

Collective Love as Public Freedom: Dancing Resistance. Ehrenreich, Arendt, Kristeva, and *Idle No More*

ALLISON WEIR

In the Indigenous resistance movement that came to be known as “Idle No More,” round dances played a central role. From the beginning of the movement in western Canada in the winter of 2012–13, and as it spread across Turtle Island (North America) and throughout the world, round dances served to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists with people in the streets. “At almost every event, we collectively embodied our diverse and ancient traditions in the round dance by taking the movement to the streets, malls and highways across Turtle Island” (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014, 24). But why was the round dance important, and how does the dance work to support political resistance?

In this article I argue that the round dance is a skilled ritual practice of collective love as *philo Xenia* (love for the stranger) that works as a practice of public freedom. Drawing on Barbara Ehrenreich’s history of circle dance rituals as practices of what she calls “collective love” (Ehrenreich 2007), I argue that the concept of collective love as a ritual practice has important implications for a political theory of public freedom. In modern Western political thought, collective love has been feminized and repudiated as dangerous, romantic, and apolitical—even antipolitical. Love, for most modern Western political thinkers, is not connected to political freedom. Hannah Arendt was drawn to the idea of love as a basis of public freedom. But although she argued for the importance of *amor mundi*—love of the world—and for *philia*, or political friendship, she ultimately rejected most forms of love as unpolitical and unworldly. Arendt recognized all too well the danger of a collective love that is insular and exclusive: such love is the glue of nationalism, racism, and the totalitarian state. So Arendt turned to agonistic relations of discourse and debate to define her theory of public participatory freedom. I take up Arendt’s discussions of the relations between freedom and love to argue that practices of collective love *can* be important practices of open and inclusive, public and political, antipatriarchal freedom, if they

Hypatia vol. 32, no. 1 (Winter 2017) © by Hypatia, Inc.

are practices of *philoxenia*, or love for the stranger. I draw on Julia Kristeva's psychoanalytic theory, on the concept of the exemplar in Gandhi and in Indigenous philosophy, and on Indigenous philosophies of the circle dance, specifically in the context of Idle No More, to theorize a practice of collective love that is open and inclusive, and that can support public freedom.

The idea of love as a revolutionary force is not new. In her book *All about Love: New Visions*, bell hooks writes that all of the great social movements for freedom and justice in our society have promoted an ethic of love (hooks 2000). And feminist theorists in the "love and justice" tradition have long argued that love is essential to political movements (Lorde 1984; Collins 1990). More recently, Ann Ferguson and Rosemary Hennessy have argued for the importance of attending to the affect of revolutionary love (Ferguson 2014; Hennessy 2014).

In political theory, the idea of revolutionary love has been taken up in several books by the political theorists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (Hardt and Negri 2004). But as theorists of feminist love studies have argued, the conception of love proposed by Hardt and Negri is a rather vague "romanticisation of the undifferentiated multitude" (Ferguson and Jónasdóttir 2014, 6). Although they argue for a conception of love that can infuse a broad-based revolution, Hardt and Negri assume that we can simply generalize from love in the private sphere to the public, and they fail to problematize the complex relations between private and public, intersectional identities. And though they criticize the "love of the same" that is the basis of nationalism, racism, and fundamentalism, and argue that that love must be extended to embrace others and strangers, they give no indication as to how this might be possible (see Ferguson 2014; Hennessy 2014; Wilkinson 2014). In this article I draw on a diverse range of theories to give a theoretical account of how love for the stranger might be possible. I focus on the circle dances of Idle No More to show how the ritual of the circle dance works as a practice of *philoxenia*. This ritual enacts a form of collective love with its own specificity and its own history. I argue that it can be seen as a feminist practice: a practice of mourning and celebration that resists patriarchal violence.

A HISTORY OF COLLECTIVE LOVE

In virtually all small-scale societies studied by anthropologists, ecstatic rituals involving dance, chanting and singing, masks, costumes, and feasts, and often trance, have been recorded. Emile Durkheim argued that this *collective effervescence* was an expression of the experience of the sacred, and at the root of religious life; he argued that the rituals served to solidify social bonds (Durkheim 1915). The anthropologist Victor Turner believed that ecstatic rituals are expressions of what he called *communitas*: "an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be *no society*" (Turner 1969, 97).

In *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*, Barbara Ehrenreich argues that these rituals, and the experience of *communitas* they enact, are expressions of a

particular form of *love*: “the spontaneous love and solidarity that can arise within a community of equals” (Ehrenreich 2007, 10). We have, Ehrenreich notes, no word for this kind of collective love, which she distinguishes from erotic love. “What we lack is any way of describing and understanding the ‘love’ that may exist among dozens of people at a time; and it is this kind of love that is expressed in ecstatic ritual” (14). This absence is interesting, given that this form of love, performed in ecstatic rituals and festive dance, in particular circle dances, seems to be foundational to virtually all societies. Rock drawings depicting dancing figures have been found in Africa, India, Australia, as well as southern Europe and the Middle East. The archaeologist Yosef Garfinkel argues that dancing scenes “were a most popular, indeed almost the only, subject used to describe interaction between people in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods” (quoted in Ehrenreich 2007, 22). In other words, as Ehrenreich notes, “well before people had a written language, and possibly before they took up a settled lifestyle, they danced and understood dancing as an activity important enough to record on stone” (22). Evolutionary biologists and psychologists argue that dance preceded speech in human development. Ehrenreich notes that anthropologists tend to agree that dance served an evolutionary function: to hold humans together in groups. And she points out that it holds people together—and works much better than talking—because it is a source of a deep collective joy, a pleasure that could be called love.

With her characteristic exuberance and creativity, Ehrenreich traces practices of collective joy and love through Greek and Roman cultures, focusing on the cult of Dionysus and its continuation in early Christianity. Women and the poor and marginalized played leading roles in these cults, and the danced rituals overturned hierarchies: Turner argues that in rituals of *communitas*, the lowly and marginal often attain a sacred status, with magical powers, which he describes as “the mystical powers of the weak” (Turner 1969, 109). Ehrenreich also notes that these rituals maintained the worship of a variety of deities, including the earth goddesses, through the emergence of patriarchal Greek and Roman cultures, and through the development of Christianity: the Jesus cults often preserved the Dionysian, which in turn continued the worship of the older, agrarian earth goddesses. The danced rituals that held groups together thousands of years ago are repeated in the circle dances of European festivals and are performed in many Indigenous communities today.

COLLECTIVE LOVE AS FREEDOM?

Ehrenreich provides a rich and compelling account of the history of ritual as a history of collective love. But she does not explicitly connect this history to theories of freedom. What then is the relationship between practices of collective love and practices of *freedom*?

For Turner, *communitas* is complementary to social structures: rituals of *communitas* suspend the rules, roles, and temporality of society, elevating those of low or marginal status and debasing the powerful, providing an experience of an egalitarian “we” and

of the uniqueness of the individual that serves to strengthen social bonds and facilitates reintegration. So it can be argued that the rituals allow for a freedom from social structures, while ensuring that those structures are renewed. Ehrenreich suggests instead the potential for *resistance* to and *liberation* from those structures. The “rituals of inversion” that characterize carnivalesque rituals and festivals are forms of resistance to social hierarchies, and although this resistance is often temporary and contained, it also often overflows the boundaries of containment to support sustained struggles for political freedom. Moreover, I want to emphasize the distinctiveness of the experience of freedom in the practice of *communitas*, or collective love, itself. This is an embodied and playful freedom, expressed in movement and song, costume and feasting, a celebration of being-with. So collective love is a form of freedom with its own organizing principles and with its own substantive experiential content. It involves the overturning of hierarchies and the practice of equality among heterogeneous participants, inclusive of all in the solidarity of a “we” that supports the expression of individuality and diversity. It is an embodied freedom, a freedom of bodies and pleasures that resists the patriarchal social order. I would argue that it is this experience of freedom in love that underlies solidarity, and it has its own history.

This would mean that although freedom in ancient Rome referred to a status—not being a slave—it also invoked a subversion of the binary slave/not slave, a subversion that was commonly performed in rituals that the Roman government perceived as a threat, and attempted to suppress. These rituals performed freedom in collective love, a dangerous freedom that threatened to overturn hierarchies of slave and master, plebeian and patrician.

PLEASURE AND DANGER: LOVE AND FREEDOM IN RESISTANCE

Political theorists have typically not regarded practices of collective love as practices of public freedom. Although practices of collective love have been taken up by political movements—including most recently the Idle No More movement, the queer politics of ACT Up and pride parades, and the antiglobalization and Occupy movements—political commentators typically dismiss these practices as romantic and apolitical: as distractions from the serious work of politics. Theorists of political solidarity also tend to prioritize political commitment and rational moral responsibility over affective relations. As Hennessy argues, the circulation of love “through the affective attachments of organizing is one of the under-theorized features of social movement” (Hennessy 2014, 270). Thus the importance of alternative “affective economies” for political movements is too often ignored (Ferguson 2014).

The perception of collective love as apolitical is closely linked to a fear that it is dangerous. Ehrenreich notes that the deep pleasure experienced in collective ecstatic rituals has often been treated with suspicion by Western anthropologists (including Turner), who have seen it as a form of savagery, or have stressed its role as a temporary suspension of rules that must be reinstated, to prevent degeneration into wildness and anarchy. This suspicion mirrors the attitude of the Greek and Roman

governments, which outlawed the cults. But it also mirrors the sense of danger in the sacred often experienced in the cults themselves. In the past century, collective joy has been linked to the fascist romanticism of blood and soil, and to the mindless crowds of fascist festivals, celebrations of the triumph of totalitarianism over the individual. But Ehrenreich points out that Nazi rallies were not festivals of collective joy but spectacles of military might, involving not dancing and feasting but marching. They did not overturn hierarchies but were organized and rigidly controlled by the Party. Ehrenreich argues that the contemporary horror of crowds and festivals can be traced back to the French Revolution, when the revolutionaries feared that the peasant uprisings that supported the revolution were also sources of resistance to the new order. And the late nineteenth-century Gustave Le Bon's descriptions of the crowd as a form of insanity were uncritically taken up by Freud and by political theorists.

For modern Westerners, a primary danger of Dionysian ritual and festival is the danger of self-loss: the dissolution of self in the unity of the group. The term *Dionysian* conjures images of wild abandon, drunkenness, and self-loss, which can veer toward madness. Thus the freedom it evokes is not political freedom but the freedom of self-loss, a brief return to what Nietzsche referred to as "primal being." As many feminist theorists have argued, this fear of self-loss is connected to a fear of regression to the womb, to a dependence on a fantasied all-powerful mother (see Irigaray 1985).

So it is important to emphasize that for Turner rituals of *communitas* actually involve an enhancement of individual uniqueness, and an experience and recognition of self and other as unique and independent beings. Turner explicates this experience of equal individuals in community who recognize one another's individuality in terms of Martin Buber's encounter between "I and thou" in an "essential We": "a community of several independent persons, who have a self and self-responsibility" (Turner 1969, 137, quoting Buber).

But the perception of rituals of collective love as dangerous is also quite accurate: in Ehrenreich's account, these are rituals that overturn hierarchies, that include and are often led by women and the poor and marginalized. They invoke the possibility of rebellion against patriarchal power, and the continued power of the cults of matrilineal earth goddesses as sources of subversion, rooted in a powerful experience of embodied and collective freedom. So the association of collective love with the devouring mother is connected with the threat of feminist rebellion. Thus they are indeed dangerous—but they are certainly not apolitical!

Ehrenreich distinguishes between rituals of collective love that are open and inclusive, and rituals of racist nationalisms, defining such rituals as something other than collective love. She provides clear criteria for the practices that constitute collective love. Yet the danger of nationalist and racist rituals still haunts any invocation of collective love as a practice of freedom. In his early descriptions of rituals of *communitas*, Turner argued that they involved obedience to a leader, and only served to reaffirm hierarchies. He later broadened his understanding of *communitas* to include practices of carnival and group experiences of "flow" that were more egalitarian and open-ended. But it is important to theorize how practices of collective love can be open and inclusive, and how they can perform public freedom.

FREEDOM AND LOVE IN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY: HANNAH ARENDT

Hannah Arendt argued that freedom is a practice, connected to natality, to birth: the capacity to begin. For Arendt this meant the capacity for spontaneity, the capacity to create, to act, but most important, the capacity of citizens to act and interact together in the public realm, to participate in the public realm of the *polis*, and in the political creation of a new republic. Arendt locates the roots of the practice of public participation in the Greek *polis*.

Arendt was engaged throughout her work with the exploration of various concepts of love as the source of the public bonds or connections that could hold human actors together in the public realm. Thus we could say that Arendt actively sought the sources of her conception of freedom as political participation in the public realm in forms of collective love. In this she drew on a long tradition in Greek and Latin philosophy in which love was seen as the source of relatively durable relationships, or *vincula*. In this tradition, love was regarded as “the inner organ for freedom” and as “the spring of action” (from Arendt 1978, quoted in Chiba 1995, 507). As Shin Chiba writes in her analysis of the concept of love in Arendt’s work, “Arendt’s vision of a politics of freedom reveals its fundamental structure as a political theory of *amor mundi*, love of the world” (Chiba 1995, 506).

But Arendt was ambivalent about the possibility of love as a source of public freedom. Her doctoral dissertation, “Der Liebesbegriffe bei Augustin,” distinguished among forms of love in Augustine, focusing on *agape* or *caritas*; the working title for her major work, *The Human Condition*, was *Amor Mundi*. Yet in her mature work, she frequently argued that love was opposed to politics: “Love, by its very nature, is unworldly, and it is for this reason rather than its rarity that it is not only apolitical but antipolitical, perhaps the most powerful of all antipolitical human forces” (Arendt 1958/1998, 242). Love, for Arendt, was “unworldly” because it collapses the distance between individuals, dissolving human plurality and difference into an undifferentiated unity. For Arendt, political freedom requires that participants engage with a common world; in love, people focus only on each other: “Love, by reason of its passion, destroys the in-between which relates us to and separates us from others” (242). Here she is clearly referring to romantic love, but she also extends this critique to *agape*, arguing against the Christian belief that forgiveness (which she sees as essential to freedom from vengeance) is possible only through love. Instead, respect, which is a kind of friendship “without intimacy and without closeness” is the basis of political life (243). Thus Arendt distinguishes friendship, Aristotle’s *philia politikē*, and the idea of *amor mundi*, or love of the world, which she roots in the ancient love for earthly immortality, from other forms of love, including not only romantic love but fraternity, as well as pity and compassion. Chiba argues that there is a tension in Arendt’s work between the classical objective conception of love as “the universal quest for a public bond immanent in the human condition” and the modern subjective understanding of love as “mere sentiment or emotion” (Chiba 1995, 510).

Arendt’s conception of freedom as political participation draws on Aristotle’s association of *philia*—the form of love that is friendship—with the *polis*. The friendship

that constitutes political freedom, for Arendt, is focused on discourse, discussion, and debate among equal participants in the public realm. “For the Greeks, the essence of friendship consisted in discourse. They held that only the constant interchange of talk united citizens in a *polis*. In discourse the political importance of friendship, and humanness peculiar to it, were made manifest.” In fact, she writes, for the Greeks, “the common world . . . remains ‘inhuman’ in a very literal sense unless it is constantly talked about by human beings” (Arendt 1968, 24). Arendt valued political friendship for its world-building capacity: its capacity to create a community of equals focused on a common world. And she believed that a common world is created through political discourse: through agonistic contest conducted through discourse and debate in the public realm. Thus *amor mundi*, love of the world, involves the creation of the world through political discourse among equal citizens, and this is the essence of political freedom.

Although discourse and argument are certainly essential to public freedom, it is not true that only “the constant interchange of talk” unites citizens in a *polis*. As we have seen, anthropologists argue that communities are held together primarily not through discourse but through rituals of *communitas*, and the earliest social bonds were created through dance. These rituals did not involve discourse on common issues or problems. But these rituals are very much focused on a common world: as I shall show, in Indigenous philosophy, as in Ehrenreich’s account, the participants consciously affirm equality among heterogeneous individuals and groups, and consciously overturn hierarchies of status and power, to create a community of equal individuals. In other words, power and difference are thematized, not discursively, but in a playful practice of transformation that temporarily actualizes an imagined equality. I would certainly not argue that dance and song should *replace* discourse and debate as essential to political freedom. I am arguing that rituals of collective love enact and sustain a practice of public freedom that creates a better affective context for democratic discourse and debate than agonistic contests. Moreover, these rituals can in themselves practice an alternative form of politics.

But if they are to avoid nationalism and exclusiveness, these rituals must be expressions of what Epicurus called *philoxenia*. In contrast to Aristotle’s *philia*, which united citizens in their sameness, and excluded noncitizens, Epicurus argued for the importance of friendship as *philoxenia*: love for strangers, or foreigners, who are guests. And as Leela Gandhi points out, *philoxenia* was posited by the Epicureans explicitly against the exclusive form of friendship that is the basis of the *polis*, which was seen as an “unfriendly place,” “destructive of friendship” (Gandhi 2006, 29). The citizenship of free men in the *polis* was based on the exclusion of strangers and slaves, and women. *Philoxenia* is a form of love that constitutes community with those who are excluded from the status and power of citizens, with different and heterogeneous others. Thus it is surely a better *affective* basis for political freedom than is Aristotle’s *philia*. And as I shall show, it is *philoxenia* that is the affective ethos of the danced rituals of collective love in many Indigenous practices. The dances that affirm equality among diverse participants and that overturn hierarchies of status and power thus enact and sustain what Gandhi calls “*philoxenic* solidarity.”

Arendt would surely agree that *philoxenia* would be essential to public political freedom. A central concern in much of her work was the inclusion of outsiders, in particular Jews and refugees, in the common public world. As Chiba notes, Arendt's *amor mundi*, love of the world that we share, was meant to include outsiders: "One's readiness to live together with those who are different, diversified, and heterogeneous, is the essential ingredient of *amor mundi*" (Chiba 1995, 534). But in arguing that the public realm is a realm of freedom because it is free from necessity, Arendt perpetuates the exclusiveness of this realm, governed by a *philia* untainted by the relationships that govern the realms of the household and the economy, the realms of work and labor and the body. Yet practices of collective love are also practices of freedom in part because they are free from these realms of necessity. The difference is that they include those who are normally relegated to these realms, and can include a politics of resistance to this relegation.

Would Arendt be able to see danced rituals of collective love as practices of public freedom? She might concede that collective dance and song are sources of community. Certainly they are expressions of the creativity and spontaneity that Arendt associated with natality and with freedom. But as embodied and nondiscursive practices of collective love, she would see them as unworldly, as fraternal and social rather than political. In *On Revolution*, Arendt wrote that in contrast to the American Revolution, the French Revolution manifested not as deliberation, discussion, and decision, but as the "intoxication" of "the crowd" (Arendt 1963, 120). And she goes so far as to argue that the French Revolution devolved into the Terror because it lost its focus on freedom and sank to the realm of necessity, driven by the claims of the poor. Thus it shifted from a political practice of freedom to a social practice rooted in claims of necessity. Hanna Pitkin has argued that Arendt's repudiation of the social as opposed to the political can be read as an expression of a fear of the social as "the Blob": "the Blob is a fantasy of regression of losing one's separate self and being once more dissolved in—swallowed up by—an engulfing mother" (Pitkin 1995, 79; see also Pitkin 1998). The social is feminized and feared as antipolitical and dangerous. Probably the embodied freedom of collective love would appear to Arendt as an instantiation of the Blob.

Arendt did embrace an ideal of "public happiness" that was synonymous with political freedom. In *On Revolution*, she argues that the American Revolution was successful because it was a practice of freedom of those who were experienced in the art of public freedom, which they experienced as public happiness. Arendt writes: "the Americans knew that public freedom consisted in having a share in public business, and that the activities connected with this business by no means constituted a burden but gave those who discharged them in public a feeling of happiness they could acquire nowhere else" (Arendt 1963, 119). They understood their participation in democratic governance not simply as a duty, nor as a means to serve their self-interest, but "most of all because they enjoyed the discussions, the deliberations, and the making of decisions" (119). Thus Arendt argues that happiness and enjoyment are essential to freedom. But what exactly was it that the Americans enjoyed?

“What brought them together was ‘the world and the public interest of liberty’ (Harrington), and what moved them was ‘the passion for distinction’ which John Adams held to be ‘more essential and remarkable’ than any other human faculty” (Arendt 1963, 119). Arendt quotes Adams, who writes: “every individual is seen to be strongly actuated by a desire to be seen, heard, talked of, approved and respected by the people about him, and within his knowledge” (119). Arendt concurs with Adams that the chief virtue of political man is this desire to be seen, and “to excel another.” The chief vice is ambition, which “aims at power as a means of distinction” (119). Thus ambition must be met with and checked by the ambition of others (135). Thus the motivation for public freedom, and public happiness, for Arendt, is the passion to be seen, to be of significance, to “excel another”: “It is the desire to excel which makes men love the world and enjoy the company of their peers, and drives them into public business” (120).

I agree with Arendt that the experience and practice of public happiness is essential to democracy. But I do not agree that the desire to appear and to excel another are its definitive or most useful motivations. Certainly the desires to appear and to be recognized as significant and to excel another are strong motivations for public life. But we have seen where these desires can lead: to a culture in which the pursuit of fame is the most pressing pursuit, and where the desire to excel degenerates into the kind of agonistic contest that produces only winners and losers. Of course for Arendt, the desire for appearance is not simply a desire for fame and recognition. Arendt is invoking the concept of appearance in Heidegger, and in Aristotle, as the disclosure of being in a social world. So appearance is essentially related to *Mitsein*—being with. For Arendt the desire to appear is essential to freedom rooted in natality. And for Arendt it is crucially important that the individual appear in his uniqueness and not dissolve into the “we.” But I would argue that the experience of pleasure in democratic freedom that should be emphasized is not so much the pleasure of appearing to others, and being seen to excel, and not so much the pleasure in excelling others, but the pleasure of *being with* others, and acting together. Surely it is this pleasure that is more likely to support working together in the pursuit of social justice. In her discussion of public happiness in *On Revolution*, Arendt does not seriously consider the *violence* that the desire to excel another—agonistic contest—can produce if it is not played out in the context of an affective ethos in which we prioritize the pleasure of being together, and in which we embrace the otherness of the other.

LOVING THE STRANGER: JULIA KRISTEVA

Julia Kristeva argues that in her discussions of public happiness, Arendt failed to give serious consideration to the characteristic vice of political life: the tendency to domination (Kristeva 2001). Kristeva argues that if we attend to the role of the body and the psyche in the event of natality, we can better understand the tendency to violence and domination as an effect of the inability to mourn the loss of the original object—the original other—the mother. Drawing on Melanie Klein, Kristeva writes

that the separation of self from the mother is experienced as pain and anxiety, fear of destruction, which is abjected and projected onto the mother, who is blamed and attacked. Only through the capacity to mourn the loss of the good object—the mother—is the child able to move from destructiveness into gratitude and love, to hold together the good and bad object, to experience both the pain of loss and the pleasure of gratitude together. As Peg Birmingham writes, “The fragmentation and splitting characteristic of the paranoid-schizoid position is transformed into gratitude for the ‘whole object’ whose ineradicable loss is now mourned. The transformation of the violence of the death drive into gratitude occurs through the mourning of the object which remains forever foreign and alien in a primordial and irrecoverable separation” (Birmingham 2003, 70). Thus Birmingham argues that Kristeva’s analysis of Klein shows that this violence can give way to pleasure through gratitude for the foreigner, replacing destructiveness with reparation and love: “Kristeva, following Klein, shows how both anxiety (associated with the death drive) and gratitude (which, like Arendt, she locates in memory and mourning) are part of the event of natality” (69). For Birmingham, this gratitude for the foreigner, rooted in the event of natality, which is the source of both destructiveness and love, is the missing piece in Arendt’s understanding of our pleasure in the company of others. “The *affective ethos* that underlies public happiness, therefore, is gratitude for what remains ineradicably alien and foreign. It alone makes possible pleasure rather than grief in the company of others” (73).

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva argues that the capacity to live with and love the foreigner requires the capacity to *be the other*: “Living with the other, the foreigner, confronts us with the possibility or not of *being the other*. It is not simply—humanistically—a matter of our being able to accept the other, but of *being in his place*” (Kristeva 1991, 11; quoted in Birmingham 2003, 71). For Kristeva this requires accepting the otherness within ourselves, and the strangeness of ourselves—“to make oneself other for oneself.” And this is possible only if we are able to mourn the loss of the original object—the mother—and to integrate that loss into a capacity to hold ourselves together.

In the remainder of this article, I argue that the practice of *being the other* reflects the importance of the *exemplar*, or “being the change,” in many Indigenous philosophies. And *being the other* is central to the masked dances in rituals of collective love. Finally, the practice of the circle dance ritually enacts the mourning of the lost mother, who is included in a collective practice of holding together.

AN ALTERNATIVE POLITICS OF FREEDOM: BEING THE CHANGE/BEING THE OTHER

In his analysis of the political philosophy of Mohandas Gandhi, Akeel Bilgrami has argued that the integrating theme in Gandhi’s thought is the idea of exemplary action. The practice of nonviolence requires exemplary action, rather than criticism. The originality of Gandhi’s thought lies in the fact that “the concept of the exemplar is intended to provide a wholesale alternative to the concept of principle in moral

philosophy” (Bilgrami 2014, 112). One can be confident in one’s actions and the example they set without arrogance, and without generating a principle by which we judge others. Rather, the example is a form of action that will itself create a transformation in the world. Thus, Gandhi believed that “there is no true non-violence until criticism is removed from the scope of morals” (114–15). Although he admires the romanticism of Gandhi’s thought, Bilgrami argues that this position is based in fear, in a religious pessimism about human nature: a fear that if we criticize and argue, we will not be able to get beyond conflict, and will descend into violence. Modernity’s great achievement, for Bilgrami, is the commitment to political means of dealing with conflict, to allow democratic contestation without destruction.

But, in fact, the commitment to exemplary action, rather than critique, is an ethics that has sustained democratic practices in many Indigenous societies. Many contemporary Indigenous philosophers and political theorists argue that an ethics of nonconfrontation, an avoidance of direct confrontation or critique, is common to many Indigenous cultures. Elders teach children not through direct instruction but through stories that provide exemplars to guide choices, and through their own exemplary action. Direct criticism is considered disrespectful, and is avoided in relations among adults as well (McPherson and Rabb 2011, 104–108). We can see these practices as rooted in fear. But we know that Indigenous societies did have highly developed systems of democratic governance both within and between nations. One example is the Iroquois Confederacy, and the Great Law of Peace.

What distinguishes Indigenous worldviews is a conception of the person in connection to “all my relations”: relations that include those among humans as well as relations with all elements of nature, as well as the ancestors. This underlies a conception of *freedom* as an experience and practice of empowerment in connection to “all my relations.”¹ Thus we can see the resistance to direct confrontation as integral to an Indigenous worldview: a belief that if I criticize and attack my relations, I diminish my own freedom, and the freedom of all. This worldview supports a different understanding of the practice of democracy, in which conflicting views are expressed through respectful dialogue, oriented toward consensus.

The ethics of exemplary action, or “being the change,” are rooted in an ethics of mimesis. In his essay “Reconciliation Here on Earth,” James Tully argues that the alienation of colonizing societies from Indigenous peoples and from the earth can only be overcome by recovering the reciprocal practices of reconciliation that governed Indigenous societies:

So, to respond to this crisis we need to free ourselves from the one-eyed perspective our unsustainable system gives us. We need to move around and see the crisis from other eyes: from the perspectives of other members of the underlying interdependent commonwealth of all forms of life. The Haida have a wonderful way of doing this. They put on a mask of the other living being whose perspective they wish to inhabit. Wearing the mask *and* performing the appropriate dance enables the person to see and experience the mode of being-with-others of the animal the mask

represents. As Lévi-Strauss noted, “the essential function of the mask is the *transformation* of the individual wearer into another being.”

The crucial feature of this *transformation* is that the wearer not only wears the mask, but dances in a way that participates in the way of life of the other being. That is, we can get ourselves out of our one-eyed view of the world only by moving around and participating in another way of being in the pluriverse. This is the central feature of the practices of reconciliation We have to begin to “be the change” by exercising and enacting our shared responsibilities if we wish to disclose and bring to self-awareness the underlying sustainable world we wish to re-inhabit. (Tully 2012, 23)

Here Tully is recognizing the practice of mimesis as a practice of “being the change”: a practice of freedom, and transformation. The danced rituals are not just practices of belonging; they are mimetic rituals that reconcile conflict not through argument and debate, and not just through listening to others’ perspectives, but through, for that moment, *becoming the others*: wearing their faces, dancing their dances. Through this practice participants transform themselves, and thereby transform the collective. We can see these rituals as techniques of love and freedom, practices of the skill of holding together, which is essential to social and political solidarity.²

IDLE NO MORE: DANCING RESISTANCE

In the anthology *The Winter We Danced: Notes from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement*, The Kino-nda-niimi Collective writes that the winter of 2012–13 will be remembered as “one of the most important moments in our collective history”—one moment in a long chain of resistance to colonization of Indigenous peoples on territory claimed by Canada (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014, 21). The Idle No More movement was initiated with a “teach-in” organized by four women in Saskatchewan, Sylvia McAdam, Jess Gordon, Nina Wilson, and Sheelah McLean, to educate Indigenous communities about the impacts of the Canadian federal government’s proposed legislation, Bills C-38 and C-45, which introduced drastic changes to the Indian Act, the Fisheries Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, and the Navigable Water Act. They raised particular concerns about effects on water and environmental protection, the use of First Nations land, and lack of consultation with First Peoples. This event coincided with Chief Theresa Spence’s hunger strike, which inspired and galvanized the movement: Chief Spence refused solid food for several weeks, to draw attention to the fact that unfulfilled treaties are slowly starving her community. Over the winter of 2012–13, the movement spread through Canada and North America (Turtle Island) and became a global movement of resistance of Indigenous peoples to the continuing legacies of colonization.

Like the Occupy movement, Idle No More was a radically decentralized movement, with no single leader, defying orthodox politics. The movement included

many diverse groups and communities organizing around multiple issues, focusing on demands to repeal the proposed Canadian legislation, to stabilize emergency situations in First Nations communities, and to establish nation-to-nation relations of mutual recognition and collaboration between Canada and First Nations communities, but also on diverse projects of Indigenous resurgence, and on central issues including ownership, stewardship and protection of land and water, and responses to the alarming numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada.

Throughout the weeks and months of Idle No More, round dances were the heart of the movement. A few days after Bill C-45 was passed by the Canadian Senate to become federal law, the first flash mob round dance took place at a shopping mall in Regina, Saskatchewan: Aboriginal activists began beating drums and singing, and were quickly joined by hundreds of other people who joined hands in a circle moving clockwise around the mall's giant Christmas tree. In the next few days, the dance was repeated in hundreds of malls, intersections, highways, and reserves across Canada and the US, and the dancing continued over the next several months, supported by dances and protests around the world on International Days of Action. The round dances were multiethnic and multigenerational: people from diverse communities joined hands and moved in circles in support of First Nations communities, always to a drumbeat and often with singing.

In *The Winter We Danced*, The Kino-nda-niimi Collective quotes the story of the origin and significance of the round dance, as told by Cree Elder John Cuthand: a woman who was grieving her mother's death was visited by her mother, who gave her the dance as a way to help the people grieve in a good way. "Tell the people that when this circle is made we the ancestors will be dancing with you and we will be as one" (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014, 24). In the poem, "A Healing Time," by Sky-Blue Mary Morin, the dance is referred to as "the Friendship Dance," and "a dance of love" (Morin 2014, 7–9). For the Idle No More movement, the circle dances are dances of love and freedom, dances creating and sustaining solidarity to support resistance to colonization. The Kino-nda-niimi Collective writes:

In the winter of 2012–2013, our Ancestors danced with us. They were there in intersections, in shopping malls, and in front of Parliament buildings. They marched with us in protests, stood with us at blockades, and spoke through us in teach-ins. Joining us were our relatives, long-tenured and newly arrived Canadians, and sometimes, when we were lucky, the elements of creation that inspired action in the first place. (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014, 24)

The revival of the circle dance is part of a practice of Indigenous resurgence: the circle dance, along with many other ceremonies that were part of the "Potlatch," was banned by the Canadian Indian Act in 1880, and nearly disappeared in many communities. Cree singer Ray "Coco" Stevenson notes that although the round dance was originally a funeral ceremony to send the spirit to the spirit world, its meaning has gradually evolved to become more celebratory—but "the foundation has not

changed in terms of what it represents.” “Our people had this great faith that there was great power in the round dance,” says David Courchene Jr., an Ojibwe spiritual leader: “The dancing itself was calling the spirit to help in healing whatever the community was in need of healing” (Martin 2013). The flash mob dances can be seen as part of a larger trend of social movements to “take back the commons,” as they “merg[e] the formerly heterotopic spaces . . . of radical social movements with normative public ones” (Ferguson 2014, 257).

The Indigenous leaders of the dances of Idle No More welcomed non-Indigenous participants of all classes, genders, and ethnicities as allies, joining hands to cross multiple lines of power. And the allies joined in dancing the dance of the other—of the Indigenous peoples who led them. Most were probably not aware of the history of the dance. But many were consciously mourning loss: the devastating effect of colonization on Indigenous peoples, the commodification of land and water, the violence that has diminished all of us—and yet celebrating a possible future that would involve nation-to-nation relations of mutual recognition and collaboration between Canada and First Nations communities.

It is significant that Idle No More was inspired and led by women—by Chief Spence and the four women leaders in Saskatchewan. And it is significant that the circle dance, which formed an essential support for resistance, was given by a mother to her daughter, who brought it to the people. Dory Nason argues that the Idle No More movement is evidence of “the boundless love that Indigenous women have for their families, their lands, their nations, and themselves as Indigenous people. These profound forms of love motivate Indigenous women everywhere to resist and protest, to teach and inspire, and to hold accountable both Indigenous and non-Indigenous allies to their responsibilities to protect the values and traditions that serve as the foundation for the survival of the land and Indigenous peoples.” The movement shows us, Nason writes, that “Indigenous women’s love is powerful. It is a love that can inspire a whole world to sing and dance and be in ceremony for the people. This has always been so” (Nason 2014, 186–87). Nason points out that this love also makes Indigenous women vulnerable to hate. Yet Indigenous women continue to risk practices of love in the face of colonization, misogyny, and abuse.

The story of the circle dance, given by a mother to her daughter as a way to mourn the loss of the mother, suggests that the power of Indigenous women’s love has long been invoked as the source of a way to forestall and counteract violence. The dance includes the mother and the ancestors in a ritual of collective love that accepts and mourns loss and destruction while it celebrates and performs solidarity, holding together “all our relations.” I have argued that this is a practice of freedom that ritually performs equal and inclusive relations among diverse participants, subverting and transforming hierarchical relations through the embodied practice of being the other. This is a practice that includes the relation to the mother in public political life, addressing the fear of the devouring mother in a way that avoids defensive and violent repudiation, in a practice of reparative love. The movement of the dance, “a complicated movement filled with the task of finding unity,” inspires and

sustains a movement of resistance (Alyssa Bird, in *The Kino-nda-nimi Collective* 2014, 440). Thus the circle dance is part of a powerful feminist practice of resistance against patriarchal oppression and colonization.

NOTES

I am grateful to Ann Ferguson and Margaret Toye as well as anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments. I also wish to thank Nivedita Menon and all those who responded to an earlier version of this paper at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies in Delhi and the Forum for Critical Theory in Cuttack, India.

1. “All my relations” is a phrase used by many Indigenous communities to situate the individual in a web of relations including all of creation, including human and nonhuman persons and the ancestors.

2. I take the idea of solidarity as a skill-based practice from Simon Dougherty, “The Art of Political Solidarity,” doctoral dissertation in progress, Institute for Social Justice, ACU.

REFERENCES

- Arendt, Hannah. 1958/1998. *The human condition*. 2nd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- . 1963. *On revolution*. New York: Penguin (Viking).
- . 1968. *Men in dark times*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- . 1978. *The life of the mind, vol. 2: Willing*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Bilgrami, Akeel. 2014. *Secularism, identity, and enchantment*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Birmingham, Peg. 2003. The pleasure of your company: Arendt, Kristeva, and an ethics of public happiness. *Research in Phenomenology* 33 (1): 53–73.
- Chiba, Shin. 1995. Hannah Arendt on love and the political: Love, friendship, and citizenship. *Review of Politics* 57 (3): 505–35.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black feminist thought*. London: Harper Collins.
- Durkheim, Emile. 1915. *The elementary forms of the religious life*. Trans. Joseph Ward Swain. London: Allen and Unwin.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara. 2007. *Dancing in the streets: A history of collective joy*. London: Granta.
- Ferguson, Ann. 2014. Feminist love politics: Romance, care, and solidarity. In *Love: A question for feminism in the twenty-first century*, ed. Ann Ferguson and Anna Jónasdóttir. London: Routledge.
- Ferguson, Ann, and Anna Jónasdóttir, eds. 2014. *Love: A question for feminism in the twenty-first century*. London: Routledge.
- Gandhi, Leela. 2006. *Affective communities: Anticolonial thought, fin-de-siècle radicalism, and the politics of friendship*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. 2004. *Multitude: War and democracy in the age of empire*. New York: Penguin Books.

- Hennessy, Rosemary. 2014. Bread and roses in the common. In *Love: A question for feminism in the twenty-first century*, ed. Ann Ferguson and Anna Jónasdóttir. London: Routledge.
- hooks, bell. 2000. *All about love: New visions*. New York: William Morrow.
- Irigaray, Luce. 1985. *Speculum of the other woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- The Kino-nda-niimi Collective. 2014. Idle No More: The winter we danced. In *The winter we danced: Voices from the past, the future, and the Idle No More movement*. Winnipeg: ARP Books.
- Kristeva, Julia. 1991. *Strangers to ourselves*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.
- . 2001. *Hannah Arendt: Life is a narrative*. Trans. Frank Collins. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lorde, Audre. 1984. *Sister outsider*. Freedom, Calif.: Crossing Press.
- Martin, Melissa. 2013. Round dance: Why it's the symbol of Idle No More. *CBC Manitoba*, January 28. <http://www.cbc.ca/manitoba/scene/homepage-promo/2013/01/28/round-dance-revolution-drums-up-support-for-idle-no-more/> (accessed September 29, 2016).
- McPherson, Dennis H., and J. Douglas Rabb. 2011. *Indian from the inside: Native American philosophy and cultural renewal*, 2nd edition. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland.
- Morin, Sky Blue Mary. 2014. A healing time. In The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, *The winter we danced: Voices from the past, the future, and the Idle No More movement*. Winnipeg: ARP Books.
- Nason, Dory. 2014. We hold our hands up: On Indigenous women's love and resistance. In The Kino-nda-niimi Collective, *The winter we danced: Voices from the past, the future, and the Idle No More movement*. Winnipeg: ARP Books.
- Pitkin, Hanna Fenichel. 1995. Conformism, housekeeping, and the attack of the Blob: The origins of Hannah Arendt's concept of the social. In *Feminist interpretations of Hannah Arendt*, ed. Bonnie Honig. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- . 1998. *The attack of the blob: Hannah Arendt's concept of the social*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Tully, James. 2012. Reconciliation here on Earth. Unpublished manuscript. Dalhousie University Sustainability Lecture.
- Turner, Victor. 1969. *The ritual process: Structure and anti-structure*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press.
- Wilkinson, Eleanor. 2014. Love in the multitude? A feminist critique of love as a political concept. In *Love: A question for feminism in the twenty-first century*, ed. Ann Ferguson and Anna Jónasdóttir. London: Routledge.