

## **Relational Pluralism and Group Authority**

Debates about the authority of groups to act independently of public values and state law have made a remarkable comeback. Group authority is invoked in conflicts about the appropriate role of religious groups to provide goods and entitlements according to their own ethical perspectives, in relation to the jurisdictional authority of Indigenous communities over decision making within their claimed territory, and in relation to corporations seeking to control workers and shield themselves from laws that guarantee entitlements to all citizens. In many such cases, a leading claim is that the authority of some groups is not derived from the state or dependent on its recognition. Increasingly, the sovereign power of the state over some groups is questioned and considered unsettled.

Some scholars, who reflect on these issues, express enthusiasm for the possibility of a richer associational life that, importantly, is neither created nor controlled by the state. Others view these developments as ushering in neo-feudalism under the guise of legal and political pluralism and worry that, as the state's sovereign authority becomes fragmented, people's access to basic goods and services will increasingly depend on their group attachments rather than on guarantees that are equally accessible to all through the rights of citizenship.

My research program focuses on these issues with three goals: (A) to examine how group authority is understood in 20-21<sup>st</sup> Century political theory; (B) to reflect on theoretical approaches to group authority in light of contemporary cases of contested group authority; and (C) to situate and explain the shortcomings of current approaches to group-state relations of authority by developing an alternative relational account of political authority. My research aims to highlight the distinctive and radical democratic promise of this alternative account, which I call 'relational pluralism'.