

Gender, Work and Organization 2024  
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Shannon School of Business, Cape Breton University  
Stream Proposal

**Indigenous Knowledge and Feminisms in the Global South and North**

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*“Every action organized by indigenous women for the benefit of a good life for all women, translates into castellano as feminism” (Julieta Paredes, Aymara feminist; apud Gargalo, 2006, p.255).*

According to some authors, speaking of indigenous feminisms would have been unthinkable thirty years ago (Hernandez Castillo, 2010). However, since the 1990s we have witnessed the emergence of indigenous women’s movements in various Latin American countries, acting and struggling on different fronts. These struggles for fairer relations between men and women are based on definitions of human beings that seem to transcend Western individualism. Their notion of equality identifies complementarity between genders as well as between human beings and nature.

Some of the most relevant notions of indigenous epistemology are expressed in different terms. In contrast to the stark individualism promoted by globalized capitalism, indigenous women reclaim the values of *Community*, by understanding this term as a life where people are intimately linked with their surroundings, under conditions of respect and equality where nobody is superior to anybody; *Equilibrium*, which means to watch over the life and

permanence of all beings in space and in nature, and to understand that destruction of some species affects the rest of beings; *Respect*, based on the concept of the elders being those who are most respected, an attitude that extends to all other beings in nature; *Duality*, in which the feminine and the masculine in a same deity are two energy forces found in one. The value of duality or dualism contrasts with the superiority of the masculine over the feminine, constantly encountered in patriarchal ideologies; and *cuatriedad*, which signifies the totality, a cosmic balance, that which is complete as represented by the four cardinal points, unity and the totality of the universe. By seeing both ahead and behind, by seeing to the sides, it is possible to struggle for unity. (First Summit of Indigenous Women in the Americas - Cumbre de Mujeres Indígenas de América 2003).

Many indigenous women from the so-called “Global South” are engaged in collective action at the local, national, regional and global level against violence, ethnocide, poverty, exclusion, exploitation, and promotion of women’s rights in their communities. Indigenous women have played a central role in these struggles, also assuming full responsibility for their families when male relatives disappear or are killed by authoritarian forces. They have also contributed to review feminist knowledge production, especially in explaining key notions and understandings of indigenous people’s epistemologies. Nevertheless, it is unfortunate to recognize that these feminist indigenous movements have obtained very little space in a stable form of colonial production of knowledge and colonial State (Matos and Kambinwá, 2021).

Although Indigenous women’s activism in the Global South has intensified in recent years, the presence of Indigenous women’s in social movements does not mean that they have become feminists in the Western style. While feminism in the West emerged in response to a liberal, bourgeois society that secured individual rights for bourgeois men but not for bourgeois women (Paredes 2014), indigenous feminism movements are known as communitarian. Communitarian feminism is a theoretical and revolutionary proposal toward depatriarchalizing life. It criticizes neoliberal capitalism and breaks with Western feminisms, and thus constructs its own epistemology, inspired from the life experiences of its adherents both as women and as Indigenous persons, based upon their ancestors’ memories and historical references (Maso et al., 2022).

These growing indigenous women's movements can be seen as a new indigenous feminism, if we consider feminism to be a body of social theories and political practices that analyze and seek to change inequality between men and women. Nevertheless, indigenous women do not always define themselves as feminists, even though they have allied with wider women's movements. Indeed, most indigenous women associate feminism with urban middleclass women and regard it as divisive of their shared struggles with indigenous men. However, these preconceptions are starting to change, and some indigenous women's groups in Mexico as well as some Mayan feminists from Guatemala are beginning to appropriate the concept of feminism (Hernandez Castillo, 2008).

In many Latin American countries, organized indigenous women have joined their voices with those of the national indigenous movements to denounce the economic and racial oppression that characterizes the insertion of indigenous communities into the national project. At the same time, these women are struggling within their organizations and communities to change those traditional elements that exclude and oppress them.

In Brazil, indigenous women have found unique and revolutionary ways to resist the last years of an oppressive national regime through their activism on social media. These digital activism involve women from multiple indigenous groups across the country, along with non-Indigenous Brazilian supporters and international organizational allies (Machea Duarte, 2022). Since January 2023, an indigenous woman, Sonia Guajajara, is a new Minister of Indigenous People of Brazil.

In Colombia, one of the most biodiverse countries in the world, there have been significant threats to biodiversity, where Indigenous communities' access to and control of natural resources has been shaped by colonialism, armed conflicts, and illegal extractivism (extraction of minerals and agribusiness). The imposition of these extractive industries in territory place women at greater risk of exploitation and violence (Vargas and Killean, 2023).

Similarly to Brazil, Colombia has a history of land dispossession and unequal distribution of natural resources. These environmental harms have been strongly felt, but also resisted, by Indigenous and Afro-descendent groups. One example of resistance is the case of babassu coconut breakers in Brazil, who organized themselves to struggle against extractivist practices, which led to biodiversity protection in the Amazon region (Puppim de Oliveira et al., 2022). Environmental harms frequently lead to additional forms of state and armed violence

perpetrated against these groups. We can thus reflect on the ways through which decolonial and indigenous feminist literature can inform our understandings of the gendered impacts of these harms.

In addition to the diverse indigenous movements in Latin America, we wish to recognize the contributions of the indigenous communities of Northern regions. For example, the Sámi, who inhabit the Arctic areas of Northern Europe (including parts of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Russia) have a rich tradition of indigenous knowledge and activism. In their struggles against cultural assimilation, land dispossession, and the adverse effects of climate change we may find parallels with indigenous movements in the Global South. By encompassing the experiences and perspectives of the indigenous communities of the North into our discussions on indigenous feminism and decolonial knowledge, we aim to provide a broad and inclusive understanding of the intersectionality of indigenous struggles worldwide.

In this call, we invite texts, accounts, alternative narratives, autobiographies, collective accounts, and other forms of contemplation on issues surrounding indigenous knowledge and in particular feminist indigenous knowledge in the Global South. We particularly encourage feminist and interdisciplinary approaches taking a decolonial take on the topic. Work submitted to the stream can have a large scope, and can include, but is not restricted to the following issues:

- Are there Indigenous Feminisms in the Global South? What characterizes them?
- Are there Indigenous Feminisms in the Global North/ Northern regions? What characterizes them?
- How can we make sense of Indigenous Feminisms? Were they influenced by Western feminisms? In which ways?
- How can Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous Feminisms from the Global South and from the North help us to better understand the global challenges we live today?
- Do Indigenous knowledges and Feminisms contribute to reflections on sustainability and other ways of living on the planet? In which ways?
- What can we identify in common and differences between Indigenous Feminisms in the Global South and in the Global North?
- How are Indigenous Feminisms and Knowledge articulated in specific global, socio-economic, or cultural contexts?

- How are Indigenous Feminisms and knowledge experienced at the intersection of class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and/or gender?
- Which examples do we have of indigenous communities that resisted extractives practices in the Global South?
- In which ways decolonial and indigenous feminist literature can inform our understandings of the gendered impacts of environmental harms?

## Submissions

Abstracts of approximately 500 words (excluding references) must be submitted to the GWO 2024 submission system hosted by FourWaves. The link is available on the [GWO conference 2024](#) website as of November 6th, 2023. No independent abstract submissions (i.e., an abstract submitted to someone's personal email) will be considered for acceptance or presentation at the conference. Stream convenors will be conducting a blind review process and redirecting abstracts to the GWO organising committee for consideration in the open stream if and when appropriate. The abstract itself should then not have any author details to ensure this blind review process. Abstract formatting specifics are available in the submission system.

Abstracts are due by **December 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2023**, with decisions on acceptance to be made by stream convenors by the end of January 2024. No extensions to this deadline will be possible as some participants will need time and justification documents to secure visas to attend the conference onsite.

## References

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