resources to account for their own limits. The epistemic resources it contains adapt poorly to other forms of experiences and testimonies because it has a limited resilience, that is, a limited adaptative capacity to absorb disturbance and redefinition: "the problem scales farther than the epistemic resources themselves to the system upholding and preserving those resources." (Dotson 2014, 131) To address inadequate epistemic resources, one must look beyond Fricker's model of epistemic injustice because the inquiry must come from outside the epistemological system since the system in question is incapable of accounting for its own limits. This type of epistemic oppression is not concerned with the application of, or the content of the epistemic resources, but rather with the underlying conditions of production of epistemic resources. The epistemic agency of

individuals is compromised by this type of epistemic oppression because the inadequacy of epistemic resources makes it hard for the resources to account for their own limits. For example, all the persisting and ongoing critique coming from "outside" of Western epistemologies, from Indigenous scholars, thinkers, and activists can flag a resistance to changes coming from Western ways of knowing which can be a way to detect its inadequate epistemic resources producing epistemic oppression against Indigenous ways of knowing. I will examine this specific form of epistemic oppression in the next chapter with an analysis of Indigenous women and feminists' critique of Western feminism.

Conclusion

In summary, I demonstrated the links between colonial forms of power and knowledge production. I explained that there is a properly epistemic component to colonial oppression that deserves to be investigated, as it helps to explain why and how colonial structures and processes of power can be legitimized, reinforced and renewed. I introduced my main argument, that epistemic oppression is particularly adequate for investigating how knowledge production participates in maintaining processes and structures of colonial power. In the next chapter, I apply this concept to examine the colonial relations between Western feminists and Indigenous women and feminists.

Chapter 2 Indigenous Women and Feminists Critiques of Western Feminism

Introduction

This chapter examines the colonial relations of power between Indigenous women and feminists' knowledge, and Western feminism. I investigate how epistemic oppression operates between these two different epistemological systems. For this, I examine the critiques formulated against Western feminism by Indigenous women and feminists which I categorize into two themes: 1. The conceptual gaps in Western feminism hinder an adequate understanding of Indigenous women and feminists' struggles and contributions; 2. The lack of accounting for their specific ways of knowing prevents Indigenous women and feminists from formulating their views and experiences on their own terms. Alongside these critiques, I propose my analysis of the three types of epistemic resources that are responsible for epistemic oppression (inefficient, insufficient and inadequate). Ultimately, this chapter will serve as my theoretical framework to analyze the case of Quebec feminism in the third chapter.

Indigenous Women and Feminists Struggles Against Colonial and Heteropatriarchal Structures and Processes of Power

Before introducing Indigenous women and feminists' critique of Western feminism, I briefly discuss how they characterize their relationships with feminism and I precise the content and nature of their concerns. Indigenous women and feminists engage in criticism of the patriarchal and settler colonial system of power. They are distinct from postcolonial, decolonial and transnational feminisms because they follow their own traditions of thought and experience a specific relationship with colonial structures and processes of power, as it has been detailed in the first chapter. Their critique is unique, as it questions how systems

of power interact within and outside Indigenous communities. Cheryl Suzack categorizes their struggles in three different categories: 1. attenuating gender oppression experienced by Indigenous women through collective rights of Indigenous peoples; 2. building Indigenous legal and political frameworks and platforms that incorporate traditional practices; 3. restoring Indigenous women's role and status within their communities which have been disrupted by colonial and heteropatriarchal structures (Suzack 2015, 262).

Indigenous women and feminists do not necessarily share the same views about feminism; some disengage from this movement and refuse to use the appellation 'feminist' while others find the relevance of associating with this movement.[19] As Starblanket explains, there is a body of work produced by some Indigenous women interested in issues related to gender and colonialism who do not identify with feminism because they claim that it is a product of Western ways of knowing and structures of power. Thus, it does not respond to their needs and realities, as I will show subsequently. They adopt other political and cultural strategies to address the struggles they face (Starblanket 2020). They work towards empowering Indigenous women through the revitalization or rehabilitation of Indigenous women's traditional roles, subjectivities, and responsibilities within their relationships with families, communities, spiritual worlds and other life forms. They focus on a reappropriation, revitalization, and redefinition of gender categories according to Indigenous cultural knowledge (Monture and Turpel 1995; Anderson 2016). This can, for instance, entail rehabilitating women's maternal role of nurturing and maintaining good relationships:

[19] I note that the distinction made by Starblanket is not definite between Indigenous discourses on femininities and Indigenous feminism: while some thinkers and practitioners are more categorial about how they identify themselves in relation to feminism, others are less concerned with this debate. Nonetheless, I refer to Indigenous women and feminists to encompass the different views on the matter.

> Indigenous women's teachings are represented as central to the health and well-being of Indigenous communities, positioning our ability to embody and maintain cultural traditions as a powerful way of resisting and subverting colonial efforts to diminish our power and authority (Starblanket 2020, 127).

Parallelly, Indigenous feminists use this appellation because they value the utility of feminism. It does not mean, however, that they are in opposition with Indigenous women who do not wish to be associated with feminism, and that they are not critical towards Western feminism, as I show below.[20] As Starblanket defines it, Indigenous feminism is not a monolithic field, but rather a diverse and fluid body of knowledge that is more focused on problematizing identity related to gender roles, traditional or imposed by colonial forces, and most importantly to look at the interconnectedness of heteropatriarchal and colonial systems of power (Starblanket 2020, 132).

Critique 1: Categories of Analysis

I now turn to Indigenous women and feminists' specific critiques of Western feminism. Indigenous women and feminists expose how Western feminism has been built by and for struggles experienced by Western women and tends to ignore colonial relations and structures of power (Hokulani K. Aikau et al. 2015, 89). The first critique concerns Western feminists' lack of engagement with Indigenous women and feminists' contributions in the academic setting which participates in the broader colonial and disciplinary erasure of their knowledges. Emma LaRocque writes:

> There is in mainstream Canadian and American feminist writings a decided lack of inclusion of our experience, analyses or perspectives […] much work is needed to decolonize the feminist academic community concerning the

[20] I engage with works produced by specific scholars who consider themselves Indigenous feminists or not necessarily, but the distinction is not extremely precise because I do not want to use and reinforce strict categories of analysis. I choose prominent Indigenous authors who engage in a critique of Western feminism.

> treatment and reading of Aboriginal women's material and intellectual locations (LaRocque 2017, 139).

LaRocque explains that the "mainstream/white" directions in feminism produce sites of othering that exclude Indigenous women. She attributes the persisting exclusion to the dominant categories of analysis in academic feminist spaces that are not suited for Indigenous women and feminists. The underlying framework of feminism must be re-examined because it constricts Indigenous women into ways of thinking that do not fit with their own views and experiences: "Canadian […] women's movements cannot define all the terms nor expect Indigenous women to assume dominant cultures as their own, even if we share common interests around gender oppression." (LaRocque 2017, 139) She argues that "new theoretical directions are urgently needed" to challenge and transform the categories of analysis in feminist theorizing that limit the understanding of Indigenous women's concerns.

Furthermore, Cheryl Suzack explains that despite the numerous changes in feminism made to account for the marginalized experiences in the movement, engagement with Indigenous women and feminists' scholarship remains minimal (Suzack 2010). She diagnoses the problem of exclusion of Indigenous women's voices in feminism as being a conceptual one. Indigenous women and feminists must translate and adapt their own views in order to be understood and listened to: "problems of knowledge translation and lived experience […] require incorporation into our language of justice thinking in conjunction with recognition of Indigenous women's active silence." (Suzack 2015, 270) Suzack's critique relates to Burkhart's settler guardianship, both highlighting the inequal work of translation needed to be listened to. She adds that this also imposes a forced silence on

Indigenous women. Suzack enumerates a set of principles that must be integrated to recognize and address Indigenous women's "active silence":

> We must overcome the fundamental unwillingness to understand that these things are true [the translation necessity]; we must recognize the ethical reckoning required by insider and outsider knowledge systems: if these issues are not a part of one's identity, then a person's can only understand these issues intellectually. These principles represent crucial insights that require reconciliation within Indigenous feminist theorizing (Suzack 2015, 270).

I interpret Suzack's normative commitments to compensate for inefficient and insufficient epistemic resources: there is an "unwillingness" to acknowledge that Indigenous women and feminists must translate and adapt their knowledge and experience and that it creates an 'active' silence on the part of Indigenous women who must constantly explain their point of view in order to be listened to.

This unwillingness is a case of epistemic oppression due to the mobilization of *inefficient* epistemic resources. Willingness is an epistemic resource that requires to be adequately mobilized for epistemic agents to be received and listened to –an unwillingness to receive a testimony automatically creates epistemic exclusion. Moreover, the need to translate their experiences is a case of epistemic oppression due to *insufficient* epistemic resources, as it signals a conceptual lack in Western feminism's resources. Since they are two different epistemological systems, a translation effort is expected. However, oppression presents itself in the form of "active silence." The lack of will and the constant one-sided translation effort from Indigenous women and feminists create epistemic exclusions that make it difficult to participate in the production of knowledge.

Some concepts employed by Western feminism are considered to restrain Indigenous women and feminists from sharing their experiences and knowledge. I explain that Western feminism's principles and normative motivations cannot reflect Indigenous

feminists' struggles against settler colonialism and colonial relations of power. I give specific attention to the commitments to *sovereignty* and *inclusion* that are examined by Indigenous women and feminists.[21]

The first concept is sovereignty. Indigenous women and feminists highlight that there is a conceptual lack in feminist theories about the links between gender oppression and sovereignty. Rauna Kuokkanen writes:

> Some feminist theories and practices also aim at social and political changes in a society, yet their approaches often exclude notions of collectivity as well as land rights which are central elements for Indigenous peoples (Kuokkanen 2000, 415).

Even more, for M.A. Jaimes Guerrero, not addressing land rights and sovereignty is exclusionary:

> Any feminism that does not address land rights, sovereignty, and the state's systematic erasure of the cultural practices of native peoples, or that defines native women's participation in these struggles as non-feminist, is limited in vision and exclusionary in practice (in Suzack 2015, 6).

Johanne Barker explains that Indigenous women and feminists' historical ambivalence towards mainstream or Canadian feminist projects is caused by their relations with the Canadian state. In fact, Indigenous women and feminists did not engage conjointly with Canadian feminists in political activism to obtain rights and political participation within the nation-state because they do not share the same sites of struggles:

> Indigenous women's dis-identifications with the feminism of suffrage, and thus of the state citizenship and electoral participation that it envisioned, contrasted their address to the specific struggles of their nations for sovereignty and self-determination, often co-produced by attention to their unique cultures (Barker 2017, 16).

[21] I note that critical analysis of these terms is also formulated by Western feminists. For example, Barbara Arneil (1999) offers an extensive genealogy of feminism to show how it evolved critically towards Western political thought. However, I want to highlight that Indigenous women and feminists interrogate these categories from their own standpoint, bringing specific parameters of analysis such as the focus on settler colonialism.

For Canadian women, sovereignty grants them citizenship and its associated privileges, rights and duties within the Canadian state which tends to universalize belonging to the national community and to overlook "differential treatment of groups seen as 'non-national'" (Lee and Cardinal 2014, 223). For Indigenous women and feminists, Canadian sovereignty is historically associated with their exclusion from the political community. As such, Joyce Green explains how Indigenous women have been excluded and marginalized constitutionally by the Indian Act which also caused exclusion from their political community (J. Green 2001, 723). As I will exemplify in the third chapter, the Canadian nation-state's sovereignty and the related citizenship and right-based paradigm have been a site of feminist changes to claim extended status, privileges and rights rather than challenging the legitimacy of such a system. Indigenous women and feminists problematize this regime of citizenship by showing how it erases Indigenous sovereignty (Thobani 2015).

In this context, some Indigenous women and feminists argue that using the concept of equality is at odds with Indigenous nationalism and sovereignty in which women are often considered to be the center of life (St. Denis 2017, 48, Ladner 2009, 11). Barker says that the discourse on equality and inclusion is not "an organizing principle of Indigenous people" (Barker 2017, 16) and this is why they are criticized by Indigenous women and feminists when employed by Western feminists. The concept of inclusion understood as inviting Indigenous women and feminists into the feminist movement, is considered oppressive when it absorbs into existing structures and processes of power rather than transforming them (Arvin et al. 2013; Suzack 2010). Specifically, Arvin, Tuck and Morrill discuss how Western feminism adopts (albeit, often unintentionally) harmful strategies to

diversify the field by "including" Indigenous women's and feminists' claims and contributions. They argue that this commitment to inclusion still reinforces and maintains colonial structures and processes because it does not challenge them as a whole, but simply makes corrective changes. In fact, inclusion can ensure the stability of hierarchal power instead of radically transforming the structures because it allows to control the dissent and desired changes. To remedy this, they urge Western feminism to transform the foundations of its practices and principles to address this criticism (Arvin et al. 2013, 17).

I interpret the lack of theorization of issues related to settler colonialism in Western feminist theory to be caused by *insufficient epistemic resources*. Western feminism's interconnected epistemic resources are constituted in a way that makes matters related to settler colonialism unnecessary to their work. Dotson draws on Maria Lugones' testimony about how "Anglo/White" feminists do not 'need' feminists of colour's contribution in order to render their work coherent and sound: "such women can get along fine without acknowledging their reliance on women of colour or possible insights from women of colour." (Dotson, 2014,128) I argue that this can also apply specifically to matters related to settler colonialism and issues experienced by Indigenous women. Since epistemic resources are built by and for those who benefit from more epistemic power, in this case, Western feminists, it explains why Western feminists do not 'spontaneously' theorize issues that do not concern their own experience. The lack of conceptualization of issues related to settler colonialism is a case of insufficient epistemic resources from Western feminists because they do not need to account for these matters in order to formulate their claims. This creates conceptual gaps and prevents Indigenous women and feminists from

being understood in their own terms when discussing sovereignty and inclusion, for instance.

To conclude, Indigenous feminists experience a persisting exclusion and the devaluation of their contributions in two ways: first, Western feminists have a tendency to disengage with Indigenous women and feminists' contributions; second, the conceptual tools they use under-problematize and overlook Indigenous women and feminists' struggles.

Critique 2: Lack of Accounting For Their Specific Ways of Knowing

The second set of critiques concerns the lack of acknowledgement of Indigenous feminists' ways of producing and sharing their knowledge and experiences, which can be considered as too personal or not theoretical enough (Starblanket and Stark 2018). For this, I engage with Aileen Moreton-Robinson's discussion of the incommensurability between Indigenous women and feminists,' and Western feminists' ways of knowing.[22] She argues that Western feminists overlook specific Indigenous women and feminists' ways of producing knowledge. This makes Western feminists incapable of making sense of how they understand Indigenous women's concepts and ideas. More than just an unwillingness to account for their views, as Suzack notes, Moreton-Robinson defends that there are fundamental differences between Western and Indigenous feminist theorizing that are incommensurate to each other (Moreton-Robinson 2013, 335). Her critique specifically targets standpoint feminists. I think that it can be applied to Western feminist theorizing in general since standpoint feminism is a landmark in the development of Western feminist

[22] Incommensurability refers to the idea that two knowledge systems cannot meet, correspond or be reduced to each other because there are too many substantial differences between them that make them "resistant" to each other.

epistemology that had major influences in all streams of feminism.[23] Her first critique is that standpoint feminists are onto-epistemologically 'tied' to a body/earth split, even though they challenge the domination of one over another[24]:

> Feminist standpoint theory [positions] women as female humans above other non-human living things through making gender/sex the epistemological a priori within analyses of women's lived experiences and socially situated knowledges (Moreton-Robinson, 2013, 335).

As discussed in the first chapter, Indigenous conceptions do not separate human and non-human lives, and they are eminently relational and interconnected. Indigenous women's relational ontologies, including connection to ancestral spirits, to earth and non-human lives and embodiment troubles the Western distinctions between the spiritual and the material, the human and the non-human lives.

Moreton-Robinson's second critique, similar to those already mentioned, is that while standpoint feminists extensively conceptualize the fact that all knowledge is situated, they do not problematize and address their own privileged relationship to a nation's sovereignty. The author shows that their knowledge production cannot be dissociated from their context of production[25] and therefore cannot be separated from the fact that they are situated in universities and departments in settler-states: "Feminist standpoint theorists' social location, subjugated knowledges, strong objectivity and the socially situatedness of their knowledge are produced within post-colonising national contexts." (Moreton-Robinson 2013, 33) Western feminists overlook their relation to a nation's sovereignty that

[23] We can think, for instance, of the positionality of knowers as epistemically resourceful that challenges traditional objectivity (Harding 1992; Alcoff and Potter 1993).
[24] This joins Vanessa Watts and Brian Burkhart's views on Western knowledges.
[25] Moreton-Robinson mobilizes components of standpoint theory to formulate her critique of standpoint theory. She mentions that she is intellectually indebted to standpoint feminists and she formulates a critique that aims to be charitable.

frames their very own positionality which makes them 'onto-epistemologically' tied to this experience, making it difficult to consider Indigenous women and feminists' views.

Moreton-Robinson's contribution challenges standpoint feminists' anthropocentrism and commitments to sovereignty, who cannot account for "power differences between white and Indigenous women, and [are] complicit in undermining Indigenous women's interests and sovereignties." (in Sabzalian 2018, 365) Moreton-Robinson's critiques allow me to detail further how orientations in Western feminism hinder the capacity to acknowledge the limits of knowledge production which I analyze as a case of irreducible epistemic oppression.

Analysis of Irreducible Epistemic Oppression

In this final section, I detail how Western feminism's persisting lack of engagement with, and exclusion of, Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing is a case of irreducible epistemic oppression. I mobilize Moreton-Robinson's critique of standpoint feminists to help illustrate this form of epistemic oppression. To recall, irreducible epistemic oppression happens when the underlying conditions of an epistemological system[26] uphold and preserve resources that are inadequate to shed light on why they are incapable of accounting for one's experience or put simply, that are inadequate to proceed in a meta-inquiry. A meta-inquiry must avoid the pitfalls of self-reflexivity that can be a fraught mechanism for revealing one's power relations in the settler colonial research

[26] The distinction between sociopolitical and epistemological is not evident in the context of Indigenous political thoughts, and dealing with questions such as sovereignty, land, etc. The political context can render epistemic resources inadequate and therefore create irreducible epistemic oppression (rather than solely the epistemological system) because the political context can reconduct, preserve and reinforce the inadequacy and irreducibility of the epistemic resources and epistemological system.

context since it can reinforce the "illusion that we can transcend colonial power structures once they become visible to us." (D'Arcangelis 2018)

A meta-inquiry, or the analysis of irreducible epistemic oppression, however, must be able to address why a given epistemological system's underlying conditions of production prevent the generation of an adequate response to Indigenous women and feminists' discourses, experiences, and critiques. Thus, I ask how Western feminism's epistemic resources are inadequate to account for their own limits which cause persisting exclusion of Indigenous women's contributions. The first step to account for irreducible epistemic oppression is to admit that there are two distinct epistemological systems at odds with each other. In fact, because of the irreducible nature of this type of epistemic oppression, one must engage with an exterior set of epistemic resources that can detect problems about the given epistemological system from the "outside."[27] In the first and the second chapter, I demonstrated Western feminism and Indigenous women and feminists' knowledges can be conceived as two distinctive epistemological systems. Indigenous women and feminists' critique of Western feminism allows me to argue that their critiques are external to Western feminism and therefore can shed light on its epistemological system's limits.

As such, Moreton-Robinson points to a fundamental disjunction: "the irreducible difference […] between white feminists and Indigenous women, is the embodied experience of Indigenous subjects, who have a connection to land that is not based on white

[27] It can be difficult to account for an external critique that would point to a discussion of the system's irreducibility because it is this very irreducibility that makes it difficult to 'understand' and 'properly' consider the critique and the changes required to adequately address it. Thus, an 'external' critique could account for irreducibility regardless of the type/degree/object of the external critique. For the scope of this thesis, I will mobilize a critique that looks at the scale of epistemological systems to simplify and render as explicitly as possible how I think irreducible oppression can be articulated.

conceptualization of property." (Moreton-Robinson 2000, 162) In fact, as we saw, Indigenous women and feminists reclaim their own ways of knowing, their own ways of conceptualizing and engaging in struggles against colonial and heteropatriarchal oppression. Western feminists' struggles are *within* the dominant epistemological framework whereas Indigenous women and feminists fight for the *recognition* of their own:

> Indigenous women seek to transform cultural and educational institutions so that our ways of knowing will be taught and respected, whereas white middle-class feminists seek to gender institutions from within the epistemological framework of the dominant white culture (Moreton-Robinson 2000, 163).

Following Moreton-Robinson's critique, Western feminists have trouble accounting for Indigenous women's conception of and relationships to land. Being situated in the dominant colonial epistemological system, they adopt a specific vision of the land that is anchored in Western conceptions. Thus, Western feminists use not just insufficient but inadequate epistemic resources because, as I have shown in the first chapter, this distinctiveness in conceptions of land is eminently onto-epistemological and therefore frames its underlying epistemological system's conditions. Epistemic resources are inadequate to account for their own limitations when engaging with the experiences and contributions of Indigenous women and feminists. Their epistemological system is not resilient enough, i.e., its capacity to adapt is such that it cannot account for the fact that the transformations it is able to operationalize are limited.

Appreciating this is made possible given my methodological commitments anchored in comparative political theory as discussed in the introduction. As I engage with Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing without submitting them to prescriptive or evaluative judgements, what we see with Moreton-Robinson's arguments is that the positionality of knowers (Western feminists) is inherently incommensurable to

Indigenous women's experiences. In Dotson's terms, this may be due to sociopolitical rather than epistemic conditions, given that the possession of privileges associated with belonging to a political community that enjoys territorial sovereignty, as do Western feminists, is primarily a political factor. Moreton-Robinson's argument, however, is that this phenomenon is not only political – and to understand it solely in political terms would be to impose Western categories of analysis on her interpretation – but spiritual, epistemological, and ontological, given Indigenous visions of sovereignty and territory. Thus, this allows me to argue that the experience of Western feminists in settler-colonial states, coupled with the network of epistemic resources that comes with it (such as their conceptions of property, inclusion, diversity, etc.) is constitutive of Western feminists' epistemological system's underlying conditions of production. In fact, it affects the resilience of their epistemological system so that their epistemic resources have difficulty accounting for their irreducibility to the experiences and conceptions of Indigenous women and feminists in general and specifically related to their relationships with land and sovereignty. Therefore, using Moreton-Robinson's critique of Western feminism, I have been able to detect Western feminism's inadequate epistemic resources producing irreducible epistemic oppression against Indigenous women and feminists.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this second chapter analyzed how epistemic oppression operates within Western feminism. I started my inquiry by reporting two levels of critique that I collected in Indigenous women and feminists' scholarly literature; 1. the conceptual shortcoming in Western feminism' principles; 2. Western feminism's lack of accounting for their specific ways of knowing. Then, I interpreted these critiques following the three levels of epistemic

oppression conceptualized by Kristie Dotson. The first level is due to inefficient epistemic resources. I explained that Western feminism's tendency to disregard Indigenous women and feminists' contributions can be explained as coming from an inadequate mobilization of epistemic practices such as willingness to learn about them. The second level of epistemic oppression is due to insufficient epistemic resources. I explained that Western feminism's principles tend to overlook Indigenous women and feminists' preoccupations because they conceptualize epistemic resources that correspond to their vision. For example, the concepts of sovereignty and inclusion reflect their belonging to the Canadian political community which evacuates Indigenous views on sovereignty and land. Finally, the third level of epistemic oppression is due to inadequate epistemic resources. I demonstrated that epistemic resources are inadequate to account for the incommensurability between Western feminism and Indigenous women's ways of knowing. The method that I developed in this chapter consists of taking Indigenous women and feminists' contributions as they are without reimposing settler guardianship. For this, I analyzed the context of the production of Western feminists' knowledge production with the analysis of epistemic oppression. This allows me to recontextualize and decenter their ways of knowing because it exposes the sources and the consequences of their knowledge production activities onto Indigenous women and feminists' knowledge production. By analyzing the conditions of production, it becomes possible to engage in an internal or immanent critique of Western feminism and in dialogical relationships that are less oppressive.

Chapter 3 Reading Epistemic Oppression in Quebec Feminist Literature

Introduction

In this final chapter, I mobilize my methodological framework presented in the second chapter to analyze Quebec feminism's conditions of knowledge production in relation to Indigenous women and feminists in Quebec. First, I present an overview of Indigenous women's ongoing struggles and mobilization against the imposition of colonial categories and processes in Quebec. I engage with sources mainly in French, published in Quebec, by Indigenous women but also by Quebec scholars. Then, I present Quebec feminism's evolution of its relations with and concerns about Indigenous women in Quebec. This allows me to analyze the extent to which Quebec feminists adapted their epistemic resources to better account for Indigenous women's realities in Quebec while inadequately engaging with its commitments to settler sovereignty. I cover the operationalization of one major shift in Quebec feminism[28] that started in the early 1970s spanning to the present day. This shift from a universalist-nationalist to an intersectional framework has been analyzed by specific Quebec feminist academics studying the transformations in the movement with whom I engage in this chapter: Diane Lamoureux, Geneviève Pagé, Chantal Maillé and Pascale Dufour.

[28] I consider Quebec feminism as an example of Western feminist orientations. Authors mobilized in this chapter also refer to white or mainstream feminism. Although these terms are not synonyms, they are overlapping, and I will consider them as referring to the dominant tendencies in feminism in Quebec.

Indigenous Women's Mobilizations in Quebec

Indigenous Women's Knowledge Production

I start with discussing Indigenous women and feminists' knowledge production in the Quebec context to show that their knowledge and contributions are marginalized in different spaces. Widia Larivière, the co-founder of Idle No More Quebec, laments the lack of Indigenous women in academic research:

> It is regrettable that so few Indigenous people have access to these [researchers'] authoritative statuses because of the validation criteria of university systems that reward degrees, research grants and written publications to the detriment of real-life experience and the oral transmission of knowledge (Chung, 2018, 3).

In an effort to redress this situation, two academic journals recently published an issue on Indigenous women's struggles in Quebec I draw upon in this chapter: *Mouvements sociaux et nouveaux acteurs politiques : incidences sur les pratiques de gouvernance autochtone* (*Nouvelles pratiques sociales*) and *Femmes autochtones en mouvement : fragments de décolonisation* (*Recherches féministes*).[29] Marie Léger and Hudson-Morales, the editors of the second issue, emphasize the necessity of their initiative by showing the limited research done and the little presence of Indigenous feminist scholars in the field:

> In addition to the scarcity of writings by or about Indigenous women in Quebec, we need to ask to what extent Indigenous women's various types of knowledge, practices and forms of resistance succeed in challenging the hegemonic production of knowledge (Léger and Morales Hudon, 2017, 5, personal translation).

Complementarily, a paper in this issue by Basile et al. lays out Atikamekw women's testimonies about how colonialism has disrupted the relationship between these women

[29] I chose these specific issues because they are published by two Quebec-based academic journals. I wanted to mobilize similar sources as for my overview of Quebec feminism for coherence in interpretation.

and the territory that constitutes a source of knowledge transmission. The article formulates similar arguments as those articulated in the second chapter: Indigenous women in Quebec also have been alienated from their related practices, responsibilities and roles in their community. Basile et al. interviewed 32 Atikamekw women and concluded that their disconnection from the territory (including through residential schools and forced sedentarisation) contributes to their loss of identity and belonging. They claim that a way to reappropriate their power should include the valorization of their knowledges that has been devalued in these collective spaces.

Coherently, in this effort of revitalization and reappropriation, other scholars highlight Indigenous women's prolific literature in the francophone Quebec context, in particular, the work of Innu women such as An Antane Kapesh,[30] Joséphine Bacon, Natasha Kanapé Fontaine, Naomi Fontaine and Marie-Andrée Gill. Indigenous women in Quebec engage in this medium as a way to adopt a written resurgence practice to reappropriate through their art and language the knowledges they contain (Bradette 2019, 101). As I show in the next sections, in addition to Indigenous women being marginalized in academic circles, they reclaim their roles and practices as knowledge holders in their communities to mitigate ongoing marginalization in Quebec society. However, their organization and mobilization[31] led Quebec feminists directly and indirectly to be more open to their realities.

[30] Mailhot details An Antane Kapesh's literary practice as a way to negotiate her dual relationship with the settler culture and Innu culture to tell in her own terms the discrepancy between the settlers' and her story of the colonization of the Nitassinan (Mailhot 2017, 32).

[31] As mentioned, because of structural factors preventing the production of academic sources by Indigenous women in Quebec, I also report their political action and community organization to analyze their fight for being heard in their own terms.

Indigenous Women's Legislative and Political Struggles

Indigenous women and feminists challenged colonial and heteropatriarchal prejudices in the law and in political organizations to be heard on their own terms. In fact, through legislative and political fights, they aimed to challenge the categories and roles that prevented them from defining themselves as they wanted.

Starting in the beginning of the 1970s and even before, Indigenous women in Quebec undertook major mobilization to reclaim their power both legislatively and politically. They formed organizations such as the FAQ (and the Native Women Association of Canada (NWAC)) in 1974 to take action against discrimination (Léger 2017, 162). Indigenous women and feminists in Quebec invested sites of political action, alongside Indigenous women and feminists across Canada to fight against section 12(1)(b) in the Indian Act.[32] They challenged this heteropatriarchal disposition to address the discrimination and the weakening of their communities' cultural transmission (Arnaud 2014). In Quebec, Indigenous women created the movement "Equal Rights for Native Women" headed by Mary Two-Axe Early to raise awareness and to provide resources to support Indigenous women experiencing the negative effects of this disposition. Alongside other Indigenous women's organizations, they led national mobilizations to amend the law and Bill C-31[33] was adopted.

[32] There are a lot of similitudes in the struggles and mobilization between with Indigenous women across Canada. However, Audette highlights some differences that differently impact Indigenous women in Quebec, such as the imposition of French on certain communities, creating a language barrier with other communities and making solidarities harder to build (Audette 2019; Bradette 2019).

[33] Bill C-31 was passed in 1985 to amend the Indian Act to make it more aligned with gender equality provisions in the Charter of Rights and Freedom and to end enfranchisement. However, the introduction of two categories of status, 6(1) and 6(2) would penalize children because the granting of the status depends on the gender of their parent transmitting the status (Vowel 2017, 30). For more details, see Vowel, Chelsea. 2017. *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis, & Inuit Issues in Canada*. Winnipeg, United States: Portage & Main Press.

Indigenous women's and feminists' organizations also claimed more political representation and to be better included in the political organizations of their communities. For example, the FAQ fought to get a right to speak at the chiefs councils at the Assemblée des Chefs du Québec et du Labrador (Arnaud 2014, 214). As mentioned in the second chapter, Starblanket explains that Indigenous communities can struggle with internalized forms of heteropatriarchal prejudices, values and forms of organization which contribute to the marginalization of Indigenous women. Indigenous women were often excluded from band council meetings even though, traditionally, in many communities, women were important actors of political life (Starblanket 2020).

Mobilizations Against Violence Against Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA People

Indigenous women and feminists mobilized against the amplification of violence against Indigenous girls, women and 2SLGBTQQIA people across Canada. The rate of disappearances increased drastically at the beginning of the 2000s and became an urgent issue widely denounced and monitored by Indigenous women's organizations.[34] Indigenous women and feminists across Canada fought to be heard and believed by Canadian society about the violence they were and are still facing today. In Quebec, there have been multiple initiatives to expose and understand this systemic violence despite a context in which Quebec society was inclined towards indifference and passivity towards their calls for help. In 2015, the FAQ published a report with the participation of the *Institut*

[34] The FAQ was particularly mobilized to raise awareness concerning domestic, family and sexual violence in Indigenous communities. For example, it developed a campaign back in 1987 called *Violence is Tearing Us Apart, Let's Get Together*, and produced various forums on the topics of violence and healing in Indigenous contexts (Audette 2019, 32). Beginning in 2005, the NWAC initiated *Sisters in Spirit*, a program that compiled 582 cases of disappearances and murders and undertook a series of direct actions such as marches, vigils, and commemoration days (Rousseau and Chartrand 2023, 712).

national de la recherche scientifique (INRS) called Nānīawig Māmawe Nīnawind; Debout et solidaires (Femmes Autochtones du Québec 2015). They discuss the colonial ideology that leads to erasure via policies and institutions (as discussed in the first chapter: the Indian Act, residential schools, the Sixties Scoop), family violence, the housing crisis, problems related to social services such as barriers hindering access to services, misunderstanding of Indigenous realities, police services and prejudices against Indigenous people.

This systemic violence has been addressed more seriously by Quebec society after Radio-Canada broadcasted an investigation on Val d'Or Sûreté du Québec services. The investigation revealed 38 cases of police abuse against Indigenous women filed without criminal charges against the officers[35] – even though Indigenous women were appealing to Quebec society way before the release of this investigation. The Viens Commission[36] was convened in 2015 following the denunciations but was rather focused on evaluating whether and how Indigenous people are victims of discrimination by public services in Quebec.

The context of the Commission before, during and after shows a hostile context for Indigenous women to express their grievances. First, as Ryoa Chung highlights, the persisting lack of listening and the fact that attention at the provincial scale only came after the release of the documentary is a case of epistemic injustice because it stems from a lack of credibility caused by Indigenous women's social identities that are marginalized (Chung 2018, 201). Then, during the hearings of the Commission, participants employed a

[35] Marchand, Emmanuel, dir. 2015. 'Abus de La SQ: Les Femmes Brisent Le Silence'. Enquête. Montreal: Radio-Canada. https://ici.radio-canada.ca/tele/enquete/2015-2016/episodes/360817/femmes-autochtones-surete-du-quebec-sq.

[36] Full title: *Commission d'enquête sur les relations entre les Autochtones et certains services publics au Québec*

language that would tend to evacuate the systemic violence's factors rooted in colonialism. In particular, it left out Indigenous views on self-determination: "decolonial terms [were] adopted yet presented in ways that do not address questions of land dispossession, ancestral rights, or jurisdiction, but rather encourage more self-management practices." (Bazinet 2023, 175) This participates in extracting Indigenous women's testimonies for the needs of the inquiry and not for the sake of their healing and need for justice or reparations (Bazinet 2023, 184).[37] Finally, the Final Report of the Commission (Viens 2019) briefly addressed systemic violence against Indigenous women in Quebec but did not discuss the relations between the state and Indigenous women: the president of the FAQ at the time, Viviane Michel, expressed that "the biggest thing missing is the securitization of Indigenous women in their interactions with members of the police force and the justice system." (Habel-Thurton and Hubermont 2019, personal translation)

As Michèle Audette states in the introduction of the *Rapport Final de la Commission d'enquête sur les femmes et les filles autochtones disparues et assassinées au Québec* (2019), violence against Indigenous women in Quebec is still often overlooked because of the lack of interest in Indigenous women's strategies and resources they use against the violence they face (Audette 2019, 11). Indigenous women's exposition and denunciations of the colonial factors causing systemic violence against Indigenous girls, women and 2SLGBTQQIA people in the Quebec context do not receive the expected consideration from Quebec society as I demonstrated with the analysis of the Viens Commission.

[37] Furthermore, the official excuses (one of the 142 recommendations of the Viens Report) were made to Indigenous leaders and officials. Indigenous feminists such as Michèle Audette (the ex-Commissioner of the MMIWG Quebec Inquiry) denounce that Indigenous women's sufferings were evacuated from the official excuses: "We should have apologized [first] to the women, not to the leaders." (Savard-Fournier 2019)

This allows me to interpret that Quebec society fosters a context of epistemic oppression against Indigenous women. To build on Chung's analysis of epistemic injustice, I argue that the persisting devaluation of Indigenous women's voices is due to a context of epistemic *oppression* since it is caused by the underlying Quebec society's epistemological system anchored in Western ways of knowing that is inadequate to self-reflect on its relations with settler sovereignty that systematically erase the colonial roots of violence.

Idle No More

Despite the unfavourable political context in Quebec for disclosing their concerns, Indigenous women undertook a Canada-wide Indigenous political movement to contest the omnibus Bill C-45 that modifies elements of Indigenous governance and environmental norms on which Indigenous peoples were not consulted (Larivière et al. 2016, Fortin 2016, 13). Idle No More, originally initiated by four Indigenous women, Nina Wilson, Sylvia McAdam, Jessica Gordon et Sheelah McLean, was co-founded in Quebec by Widia Larivière, Anishnabekwe and Mellisa Mollen-Dupuis, Innu. Despite the difficult context of systematically obliterating Indigenous women's voices, Idle No More allowed the Quebec feminist movement to become more attentive to Indigenous women's activism in the Province of Quebec and at the scale of the country. Analysts attribute an important role to this movement in the transformations that occurred within the Quebec feminist movement as I will show in subsequently.

Quebec Feminism's Transformations

The 1970-1990 Period: The Nationalist-Universalist Framework

Now that I have presented an overview of Indigenous women's struggles in Quebec and their strategies to reclaim their voices and power, I turn to the analysis of Quebec feminism. The following focuses on Quebec feminism and its relations with Indigenous women's concerns and contributions. To start, the 1970-1990 period is marked by an intense political mobilization in the province of Quebec. Even starting before the 1970s, the province is mobilized by a developing sense of national identity and a project of self-determination. In this period, a nationalist-driven feminist project emerged adding to the main universalist framework.[38] The framework was built around the idea that feminism is complementary and even necessary to the nationalist project, and the nationalist project is also a fruitful and efficient vector for change and for supporting feminist struggles. This period of political redefinition of Quebec society led feminist groups to build alliances with "radical nationalist" groups and adopt principles of national liberation, as an aspiration to redefine women's status within the nation-state (Lamoureux 2018, 191).[39] Diane Lamoureux shows that feminist concerns and claims were brought through the project of state building, and highlights that both movements, imbricated, were mutually profitable: feminists obtained institutional gains while the state-building project could display a "modern" image. Pagé and Dufour (2020) argue that feminists' investment in the Quebec nationalist movement shaped the sense of the "we" or the political community underlined by a universalizing

[38] Universalism in feminism refers to the idea that all women must unit under overarching goals and fight for the same struggles.

[39] To recall the second chapter, Quebec feminists enjoy their participation within a right-based paradigm granted by citizenship and work towards extending their privileges and rights rather than questioning its legitimacy.

discourse. This "we", as Chantal Maillé reports, made some women feel excluded from the movement: "[marginalized women] did not recognize themselves in the universalizing discourse of a feminism reflecting the agenda and analysis of privileged women." (Maillé 2000, 93)

The Quebec feminist movement's underlying national liberation discourse conflated colonization with Quebec women's oppression: "by defining Quebec as an oppressed and colonized nation, these feminists reclaimed membership in the Quebec nation and adopted the discourse of nationalist decolonization." (Lamoureux, 2018, 190) They saw their oppression as being at the intersection of capitalism, patriarchy and colonialism and, as francophones, experiencing colonial oppression by anglophones (Pagé and Dufour 2020, 226). Quebec feminists therefore saw feminism as an integral part of the "decolonization" of their nation, seeking the emergence of a new nation that would redefine women's roles (Lamoureux, 2018, 191). Indigenous women and feminists' struggles for challenging their status in the Indian Act and their commitments towards decolonization were overshadowed by Quebec feminists because of the emphasis being placed on Quebec women.[40]

The colonization narrative is an epistemic resource designed for nation-state building that would erase Quebec's responsibility in the colonization of Indigenous peoples. I analyze this process of erasing within the colonization narrative as an inefficiency within this Quebec feminists' epistemic resource because mobilizing it makes them obliterate settler colonial processes and structures of power within Quebec society.

[40] Lamoureux mentions Madeleine Parent who played an important role in the developing relationships between Quebec feminists and Indigenous women but she was perceived rather as a Canadian feminist than as a Quebec feminist.

This is caused by the fact that it is designed to justify and solidify a political project that does not account for Quebec society's settler colonial roots.

The 1990-2010 Period: Questioning Quebec Feminists' Framework

After the intense period of nationalism and the consolidation of the Quebec welfare state, the 1990s opened new realities and struggles that destabilized the conceptual basis of the Quebec feminist movement. In fact, the new coming globalization brought a growing awareness concerning the increase of global inequalities and the building of international solidarities led Quebec feminists, to a certain extent, to put aside their commitment to nationalism, challenging their relation to the nation (Lamoureux 2018). This period generated awareness concerning the struggles lived by Indigenous, immigrant and racialized women, and built solidarities at a global scale. Changes in Quebec society transformed the way mainstream feminists understood systems of oppression: the marker of difference of the domination of anglophones over the francophones were problematized by theories and categories of analysis such as postcolonialism and intersectionality[41] more and more mobilized by Quebec feminists (Maillé 2000; 2007).

The transformations within Quebec feminism as well as the presence of the FAQ in the Quebec feminist and political spheres lead to an increasing interest in, and awareness of Indigenous women's struggles. It also led to the signature of the *Protocole de Solidarité* between the FFQ and the FAQ, to make official their partnership and their "nation-to-nation" relationships (Fédération des femmes du Québec 2004):

> [The protocol] recognized the right of Aboriginal women (and Aboriginal communities) to self-determination. It also stresses the autonomy of their movement in relation to mainstream feminism in Quebec, as the links between

[41] Intersectionality is a concept coined by Kimberly Crenshaw to illustrate the interlocking systems of oppression that compound each other, therefore challenging the single-axis framework used to look at issues such as sex/gender or race (Dhamoon 2011; Crenshaw 1991).

> the two movements were defined through the notion of solidarity (Lamoureux, 2018, 197).

Quebec feminists, including scholars cited in this chapter, worked to redress *insufficient* epistemic resources, i.e., partial, missing, or that do not reflect the experiences of groups and individuals who have less epistemic power than dominant epistemic ones. For example, the nationalist-universalist framework, built for Quebec women's struggles within the nation-state building project, did not reflect Indigenous forms of nationalism and experiences related to sovereignty. Feminists revealed how the colonization narrative that they borrowed from the Quebec nationalist movement did not account for its colonial roots.

2010 To Date: The Adoption of The Intersectional Framework

The period from 2010 to date sees a reconfiguration of the values and principles guiding Quebec feminism. The main event that crystallized the ongoing transformations over the last 20 years is the *État Généraux de l'action et de l'analyse féministes* (ÉG) (translating as General Estates of Feminist Action and Analysis), organized by the FFQ in 2011. The goal of this event was to address the tensions caused by the differences between members of the organization, and more largely between feminists in Quebec. Marie-Ève Campbell-Fiset, who coined the term "intersectional turn," to discuss this period of transformations, analyzed the dynamics between feminists during the ÉG notes that some feminists were reluctant to adopt an intersectional approach because they would not challenge their commitment to seeing themselves as victims of colonization by the anglophones. The ÉG were the scene of a backlash by universalist feminists which resulted in resignations and a reassessment of new inclusive communicative practices (Campbell-Fiset 2017, 188): "The intersectional framework remained dominant despite the attacks, and was even

consolidated by the intensity of the strategic actions taken by universalist activists." (Campbell-Fiset 2017, 226, personal translation). However, the ÉG concluded with the intersectional framework as being largely adopted by the participants. Gender as an analytic category that does not presume the homogeneity of the group was then widely adopted and understood amongst feminists (Lamoureux 2016, 13).

Quebec feminists have questioned their practices and principles to account for relations with Indigenous women in Quebec. Lamoureux assesses that these relationships have developed over the years, from signing a solidarity protocol in 2004 that recognizes a right to self-determination and autonomy from the mainstream feminist movement, to addressing Indigenous women's concerns during the ÉG in 2012-13. She attributes an increase in critical awareness concerning the colonial relations of power within the movement to an indirect effect of Idle No More (Lamoureux, 2018, 197).

Reflecting on Epistemic Oppression in Quebec Feminism

I now interrogate epistemic oppression in Quebec feminism against Indigenous women and feminists. I want to highlight how Indigenous women and feminists in Quebec have struggled and continue to struggle on many levels to make themselves heard and to raise awareness of their realities in Quebec (and more broadly, in Canadian) society, as well as cultivate their work to revitalize traditional ways of knowing and organizing. This demonstrates a struggle against the epistemic oppression to which they are subjected, as they push back against the conceptual categories (also political and legislative) and the prejudices imposed on them.

Quebec feminists have worked over the last few decades to mitigate the negative impacts that their frameworks and practices had on minority women, including Indigenous

women. The intersectional framework allows for diversifying and including the multiple experiences of the women composing Quebec society[42] because it gives conceptual resources to understand the matrices of oppression (Dhamoon 2011) that govern the varied experiences of women in Quebec. These major transformations signal the level of adaptability of the epistemological system: the intersectional approach leading to greater inclusivity is a case of redressing inefficient and insufficient epistemic resources. Quebec feminists navigate in a context that renders the listening of Indigenous women's voices difficult, as I have shown with the Viens Commission. It is a context in which Quebec society overlooks the colonial roots of systemic violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQQIA people. However, Quebec feminists have managed to engage with the criticisms of minority women including Indigenous women, opened to their concerns and adapted their framework and practices. The emergence of the intersectional framework in Quebec feminism enabled feminists to address Quebec feminism's *inefficient* and *insufficient* epistemic resources.

As I showed previously, authors argue that the intersectional turn allowed for the modification of behaviours and attitudes to foster greater inclusivity of new propositions, ideas, and experiences within the movement. Campbell-Fiset exposes the clash between universalists who adopted bad epistemic behaviours and intersectional feminists who promoted inclusive practices. The intersectional turn allowed for redressing *inefficient* epistemic resources. In fact, 'good' behaviours and attitudes to adopt when engaging in knowledge production are 'epistemic resources' because they allow the knowledge to circulate and to be built on adequately (receptivity, listening, charitability, etc.). Refusal to

[42] Some feminists have warned about the phenomenon of whitewashing intersectionality (Bilge 2015).

engage with, misinterpretation, or overall unreceptive behaviours towards shared knowledge or epistemic agents can constitute an inefficient application or use of epistemic resources, which produces epistemic oppression. With the already established collaborative relationships between the FFQ and the FAQ, Idle No More increased awareness about Indigenous women's concerns in the mainstream movement. For instance, a theme of the ÉG was adopted to focus specifically on supporting Indigenous women's claims (Arnaud 2014, 222).

Also, Quebec feminists addressed *insufficient* epistemic resources by realizing that the narrative of the colonization of Quebec's women failed to take into account the colonization of Indigenous women, making their struggles invisible. By adopting this intersectional framework, they attenuate the effects of the persisting silencing by promoting better inclusive practices and principles. In fact, it allowed for the accounting of their conceptual gaps. For example, it allowed for the realization that the colonization narrative generates the exclusion of Indigenous accounts of decolonization.

However, while Quebec feminists came to realize to a certain extent the problems associated with their relations with Quebec's national sovereignty and state-building project, they did not disengage completely from this paradigm. In fact, Lamoureux points out that Quebec feminists still have difficulty addressing fraught relationships with Indigenous women in their recognition of a nation-to-nation relationship with them:

> Despite the remarkable advance represented by the attention mainstream feminism in Quebec paid to the concerns of Aboriginal women, the *États généraux* barely addressed the fraught subject, that is, the colonial relations of power between Canadian and Quebec elites on the one hand and Aboriginal peoples on the other (Lamoureux, 2018, 197).

By targeting the conceptual limitations of Quebec feminism that have failed to examine colonial relations, she thus identifies a gap in their epistemic resources. She notes that there

is still work to be done and that it is necessary to continue to produce a self-critique of the movement: "Nevertheless, a feminist critique of past and present modes of globalization still needs to be elaborated, and then translated into feminist activism." (Lamoureux 2018, 121)

Thus, taking her invitation to further Quebec feminists' auto-examination (or a meta-inquiry) of their principles and practices, I ask what is missing for the critical inquiry and the related changes to be substantial and adequate to address the fraught relationships between Quebec feminists and Indigenous women. I argue that this conceptual vacuum is rooted in a problem more substantial than a lack of examination of Quebec feminists' colonial relations of power with Indigenous women and must be resolved beyond the adoption of the intersectional framework. As such, I question the limits of Quebec feminism's epistemological system's capacity to adapt, to help feminists understand how and why their conceptual tools can be oppressive without realizing it. As seen with D'Arcangelis in the second chapter, the self-critical examination prescribed by Lamoureux can fail if it does not fundamentally disrupt Western feminists' frameworks and practices. There is a necessity to recognize the incommensurability between both traditions and to abandon the project of transcending the colonial relations of power with Indigenous women and feminists to ensure that the mechanism of self-reflexivity is productive.[43] Thus, there is a need to address the conditions of production of Quebec feminism's epistemic resources and evaluate their inadequacy to produce substantial changes.

Quebec feminists' epistemological system cannot account for its own conditions of production that are anchored in settler sovereignty. In fact, as I have shown in the second

[43] To recall Tully and Burkhart's discussion, there is a need to decenter Western frameworks by recontextualizing their conditions of production, exposing them to engage in a genuine dialogue.

chapter with Moreton-Robinson, Indigenous women's experience of sovereignty is incommensurable to Western feminists' experience. Quebec feminism also adopts and reproduces a view that follows the Western conceptualization of sovereignty that does not account for its onto-epistemological dimension and reduces it to sociopolitical factors. Put differently, the irreducibility resides in the fact that Western feminism can challenge its ties with sovereignty, such as signing a nation-to-nation protocol with Indigenous women,[44] without having to redefine its whole epistemological system. This is because its conditions of production make conceptualizing sovereignty a concern reducible to a sociopolitical matter that can be redressed with political measures or dispositions. The discourse of inclusion promoted through the intersectional framework, as well as Western feminists' experience of sovereignty as being incommensurable to the experiences of Indigenous women, make the positionality of knowers, the interconnectedness of epistemic resources and resilience of their system incapable of adequately accounting for their relations with sovereignty, as articulated by Indigenous feminists, and ultimately with Indigenous women's ways of knowing: Quebec feminists' positionality makes them benefit from nation-state sovereignty privileges which makes them produce and mobilize epistemic resources that reflect their experience, evacuating other forms of relationality with sovereignty such as Indigenous women's understandings of knowledge, land and cultural transmission. As the whole epistemological system is built from this, it makes epistemic resources inadequate to account for its limits because, as Dotson says, the system will only reveal what it is prone to reveal (Dotson 2014, 133).

[44] Indigenous women also signed the protocol, it was a mutual agreement. However, I want to note that no matter how Quebec feminists recognize or understand sovereignty and a nation-to-nation relationship, it does not evacuate how Indigenous women conceive their relation and their understanding of sovereignty.

Conclusion

I demonstrated how epistemic oppression concretely operates in feminist spaces. I focused my analysis on the Quebec feminist movement and its relationships with Indigenous women and feminists in Quebec to provide an analysis of the different levels of addressing epistemic oppression. I exemplified how epistemic resources can be inefficient.or instance, during the ÉG, feminists who were aggressive and dismissive of minorized women were not adequately mobilizing resources such as charitability, openness, and benevolence, all epistemic attitudes important to ensure good communication and dialogical activities. Then, I showed how the Quebec feminist movement addressed the insufficiency of its epistemic resources by discussing how they came to realize the limits of their paradigm and opted to adopt new principles of action, found in intersectional theories and abandoned the colonization narrative. This important moment in the history of the movement is demonstrative of its epistemological system's resilience, or its capacity to absorb changes without having to redefine its underlying structure. Finally, I questioned the limits of this inquiry by examining the difference between addressing insufficient versus inadequate epistemic resources. I showed that Quebec feminism produces irreducible epistemic oppression due to epistemic resources inadequate to account for its foundation in settler sovereignty. In order to engage in a 'genuine dialogue', to borrow Tully's normative project, with Indigenous women and feminists, Quebec feminists must first engage in this meta-inquiry to expose how the conditions of production of their principles and practices reinforce colonial structures and processes of power.

Conclusion

This thesis offered a study on the concept of epistemic oppression applied to the relationships between Western feminism and Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing. I demonstrated that the concept of epistemic oppression, while it is highly conceptual in Dotson's article, can be also mobilized to analyze concrete cases. Thus, correspondingly, I showed that the discrepancy between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing between Western feminism and Indigenous women and feminists' knowledge has an important impact on their relationship and it is therefore worth examining. I also had the goal of examining the relations between Quebec feminism, and Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing, which is an original contribution to academic research. I aimed to offer an overview of the work that both Quebec feminists and Indigenous women and feminists have engaged in in the past 40 years to offer a new and original analysis that focuses on their epistemic relations.

In the first chapter, I detailed the relationships between knowledge production and the hegemony of settler colonialism. I looked at the distinction between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and the oppression that comes with their relationships. I looked at how Western ways of knowing are a specific component of the settler colonial system and processes of power are used to erase and eliminate Indigenous ways of knowing.

In the second chapter, I showed how this phenomenon also applies to Western feminism and Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing. For this, I presented specific critiques of Indigenous women and feminists to show exactly what they consider as hindering their capacity to participate in knowledge production. I proposed to analyze

their critique as disclosing experiencing epistemic oppression from Western feminism. For this, I mobilized Dotson's conceptualization of epistemic oppression which considers two forms of epistemic oppression, which are reducible and irreducible to sociopolitical factors. I demonstrated that Western feminism has the capacity to redress reducible forms of epistemic oppression but is limited in its capacity to redress the irreducible form of epistemic oppression that is caused by the limited resilience of its epistemological system.

In the third chapter, I substantiated my theoretical claims developed in the first two chapters by analyzing a specific case. More specifically, this was the relationship between Indigenous women and feminist and Quebec feminists. I showed that Quebec feminism undertook major transformations in its principles and practices, switching from a universalist-nationalist framework to an intersectional framework, therefore bringing more inclusivity to the movement. In parallel, I showed that Indigenous women and feminists in Quebec undertook many initiatives to address problems they faced such as the consequences of the Indian Act, exclusion from political spheres, and the experience of systemic violence. I highlighted that they developed relations with Quebec feminism but always claimed their autonomy and independence from this movement. My analysis of epistemic oppression demonstrated that major transformations in Quebec feminism can be understood as addressing reducible epistemic oppression, including redressing inefficient and insufficient epistemic resources.

I demonstrated that there is still a problem with irreducible epistemic oppression because the underlying colonial relations of power between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing have not been addressed or have been but not quite correctly and I argued that the most difficult element to address in epistemic oppression is the underlying

epistemological system. Finally, I demonstrated that Quebec feminists should examine the conditions of knowledge production to achieve substantial transformations.

A central finding of my research is that it is sound to argue that Western feminism produces epistemic oppression against Indigenous women and feminists based on the latter's academic contributions. They show that they experience persisting and continued exclusion and devaluation of their knowledge which is coherent with Dotson's conceptualization of epistemic oppression. Moreover, this research has shown it is possible to observe concretely how this theoretical investigation can be engaged in concrete cases, which is an important finding that can contribute to understanding the phenomenon of epistemic oppression.

This research could ultimately be deepened with qualitative work such as including interviews of Indigenous women, feminists and Quebec feminism to better grasp how relations are affected by knowledge production and what it would mean for them to address irreducible epistemic oppression. In fact, my research mobilized almost exclusively academic sources to analyze the relationship between Western feminism and Indigenous women and feminists' ways of knowing. It is key to highlight this limit since Indigenous ways of knowing cannot be reduced to academic forms of knowledge. Therefore, the analysis of epistemic oppression is circumscribed to, mainly, the interpretations of academics, Indigenous and Western, which do not represent and speak for all.

My research could be complemented with a normative evaluation of the problem diagnosed, including a discussion concerning solutions to remedy irreducible epistemic oppression. Irreducible epistemic oppression, when diagnosed and targeted as I tried to execute in this research, necessitates a discussion about how to overcome it. This thesis

therefore offers the possibility to further question such as how it is possible to redress irreducible epistemic oppression, how to engage in a meta-inquiry that would make it possible to transform or modify the inadequate epistemic resources mobilized by Western feminists which prevent them from fully accounting for the oppression they produce in mobilizing their knowledge.

Ultimately, this research had the objective to work towards developing new orientations in political theory, settler colonial studies, feminist theory and social epistemology. I sought to demonstrate that oppression operating epistemically can be concretely diagnosed and that it must be addressed to move beyond oppressive settler colonial structures of power. Following works to deparochialize political theory and feminism, I recontextualized the production of Western feminism's epistemological system to contribute to the transformation of the landscape of the conversation with Indigenous women and feminists.

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