

Post-National Foundation of Judith Butler's and Rossi Braidotti's Relational Subjectivity

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Abstract

This article draws on examples of Indigenous conceptualizations of nationhood to question the post-national foundation of Judith Butler's and Rossi Braidotti's theories of affective subjectivity. The article concludes that the responsibility to respect certain political boundaries is necessary in fostering non-oppressive affective relations.

Résumé

Cet article s'appuie sur des exemples de conceptualisations autochtones de la notion de nation pour remettre en question le fondement post-national des théories de la subjectivité affective de Judith Butler et Rossi Braidotti. L'article conclut que la responsabilité de respecter certaines limites politiques est nécessaire pour favoriser des relations affectives non oppressives.

The recent turn to affect in feminist theory and other disciplines has opened up a critical engagement with what constitutes the subject. A critique of the bounded, autonomous, rational liberal individual within feminist theories is not a novel project nor is it confined to feminist theorizing. The turn to affect and emotions, however, provides new ways of imagining subjectivity; it can equally be seen as a productive and as a critical project. There is certainly no unified feminist voice on this ontological issue; where a theorist like Kelly Oliver (2004) draws on Frantz Fanon for a feminist anti/post-colonial interpretation of affect, someone else like Teresa Brennan (2004) crosses disciplinary boundaries and draws on microbiology to understand the borders of the subject. A common theme, however, runs through these thinkers; thinking about affects and emotions has the effect of disturbing the precarious boundaries between self and other that have been rigidly enforced in Western liberal discourse. It seems that the debates over affect have demonstrated the ontological fiction of the atomistic individual. Despite the diversity of approaches to affect, one unifying feature is the theorization of subjectivity as *relational*; interdependence appears to be the flipside of atomism.

The turn to theorizing a relational subject through affect and emotions has not escaped productive critique. In this self-reflexive assessment of feminist theory, several theorists (Cvetkovich 2012; Hemmings 2012; Pedwell 2012; Pedwell and Whitehead 2012) have pointed to the potential pitfalls of dehistoricization and depoliticization in affect theory. For example, Clare Hemmings (2012) warns, "the expectation of reciprocity central to empathy risks universalising the subject's experience as a sound basis for engagement with others; it ignores the historical and political reasons why others may not be able or not wish to reciprocate" (153). Building on this focus on power and affect, Carolyn Pedwell (2012) places postcolonialism and neoliberalism at the centre of her analysis and Ann Cv-

etkovich (2012) theorizes “sadness” through the lens of racism and colonialism in America.

This paper aims to critically assess the danger of depoliticization and dehistoricization in the relational theories of subjectivity presented by Judith Butler and Rosi Braidotti. Specifically, I argue that the post-national impetus for their two projects is complicated by Indigenous theories of relationality that are founded on territorial belonging. Despite clear differences between the two thinkers—Braidotti focuses on affective relationality as an ontological force, whereas Butler focuses on relationality in terms of human emotions—I argue that both thinkers conceptualize relational subjectivity—and the boundaries of this porous subject—in relation to national boundaries. A study of these two thinkers’ conceptualizations of the subject is productive because they both justify this rethinking of the subject based on economic and political developments in our present era of globalization (Butler 2004a; Braidotti 2006a). Both thinkers diagnose the present as a time of both post-nationalism as well as xenophobic national resurgence (Butler 2004a, 39; Braidotti 2006a, 72) and this development requires a rethinking of the subject. While Braidotti and Butler have many other reasons for pursuing their respective projects on affect, the question of national belonging, difference, and exclusion is a place of significant convergence in their theories that deserves critical assessment.

This paper begins with an engagement with Indigenous theories of land based collective belonging. Scholars in this field present relational worldviews that are, in many ways, compatible with Braidotti and Butler’s theories, yet, unlike Butler and Braidotti, their perspectives are not founded on the rejection of nationhood. After this introduction to Indigenous ways of theorizing relationality and collective belonging, this paper creates a dialogue between Butler and Braidotti’s conceptualizations of the subject in light of these insights. The origin of the two theories of relational subjectivity in Euro-American conceptualizations of the nation-state precludes discussion of productive alternative conceptualizations of national communities and fluid boundaries. The issue of continuing colonialism and Indigenous resurgence in Canada sheds light on weaknesses in both thinkers’ theories of affect—Braidotti risks depoliticizing affec-

tive limits and Butler risks a humanistic universalism that does not engage with deep difference with respect to non-human materialism—and leads to the conclusion that a productive way forward is to hold elements of both theories in tension. The potentially contradictory twinning of the Arendtian *political* moment in Butler with Braidotti’s materialist commitment to the productivity of difference is one way for an emancipatory feminist/anti-colonial theory of the subject to take Indigenous resurgence seriously.

Indigenous Relational Nationhoods: Accountability to Relationships¹

Métis feminist scholar Zoe Todd (2014) is one of the few scholars who has questioned the relationship between Euro theorizing of relational ontology and Indigenous thought. She criticizes these increasingly popular theorists for ignoring “...Indigenous thinkers [and] their millennia of engagement with sentient environments, with cosmologies that enmesh people into complex relationships between themselves and *all* relations” (n.p.). She draws on thinkers such as Anishinaabe legal scholar John Borrows to argue that these Indigenous worldviews are not simply an interesting theoretical alternative to atomistic subjectivity, but rather are the basis of political struggles. She writes: “...Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies represent *legal orders*, legal orders through which Indigenous peoples throughout the world are fighting for self-determination, sovereignty” (n.p.).

This political fight is visible in recent Indigenous resurgence across “Canada” especially as seen in the Idle No More Movement. A collection of writings from this movement (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014) demonstrates that there is no unitary Indigenous voice in addressing colonialism, yet the theme of Indigenous resurgence—the rebuilding of Indigenous ways of life through assertion rather than state dominated negotiation—is a recurrent theme. For many, like Tara Williamson (2014), this resurgence is “about nationhood. Not nation-state-hood, but nationhood—the ability to take care of the land, our children, and our families in the way we best know how” (153). Several other contributors argue that the momentum of the Idle No More movement should be directed toward the longstanding struggle to assert national self-determination (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, 2014).

Indigenous conceptualizations of “nationhood,” as alluded to above, are not the same as Western notions of the nation-state. Indigenous peoples have not simply taken up a European concept of national self-determination and used it politically, but rather this use of nationhood reflects the historical and continuing existence of political communities based on the interrelation of land, people, and spirituality. In contrast to political identity founded on grievances and mobilization, Indigenous scholars Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel (2005) provide a concept of Indigenous “peoplehood” based on sacred history, language, land, and interrelationship between people and nature (609). This conceptualization does not rely on a static and essentialist identity nor does it reduce Indigenous peoplehood to a normative identity based solely in resistance.

Relationality is one of the core ideas that connect diverse Indigenous nationhoods. Shawn Wilson (2008) states that “...the shared aspect of an Indigenous ontology and epistemology is relationality (relationships do not merely shape reality, they *are* reality) (7). The importance of relational interconnectedness can be seen as a “theoretical framework” that connects various Plains First Nations (Cardinal and Hildebrand 2000, ix). According to Plains Treaty Elders, their sovereignty as nations is rooted in a lived relationship with the Creator and *iyiniw sawëyihtâkosiwin* (Cree for the peoples’ sacred gifts) (10). *Iyiniw sawëyihtâkosiwin* includes not only the material world, but also laws and values that guide relationships (10). The key to maintaining sovereign nationhood in this worldview is the Cree concept of *miyo-wîcêhtowin*, meaning “having or possessing good relations” (39). These good relations extend from the individual, through the family, outward to the nation, and beyond to inter-national relations. Rather than national territorial boundaries being a sharp demarcation of the political outside, the Cree word *wîtaskêwin* means “living together on the land” and applies to pre-colonial territorial sharing with other nations along territorial boundaries (39). It is within this framework that Shawn Wilson (2008) makes the argument that ethical action is based on “relational accountability”—that is, action that respects and builds good relations rather than diminishing them.

While the specific laws and ceremonies of each nation will differ with respect to the ways of building nationhood through relations, it appears that relation-

ality is central to Indigenous thought across Turtle Island (D’Arcangelis 2010). Charles Menzies (2013) of the Gitxaala Nation of the North Coast writes about three central concepts in the Gitxaala worldview that are all connected to relationality: “These move from the central idea of social relationships (WulE’isk, relative or not relative) through the principle of interconnections (syt güülm goot, being of one heart) to the idea of continuity (nabelgot, reincarnation) (180). Like the Cree concepts discussed above, the nation based on relationality does not have a fixed outside, but rather attempts to bring outside peoples into relations (Menzies 2013). Historically, white settlers have not been excluded from Indigenous nations because of xenophobic nationalism, but rather because their actions have harmed relations and placed themselves on the outside as *wa’ayn*—“unhealed people” (184). This is an example of settlers acting as if they are unaccountable for their relations.

Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson (2011) explains the difference between Western conceptualizations of nation and sovereignty and Nishnaabeg concepts through the idea of change and movement as compared to fixity; the attempts to fix the nation in the institution of the state is contrary to Indigenous nationhood that is tied to the fluctuations of nature (89). She further explains that this relational fluidity applies to territorial boundaries:

... ‘boundaries,’ in an Indigenous sense, are about relationships. As someone moves away from the centre of their territory—the place they have the strongest and most familiar bonds and relationships—their knowledge and relationship to the land weakens. This is a boundary, a zone of decreasing Nishnaabeg presence... This is a place where one needs to practice good relations with neighbouring nations. (89)

Importantly for our discussion of Braidotti and Butler, *odaenauh*, according to Elder Basil Johnston, means “nation as an interconnected web of hearts” and this directly connects political relations to emotional relations (94).

Indigenous Nationhoods and Gender

Before proceeding to a discussion of Butler and Braidotti, it is important to note that just as colonialism is a gendered process, so is national resurgence. The appropriation of traditional Indigenous territory

in Canada and the spacial containment of First Nations on reserves has been intimately linked with sexist *Indian Act* membership rules, restrictive mobility rights for Indigenous women, the sexual objectification of Indigenous women, and institutional indifference to sexual violence against Indigenous women (Silman 1987, Lawrence 2004; Smith 2005; Razack 2002; Barman 1997/1998; Maracle 1996). Given the multigenerational imposition of colonial patriarchy, it is not surprising that some Indigenous men—and women—internalized these gendered norms and came to see Indigenous feminism as “untraditional and, by extension, as deleterious to indigenous liberation” (Green quoted in Coulthard 2014, 88). Bonita Lawrence (2004) traces how racist and sexist norms of membership in the *Indian Act* came to be internalized by some Indigenous people in the context of state-imposed scarcity of resources. Glen Coulthard (2014) provides a concise overview of gender discrimination in the struggle for Indigenous self-determination and comes to the conclusion that feminism is not the enemy of Indigenous sovereignty; rather, the imposition of colonial patriarchy is the real threat to Indigenous traditions of egalitarianism (92).

As can be seen in the earlier examples of resurgent Indigenous nationhoods, the “traditional” is based on lived relations and is always in flux; there is no inherent tension between Indigenous nationalisms thus conceived and gender equality. Indeed, the Native Women’s Association of Canada (2011)—once maligned by male-dominated organizations as the enemy of self-determination—has adopted the position that drawing on tradition to rebuild nations is key to Indigenous women’s well-being. It is widely held in Indigenous scholarship (Sunseri 2011; Monture-Angus 1999; Lawrence 2004) that tradition-informed nation-building projects are key to decolonizing imposed patriarchal relations. Central to these projects is the reclaiming of women’s traditional roles as the foundation of Indigenous communities. Though she does not use the language of nation, Jeanette Armstrong (2005) argues that the imposition of a patriarchal family structure on the co-operative family-clan system is central to colonization and cultural genocide. Thus, attempts at decolonization should build community organically from the ground up in a way that respects women’s roles in promoting relationality. Armstrong says: “It is woman who holds this power and becomes powerful only when catalyz-

ing co-operation and harmony, and therefore health, at all levels—from the individual, outward to the family, to the community, and to the environment” (76) Likewise, Lina Sunseri (2009) draws on Oneida tradition to put forward her conceptualization of anti-patriarchal “mothering the nation” as part of a decolonizing process. Of central importance is the fact that these conceptualizations of community- and nation-building differ from exclusionary nation-state formations in the sense that they are not founded on a constitutive “othering,” but rather on the living process of relationship building. This resurgence of nation-building is not simply a strategic opposition to colonialism, but rather draws on pre-colonial tradition and is productive in fostering the type of relational subjectivity called for by Butler and Braidotti who reject national identity as exclusionary.

A Note on the Settler/Indigenous Binary

In this article, I use the term “settler” to refer to all non-Indigenous people in Canada. This should not be construed as a levelling of difference nor an ignorance of power relations between settler groups. The influential piece “Decolonizing Antiracism” by Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua (2005) provides one entry point into the debate about who and what a settler is. The authors argue that, although facing racist exclusion, people of colour are in fact settlers and are implicated in settler colonialism. They call for scholarly attention to be paid to the complex histories that implicate people of colour in settler colonialism through exclusion of Indigenous peoples in written history and appeals to belonging in the dominant body politic. Soon after its publication, Nandita Sharma and Cynthia Wright (2008/2009) responded to Dua and Lawrence’s position with a scathing critique of Indigenous nationalisms as well as what Sharma and Wright read as a conflation, in the original piece, of migration with settlement.

This exchange led to a flurry of writing on the question of the settler/Indigenous binary and how to think of racialized and otherwise marginalized non-Indigenous people in the process of settler colonialism. Many scholars of settler colonialism (Wolfe 2013; Barker 2009; Jafri 2012; Phung 2011; Waziyatawin 2011) have defended the binary and its usefulness in understanding historical and current forms of settler colonialism. Others have called for an intersectional analysis that examines the multiple binaries of settler colonialism,

while paying attention to the unique nature of colonization for Indigenous peoples and the different forms of oppression faced by marginalized non-Indigenous peoples (Saranillio 2013). A recurrent theme, even among those defending the binary, is a call to understand the different ways in which marginalized groups are implicated in settler colonialism; for example, by conflating sexual or racial oppression with colonization (Morgenson 2010; Tuck and Yang 2012). When I use the term settler, it is a shorthand for this last approach that recognizes that, while all non-Indigenous people in Canada are structurally implicated in settler colonialism, they are not implicated in the same way. This means that different histories, different relations to the state, and different relations with Indigenous communities lead to different responsibilities to these relations. Regardless, the Indigenous theories of relationality suggest that a commitment to decolonization requires a responsibility for one's relations and these relations can be understood through attention to the specificity of marginalized settler groups' historical and contemporary relation to settler-colonialism.

The Post-National Impetus for Butler and Braidotti's Relational Subject

To begin this discussion, it is necessary to examine the political motivations behind rethinking the subject in affective terms and how Butler and Braidotti each understand subjectivity. In *Transpositions: On Nomadic Ethics*, Braidotti (2006a) constructs a certain understanding of the subject in her formulation of a materialist post-humanistic ethics. She states that her project is a "radical revision of the subject" who is "not unitary and still capable of ethical and political accountability" (144). It is a political response to the dominance of post-industrial neo-liberalism and the technological mediation of the subject (3). The nomadic subject is also made nomadic by geopolitical actors in the postmodern era that schizophrenically celebrate "free borders," while shoring up security borders and thus enhance the mobility of the privileged at the expense of marginalized bodies (7). The complexity of the postmodern era calls for a conception of the subject that is equally complex based on multiple belongings rather than on fixed identity (10). The very use of the concept "nomadic" points to a detachment from fixed territoriality. The nomadic subject can be understood

primarily as a subject in becoming. Unlike a humanist ontology, onto which one could map essential human conditions like speech or rational thought, the nomadic subject is radically anti-essentialist. Braidotti writes that "Nomadic becomings are rather the affirmation of the unalterably positive structure of difference, meant as a multiple and complex process of transformation, a flux of multiple becomings, the play of complexity, or the principle of not-One" (145).

For Braidotti, the question of difference—central to her project(s)—arises out of the history of European fascism and philosophy that takes difference as dualistic and as inferring inferiority (Braidotti and Butler 1994, 45). Given the influence of this history on Braidotti, national difference is read as the gravest danger facing Europe in an era of complexity that sees both the fragmentation of national identity and its resurgence (45). In this context, Braidotti (2006a) sees the need for a post-nationalist European identity that celebrates multiple belongings and undermines essentialist identity (69). Here, we can see the connection between relational affective subjectivity and the nation-state in her theory; a new theory of subjectivity is needed to account for the complexities of globalization and increasing incoherence of the nation-state, while simultaneously a push for new forms of post-national governance is required to enact this subjectivity.

Butler similarly bases her formulation of the affective subject on the complexities of a post-nationalist world that responds to this uncertainty with reactionary nationalist xenophobia. Butler (2004) argues that, after 9/11, the US had its sense of first worldism shaken in that America lost its monopoly on being "the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one's own boundaries transgressed" (39). She hopes that this shaken foundation, and the related emotion of grief, can allow for critical discussion of vulnerability and the possibility of working toward a shared political community; in contrast, the alternative is violent closure and the shoring up of xenophobic boundaries and borders (30).

For Butler, the problem of the nation-state is similarly located in the exclusionary nature of the nation. In *Precarious Life* (Butler 2004a), the problem is nationalist xenophobia that renders some lives unintelligible, while in *Who Sings the Nation-State?* (Butler

and Spivak 2007), the problem is framed more broadly around Hannah Arendt's critique of the nation-state in the context of post-World War II Europe. Butler's attempt to rehabilitate an open-ended humanism through mutual vulnerability and emotional connections can be read as an attempt to create a post-national subject: a subject with the right to have rights regardless of nationality. Considering the driving force behind her critique of nationalism, it is not surprising that Butler comes to a similar assessment of nationalism as Braidotti. Butler argues forcefully against homogeneous national identity when she writes: "This is, needless to say, not a reason to favour pluralism, but rather, a reason to be suspicious of any and all forms of national homogeneity, however internally qualified they may be..." (Butler and Spivak 2007, 41).

The Unbounded Relational Subject in Braidotti and Butler

For Braidotti, the subject comes into being over time through the body's capacity to interact with others. It is this element of affect—the body's ability to affect and be affected by others—that makes subjectivity possible. As Braidotti (2006a) writes: "Viewed spatially, the post-structuralist subject may appear as fragmented and disunited; on a temporal scale, however, its unity is that of a continuing power to synchronize its recollections. This creates a continuity of disconnected fragments..." (151). Though coming at the question of the human subject from a different angle, one of understanding loss in the context of 9/11, Butler (2004a) describes a subject that shares points of contact with the nomadic subject; that is, relational inter-dependence provides the conditions that allow for the emergence of a subject.

The main thrust of Butler's (2004a) *Precarious Life* is to look at the possibility of a political community based on inter-dependence. Through this collection of essays, she attempts *not* to create an ontological category of the human through a shared universal human condition, but rather to think of a political definition of the human as a work in progress. Loss and grieving are central to this project because when one experiences loss, the attachment to others comes to the fore in a way that exceeds discursive representation. She writes that "One finds oneself fallen. One is exhausted but does not know why. Something is larger than one's own

deliberate plan, one's own project, one's own knowing and choosing" (21). The outside force that thwarts the self-regulating individual is its relationality: the ability to affect and be affected by others. Affectivity is not reducible to signifiable emotions like grief, but grief allows intuitive access to the trans-subjective nature of affectivity.

To be clear, Braidotti (2006a) rejects this focus on loss and death, characterizing it as the "sterility of habit" (40) and argues instead for a reappraisal of the vitality of life that is not so obsessed with loss of the self. Nevertheless, the drive to transform "resentment into affirmation" (208) shares much with Butler's political project of thinking an affectively informed alternative to the violent US reaction to the 9/11 attacks. The goal is the same: to avoid a reactionary response to pain, one should approach pain, and even death, as potentially productive in increasing our knowledge of our inter-dependence. One of the central differences that cuts through this shared focus on the transformation of pain is that Butler aims to resurrect an open-ended humanism, while Braidotti's (2006a) nomadic subject relies on a radical critique of anthropocentrism (97).

Like Braidotti's nomadic subject, Butler's (2004a) inter-subject cannot be characterized as a completely undifferentiated flux. Temporality plays an important role since "Individuation is an accomplishment, not a presupposition, and certainly no guarantee" (27). It is important to note that this somewhat bounded subject is not just the result of developmental individuation, but also an effect of political performativity. Butler argues that the use of bounded identity categories and rights discourse, which privileges the liberal individual, is necessary; however, this discourse does not "do justice" to the complex affective connections that make us and undo us (Butler 24-25). The question, then, is whether this is just a pragmatic, strategic consideration or is this limit to the undone subject reflective of something more essential in the formation of subjects? If it is the case, as Butler says, that "It is important to claim that our bodies are in a sense *our own* and that we are entitled to claim rights of autonomy over our bodies" (25), then perhaps there is value in claiming bounded identity that goes beyond *strategic* politics. Is there a way of thinking about mutual respect of boundaries that, instead of excluding and oppressing, is productive in the sense of creating the conditions of inter-dependence? Butler

(2004b) clarifies her position on norms as they relate to political commitments and identities when she writes: “On the one hand, norms seem to signal the regulatory or normalizing function of power, but from another perspective, norms are precisely what binds individuals together, forming the basis of their ethical and political claims” (219). For Butler, then, it is not simply a matter of rejecting bounded identity—normative identity is the precondition for political action—rather, one must always be aware of the exclusionary nature of these identities. The affectively open subject is bounded, in Butler’s account, by normative political boundaries that are necessary for political action as well as by normative boundaries that exclude some from the category “human,” severing the potential for affective connection.

Braidotti (2006a) conceptualizes limits to her nomadic subject in a different way through her unique use of the concept “sustainability”; this limit is to be found in the material realm that some critics see as marginal in Butler’s thought. Braidotti explains that affectivity can be seen:

In those moments of floating awareness when rational control releases its hold, ‘Life’ rushes on towards the sensorial/perceptive apparatus with exceptional vigour. This onrush of data, information, affectivity, is the relational bond that simultaneously propels the self out of the black hole of its atomized isolation and disperses it into a myriad of bits and pieces of data imprinting or impressions. It also, however, *confirms the singularity of that particular entity* which both receives and recomposes itself around the onrush of data and affects. (145; emphasis mine)

The power of this rush of relationality can be destructive; thus “One needs to be able to sustain the impact with the onrushing affectivity, to ‘hold’ it, without being completely overwhelmed by it” (145).

One of Braidotti’s (2006a) most interesting takes on sustainability is the bodily manifestation of limits. She argues that if one reaches a limit of sustainability, the body will make the limit clear through somatic manifestations (159). Another way of thinking about the body’s immersion in affective relationality is “the subject’s ability to sustain the shifts without cracking” (160). The somatic manifestations of unsustainable affectivity have particular importance for post-colonial and feminist theories that show the connection between

asymmetrical power relations and those who live with unsustainable affects. Teresa Brennan (2004), for example, shows the ways in which racialized and/or gendered subjects face affective “dumping” by privileged groups who can maintain their sense of bounded security only through projecting negative affects onto others. According to Brennan, this might account for the somatic manifestation of hysteria as a women’s illness (15). Furthermore, Kelly Oliver’s (2004) critical engagement with Fanon draws attention to the self-destructive manifestations of negative affects in the colonized, which originate in the colonizer.

Limitations of Braidotti’s Ethical Response to Pain and Suffering

An understanding of asymmetrical power relations reveals something that remains under-theorized in Braidotti’s work; if the nomadic subject is fluid and contingent, yet maintains borders in order to sustain and manage this fluidity, how is it that some subjects *appear* more sovereign and more autonomous than others? The appearance of boundedness is always relational, and if Brennan (2004) is correct, then white, masculine subjects gain their own sense of autonomy by affectively transgressing the porous borders of feminized and racialized others. Those benefiting from asymmetrical power relations may see this autonomy as a natural aspect of human freedom, whereas the epistemic privilege of the oppressed may allow this autonomy to appear contingent on relations of power.

This question of asymmetrical power in the politics of sustainability has not gone unnoticed by otherwise sympathetic critics. For example, Lisa Baraitser (2010) asks: “What if a body says ‘I can’t take it anymore,’ and another body nevertheless continues to hurt it?...Does this not push all the responsibility for knowing when it’s enough back onto abused bodies...?” (129). Similarly, Hemmings (2010, 139) asks: “Are only the strong-hearted, the ones who can stand the openness and survive retrospective clarity, the inheritors of an ethical future?” (139). Braidotti (2010) does not adequately address these pressing questions; she simply responds to them by reiterating the need to transform pain and negative affect into ethical—that is, sustainable—relationships (140).

For Braidotti (2006a), the theoretical basis for judging the sustainability, and hence the ethics of an

action, is found in “a fundamental drive to life: a *potentia*” (155); it is this fundamental vitalistic drive that is the ultimate good against which to measure oppression. Good government, and ethical behaviour, promote this drive for relational connectivity, while unethical behaviour hinders this positive freedom of *potentia* (150). Though Braidotti wants to focus on the positivity of affect, she does not deny that conflict, even violent oppression, occurs. It is because of the universality of the drive for *potentia* that these conflicts can be judged as oppressive and hence “Because all subjects share in this common nature, there is a common ground on which to negotiate the interests and the eventual conflicts” (157).

In her recent introduction to the second edition of *Nomadic Subjects*, Braidotti (2011) clearly engages with these questions of asymmetrical power by framing her broad theoretical project(s) as being driven by “the fundamental power differential among categories of human and nonhuman travellers or movers” (4). She takes care to note that certain bodies are made marginal through violence and that these bodies are dispossessed of their selves (6). Although Braidotti provides an ethical basis for judging oppressive affective relations as wrong—her nomadic ethics of sustainability provides a convincing framework for this—it seems that she does not live up to her own standard of assessing nomadic subjectivity through “historically grounded, socio-economic references” (4). While Braidotti’s (2006a) discussion of the ethical implications of “sustainability” on the discourse of addiction is productive (224), one might imagine a more in depth discussion of sustainability as it relates to her three axes of alterity: woman/native/nature. Braidotti gives a nod to Indigenous others, but does not deeply engage with Indigenous scholars and activists engaged in national resurgence aimed at creating sustainable relations.

What is compelling in Butler’s account of power and national difference is the attempt to take account of affectivity in light of the political construction of national difference. Her handling of borders and boundaries provides a specificity that is lacking in Braidotti’s discussion of sustainability. That the US could appear bounded and sovereign as a nation-state relies on a similar process through which members of privileged social groups come to embody (however imperfectly) the liberal ideal of the autonomous individual. This is

a primary concern for Butler (2004a) in *Precarious Life* where she engages with how the human has been variably constructed in ways that exclude the vulnerability of some, making them unreal (33).

Butler’s theoretical elaboration on the connection between national borders and affective boundaries allows the naming of the political origin of oppressive transgression of these boundaries and thus potentially political solutions. Braidotti, on the other hand, rejects a politics that attempts to avoid pain or seeks redress for these transgressions. One of the consequences of such an ethics is that violence is not objected to because it violates the autonomy of the bounded individual as an end in him or herself, but because “the harm you do to others is immediately reflected in the harm you do to yourself, in terms of loss of *potentia*, positivity, self-awareness and inner freedom” (Braidotti 2006a, 157). This analysis of relational freedom seems compatible with Indigenous conceptualizations of responsibility to relations, yet it downplays the political nature of resurgence against colonial harm by collapsing avoidable political pain with random suffering that flows from the chaos of material reality. In “Affirmation Versus Vulnerability,” Braidotti (2006b) argues that nomadic ethics should not seek to avoid pain, but rather avoid the “stultifying effects of passivity” associated with pain (242). For Braidotti (2006a), our responsibility to those we harm “...calls for recognition, acknowledgement and understanding: this is the only ethical freedom we dispose of” (151). Yet, it remains unclear who is doing the recognizing and what conditions are required for recognition. Glen Coulthard (2007) provides a stinging critique of dominant settler politics of recognition that are inherently asymmetrical and that replicate the colonial relationship by placing the power to recognize squarely with the settler-state. In light of this critique, it seems likely that self-assertion of Indigenous national identity is one of these conditions for sustainable affective relations.

Indigenous Nationhoods: Toward a Nuanced Reading of Relational Political Borders

I want to turn now to the question of Indigenous nationhoods in Canada and how it can productively inform the Euro/American theories of affective relationality under discussion. From my location in British Columbia, Canada, one of the most pressing po-

litical issues of the day is the proposed construction of liquefied natural gas and bitumen pipelines across Indigenous territories. Anywhere in the world, these project could become a contentious issue of environmental sustainability, but in British Columbia—where very few treaties between Indigenous nations and Canada have been signed, making the land *unceded Indigenous territories*—the controversy has become a question of land, boundaries, and nationhood. It is a question of who gets to cross and transgress boundaries.

The continuing currency of the concept of Indigenous nationhood provides grounds for questioning the post-national impetus behind Butler and Braidotti's work. Braidotti's theory grows out of a legitimate concern about fascism and nationalism in Europe, but this basis then leads to an ethical theory of relationality that, when applied in Canada, severely limits attempts at decolonization through Indigenous nation building. What might the implications be if Indigenous conceptions of nation are given priority? What might this tell us about the potentially liberatory potential of national identity that is not nomadic, but rather is intimately tied to territory and provides an alternative to clearly demarcated nation-states constituted on othering?

While the conceptions of nation discussed above challenge the exclusions and boundaries of the Western nation-state, this does not mean that they are completely unbounded. In returning to the question of pipeline development, members of the Unist'ot'en Clan of the Wet'suwet'en nation have been actively asserting traditional regulation of territorial boundaries. In August 2010, hereditary leaders Toghestiy and Hagwilakw presented an eagle feather to Enbridge representatives as a "first and final" warning of trespass on Wet'suwet'en territory (Unist'ot'en Camp, "Trespass Notice" 2010). This is in keeping with traditional Wet'suwet'en law that requires guests to fully identify themselves, ask permission to enter Wet'suwet'en territory, and be granted this permission prior to entry (Unist'ot'en Camp, "Consent Protocol"). Because of the incursion of settler industry onto Unist'ot'en territory, several community members have created a camp in the proposed pipeline route that they describe as a "gateway (not a blockade)" (Unist'ot'en Camp, "Northern Gateway"). This example of grassroots assertion of territorial boundaries points to one facet of a boundary of responsibility. Settlers—and non-Wet'suwet'en Indigenous peoples—have a re-

sponsibility to respect the laws of the land so that decolonized relationships can be built across boundaries and "gateways." It is crucial to note that this assertion of boundary is not the same as wall building; if guests are willing to develop good relations, to be responsible, they will be welcomed. It is not a fixed characteristic of outsiders that makes them outsiders, but rather it is their actions as settler developers, their refusal to acknowledge Indigenous title and laws that makes them trespassers.

Colonialism in Canada is a complex and multifaceted process that can be partly understood as unreciprocated transgression of boundaries. Braidotti's nomadic ethics would suggest that, for members of settler society, there is a loss of *potentia* by continuing colonial relations because of a loss of affective connections with Indigenous peoples. The problem is that for most non-Indigenous people in Canada, the status quo is working out fairly well. There is very little incentive to allow the Crown to negotiate a relationship with Indigenous nations that would be truly sustainable and decolonized as this would require not only significant transfer of land wealth, but a complete reconceptualization and questioning of Canadian sovereignty to bring it in line with principles of co-existing relational sovereignty. Braidotti's view that the origin of suffering cannot be adequately determined and that compensation is politically futile takes on a colonialist flavour in British Columbia where settlers are for the most part squatters on Indigenous territory. This is not to say that "we"—that is, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike—should not work toward transforming pain into something productive and figuring out how to live together. However, settlers must open our eyes to Indigenous national resurgence as *political* action and as political action that entails responsibility to building good relations. It seems that sustainable relational affectivity from my location, as a settler, first requires respect of relational boundaries. Political action against settler trespassing—especially state supported development without Indigenous consent—as well as action toward positive settler-Indigenous relation building are two sides of the question of responsibility. Respect of boundaries does not shut down the type of relational affectivity that Braidotti supports, but rather is the precondition for it.

Butler's focus on normative political limits to affectivity has its own shortcomings when it comes to

Indigenous nations. As discussed above, normative identity claims are a necessary precondition for political action in Butler's work, but they are also inherently exclusionary. However, the initial discussion of Indigenous conceptions of nationhood suggests that this political form is not inherently exclusionary in the same way as the nation-state. Butler's claim that, in the face of violent transgression of sovereignty, one can accept vulnerability and interdependence or, alternatively, shore up xenophobic borders is a false dilemma. Perhaps inter-dependence demands a political form like Indigenous nationhood where good relations with other communities are essential to good domestic relations. This conceptualization does not rely on a static and essentialist identity nor does it reduce Indigenous peoplehood to a normative identity based solely in resistance. Indigenous relational belonging offers theories—provided by Indigenous scholars—as well as concrete historical examples of political forms that are ignored in Butler's focus on the dangers of the European tradition of the nation-state.

This brings me directly to the question of both theorists' anti/post-nationalism in light of Indigenous nationhood. In discussing identity claims, Braidotti (2006a) concedes that "feminists, anti-racists and human rights activists, at this point in history are legitimate in pursuing "molar" positions, claiming identity-centred redefinition of their political subjectivity" (154). Given the fact that Braidotti argues for the productivity of difference—that is, the others of modernity including "natives" provide productive alternative subjectivities—it is better to think of Indigenous nationhood not as a "molar" identity, or a strategic norm in Butler's case, but rather as productive difference. For example, Anishinaabek legal scholar John Borrows (2010) argues that the Anishinaabek belief in a living earth and obligations to this earth presents a challenge to the liberal legal tradition in Canada and serves as a productive reason for adopting legal pluralism in Canada (249). Unlike a reactionary xenophobic nationalism, the recognition of Indigenous peoplehood is complementary to projects that aim to disrupt the autonomous liberal subject by highlighting mutual interdependence.

Despite her ambivalence toward Arendt's public/private distinction, it is Butler's focus on *the political* as a site of human action that might allow an adequate assessment of non-Indigenous responsibility in

respecting relational borders. Braidotti's focus on affective sustainability risks eliminating the political agency required to build sustainable decolonized relationships in Canada. That said, Braidotti's refusal of anthropocentrism provides a "European" theory that can respect the deep differences between the European nation-state and Indigenous nationhood by accepting the interdependence of human, animal, and environment. Once again, Indigenous conceptualizations of nationhood demonstrate that choosing between political agency and a holistic anti-anthropocentrism is a false binary. Indigenous nationhood is deeply political, but it does not require the human to define itself against an external nature.

This brief discussion of Indigenous nationhood does not show that either Butler or Braidotti is wrong. It simply reinforces that they are approaching affect from a specific location, which they both acknowledge. Likewise, my location is limited, but suggests that these two theorists are perhaps too hasty in pursuing post-national theories of affect. If one reads Braidotti in light of the political significance of relational national boundaries, the concept of sustainability could be extended to include agency against "negative" affects such as pain. The ethics of a sustainable nomadism would then also require avoidance of pain and an acknowledgement of the source of the pain in order to prevent it. This shift in thinking requires that, though boundaries are always dynamic, ethics involve respecting these boundaries as much as it involves understanding the in-betweenness that makes these boundaries possible.

For Butler, a closer examination of power dynamics in her concept of vulnerability is required to account for the limits of the subject. One might argue that a pre-requisite for acknowledging the shared condition of vulnerability is a level of respect for the boundaries of the corporeal subject, which is intimately linked with respect for national boundaries; otherwise, an appeal to vulnerability will appear as nothing more than an attempt to conceal the colonial relationship with a false universalism. Therefore, the dialogue and coalition politics that Butler borrows from Chandra Mohanty would be as much about recognizing the fluidity of identity categories as recognizing the territorial crystallization of these identities in Indigenous nations.

The implications of Butler and Braidotti's work provide convincing theoretical grounds for rejecting a

fully discrete, bounded, and autonomous subject, which is usually associated with European liberalism. However, their theories also imply that a fully contingent and open subject is not only a poor description of the contemporary subject, but it is also not a normative ideal. If both Butler's and Braidotti's diagnoses of a post-national world require revision in light of the complexities of Indigenous nationhoods, then so do their affectively constituted subjects. This paper is not the place to begin a full development of what this hybrid subjectivity looks like, but the cited Indigenous scholars provide an entry point into this discussion. Upon initial inspection, it appears possible to balance Butler's focus on the political and cultural realm with Braidotti's privileging of non-human vitalism. It also appears possible to develop a transformative political realm nationally and transnationally, which does not cut off "the human" from its environment. My hope is that this engagement has demonstrated not only the limits of the location from which Butler and Braidotti are theorizing, but also the contribution of Indigenous thought on its own terms.

Endnotes

¹ I use the plural 'nationhoods' to indicate the varied national traditions of different First Peoples. This paper offers a cursory view of some conceptions of 'nation' and political community that should not be taken as representative of a homogeneous 'Indigenous' worldview. Examples of Oneida and Mohawk national traditions will be unique from Wet'suwet'en traditions, yet these diverse examples all point to alternate understandings of nation and territory in contrast to European traditions.

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