



BOOK REVIEW

Theorizing Native Studies

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Book Review

Theorizing Native Studies

Editors: Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith

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Theorizing Native Studies is a mind expanding volume that serves to build a conceptual bridge between Indigenous Theory and Western Theory. The editors seek to demonstrate the variety of ways that scholars within Native studies operationalize multiple forms of theory to get analysis done (p19). Within this is the thread of relationality that the scholarly works encapsulate that positions their intellectual endeavours not only for representation within the academy, but also to their political commitment to Native communities outside of the academy. The works included by the ten Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholarly essays, provide an assemblage of insights on the 'how' to turn towards theory and its value in Native studies and its importance to multiple other fields within academia. This critical volume appearing at a time, as stated by the editors, that there has been a turn against theory within the field of Native studies.

Throughout the book there are succinct and powerful examples of what in fact is 'Indigenous Theory' and its importance within the academy and to native communities. Dian Million describes the theorizing that is done in Native communities and discusses Indigenous epistemologies as theory, 'since they posit a proposition and a paradigm on how the world works' (p35). And Mishuana R. Goeman informs about why we need Indigenous theory to better understand the lived experiences of Indigenous people in the present 'since time immemorial, Native philosophical ideas have been shaped by connections to our surroundings, within our Nations, our immediate neighbours, or with those regarded on a nation to nation basis' (p233). There were also strong advocates for why we shouldn't throw away Western theory for Indigenous inquiry, and how Western Theory can support Indigenous Theory and how this process can encompass sovereignty: Teresia Teaiwa states 'Sovereign intellectuals have nothing to lose by admitting that some white men, white women, and white people are part of our genealogies of thinking whether we like it or not' (p53). And how by building at this conceptual bridge between Indigenous theory and Western theory, there is room for critiques and gleaning useful aspects of various theoretical starting points, such as, how Glen Coulthard does within his reading of Marxist theory through the lens of Indigenous struggle (see pp56-98).

The main strengths of the book is that it demystifies Indigenous theory by giving concrete examples and highlighting that Indigenist theorists do not only reside within academia, but also in activists circles, art galleries and native communities, and all have a profound voice. The introduction of Indigenous epistemologies as theories, not just as one theory, or one way to 'do' theory: but as many as are contained within the rich epistemological diversity that exists and is available for use in well-articulated analysis. Sovereignty was also a recurring theme in the book and this is where Western discourses fall short of describing Indigenous realities. Mark Rifkin explains: 'biopolitical discourses perform geopolitical work, however, such scholarship does not explore the forms of spatial self-representation, mapping and sovereignty that are displaced through imperial population making' (p158). In addition to discussing sovereignty and biopolitics, a robust picture of sovereignty emerges in discussions about ethnographic entrapment, health sovereignty, racial limits of tribal sovereignty, sexuality, spatiality, racism and sovereignty; and supremacist ideologies of sovereignty: all contribute to what Andrea Smith states as 'the possibilities of collective imagining, analysis, and thought that are necessary to build another world' (p230). Sovereignty and Indigenous Theory are synonymous; their detailing throughout this book accomplishes its goal to move

towards building intellectual coalitions and political power needed to destabilize settler colonialism structures, within the academy, all while considering the connectedness to native communities, which is at the heart of this intellectual endeavour. As Vera Palmer wisely articulates 'theories tools are fireballs that can herald our sovereignty, but it's a risky sport, and not for the faint of heart' (p249).

The book in its entirety is not a breeze through read. It requires re-visiting, re-learning and much discussion. It will be an excellent resource to many academic disciplines and I would recommend it as the go-to text for anyone who wishes to gain an indepth understanding of Indigenous theory and its important contribution to academia.