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INTRODUCTION

Subjects of Empire

Real recognition of our presence and humanity would require a genuine reconsideration of so many people's role in North American society that it would amount to a genuine leap of imagination.

—GEORGE MANUEL and MICHAEL POSLUNS,
The Fourth World

FROM "WARDS OF THE STATE" TO SUBJECTS OF RECOGNITION?

Over the last forty years, the self-determination efforts and objectives of Indigenous peoples in Canada have increasingly been cast in the language of "recognition."¹ Consider, for example, the formative declaration issued by my people in 1975:

We the Dene of the NWT [Northwest Territories] insist on the right to be regarded by ourselves and the world as a nation.

Our struggle is for the *recognition* of the Dene Nation by the Government and people of Canada and the peoples and governments of the world. . . .

And while there are realities we are forced to submit to, such as the existence of a country called Canada, we insist on the right to self-determination and the *recognition* of the Dene Nation.²

Now fast-forward to the 2005 policy position on self-determination issued by Canada's largest Aboriginal organization, the Assembly of First Nations (AFN). According to the AFN, "a consensus has emerged . . . around a vision of the relationship between First Nations and Canada which would lead to strengthening recognition and implementation of First Nations' governments."³ This "vision," the AFN goes on to explain, draws on the core principles outlined in the 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP): that is, recognition of the nation-to-nation relationship between First Nations

and the Crown; recognition of the equal right of First Nations to self-determination; recognition of the Crown's fiduciary obligation to protect Aboriginal treaty rights; recognition of First Nations' inherent right to self-government; and recognition of the right of First Nations to economically benefit from the use and development of their lands and resources.⁴ Since 2005 the AFN has consistently reasserted and affirmed these guiding principles at its Annual General Assemblies and in the numerous resolutions that these gatherings have produced.

These demands have not been easy to ignore. Because of the persistence and dedication of countless Indigenous activists, leaders, communities, and organizations, we have witnessed within the scope of four decades the emergence of an unprecedented degree of recognition for Aboriginal "cultural" rights within the legal and political framework of the Canadian state.⁵ Most significant on this front was Canada's eventual "recognition" of "existing aboriginal and treaty rights" under section 35(1) of the Constitution Act of 1982. This constitutional breakthrough provided the catalyst that led to the federal government's eventual recognition, in 1995, of an "inherent right to self-government,"⁶ as well as the groundswell of post-1982 court challenges that have sought to both clarify and widen the scope of what constitutes a constitutionally recognized Aboriginal right to begin with. When considered from the vantage point of these important developments, it would certainly appear that "recognition" has emerged as the dominant expression of self-determination within the Aboriginal rights movement in Canada.

The struggle for recognition has become a central catalyst in the international Indigenous rights movement as well. As the works of Will Kymlicka, Sheryl Lightfoot, Ronald Neizen, and others have noted, the last three decades have witnessed the emergence of recognition-based approaches to Indigenous self-determination in the field of Indigenous–state relations in Asia, northern Europe, throughout the Americas, and across the South Pacific (including Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific Islands).⁷ Although varying in institutional scope and scale, all of these geopolitical regions have seen the establishment of Indigenous rights regimes that claim to recognize and accommodate the political autonomy, land rights, and cultural distinctiveness of Indigenous nations within the settler states that now encase them. Although my primary empirical focus in *Red Skin, White Masks* is Canada, I suspect that readers will find many of my conclusions applicable to settler-colonial experiences elsewhere.

On a more discursive plane, the increase in recognition demands made by Indigenous and other marginalized minorities over the last forty years has also prompted a flurry of intellectual activity that has sought to unpack the complex ethical, political, and legal questions that these types of claims raise. To date, much of this literature has tended to focus on a perceived relationship between the affirmative recognition and institutional accommodation of societal cultural differences on the one hand, and the freedom and autonomy of marginalized individuals and groups living in ethnically diverse states on the other. In Canada it has been argued that this synthesis of theory and practice has forced the state to dramatically reconceptualize the tenets of its relationship with Indigenous peoples; whereas before 1969 federal Indian policy was unapologetically assimilationist, now it is couched in the vernacular of “mutual recognition.”⁸

In the following chapters I critically engage a multiplicity of diverse anti-imperialist traditions and practices to challenge the increasingly commonplace idea that the colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state can be adequately transformed via such a politics of recognition. Following the work of Richard J. F. Day, I take “politics of recognition” to refer to the now expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to “reconcile” Indigenous assertions of nationhood with settler-state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity claims in some form of renewed legal and political relationship with the Canadian state.⁹ Although these models tend to vary in both theory and practice, most call for the delegation of land, capital, and political power from the state to Indigenous communities through a combination of land claim settlements, economic development initiatives, and self-government agreements. These are subsequently the three broad contexts through which I examine the theory and practice of Indigenous recognition politics in the following chapters. Against this variant of the recognition approach, I argue that instead of ushering in an era of peaceful coexistence grounded on the ideal of *reciprocity* or *mutual* recognition, the politics of recognition in its contemporary liberal form promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend.

To demonstrate the above claim, *Red Skin, White Masks* will theoretically and empirically map the contours of what I consider to be a decisive shift in

the modus operandi of colonial power following the hegemonization of the recognition paradigm following the release of the federal government's infamous *Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy*—also known as the “White Paper”—in 1969.¹⁰ In the two centuries leading to this historic policy proposal—which called for the blanket assimilation of the status Indian population by unilaterally removing all institutionally enshrined aspects of legal and political differentiation that distinguish First Nations from non-Native Canadians under the Indian Act—the reproduction of the colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and what would eventually become Canada depended heavily on the deployment of state power geared around genocidal practices of forced *exclusion* and *assimilation*.¹¹ Any cursory examination into the character of colonial Indian policy during this period will attest to this fact. For example, this era witnessed Canada's repeated attempts to overtly uproot and destroy the vitality and autonomy of Indigenous modes of life through institutions such as residential schools;¹² through the imposition of settler-state policies aimed at explicitly undercutting Indigenous political economies and relations to and with land;¹³ through the violent dispossession of First Nation women's rights to land and community membership under sexist provisions of the Indian Act;¹⁴ through the theft of Aboriginal children via racist child welfare policies;¹⁵ and through the near wholesale dispossession of Indigenous peoples' territories and modes of traditional governance in exchange for delegated administrative powers to be exercised over relatively minuscule reserve lands. All of these policies sought to marginalize Indigenous people and communities with the ultimate goal being our *elimination*, if not physically, then as cultural, political, and legal *peoples* distinguishable from the rest of Canadian society.¹⁶ These initiatives reflect the more or less unconcealed, unilateral, and coercive nature of colonial rule during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Although Indigenous people and communities have always found ways to individually and collectively resist these oppressive policies and practices, it was not until the tumultuous political climate of Red Power activism in the 1960s and 70s that policies geared toward the recognition and so-called “reconciliation” of Native land and political grievances with state sovereignty began to appear. Three watershed events are generally recognized as shaping this era of Native activism in Canada. The first was the materialization of widespread First Nation opposition to the previously mentioned 1969 White

Paper. Instead of serving as a bridge to passive assimilation, the White Paper inaugurated an unprecedented degree of pan-Indian assertiveness and political mobilization. The National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) issued the following response to the federal government's proposed initiative: "We view this as a policy designed to divest us of our aboriginal . . . rights. If we accept this policy, and in the process lose our rights and our lands, we become willing partners in cultural genocide. This we cannot do."¹⁷ Although designed as a once-and-for-all solution to Canada's so-called "Indian Problem," the White Paper instead became a central catalyst around which the contemporary Indigenous self-determination movement coalesced, "launching it into a determined [defense] of a unique cultural heritage and identity."¹⁸ The sheer magnitude of First Nations' resistance to the White Paper proposal forced the federal government to formally shelve the document on March 17, 1971.¹⁹

The second watershed event occurred following the partial recognition of Aboriginal "title" in the Supreme Court of Canada's 1973 *Calder* decision.²⁰ This landmark case, which involved a claim launched by Nisga'a hereditary chief Frank Calder to the un-extinguished territories of his nation in north-western British Columbia, overturned a seventy-five-year precedent first established in *St Catherine's Milling and Lumber Company v. The Queen* (1888), which stated that Aboriginal land rights existed only insofar and to the extent that the state recognized them as such.²¹ Although technically a defeat for the Nisga'a, the six justices that rendered substantive decisions in *Calder* all agreed that, prior to contact, the Nisga'a indeed held the land rights they claimed in court.²² The question then quickly shifted to whether these rights were sufficiently extinguished through colonial legislation. In the end, three justices ruled that the Aboriginal rights in question had not been extinguished, three ruled that they had, and one justice ruled against the Nisga'a based on a technical question regarding whether this type of action could be levelled against the province without legislation permitting it, which he ruled could not.²³ Thus, even though the Nisga'a technically lost their case in a 4–3 decision, the Supreme Court's ruling in *Calder* left enough uncertainty around the question of existing Aboriginal rights that it prompted a shift in the federal government's policy vis-à-vis Native land interests. The result was the federal government's 1973 *Statement on Claims of Indian and Inuit People: A Federal Native Claims Policy*, which effectively reversed fifty-two years (since the 1921 signing

of Treaty 11 in the Northwest Territories with the Sahtu Dene) of state refusal to recognize Indigenous claims to land where the question of existing title remained open.²⁴

The third event (or rather cluster of events) emerged following the turbulent decade of energy politics that followed the oil crisis of the early 1970s, which subsequently fueled an aggressive push by state and industry to develop what it saw as the largely untapped resource potential (natural gas, minerals, and oil) of northern Canada.²⁵ The federal government's holding of 45 percent equity in Panartic Oils led Indian Affairs minister Jean Chrétien to state that "it is very seldom in public life that a minister of a government presides over that kind of profit."²⁶ The proposed increase in northern development was envisioned despite concerns raised by the Métis, Dene, and Inuit of the Northwest Territories regarding Canada's proposal to sanction the development of a huge natural gas pipeline to be carved across the heartland of our traditional territories, as well as the resistance mounted by the Cree of northern Quebec against a similarly massive hydroelectric project proposed for their homeland in the James Bay region.²⁷ The effectiveness of our subsequent political struggles, which gained unprecedented media coverage across the country, once again raised the issue of unresolved Native rights and title issues to the fore of Canadian public consciousness.

In the following chapters I will show that colonial rule underwent a profound shift in the wake of these important events. More specifically, I argue that the expression of Indigenous anticolonial nationalism that emerged during this period forced colonial power to modify itself from a structure that was once primarily reinforced by policies, techniques, and ideologies explicitly oriented around the genocidal exclusion/assimilation double, to one that is now reproduced through a seemingly more conciliatory set of discourses and institutional practices that emphasize our *recognition* and *accommodation*. Regardless of this modification, however, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state has remained *colonial* to its foundation.

KARL MARX, SETTLER-COLONIALISM, AND INDIGENOUS DISPOSSESSION IN POST-WHITE PAPER CANADA

What do I mean by a *colonial*—or more precisely, *settler-colonial* relationship? A settler-colonial relationship is one characterized by a particular form of *domination*; that is, it is a relationship where power—in this case, interrelated

discursive and nondiscursive facets of economic, gendered, racial, and state power—has been structured into a relatively secure or sedimented set of hierarchical social relations that continue to facilitate the *dispossession* of Indigenous peoples of their lands and self-determining authority. In this respect, Canada is no different from most other settler-colonial powers: in the Canadian context, colonial domination continues to be structurally committed to maintain—through force, fraud, and more recently, so-called “negotiations”—ongoing state access to the land and resources that contradictorily provide the material and spiritual sustenance of Indigenous societies on the one hand, and the foundation of colonial state-formation, settlement, and capitalist development on the other. As Patrick Wolfe states, “Whatever settlers may say—and they generally have a lot to say—the primary motive [of settler-colonialism] is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.”²⁸

In thinking about colonialism as a form of structured dispossession, I have found it useful to return to a cluster of insights developed by Karl Marx in chapters 26 through 32 of his first volume of *Capital*.²⁹ This section of *Capital* is crucial because it is there that Marx most thoroughly links the totalizing power of *capital* with that of *colonialism* by way of his theory of “primitive accumulation.” Challenging the idyllic portrayal of capitalism’s origins by economists like Adam Smith, Marx’s chapters on primitive accumulation highlight the gruesomely violent nature of the transition from feudal to capitalist social relations in western Europe (with an emphasis placed on England). Marx’s historical excavation of the birth of the capitalist mode of production identifies a host of colonial-like state practices that served to violently strip—through “conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder”³⁰—noncapitalist producers, communities, and societies from their means of production and subsistence. In *Capital* these formative acts of violent *dispossession* set the stage for the emergence of capitalist accumulation and the reproduction of capitalist relations of production by tearing Indigenous societies, peasants, and other small-scale, self-sufficient agricultural producers from the source of their livelihood—the *land*. It was this horrific process that established the two necessary preconditions underwriting the capital relation itself: it forcefully opened up what were once collectively held territories and resources to privatization (dispossession and enclosure), which, over time, came to produce a “class” of workers compelled to enter the exploitative realm of the labor market for their survival

(proletarianization). The historical process of primitive accumulation thus refers to the violent transformation of noncapitalist forms of life into capitalist ones.

The critical purchase of Marx's primitive accumulation thesis for analyzing the relationship between colonial rule and capitalist accumulation in the contemporary period has been the subject of much debate over the last couple of decades. Within and between the fields of Indigenous studies and Marxist political economy, these debates have at times been hostile and polarizing. At its worst, this hostility has led to the premature rejection of Marx and Marxism by some Indigenous studies scholars on the one side, and to the belligerent, often ignorant, and sometimes racist dismissal of Indigenous peoples' contributions to radical thought and politics by Marxists on the other.³¹ At their nondogmatic best, however, I believe that the conversations that continue to occur within and between these two diverse fields of critical inquiry (especially when placed in dialog with feminist, anarchist, queer, and post-colonial traditions) have the potential to shed much insight into the cycles of colonial domination and resistance that characterize the relationship between white settler states and Indigenous peoples.

To my mind, then, for Indigenous peoples to reject or ignore the insights of Marx would be a mistake, especially if this amounts to a refusal on our part to critically engage his important critique of capitalist exploitation and his extensive writings on the entangled relationship between capitalism and colonialism. As Tsimshian anthropologist Charles Menzies writes, "Marxism retains an incisive core that helps understand the dynamics of the world we live." It "highlights the ways in which power is structured through ownership" and exposes the state's role "in the accumulation of capital and the redistribution of wealth from the many to the few."³² All of this is not to suggest, however, that Marx's contributions are without flaw; nor is it meant to suggest that Marxism provides a ready-made tool for Indigenous peoples to uncritically appropriate in their struggles for land and freedom. As suggested above, rendering Marx's theoretical frame relevant to a comprehensive understanding of settler-colonialism and Indigenous resistance requires that it be transformed *in conversation* with the critical thought and practices of Indigenous peoples themselves. In the spirit of fostering this critical dialog, I suggest that three problematic features of Marx's primitive accumulation thesis are in need of such a transformation.

The first feature involves what many critics have characterized as Marx's rigidly *temporal* framing of the phenomenon. As early as 1899, for example, anarchist geographer Peter Kropotkin made note of what seemed to be an "erroneous division" drawn in Marx "between the *primary* [or primitive] accumulation of capital and its *present day formulation*."³³ The critical point here, which many contemporary writers have subsequently picked up on, is that Marx tended to portray primitive accumulation as if it constituted "a process confined to a particular (if indefinite) period—one already largely passed in England, but still underway in the colonies at the time Marx wrote."³⁴ For Marx, although the era of violent, state dispossession may have *inaugurated* the accumulation process, in the end it is "the silent compulsion of economic relations" that ultimately "sets the seal on the domination of the capitalist over the worker."³⁵ This formulation, however, clearly does not conform well to our present global reality. As the recent work of scholars as diverse as David Harvey, Silvia Federici, Taiaiake Alfred, Rauna Kuokkanen, and Andrea Smith (to name but a few) have highlighted, the escalating onslaught of violent, state-orchestrated enclosures following neoliberalism's ascent to hegemony has unmistakably demonstrated the *persistent* role that unconcealed, violent dispossession continues to play in the reproduction of colonial and capitalist social relations in both the domestic and global contexts.³⁶

The second feature that needs to be addressed concerns the *normative developmentalism* that problematically underscored Marx's *original* formulation of the primitive accumulation thesis. I stress "original" here because Marx began to reformulate this teleological aspect of his thought in the last decade of his life, and this reformulation has important implications with respect to how we ought to conceptualize the struggles of non-Western societies against the violence that has defined our encounter with colonial modernity. For much of his career, however, Marx propagated within his writings a typically nineteenth-century modernist view of history and historical progress. This developmentalist ontology provided the overarching frame from which thinkers as diverse as Immanuel Kant, Georg W. F. Hegel, John Stuart Mill, and Adam Smith sought to unpack and historically rank variation in "human cultural forms and modes of production" according to each form's "approximation to the full development of the human good."³⁷ As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out, this modernist commitment often led Marx (along with Engels) to depict those non-Western societies deemed to be positioned

at the lower end of this scale of historical or cultural development as “people without history,” existing “separate from the development of capital and locked in an immutable present without the capacity for historical innovation.”³⁸ As a result, Marx’s most influential work tends to not only portray primitive accumulation as a historical phenomenon in the sense that it constituted a prior or transitional stage in the development of the capitalist mode of production, but that it was also a historically *inevitable* process that would ultimately have a *beneficial* effect on those violently drawn into the capitalist circuit. Take, for instance, Marx’s often quoted 1853 *New York Tribune* writings on colonial rule in India. There he suggests that, although vile and barbaric in practice, colonial dispossession would nonetheless have the “revolutionary” effect of bringing the “despotic,” “undignified,” and “stagnant” life of the Indians into the fold of capitalist-modernity and thus onto the one true path of human development—socialism.³⁹ Just as Hegel had infamously asserted before him that Africa exists at the “threshold of World History” with “no movement or development to exhibit,” Marx would similarly come to declare that “Indian society has no history at all, at least no known history.”⁴⁰ Clearly, any analysis or critique of contemporary settler-colonialism must be stripped of this Eurocentric feature of Marx’s original historical metanarrative.⁴¹

But this still raises the question of *how* to address this residual feature of Marx’s analysis. For our purposes here, I suggest that this can most effectively be accomplished by *contextually shifting* our investigation from an emphasis on the *capital relation* to the *colonial relation*. As suggested in his critical appraisal of Edward G. Wakefield’s 1849 text, *A View of the Art of Colonization*, Marx was primarily interested in colonialism because it exposed some “truth” about the nature of capitalism.⁴² His interest in the specific character of colonial domination was largely incidental. This is clearly evident in his position on primitive accumulation. As noted already, primitive accumulation involved a dual process for Marx: the accumulation of capital through violent state dispossession resulting in proletarianization. The weight given to these constituent elements, however, is by no means equal in Marx. As he explicitly states in chapter 33 of *Capital*, Marx had little interest in the condition of the “colonies” as such; rather, what caught his attention was “the secret discovered in the New World by the political economy of the Old World, and loudly proclaimed by it: that the capitalist mode of production and accumulation, and therefore capitalist private property as well, have for their fundamental condition the . . .

expropriation of the worker" (emphasis added).⁴³ When examined from this angle, colonial dispossession appears to constitute an appropriate object of critique and analysis only insofar as it unlocks the key to understanding the nature of capitalism: that capital is not a "thing," but rather a "social relation" dependent on the perpetual separation of workers from the means of production.⁴⁴ This was obviously Marx's primary concern, and it has subsequently remained the dominant concern of the Marxist tradition as a whole.⁴⁵ The contextual shift advocated here, by contrast, takes as its analytical frame the subject position of the colonized vis-à-vis the effects of *colonial dispossession*, rather than from the primary position of "the waged male proletariat [in] the process of commodity production,"⁴⁶ to borrow Silvia Federici's useful formulation.

At least four critical insights into our settler-colonial present emerge from the resolution of these first two problems. First, by making the contextual shift in analysis from the capital-relation to the colonial-relation the inherent injustice of colonial rule is posited *on its own terms and in its own right*. By repositioning the colonial frame as our overarching lens of analysis it becomes far more difficult to justify in antiquated developmental terms (from either the right or the left) the assimilation of noncapitalist, non-Western, Indigenous modes of life based on the racist assumption that this assimilation will somehow magically redeem itself by bringing the fruits of capitalist modernity into the supposedly "backward" world of the colonized.⁴⁷ In a certain respect, this was also the guiding insight that eventually led Marx to reformulate his theory after 1871. Subsequently, in the last decade of his life, Marx no longer condemns non-Western and noncapitalist social formations to necessarily pass through the destructive phase of capitalist development as the condition of possibility for human freedom and flourishing. During this period, Marx had not only come to view more clearly how certain features of noncapitalist and capitalist modes of production "articulate" (albeit asymmetrically) in a given social formation, but also the ways in which aspects of the former can come to inform the construction of radical alternatives to the latter.⁴⁸

A similar insight informed Kropotkin's early critique of Marx as well. The problem for Kropotkin was that Marx not only drew an "erroneous division" between the history of state dispossession and what has proven to be its persistent role in the accumulation process, but that this also seemed to justify in crude developmentalist terms the violent dispossession of place-based, non-state modes of self-sufficient Indigenous economic, political, and social

activity, only this time to be carried out under the auspices of the coercive authority of *socialist* states. This form of dispossession would eventually come to be championed by Soviet imperialists under the banner *socialist primitive accumulation*.⁴⁹ I suggest that by shifting our analytical frame to the colonial relation we might occupy a better angle from which to both anticipate and interrogate practices of settler-state dispossession justified under otherwise egalitarian principles and espoused with so-called “progressive” political agendas in mind. Instead, what must be recognized by those inclined to advocate a blanket “return of the commons” as a redistributive counterstrategy to the neoliberal state’s new round of enclosures, is that, in liberal settler states such as Canada, the “commons” not only belong to somebody—the *First Peoples of this land*—they also deeply inform and sustain Indigenous modes of thought and behavior that harbor profound insights into the maintenance of relationships within and between human beings and the natural world built on principles of reciprocity, nonexploitation and respectful coexistence. By ignoring or downplaying the injustice of colonial dispossession, critical theory and left political strategy not only risks becoming complicit in the very structures and processes of domination that it ought to oppose, but it also risks overlooking what could prove to be invaluable glimpses into the ethical practices and preconditions required for the construction of a more just and sustainable world order.

The second insight facilitated by this contextual shift has to do with the role played by Indigenous labor in the historical process of colonial-capital accumulation in Canada. It is now generally acknowledged among historians and political economists that following the waves of colonial settlement that marked the transition between mercantile and industrial capitalism (roughly spanning the years 1860–1914, but with significant variation between geographical regions), Native labor became increasingly (although by no means entirely) superfluous to the political and economic development of the Canadian state.⁵⁰ Increased European settlement combined with an imported, hyper-exploited non-European workforce meant that, in the post–fur trade period, Canadian state-formation and colonial-capitalist development required first and foremost *land*, and only secondarily the surplus value afforded by cheap, Indigenous labor.⁵¹ This is not to suggest, however, that the long-term goal of indoctrinating the Indigenous population to the principles of private property, possessive individualism, and menial wage work did not constitute an

important feature of Canadian Indian policy. It did. As the commissioner of Indian Affairs in 1890 wrote: “The work of sub-dividing reserves has begun in earnest. The policy of destroying the tribal or communist system is assailed in every possible way and every effort [has been] made to implant a spirit of individual responsibility instead.”⁵²

When this historical consideration is situated alongside the contemporary fact that there has been, first, a steady increase in Native migration to urban centers over the last few decades, and, second, that many First Nation communities are situated on or near lands coveted by the resource exploitation industry, it is reasonable to conclude that disciplining Indigenous life to the cold rationality of market principles will remain on state and industry’s agenda for some time to follow.⁵³ In this respect Marx’s thesis still stands. What I want to point out, rather, is that when related back to the primitive accumulation thesis it appears that the history and experience of *dispossession*, not proletarianization, has been the dominant background structure shaping the character of the historical relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state. Just as importantly, I would also argue that dispossession continues to inform the dominant modes of Indigenous resistance and critique that this relationship has provoked. Stated bluntly, the theory and practice of Indigenous anticolonialism, including Indigenous anticapitalism, is best understood as a struggle primarily inspired by and oriented around *the question of land*—a struggle not only *for* land in the material sense, but also deeply *informed* by what the land *as system of reciprocal relations and obligations* can teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and the natural world in nondominating and nonexploitative terms—and less around our emergent status as “rightless proletarians.”⁵⁴ I call this place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice *grounded normativity*, by which I mean the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time.

The third insight to flow from this contextual shift corresponds to a number of concerns expressed by Indigenous peoples, deep ecologists, defenders of animal rights, and other advocates of environmental sustainability regarding perceived “anti-ecological” tendencies in Marx’s work. Although this field of criticism tends to be internally diverse—and some have argued, overstated (I am thinking here of eco-socialists like Joel Kovel and John Bellamy Foster)—

at its core it suggests that Marx's perspectives on nature adhered to an instrumental rationality that placed no intrinsic value on the land or nature itself, and that this subsequently led him to uncritically champion an ideology of productivism and unsustainable economic progress.⁵⁵ From the vantage point of the capital relationship—which, I have argued, tends to concern itself most with the adverse structural and ideological effects stemming from expropriated labor—*land is not exploitable, people are*. I believe that reestablishing the colonial relation of dispossession as a co-foundational feature of our understanding of and critical engagement with capitalism opens up the possibility of developing a more ecologically attentive critique of colonial-capitalist accumulation, especially if this engagement takes its cues from the grounded normativity of Indigenous modalities of place-based resistance and criticism.

And finally, the fourth insight that flows from the contextual shift advocated here involves what many have characterized as Marx's (and orthodox Marxism's) economic reductionism. It should be clear in the following pages that there is much more at play in the contemporary reproduction of settler-colonial social relations than capitalist economics; most notably, the host of interrelated yet semi-autonomous facets of discursive and nondiscursive power briefly identified earlier. Although it is beyond question that the predatory nature of capitalism continues to play a vital role in facilitating the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples in Canada, it is necessary to recognize that it only does so *in relation to or in concert with* axes of exploitation and domination configured along racial, gender, and state lines. Given the resilience of these equally devastating modalities of power, I argue that any strategy geared toward authentic decolonization must directly confront more than mere economic relations; it has to account for the multifarious ways in which capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and the totalizing character of state power interact with one another to form the constellation of power relations that sustain colonial patterns of behavior, structures, and relationships. I suggest that shifting our attention to the colonial frame is one way to facilitate this form of radical intersectional analysis.⁵⁶ Seen from this light, the colonial relation should not be understood as a primary locus or "base" from which these other forms of oppression flow, but rather as the inherited background field within which market, racist, patriarchal, and state relations *converge* to facilitate a certain power effect—in our case, the reproduction of hierarchical social relations that facilitate the dispossession of our lands and self-determining

capacities. Like capital, colonialism, as a structure of domination predicated on dispossession, is not “a thing,” but rather the sum effect of the diversity of interlocking oppressive social relations that constitute it. When stated this way, it should be clear that shifting our position to highlight the ongoing effects of colonial dispossession in no way displaces questions of distributive justice or class struggle; rather, it simply situates these questions more firmly alongside and in relation to the other sites and relations of power that inform our settler-colonial present.

With these four insights noted, I can now turn to the third and final feature that needs to be addressed with respect to Marx’s primitive accumulation thesis. This one, which constitutes the core theoretical intervention of this book, brings us back to my original claim that, in the Canadian context, colonial relations of power are no longer reproduced primarily through overtly coercive means, but rather through the asymmetrical exchange of mediated forms of state recognition and accommodation. This is obviously quite different from the story Marx tells, where the driving force behind dispossession and accumulation is initially that of *violence*: it is a relationship of brute “force,” of “servitude,” whose methods, Marx claims, are “anything but idyllic.”⁵⁷ The strategic deployment of violent sovereign power, then, serves the primary reproductive function in the accumulation process in Marx’s writings on colonialism. As Marx himself bluntly put it, these gruesome state practices are what thrust capitalism onto the world stage, “dripping from head to toe, from every pore, in blood and dirt.”⁵⁸

The question that needs to be asked in our context, however, and the question to which I provide an answer in the following chapters, is this: what are we to make of contexts where state violence no longer constitutes the regulative norm governing the process of colonial dispossession, as appears to be the case in ostensibly tolerant, multinational, liberal settler polities such as Canada?⁵⁹ Stated in Marx’s own terms, if neither “blood and fire” nor the “silent compulsion” of capitalist economics can adequately account for the reproduction of colonial hierarchies in liberal democratic contexts, what can?

FRANTZ FANON AND THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION IN COLONIAL CONTEXTS

To elucidate precisely *how* colonial rule made the transition from a more-or-less unconcealed structure of domination to a mode of colonial *governmentality*

that works through the limited freedoms afforded by state recognition and accommodation, I will be drawing significantly (but not exclusively) on the work of anticolonial theorist, psychiatrist, and revolutionary Frantz Fanon.⁶⁰ At first blush, turning to Fanon to develop an understanding of the regulating mechanisms undergirding settler-colonial rule in contexts where state violence no longer constitutes the norm governing the process might seem a bit odd to those familiar with his work. After all, Fanon is arguably best known for the articulation of colonialism he develops in *The Wretched of the Earth*, where colonial rule is posited, much like Marx posited it before him, as a structure of dominance maintained through unrelenting and punishing forms of violence. “In colonial regions,” writes Fanon, the state “uses a language of *pure violence*. [It] does not alleviate oppression or mask domination.” Instead, “the proximity and frequent, direct intervention by the police and military ensure the colonized are kept under close scrutiny, and contained by rifle butts and napalm” (emphasis added).⁶¹ And considering Fanon wrote *The Wretched of the Earth* during one of the twentieth century’s most gruesome anticolonial struggles—the Algerian war of independence (1954–62)—it is not surprising that he placed so much emphasis on colonialism’s openly coercive and violent features. Given the severe nature of the colonial situation within which *The Wretched of the Earth* was produced one could argue that the diagnosis and prescriptions outlined in the text were tragically appropriate to the context they set out to address.

But this simply is not the case in contemporary Canada, and for this reason I begin my investigation with a sustained engagement with Fanon’s earlier work, *Black Skin, White Masks*. As we shall see in the following chapter, it is there that Fanon offers a groundbreaking critical analysis of the affirmative relationship drawn between recognition and freedom in the master/slave dialectic of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*—a critique I claim is equally applicable to contemporary liberal recognition-based approaches to Indigenous self-determination in Canada.⁶² Fanon’s analysis suggests that in contexts where colonial rule is not reproduced through force alone, the maintenance of settler-state hegemony requires the production of what he liked to call “colonized subjects”: namely, the production of the specific modes of colonial thought, desire, and behavior that implicitly or explicitly commit the colonized to the types of practices and subject positions that are required for their continued domination. However, unlike the liberalized appropriation of Hegel that continues to

inform many contemporary proponents of identity politics, in Fanon recognition is not posited as a source of freedom and dignity for the colonized, *but rather as the field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained*. This “is the form of recognition,” Fanon suggests, “that Hegel never described.”⁶³ Subsequently, this is also the form of recognition that I set out to interrogate in *Red Skin, White Masks*.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

With these preliminary remarks made, I will now provide a brief outline of the structure and chapter breakdown of the book. In chapter 1, I use Frantz Fanon’s critique of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic to challenge the now commonplace assumption that the structure of domination that frames Indigenous–state relations in Canada can be undermined via a liberal politics of recognition. I begin my analysis by identifying two Hegelian assumptions that continue to inform the politics of recognition today. The first, which is now uncontroversial, involves recognition’s perceived role in the constitution of human subjectivity: the notion that our identities are formed *intersubjectively* through our complex social interactions with other subjects. As Charles Taylor influentially asserts: the “crucial feature of human life is its fundamentally *dialogical* character. . . . We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others acknowledge in us.”⁶⁴ The second, more contentious assumption suggests that the specific structural or interpersonal character of our relations of recognition can have a positive (when mutual and affirmative) or detrimental (when unequal and disparaging) effect on our status as *free and self-determining agents*. I draw off Fanon’s work to partially challenge this second assumption by demonstrating the ways in which the purportedly diversity-affirming forms of state recognition and accommodation defended by some proponents of contemporary liberal recognition politics can subtly reproduce nonmutual and unfree relations rather than free and mutual ones. At its core, Fanon’s critique of colonial recognition politics can be summarized like this: when delegated exchanges of recognition occur in real world contexts of domination the terms of accommodation usually end up being determined by and in the interests of the hegemonic partner in the relationship. This is the *structural* problem of colonial recognition identified by Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Fanon then goes on to demonstrate how subaltern populations often develop what he called “psycho-affective”

attachments to these structurally circumscribed modes of recognition. For Fanon, these ideological attachments are essential in maintaining the economic and political structure of colonial relationships over time. This is the *subjective* dimension to the problem of colonial recognition highlighted in *Black Skin, White Masks*. With these two interrelated problematics identified, I go on to conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of an alternative politics of recognition, one that is less oriented around attaining legal and political recognition by the state, and more about Indigenous peoples empowering themselves through cultural practices of individual and collective self-fashioning that seek to *prefigure* radical alternatives to the structural and subjective dimensions of colonial power identified earlier in the chapter. I call this a *resurgent politics of recognition* and take it up in more detail in my concluding chapter.

In chapters 2, 3, and 4, I set out to empirically demonstrate the largely theoretical insights that are derived from my applied use of Fanon's critique of Hegel's master/slave narrative through three case studies drawn from the post-1969 history of Indigenous–state relations in Canada. These case studies will also serve to flesh out in more detail a number of recent debates within the liberal recognition and identity politics literature, including those that have focused on the following cluster of issues and concerns.

The Left-Materialist Challenge

The ascendant status of “identity,” “culture,” and “recognition” in contemporary political struggles has not emerged without controversy. Critics on the left, for example, have long voiced concern over what they claim to be the excessively insular and divisive character of many culture-based, identity-related movements.⁶⁵ More specifically, they argue that the inherently parochial and particularistic orientation of recognition-based politics is serving (or worse, has already served) to undermine more egalitarian and universal aspirations, like those focused on class and directed toward a more equitable distribution of socioeconomic goods. As Brian Barry explains: “Pursuit of the multiculturalist [recognition] agenda makes the achievement of broadly based egalitarian policies difficult in two ways. At a minimum it diverts political effort away from universalistic goals. But a more serious problem is that multiculturalism may very well destroy the conditions for putting together a coalition in favour of across-the-board equalisation of opportunities and resources.”⁶⁶ In such contexts it would indeed appear that “recognition struggles are serving

less to supplement, complicate and enrich redistribution struggles than to marginalize, eclipse and displace them,” as Nancy Fraser’s work suggests.⁶⁷ In short, advocates of the left-materialist critique challenge the affirmative relationship drawn between recognition and freedom by many defenders of identity/difference politics on the grounds that such a politics has proven itself incapable of transforming the generative material conditions that so often work to foreclose the realization of self-determination in the lives of ordinary citizens.

Chapter 2 interrogates the above challenge through an examination of the cultural, political, and economic dynamics that informed the Dene Nation’s struggle for national recognition and self-determination in the 1970s and early 1980s. During this period the Dene Nation was the main organization representing the political interests of the Dene peoples of the Northwest Territories, of which my own community is a part (the Yellowknives Dene First Nation). Although sensitive to certain concerns animating the left-materialist position, I argue that there is nothing intrinsic to the identity-related struggles of Indigenous peoples that predispose them to the cluster of charges noted above. To the contrary, I suggest that insofar as Indigenous cultural claims always involve demands for a more equitable distribution of land, political power, and economic resources, the left-materialist claim regarding the displacement of economic concerns by cultural ones is misplaced when applied to settler-colonial contexts.⁶⁸ However, if one takes a modified version of the displacement thesis and instead examines the relationship between Indigenous recognition claims and the distinction made by Nancy Fraser between “transformative” and “affirmative” forms of redistribution the criticism begins to hold more weight.⁶⁹ For Fraser, “transformative” models of redistribution are those that aspire to correct unjust distributions of power and resources *at their source*, whereas “affirmative” strategies, by contrast, strive to alter or modify the second-order effects of these first-order root causes. As we shall see with the example drawn from my community, the last forty years has witnessed a gradual erosion of this transformative vision within the mainstream Dene self-determination movement, which in the context of northern land claims and economic development has resulted in a partial decoupling of Indigenous “cultural” claims from the radical aspirations for social, political and economic change that once underpinned them. However, following my reading of Fanon, I argue that this gradual displacement of questions of Indigenous sovereignty and alternative

political economies by narrowly conceived cultural claims within the Dene struggle is better understood as an *effect* of primitive accumulation via the hegemonization of the liberal discourse of recognition than due to some core deficiency with Indigenous cultural politics as such.

The Essentialism Challenge

The second constellation of criticisms frequently leveled against the recognition paradigm revolves around the “essentialist” articulations of individual and collective identity that sometimes anchor demands for cultural accommodation in theory and practice. In recent feminist, queer, and antiracist literature, the term “essentialism” is often used pejoratively to refer to those theories and social practices that treat identity categories such as gender, race, and class as “fixed, immutable and universal,” instead of being constructed, contingent, and open to “cultural variation.”⁷⁰ According to Ann Philips, when recognition-based models of cultural pluralism invoke essentialist articulations of identity they risk functioning “not as a cultural liberator but as a cultural straitjacket,” forcing members of minority cultural groups “into a regime of authenticity, denying them the chance to cross cultural borders, borrow cultural influences, define and redefine themselves.”⁷¹ In order to avoid this potentially repressive feature of identity politics, we are told that the various expressions of identification and signification that underpin demands for recognition—such as “gender,” “culture,” “nationhood,” and “tradition”—must remain open-ended and never immune from contestation or democratic deliberation. The anti-essentialist position thus poses yet another set of challenges to the affirmative relationship drawn between recognition and freedom by uncritical supporters of the politics of difference.

Chapter 3 unpacks some of the problems identified by the anti-essentialist challenge through a gendered analysis of the decade of Indigenous mega-constitutional politics spanning the patriation of Canada’s Constitution Act, 1982 and the demise of the Charlottetown Accord in 1992. The Charlottetown Accord was a proposed agreement struck between the federal government, the provincial and territorial governments, and Aboriginal representatives on a proposed series of amendments to the Constitution Act, 1982. Among other things, the amendment sought to address issues concerning the recognition of Quebec’s distinct status within confederation, the recognition of an Aboriginal right to self-government, and parliamentary reform.

Although I remain indebted to the critical insights offered by Frantz Fanon and activists within the Dene Nation regarding the entangled relationship among racism, state power, capitalism, and colonial dispossession, all paid insufficient attention to the role played by patriarchy in this corrosive configuration of power. Recent feminist analyses of the ten-year effort to constitutionally entrench an Aboriginal right to self-government provide a particularly illustrative corrective to this shortcoming. Specifically, these analyses have done an excellent job foregrounding the manner in which contemporary essentialist articulations of Indigenous culture have converged with the legacy of patriarchal misrecognition under the Indian Act to discursively inform our recent efforts to attain recognition of a right to self-government. However, even though I find much of this anti-essentialist-inspired analysis compelling, I nonetheless hope to illuminate two problems that arise when this form of criticism is uncritically wielded in the context of Indigenous peoples' struggles for recognition and self-determination. First, using recent feminist and deliberative democratic critiques of Indigenous recognition politics as a backdrop, I demonstrate how normative appropriations of social constructivism can undercut the liberatory aspirations of anti-essentialist criticism by failing to adequately address the complexity of interlocking social relations that serve to exasperate the types of exclusionary cultural practices that critics of essentialism find so disconcerting. Second, and perhaps more problematically, I show that when constructivist views of culture are posited as a universal feature of social life and then used as a means to evaluate the legitimacy of Indigenous claims for cultural recognition against the uncontested authority of the colonial state, it can serve to sanction the very forms of domination and inequality that anti-essentialist criticism ought to mitigate.

Chapter 4 examines the convergence of Indigenous recognition politics with the more recent transitional justice discourse of "reconciliation" that began to gain considerable attention in Canada following the publication of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) in 1996. RCAP was established by the federal government in 1991 in the wake of two national crises that unraveled the previous summer and fall: the failed Meech Lake Accord and the armed standoff between the Mohawks of Kanesatake, Quebec, and the Canadian military (popularly known as the "Oka Crisis"). The commission was established with a sixteen-point mandate to investigate the troubled relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the state, and to issue a series of

comprehensive recommendations that might serve to facilitate a process of genuine “reconciliation.” The last thirty years have witnessed a global proliferation of state institutional mechanisms that promote “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” as a means of resolving the adverse social impacts of various forms of intrastate violence and historical injustice. Originally, however, this approach to conflict resolution was developed in polities undergoing a formal “transition” from the violent history of openly authoritarian regimes to more democratic forms of rule. This chapter will explore the efficacy of transitional justice mechanisms—such as state apologies, commissions of inquiry, truth and reconciliation commissions, individual reparations, and so forth—when applied to the “nontransitional” context of the Canadian settler state.

In doing so, I argue that in settler-colonial contexts such as Canada—where there is no formal period marking an explicit transition from an authoritarian past to a democratic present—state-sanctioned approaches to reconciliation tend to ideologically fabricate such a transition by narrowly situating the abuses of settler colonization firmly *in the past*. In these situations, reconciliation itself becomes temporally framed as the process of individually and collectively *overcoming* the harmful “legacy” left in the wake of this past abuse, while leaving the *present* structure of colonial rule largely unscathed. In such a context, those who refuse to forgive or reconcile are typically represented in the policy literature as suffering from this legacy, unable or unwilling to “move on” because of their simmering anger and resentment. Drawing again on Frantz Fanon’s work, I challenge the ways in which Canadian reconciliation politics tends to uncritically represent Indigenous expressions of anger and resentment as “negative” emotions that threaten to impede the realization of reconciliation in the lives of Indigenous people and communities on the one hand, and between Indigenous nations and Canada on the other. Although it is on occasion acknowledged that reactive emotions like anger and resentment can generate both positive and negative effects, more often than not defenders of reconciliation represent these emotional expressions in an unsympathetic light—as irrational, as physically and psychologically unhealthy, as reactionary, backward looking, and even as socially pathological. In contradistinction to this view, I argue that in the context of ongoing settler-colonial injustice, Indigenous peoples’ anger and resentment can indicate a sign of moral protest and political outrage that we ought to at least take seriously, if not embrace as a sign of our critical consciousness.

By the end of chapter 4 it should be evident why Fanon did not attribute much emancipatory potential to either a Hegelian or liberal politics of recognition when applied to colonial situations; this did not lead Fanon to reject the recognition paradigm entirely, however. Instead, what Fanon's work does is redirect our attention to the host of *self-affirmative* cultural practices that colonized peoples often critically engage in to *empower themselves*, as opposed to relying too heavily on the subjectifying apparatus of the state or other dominant institutions of power to do this for them. In doing so, Fanon's position challenges colonized peoples to transcend the fantasy that the settler-state apparatus—as a structure of domination *predicated* on our ongoing dispossession—is somehow capable of producing liberatory effects.⁷² The task of chapter 5 is to flesh out this self-affirmative thread in Fanon's thought and politics through a critical reading of his engagement with the work of Jean-Paul Sartre on the one hand, and the *negritude* movement on the other. Although *negritude* constituted a diverse body of inter- and postwar, francophone black artistic production and political activism, at its core the movement emphasized the need for colonized people and communities to purge themselves of the internalized effects of colonial racism through an affirmation of the worth of black difference. I argue that even though Fanon's critical appraisal of *negritude* clearly saw the revaluation of precolonial African cultural forms as a crucial means of momentarily freeing the colonized from the interpellative grasp of racist misrecognition, in the end it will be shown that he shared Sartre's unwillingness to acknowledge the transformative role that critically revived Indigenous cultural practices might play in the construction of alternatives to the colonial project of genocide and land dispossession. I thus conclude the chapter with the claim that, although insightful in many respects, Fanon's overly instrumental view of the relationship between culture and decolonization renders his theory inadequate as a framework for understanding contemporary Indigenous struggles for self-determination. Indigenous peoples tend to view their resurgent practices of cultural self-recognition and empowerment as *permanent* features of our decolonial political projects, not transitional ones.

The conclusion begins with a reiteration of the main line of argument defended in *Red Skin, White Masks*—that the liberal recognition-based approach to Indigenous self-determination in Canada that began to consolidate itself after the demise of the 1969 White Paper has not only failed, but now serves to reproduce the very forms of colonial power which our original demands for

recognition sought to transcend. This argument will undoubtedly be controversial to many Indigenous scholars and Aboriginal organization leaders insofar as it suggests that much of our efforts over the last four decades to attain settler-state recognition of our rights to land and self-government have in fact encouraged the opposite—the continued dispossession of our homelands and the ongoing usurpation of our self-determining authority. I suggest that this conclusion demands that we begin to collectively redirect our struggles *away* from a politics that seeks to attain a conciliatory form of settler-state recognition for Indigenous nations toward a *resurgent politics of recognition* premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural practices that are attentive to the subjective and structural composition of settler-colonial power. I thus conclude my investigation in *Red Skin, White Masks* with “5 theses” on Indigenous politics that highlight the core features of this resurgent approach to Indigenous decolonization in light of the Idle No More movement that exploded onto the Canadian political scene in Canada in the late fall/early winter of 2012. What originally began in the fall of 2012 as an education campaign designed to inform Canadians about a particularly repugnant and undemocratic piece of legislation recently passed by the Canadian federal government—the Jobs and Growth Act, or Bill C-45, which threatens to erode Indigenous land and treaty rights as well as environmental protections for much of our waterways—had erupted by mid-January 2013 into a full-blown defense of Indigenous land and sovereignty. Idle No More offers a productive case study through which to explore what a resurgent Indigenous politics might look like on the ground.