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Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings. By Wendy Makoons Geniusz.

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introspection and researching their own history and culture. For many of the interviewees, this path of historical recognition leads to Mission San Gabriel and Sherman Indian School. In an interesting generational divide that is not fully explored, the older generation of Gabrielinos, who possessed a more direct and personal connection to these institutions, had almost universally a more positive opinion of them than did younger Gabrielino generations. Nevertheless, generational paradoxes aside, when taken in their totality the Gabrielino oral histories about cultural and historical discovery and renewal presented in *O, My Ancestor* serve as the basis of the work and its most salient contribution to a greater understanding of the Gabrielino community in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. It is a compelling story and one, the book points out, that is best told by the Gabrielinos. Most readers of *O, My Ancestor* will agree.

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Our Knowledge Is Not Primitive: Decolonizing Botanical Anishinaabe Teachings. By Wendy Makoons Geniusz. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2009. 214 pages. \$29.95 cloth.

Colonization of knowledge is, at its very core, a way of assimilating another culture and minimizing the occupied population's experiences and historical context. In many ways we are reminded that the occupying culture often treats the knowledge of the colonized as inferior or of lesser importance in light of the perceived new and improved information at hand. This is a story told again and again in a variety of forms when discussing the outcome of the colonization of the Americas by Europeans; however, Wendy Geniusz presents not only the historical context but also a viable and unique alternative to the current overarching worldview methodology.

The premise that Geniusz eloquently builds upon is that she has the scientific background and cultural heritage as jumping points from which to address the botanical, medicinal, and spiritual context of the Anishinaabe—her own people—proposing that this information is useful to reclaiming a cultural and linguistic revitalization. The Anishinaabe knowledge, or *anishinaabegikendaasowin*, is explored in depth with sensitivity and sincere investigation in this book, implementing new systems to decolonize the culture by using a distinctly Anishinaabe approach, or Biskaabiiyang. Geniusz is careful to introduce words and concepts to the reader in a clear, understandable way. In using these terms throughout the book, the reader can begin to understand the

difficulty encountered by the *anishinaabe-izhitwaawin*, or Anishinaabe culture, to own their culture, and how they have systematically been culturally and intellectually compartmentalized, categorized, and shelved.

The history of a variety of issues of the culture being colonized and the struggle for rediscovering and maintaining *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* is extensively covered, with not only the basics of decolonization of the Anishinaabe knowledge but also with a worldview reawakening for which this author seeks to be a catalyst. The author is a trained ethnobotanist and presents the information within the cultural context and as a trained observer in the scientific methodology. This is not necessarily new on the surface, but for this culture it is a reestablishment of knowledge that took centuries of a standard methodology, not unlike the current scientific method, to establish and codify.

Decolonization of herbal and medicinal *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* is conveyed through a careful inspection of how the texts in the past were either passively discounting the information by giving little or no detail in acquisition, preparation, or dosage of herbal medicines or were actively labeled as primitive or evil. Further discussion includes the assimilation of the knowledge by colonizers to the extent that it became a part of the knowledge of the colonizing forces rather than the Anishinaabe. In the introduction, Geniusz documents the historical distinctions from the early era of the “primitive” to the later periods of “the last of.” During this later era, researchers sought out those who were believed to be the last of the keepers of Native knowledge, and these researchers left behind detailed information but without context. In this way, it is still from the perspective of the outside observer.

Concise information about the current state of the *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* is augmented with stories of the teachers that Geniusz encountered in her own past, including her mother, adding a personal gravitas to her work. Methods of recording the *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* include a sample of pictographic writing that suggests a sort of shorthand that is exclusive to the writer—a reminder of something specific but not the whole process. This method can be seen from the colonizer worldview as a code, whereas from the colonized worldview this is simply a specialization and safeguard of their knowledge—a form of copyright protection. In the worldview of a colonizer, this instead is interpreted not as a precaution but as a hindrance and yet another reason to label or ridicule. Another discussion regards the splitting of *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* into sections, with medicines, religious beliefs, and songs separated when they are one in form and use. The early division into the colonizers’ scientific system is not unlike observing a church service for healing prayer and putting the songs in one book, the prayers in another, and the types of oils used in unction in yet another, without noting that they are all part of the same service.

Recognizing that the Anishinaabe culture is at a critical point, Geniusz suggests it still could extricate itself from the colonizing, globalized cultural worldview. This would be as much an internal as an external process, and admitting this has happened creates a dichotomy of enjoying modern life while feeling like one has become the enemy. This speaks more to the perceptions not only placed upon the Anishinaabe but also through generations ingrained in the self-awareness of a people. Millions seek to be “American”; however, we rarely speak of those who live here who seek to be who they were before modern America existed. Though other scholars have explored this internal argument, Geniusz treats the subject matter with the distinction of having dual worldviews at work. The colonized view of a colonized people is reduced much like the way that we purchase a can of mixed fruit, never seeing the root, stalk, or leaf of the plants from which it came. This leads to the colonizers’ depiction of all Native peoples as the same and primitive, which can seep into the worldview of the colonized peoples to the point where their own distinctive culture is replaced by this pan-Indian, homogenized worldview.

In utilizing Biskaabiiyang and decolonizing the knowledge accumulated in previous writings, there is a good deal more room for research into the wide variety of recording methods. To decolonize the *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin*, every effort needs to be made to renew and blend the fractured records and ceremonial components into a whole decolonized structure. This can be accomplished by incorporating the old and the new. One instance is in plant identification, as precision is a necessity and, therefore, the old blends easily with new methods because both require extreme care in medicinal gathering and preparation methods. Where most researchers are actively researching the plants and their uses, the Biskaabiiyang affords a way of expanding this to incorporate a holistic approach. Compare with compilations or studies of single plants and their uses, the staple of our science: they are accurate, but the dances, songs, or sand paintings used by the specific peoples are missing. It is an important step that Geniusz has taken to put together a multidimensional picture of a cultural centerpiece. This technique enlarges the scope of the study and gives the Anishinaabe the respect due as equal partners in discovery.

The author acknowledges that, when examining the plant resources, it very quickly became an overwhelming amount of information. A revitalization of the *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* is particularly difficult at this point: where to begin? In cultural ecology, it is always important to remember that cultures change and evolve. Rediscovering a culture comes with what geographer Larry Ford once called the burden of the past: what do we agree to keep versus what do we agree to leave behind?

Another research need identified is in deleting the culturally degrading textual references within older research, replacing these with new renditions

that omit the biases of the past. Inclusion of the Anishinaabe language in the discussion opens avenues for viewing the importance of the people, diminishes the colonizing power, and should be incorporated into future research methodology.

Geniusz gives an example of how the decolonization of the *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* could look, by describing the uses and ceremonies of the white cedar, paper birch, and bearberry. The obvious care with which she treats both sides of her perspective as Anishinaabe and scientist creates a complete view that is at once exact while stimulating what we geographers would call a sense of place. A people create that sense of place with the very fabric of their culture, and in this Geniusz is guiding her own people to delve into and decolonize *anishinaabe-gikendaasowin* at a very personal level.

Our Knowledge is an important book, for it not only teases out the subtleties of colonization from a unique perspective but also engages the reader in the larger discourse of how we interpret cultural landscapes once the culture has been colonized. Further still, it challenges researchers to move forward in a way that retains the movement within both cultures while involving all in equal respect, and invites us to view Biskaabiiyang as a co-methodology with the scientific method to widen not only our research view but also our worldview.

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Plural Sovereignties and Contemporary Indigenous Literature. By Stuart Christie. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009. 296 pages. \$95.00 cloth.

Sovereignty has been the watchword in indigenous criticism for more than a decade, with “nationalist” critics such as Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and Craig Womack calling for a methodology grounded in the local, contending that “literary separatism”—criticism situated in tribally specific cosmologies and epistemologies—produces readings that work in support of indigenous sovereignty. In *Plural Sovereignties and Contemporary Indigenous Literature*, Stuart Christie argues that “contemporary indigenous sovereignty [Canadian and American] has become effectively pluralized” and that contemporary indigenous literature “documents” this plural sovereignty (1). With this claim, Christie expands the critical conversation beyond nation-based readings and creates a theoretical construct that allows room for the local and the national, for pre- and postcolonial constructs of Native sovereignty. Christie is careful to situate himself in the ongoing critical debate through a clear articulation of his terms and methodology, no easy task given his nuanced and multivalent