Sharing Economies and Indigenous Matricultures in the Land Now Called Canada

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S'appropriant la littérature féministe autochtone, l'auteure explore les formes contemporaines et historiques des matricultures autochtones coloniale du Canada et met l'emphase sur les traditions de l'économie de partage comme une des dynamiques présentes dans les matricultures autochtones et dans leurs relations avec la Terre parce qu'ils sont en correspondance avec la cosmologie autochtone. Elle ajoute que la tradition du don et les économies de partage pourraient servir de modèle pour établir une continuité culturelle devenue urgente face aux changements climatiques.

My purpose in this article is to open up a conversation about the gifting traditions and sharing economies in Indigenous matricultures in the land now called Canada. A conversation about Indigenous sharing economies may be instructive for climate change adaptations by showing settlers that there are viable alternatives to capitalist exchange economies. In my study of Indigenous matricultures as a condition of cultural continuity, sharing economies emerged as one of the dynamics of matricultures. I draw on the literature of Indigenous feminisms as a way to listen to Indigenous voices in this vital conversation.

I participate in this conversation as a white settler woman living in the Canadian Shield on Land made sacred by a petroform created two millennia ago by a culture that predates the Ojibwe, in whose territory I reside. I bring critical and ecofeminist perspectives to my study of Indigenous matricultures. As a grandmother, I am motivated to study climate change adaptation and cultural continuity in order to contribute to "ongoingness" (Haraway 132). I draw on Leanne Simpson's philosophy of regeneration (185), which has many affinities with Hanna Arendt's political philosophy of natality in my study of continuity.

Let's begin by defining "matricultures" and "sharing economy." Matricultures are egalitarian cultures founded on the maternal principles of relationality and care-giving that serve as ethical principles for all genders, for mothers and not-mothers. In matricultures, mothering is elevated for regenerating the culture and embedded in cosmological narratives. Governance by consensus, sharing economies and plurality are dynamics commonly found in matricultures, where women play a key role in the production and distribution of community resources. This definition of matricultures builds on Tina Passman's concept of "matricultures" (181), Heide Göttner-Abendroth's theory of modern matriarchies (xxvi), and Marija Gimbutas' concept of 'matristic' society (211). Leanne Simpson resists the binary word 'matriarchy' and insists on non-binary conceptualizations (128).

Sharing economy refers to an economic system grounded in ethics of relationality and care. In a sharing economy, goods and resources are produced and distributed for the collective well-being of a community or kinship group. Gifting is often embedded in ceremonies that reciprocate the generosity of Land and Water in providing for the necessities of life. Sharing and gifting are ways to reciprocate the Land's bounty, not out of obligation or self-interest, but as a way of living in harmony with the Land, often personified as Mother Earth. Genevieve Vaughan contrasts the gift or sharing paradigm with the exchange paradigm, which relates to self-interest in which the receiver is expected to give back to the giver an equivalent of what she has received. The exchange paradigm is foundational to

the capitalist economy that commodifies and exploits the gifts of nature, women, and other subjugated groups (15).

The colonial government of Canada introduced policies for "taking the Indian out of the economy" (Loney xiv). From 1885 to 1951, Canada banned the potlatch as well as Indigenous ceremonies such as the Sundance and pow-wow. The ban was first applied in the Pacific region where generous gift giving at potlatches was condemned by missionaries as reckless and excessive debauchery. The ban was later applied in other regions. Indigenous cultures view the ban as cultural genocide - an attack on Indigenous cultural integrity.

Given this colonial history, it is important that settler researchers learn about Indigenous sharing economies by listening to Indigenous voices, and for this reason, I turn to the literature of Indigenous feminism as my principle source.

Sharing Economies in Indigenous Matricultures in Canada

I briefly describe three sharing traditions in which women play key roles. First, Susan Hill (Mohawk) describes the Haudenosaunee *Ohenton Karihwatehkwen* (Thanksgiving ceremony). The ceremony reminds all present that the Earth is our mother and that she supports all life as we know it (3). The ceremony "echoes the Haudenosaunee Creation Story which teaches that the first person born on Earth was buried under the ground, and from her body the plants that sustain life grew and continue to grow to this day" (15). This practice of gratitude sustains life by connecting each participant to the Life Force that resides in physical and metaphysical timespace. It teaches mutual respect, love, generosity, and responsibility in the web of life. Haudenosaunee women have a long history of community and agricultural leadership that includes cultivating the soil and "being sisters to the food plants" (58), regenerating the nation and holding the land (60). Haudenosaunee Clan Mothers carry responsibility for ecological care and for distributing goods and services necessary for life. Kim Anderson (Cree/Metis) writes that the Haudenosaunee recognized that the strength of the culture "was only as strong as the work of the women in food production" (36) and that their economic strength was undermined by the colonial policies and practices of church and state (38).

Second, Indigenous cultures that are part of the Algonquian language family practice giveaways in ceremony. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) describes the practices that redistribute wealth within the community: "Harvests are distributed in community to our must vulnerable members…. Many of our ceremonial practices include a giveaway component where goods are distributed… Gift giving is part of our diplomacy and designed to reinforce and nurture relationships" (77). Aimée Craft (Anishinaabe-Métis) describes how gifting practices pertain to knowledge that is shared from generation to generation through the gifts of songs, language, ceremonies, and stories (116). As an Anishinaabe researcher, Craft shares her gift of creating a research space by inviting knowledge keepers of the ceremonies, songs, and stories into the research process to share Indigenous knowledges about water. Knowledge is shared, not owned, and thus remains Anishinaabe knowledge (117).

Wahkotowin is a Cree principle that is integral to gifting as enactments of Cree law. Darcy Lindberg (Cree) has "memories filled with the women in my family holding up these *wahkotowin* obligations…If *wahkotowin* is implicit law, then through its practice, it is governed by women" (26). This governance was like a hidden seam that kept our relations together. Despite the historical centrality of women and girls to the maintenance of *wahkotowin*, contemporary Cree governance reflects the imposition of patriarchal governance by the colonial state through policies that attempted to erase the Indigenous women and girls by diminishing their roles in Cree governance and ceremonies. The Cree protocols of gifting extend beyond Elders and ceremonialists to all be-ings: tobacco for the creator, sweetgrass for the ancestors, cloth of the four sacred colours for grandmother and grandfather spirits, food for kin. Gifting confirms and holds a relationship with all of these be-ings (62).

Betty Bastien (Piikani) describes the *Siksikaitsitapi* (Blackfoot) practice *of Aipommotsspistsi* as a ceremony of reciprocity and generosity that maintains balance among *Siksikaitsitapi* and ensures that Mother Earth's gifts continue to sustain the survival of all life. Gifts are given because it is the responsibility of *Siksikaitsitapi* to live according to the natural laws and generosity is an inherent characteristic of Mother Earth. Elders give offerings that are their best possessions to reflect the enormity of the gifts given by the Source of Life. Societies flourish only when they organize themselves to re-enact the generosity of Land in all their kinships (145).

Maliseet Elder, Imelda Perley, with her neighbouring Mi'kmaq community completed a four-day ceremony in which they "fasted and danced from dawn until dusk to free their communities from violence and addictions, reflecting the beliefs that energy is shared and that making sacrifices can lead to community healing" (Hanrahan 200). Perley laments that the chieftain system of governance imposed by the Indian Act has forgotten the ancient tradition of sharing gifts and energy; she seeks to restore the tradition of Clan Mothers who exercise

responsibility for the well-being of the whole community: "If women and Elders played more of a role in official politics, there would be more healing and then better decisions. We would be returning to our roots and honouring them. We would be sharing and becoming whole Maliseet people" (203).

Third, Indigenous peoples of the North Pacific practice potlatch. Each nation had its own unique potlatch traditions. Potlatch is a significant cultural ceremony during which gifts are distributed. A song is the most treasured gift one can receive for it contains teachings and histories that are part of the oral tradition. Leslie Robertson tells the story of Jane Constance Cook who defended the potlatch tradition in the lives of the Kwakwaka'wakw, where potlatch ceremonies marked important milestones such as the naming of children, marriages, transferring rights and privileges, and mourning the dead (60, 76). After Canada lifted the potlatch ban in 1951, the Indigenous peoples of the Pacific revived their ancestral ways and today they openly hold potlatches. Clans are reclaiming their birthrights and creative expressions of joy in songs, dance, and artwork. Pansy Collison (Haida), in *Haida Eagle Treasures*, recounts how potlatch ceremonies follow the ancient laws that are the foundation of their sovereignty. Through potlatch ceremonies, communities enact and reciprocate their relationship to Land and Water and validate their identity and culture through oral tradition. She describes how Clan Matriarchs and Hereditary Chiefs sit in places of honour at the head table and hosts display their generosity by providing fine food for feasting and for guests to take home. There are specific potlatch protocols for celebrating a birth, naming, raising totems, honoring the departed, and transferring leadership and social rights (197).

The Dene *balhats* (potlatch) feasting and gift exchange ceremonies follow an ancient social order that integrates customary law, gender roles, ceremonial functions, clan kinship system, hereditary chiefs, and kinship relations with the Land. Social identity is marked by membership in a matrilineal clan with rights to resources and trading routes. Property rights and access to positions of prominence remain within a clan. Rituals of reciprocity are the responsibility of all men and women involved in the harvesting, cooking, distribution, and eating of foods; however, Dene Clan Mothers are responsible for distributing food in ways that respect human kin who are recipients and also animal kin who are watching (Fiske "The Supreme Law" 187; Fiske *Cis Dideen Kat* 13).

These Indigenous voices attest to the diversity of Indigenous sharing economies in the historical and contemporary experience of Indigenous peoples in the Land now known as Canada. As First Nations decolonize, they are reclaiming their sharing economies and their matricultures. The sharing economies of Indigenous matricultures in Canada are understudied by the academy despite their rich potential to model alternatives to the patriarchal exchange economy that is entangled with the chaos of anthropogenic climate change. As the Canadian academy engages in reconciliation, perhaps it too will join this unsettling conversation.

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Transnational Indigenous Feminist Perspectives on Sharing Economy

The sharing economies of African matricultures are also understudied. Afrocentric anthropologist Ifi Amadiume (Igbo) critiques Western anthropologists for producing a version of Africa that is a projection of their own class-based patriarchal ideology. African women struggle to survive after European colonialism disrupted the socio-economic and cultural systems in which African women had autonomy. She argues, "the traditional power of African women had an economic and an ideological basis, which derived from the importance accorded motherhood" (112). She is critical of the "missing system of matriarchy in european studies of African societies," a "monological" blindness to matriarchies that is the consequence of gender prejudice, racial bias, and the masculinization of language, which together contribute to Western scholars' inability to perceive matriarchal phenomena in African cosmology, culture, social structures, and economics (29). Amadiume's critiques are relevant to Canada where the Western academy seems unwilling to perceive Indigenous matricultures and women's role in their sharing economies.

Rauna Kuokkanen (Sami) argues that the gift, in Indig-

enous philosophy, exceeds both the gift paradigm and the exchange paradigm. Indigenous philosophy perceives Land and Water as living be-ings that give abundant gifts to people only if they are treated with respect and gratitude. This philosophy perceives that, "the world as a whole is constituted of an infinite web of relationships extended to and incorporated into the entire social condition of the individual. Social ties apply to everybody and everything, including the land" ("The Logic of the Gift" 258). This philosophy of interrelatedness is integral to many Indigenous knowledge systems. Accordingly, the gift is the means for renewing and securing social order because it manifests reciprocity and recognizes the "bond of dependence and respect toward the natural world" (ibid). The bond places responsibilities on those who are dependent, and that responsibility is performed in ceremonies. Gifts are expressions of gratitude to the ancestors in a gesture of wishing a good life for all kin, human and other-than-human (266). She argues that the purpose of gifting ceremonies is to, "acknowledge and renew the sense of kinship and coexistence with the world. The gift is, therefore, the manifestation of reciprocity with one's ecosystem, reflecting the bond of dependence and respect toward the natural world" (Kuokkanen "The Politics of Form" 18). She insists that the bond between Indigenous peoples and Land is, "not an abstraction or idealization but stems from specific experiences by a specific people living in a particular locale" (19). Land is central to Indigenous economic, social, and cultural systems, to their philosophy and to the biological diversity that sustains them.

Kuokkanen offers new insights on subsistence-based lifeways, which depend on seasonal harvests that are shared within the community. Subsistence economies are complex economic systems that integrate ecological, social, cultural, and cosmological dimensions, thus enriching and sustaining communities in ways that promote cohesiveness, pride, and sharing. A subsistence economy is based on active reciprocal participation in, "kinship relations that extend beyond the human domain" because continuity depends on taking care of all relations (Kuokkanen "Indigenous Economies" 219).

Anthropological Perspectives on Sharing Economies

Early anthropologists observed the co-occurrence of First Nations' sharing economies and matricultures. Lewis Henry Morgan built on J.J. Bachofen's theory of mother right and drew on his fieldwork with people of the Haudenosaunee confederacy to argue that matrilineal clan organizations were coordinated with communal forms of living, including common lands and joint-tenant houses. Morgan and Bachofen influenced late Marx to propose a total revolution that includes gender relations, Land, imagination, and culture—a vision far more radical than his earlier ideas of communistic economic and political revolution (Davies 65). Marx, in his *Ethnological Notebooks,* acknowledges that free communistic societies had existed in history and predicted that they would return on a higher level in the future after capitalism self-destructed (87). Marxist anthropologists Eleanor Leacock and Nancy Lurie explored egalitarian and communal societies that indicated the models theorized by Morgan and Marx; they found that the Montagnais-Naskapi culture of Labrador was matrilocal until the fur trade, missionizing, and government policy caused a shift to patrilocality (22). The Montagnais-Naskapi's early matrilocal system had no market system to intervene in the direct relationships between production and distribution (Leacock et al.). Leacock asserts that the test of an egalitarian system rests on how property distinguishes between persons. Egalitarianism thus rests on people owning their own labor and making decisions about the activities for which they are responsible.

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Conclusion

Sharing economies are integral to many Indigenous matricultures because they enact relationality with Land. Sharing economies are grounded in an ethic of caring and practice generosity. This ethic is embedded in place-based cosmologies that teach ways to fulfill relational obligations to Land, community, and all be-ings. The Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving ceremony is embedded in their origin story. The North Pacific and Dene cultures practice potlatch in

order to perform their responsibility of gratitude to Land and Water, as well as to kin. Giveaways are a variation of sharing economy among the Cree, Siksikaitsitapi and Anishinaabe, who give gifts as a way of participating in the natural laws of balance and harmony. In these diverse models of sharing economy, the entire social order is contingent on giving generously as a way of reciprocating Mother Earth's generosity in taking care of the survival needs of all her relations. Indigenous sharing economies model an alternative to the capitalist economy that is urgently needed for climate change adaptation. Indigenous cultures have much to teach if only settlers like me can learn to listen and learn with humility in respectful and unsettling conversations.

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FRAN WESTWOOD

November Table II

These are days
for living on soil
not cement.

We gather to fires.
We walk, feast, listen,
and from our solitudes,
share—

our gifts move horizontally,
everyone gets some
or many,
enough.

Fran Westwood is an emerging poet of Scottish-settler heritage currently living in Toronto.

L.A.R.K

Yours, my, mine: G.i.f.t.s.

Mom, you gave me the gift of life. And I thank you.
I came from your body,
I became yours for a little while.

You gave me the basics: a place to live, food and clothes.
You also gave me some emotional support I needed.
Until it was my turn to take care of myself,
you bought me my first bra,
and you gave me pads for my periods.

When I left home, you wrote me letters,
and you gave me care packages to get me through
the first year of university.
You urged me to get computer training and to finish my course.

These gifts I am grateful for.

When I returned to your home, which became a part of mine,
we would walk, talk, and you would share stories of your life,
so that I could write them down and retell them.

L.A.R.K. lives in Ontario. She received a Bachelors degree in dance teaching and a Masters degree in dance writing. Her writing has been published in Our Voice*, a mental health magazine from New Brunswick. She hopes to return to dancing and painting full time. Cooking fills her current time.*