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Book Author(s): Glen Sean Coulthard

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CONCLUSION

Lessons from Idle No More

The Future of Indigenous Activism

Personal and collective transformation is not instrumental to the surging against state power, it is the very means of our struggle.

—TAIAIAKE ALFRED, *Wasáse*

In writing this book I set out to problematize the increasingly commonplace assumption that the colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state can be reconciled via a liberal “politics of recognition.” I characterized the “politics of recognition” as a recognition-based approach to reconciling Indigenous peoples’ assertions of nationhood with settler-state sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identity-related claims through the negotiation of settlements over issues such as land, economic development, and self-government. I argued that this orientation to the reconciliation of Indigenous nationhood with state sovereignty is still *colonial* insofar as it remains structurally committed to the dispossession of Indigenous peoples of our lands and self-determining authority.

My conceptualization of settler-colonialism as a structure of domination predicated on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ lands and political authority drew significantly from two theoretical resources: Karl Marx’s writings on the “primitive accumulation” of capital and Frantz Fanon’s anticolonial critique of Hegel’s master/slave parable when applied to colonial situations. With respect to Marx, I argued that three issues must be addressed within his work to make his writings on colonialism relevant for analyzing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and liberal settler politics like Canada. First, I argued that Marx’s thesis on primitive accumulation must be stripped of its rigidly *temporal* character; that is, rather than positing primitive accumulation as some historically situated, inaugural set of events that set the stage for the development of the capitalist mode of production through colonial expansion,

we should see it as an ongoing practice of dispossession that never ceases to structure capitalist and colonial social relations in the present. *Settler-colonialism is territorially acquisitive in perpetuity*. Second, I argued that Marx's theory of primitive accumulation must be stripped of its early *normative developmentalist* character. While it is correct to view primitive accumulation as the condition of possibility for the development and ongoing reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, it is incorrect to view it as a *necessary* condition for developing the forms of critical consciousness and associated modes of life that ought to inform the construction of alternatives to capitalism in settler-colonial contexts. I also suggested that Marx himself came to acknowledge the problematic character of this early formulation of his thesis and worked to correct it in the last decade of his life. And finally, I argued that the forms of colonial power associated with primitive accumulation need not be understood as strictly coercive, repressive, or explicitly violent in nature; rather, the practices of dispossession central to the maintenance of settler-colonialism in liberal democratic contexts like Canada rely as much on the *productive* character of colonial power as it does on the coercive authority of the settler state. Seen from this angle, settler-colonialism should not be seen as deriving its reproductive force solely from its strictly repressive or violent features, but rather from its ability to produce *forms of life* that make settler-colonialism's constitutive hierarchies seem natural.

To tease out the productive character of settler-colonial power I turned to the theoretical contribution of Frantz Fanon. I used Fanon's work because it implicates the role played by *recognition* in the reproduction of settler-colonial forms of rule in a manner that still resonates today. More specifically, I used Fanon's critical engagement with the dialectic of recognition theorized in Hegel's master/slave narrative to identify the neocolonial function played by contemporary recognition politics in maintaining the settler-colonial relationship between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state. I drew three insights from Fanon in particular. First, I claimed that Fanon's critique of Hegel's theory of recognition convincingly unpacks the ways in which delegated exchanges of political recognition from the colonizer to the colonized usually ends up being structurally determined by and in the interests of the colonizer. Second, Fanon also identifies the subtle ways in which colonized populations often come to develop what he called "psycho-affective" attachments to these circumscribed, master-sanctioned forms of delegated recognition. For

Fanon, these psycho-affective or ideological attachments create an impression of “naturalness” to the colonial condition, which he referred to as “internalization” or “internalized” colonialism. Third, Fanon showed how colonized populations, despite the totalizing power of colonialism, are often able to turn these internalized forms of colonial recognition into expressions of Indigenous self-empowerment through the reclamation and revitalization of pre-colonial social relations and cultural traditions. In the end, however, Fanon viewed these practices of Indigenous cultural self-empowerment, or *self-recognition*, as insufficient for decolonization: they constitute a “means” but not an “end.”

In this chapter I conclude my analysis by turning our attention to the contributions that Indigenous scholars and activists, particularly but not necessarily limited to those working within the emergent theory and practice of *Indigenous resurgence*, have added to our understanding of the entanglement of contemporary recognition politics with the operation of settler-colonial power.¹ I feel that it is important to conclude my study in this way because Indigenous contributions to anticolonial thought and practice have been generally underappreciated for their transformative value and insights. Indeed, as we saw in the previous chapter, even Fanon viewed the decolonial potential of Indigenous cultural politics as fundamentally undercut by its *ressentiment*-directed orientation toward the past. “We should not therefore be content to delve into the people’s past to find *concrete examples* to counter colonialism’s endeavour to distort or depreciate,” writes Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth*.² “Colonialism will never be put to shame by exhibiting unknown cultural treasures under its nose.”³ I suggest that it is on this point that we reach a limit to Fanon’s anticolonial analysis, especially when applied to the settler-colonial dynamics that inform our current circumstances. Although Fanon eschews an evolutionary anthropological theory of historical development in which societies are viewed as developing along a linear path from primitive to civilized, he remains wedded to a *dialectical* conception of social transformation that privileges the “new” over the “old.” When this dialectic is applied to colonial situations, the result, I claim, is a conceptualization of “culture” that mimics how Marxists understand “class”: as a *transitional* category of identification that colonized peoples must struggle to *transcend* as soon as they become conscious of its existence as a form of identification. This view simply does not provide much insight into either what motivates Indigenous resistance to

settler colonization or into the cultural foundations upon which Indigenous noncolonial alternatives might be constructed.

The concluding thoughts I offer in this chapter are organized into three sections. In the first one, I examine the work of two theorists of Indigenous resurgence, Taiaiake Alfred and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, and parse out their significant contributions to our understanding of the dynamics that shape settler-colonialism and Indigenous decolonization in Canada. In the second section, I use the emergent Idle No More movement as a backdrop against which to explore what a resurgent decolonial politics might look like in practice. And finally, I conclude with “Five Theses on Indigenous Resurgence and Decolonization,” in light of what we have learned throughout the preceding chapters.

INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE

To my mind, the most explicit theorization of the Indigenous resurgence paradigm can be found in the writings of two Indigenous scholar/activists working here in Canada: Mohawk political scientist Taiaiake Alfred and Anishinaabe feminist Leanne Simpson.⁴ Like Fanon’s quasi-Nietzschean invocation of self-affirmation in *Black Skin, White Masks*, both Alfred and Simpson start from a position that calls on Indigenous people and communities to “turn away” from the assimilative reformism of the liberal recognition approach and to instead build our national liberation efforts on the revitalization of “traditional” political values and practices.⁵ “We [must] choose to *turn away* from the legacies of colonialism,” writes Alfred in *Wasáse*, “and take on the challenge of creating a new reality for ourselves and for our people.”⁶ For Simpson, decolonization requires that Indigenous communities reorient our collective labor from attempts to transform “the colonial outside into a flourishing of the *Indigenous* inside.” In other words, we need to decolonize “on our own terms, without the sanction, permission or engagement of the state, western theory or the opinions of Canadians.”⁷

Unlike Fanon’s notion of self-affirmation, however, the resurgence paradigm defended by Alfred and Simpson does not require us to dialectically transcend Indigenous practices of the past once the affirmation of these practices has served to reestablish us as historical protagonists in the present. For Alfred, the struggle to regenerate “traditional values” is assigned a far more substantive value: “We have a responsibility to recover, understand, and preserve

these values, not only because they represent a unique contribution to the history of ideas, but because renewal of respect for traditional values is the only *lasting solution* to the political, economic, and social problems that beseech our people.⁸ The same goes for Simpson's work: "Building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences means significantly reinvesting in our own ways of being: regenerating our political and intellectual traditions; articulating and living our legal traditions; language learning; creating and using our artistic and performance based traditions. [Decolonization] requires us to reclaim the very best practices of our traditional cultures, knowledge systems and lifeways in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context in which they were originally generated."⁹ In *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, Alfred refers to these ethico-political practices of Indigenous resurgence as a form of "self-conscious traditionalism"—that is, a self-reflective program of culturally grounded de-subjectification that aims to undercut the interplay between subjectivity and structural domination that help maintain settler-colonial relationships in contexts absent pure force.¹⁰

For Alfred, colonial recognition politics serves the imperatives of capitalist accumulation by *appearing* to address its colonial history through symbolic acts of redress while in actuality "further entrenching in law and practice the real bases of its control."¹¹ As we have seen, over the last forty years Canada has recognized a host of rights specific to Aboriginal communities, including most importantly to land and self-government. Canada has always used this recognition, however, as evidence of its ultimately just relationship with Indigenous communities, even though this recognition continues to be structured with colonial power interests in mind. Simpson levels a similar charge against the more recent "turn to reconciliation" in Indigenous politics. "As reconciliation has become institutionalized," writes Simpson, "I worry our participation will benefit the state in an asymmetrical fashion."¹² In Simpson's view, the state's approach to reconciliation serves to neutralize the legitimacy of Indigenous justice claims by offering statements of regret and apology for harms narrowly conceived of as occurring in the past, thus off-loading Canada's responsibility to address structural injustices that continue to inform our settler-colonial present. In doing so the state can claim "that the historical 'wrong' has been 'righted' and further transformation is not needed."¹³ In the end, the optics created by these grand gestures of recognition and reconciliation suggests to the dominant society that we no longer have a legitimate

ground to stand on in expressing our grievances. Instead, Indigenous people appear unappreciative, angry, and resentful, as we saw in chapter 4.

The optics of recognition and reconciliation can also have a colonial impact on Indigenous subjects. For both Alfred and Simpson, settler-colonial rule is a form of *governmentality*: a relatively diffuse set of governing relations that operate through a circumscribed mode of recognition that structurally ensures continued access to Indigenous peoples' lands and resources by producing neocolonial subjectivities that coopt Indigenous people into becoming instruments of their own dispossession. According to this view, contemporary colonialism works *through* rather than entirely *against* freedom: In the "new relationship," writes Alfred, the "rusty cage [of colonialism] may be broken, but a new chain has been strung around the indigenous neck; *it offers more room to move, but it still ties our people to white men pulling on the strong end.*"¹⁴ Alfred's concern here is that many Indigenous people, particularly those leaders and community organizers heavily invested in the colonial politics of recognition, have come to associate this externally imposed field of maneuver with freedom or decolonization itself.

The biopolitics of settler-colonial recognition can also problematically inform our efforts at Indigenous resurgence. For both authors, recognizing this demands that we remain cognizant of the pitfalls associated with retreating into an uncritical essentialism in our practices of cultural revitalization. As Alfred states in *Peace, Power, Righteousness*: "Working within a traditional framework, we must acknowledge the fact that traditions change, and that any particular notion that constitutes 'tradition' will be contested."¹⁵ A similar insistence on cultural dynamism informs Simpson's work. Resurgence does not "literally mean returning to the past," insists Simpson, "but rather re-creating the cultural and political flourishing of the past to support the well being of our contemporary citizens."¹⁶ For Simpson this requires that we reclaim "the fluidity of our traditions, not the rigidity of colonialism."¹⁷ Acknowledging culture's malleability, however, does not mean that we cannot still identify certain "beliefs, values and principles that form the persistent core of a community's culture," writes Alfred. It is this "traditional framework that we must use as the basis on which to build a better society." The resurgence Alfred and Simpson advocate is thus a *critical* one: an intellectual, social, political, and artistic movement geared toward the self-reflective revitalization of those "values, principles and other cultural elements that are best suited to the larger

contemporary political and economic reality.”¹⁸ Resurgence, in this view, draws critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present.

In *Wasáse* Alfred expands on the foundational critique he develops in *Peace, Power, Righteousness* in a way that provides more depth to our understanding of both the complexity of power relations that give shape to settler-colonialism and the types of practices we might engage in to transform these relations. To my mind, one of the more important layers of complexity Alfred adds in *Wasáse* has to do with the placement of gender in his theoretical framework, which was largely absent in previous work. I would suggest that there are two reasons that inform the inclusion of a gendered component to Alfred’s more recent position. First, and most importantly, the crucial interventions of Indigenous feminist scholarship and activism over the years have made it *impossible* for any credible scholar working within the field to ignore the centrality of sexism to the colonial aims of land dispossession and sovereignty usurpation. This crucial area of work has also made it impossible to credibly ignore the impact that colonial patriarchy continues to have on our national liberation efforts. Second, I also think that gender figures its way into Alfred’s more recent work because of the explicit collapse of any ends/means distinction in his notion of resurgence. One of the central “problems” with Indigenous politics, insists Alfred, “is that there is no consistency of means and ends in the way that we are struggling to empower ourselves.”¹⁹ For Alfred, we must remain cognizant of the subtle ways our methods can come to discursively shape the ends we seek to attain through our decolonization strategies.²⁰ This is why Alfred is quick to insist that the struggles of Indigenous peoples today cannot hold onto a concept of struggle “that is gendered in the way it once was and that is located in an obsolete view of men’s and women’s roles.” Instead, Indigenous struggles must “be rethought and recast from the solely masculine view of the old traditional ways to a new concept of the warrior that is freed from colonial gender constructions.”²¹

Critically, Simpson extends this gendered analysis to interrogate the subtle infiltration of heteropatriarchal norms in our practices of national liberation and resurgence. Drawing off the insights of recent scholars working at the intersection of queer theory and Indigenous studies, in particular the writings of Chris Finely and Andrea Smith,²² Simpson challenges the perpetuation of heteropatriarchy within our movements on several fronts, including “[through

the construction of] rigid (colonial) gender roles, pressuring women to wear certain articles of clothing to ceremonies, the exclusion of LGBTQ₂ individuals from communities and ceremonies, the dominance of male-centred narratives regarding Indigenous experience, the lack of recognition for women and LGBTQ₂'s voices, experiences, contributions and leadership, and narrow interpretations of tradition used to control the contributions of women in ceremony, politics and leadership."²³ Although I am speculating here, I suspect that Simpson's important call to "queer resurgence" represents her own response to concerns raised by Métis feminist Emma LaRoque regarding the heteronormative conception of Indigenous womanhood that underwrites certain aspects of recent Indigenous feminist reclamation projects. Of particular concern to LaRoque is the manner in which Cree feminist Kim Anderson appears to foreground her particular view of Indigenous motherhood as "central to Aboriginal women's epistemology" in general. Although LaRoque recognizes that Anderson takes "great pains" to include as many nonmothers as possible in her analysis, including extended family members and other Indigenous women caregivers who do not have children, Anderson's normative privileging of "maternalization" nevertheless ends up being "totalizing and exclusionary." LaRoque's point here is not to dismiss the emancipatory potential of Anderson's invocation of a "maternal-based" ethical practice; rather, she is simply highlighting the way in which a specific practice of cultural empowerment can itself discursively rule out or constrain other equally legitimate and potentially empowering ways of being Indigenous in the present.²⁴ I think that Simpson's argument in "Queering Resurgence" is meant to clarify the decolonial role she attributes to her own experience of motherhood and childrearing in *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*.²⁵ Perpetuating these heteronormative exclusions "cannot be part of our nation-building work," states Simpson unequivocally. "This is not resurgence."²⁶

Alfred's call for a consistency between the means and ends of decolonization implicates more than oppressive gender constructions. It also has ramifications in the realm of political economy and governance. In relation to political economy, for example, Alfred's resurgent approach to decolonization demands that we challenge the commonsense idea that one can construct an equitable relationship with non-Indigenous peoples and a sustainable relationship with the land by participating more intensely in a capitalist economy that is environmentally unsustainable and founded, at its core, on racial, gender, and class exploitation and inequalities.²⁷ The same can be said regarding our attempts

to negotiate a relation of nondomination with a structure of domination like the colonial nation-state. For Alfred, the best aspects of traditional Indigenous governing practices stand in “sharp contrast to the dominant understanding of ‘the state’: there is no absolute authority, no coercive enforcement of decisions, no hierarchy and no separate ruling entity.”²⁸ In our thirty-year effort to achieve recognition of a right to self-government, we have come to accept the liberal democratic state as a legitimate, if not normative, mode of political organization. In doing so, Alfred claims that we have allowed “indigenous political goals to be framed and evaluated according to a ‘statist’ pattern.”²⁹ In light of the productive capacity of the colonial state to call forth modes of life that mimic its constitutive power features, Alfred’s concern is that our negotiations for self-government will end up replicating the worst manifestations of the state’s power within the intensified context of our own communities and governance structures. We also saw in chapter 3 how a similar concern came to animate the late Mohawk legal theorist Patricia Monture’s critique of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as an appropriate tool in the gender justice struggles of Indigenous women. For Monture, when Native women seek legal protection from the patriarchal colonial state as a means of ameliorating the gendered violence that the state has disciplined into the minds and bodies of our citizens through the Indian Act, they risk reifying the subjective and structural relations required for their continued domination both as Indigenous women and as members of Indigenous nations.³⁰ To my mind, Monture’s insight here adds a crucial gender dynamic to Alfred’s claims that “structural change negotiated in a colonial cultural context will only achieve the further entrenchment of the social and political foundations of injustice, leading to reforms that are mere modifications to the pre-existing structures of domination.”³¹ By contrast, the resurgent approach to recognition advocated here explicitly eschews the instrumental rationality central to the liberal politics of recognition and instead demands that we *enact* or *practice* our political commitments to Indigenous national and women’s liberation in the cultural form and content of our struggle itself. Indigenous resurgence is at its core a *prefigurative* politics—the methods of decolonization prefigure its aims.

IDLE NO MORE: A HISTORY

Below I want to turn our attention to the Idle No More movement that burst onto the Canadian political scene in the late fall/early winter of 2012/13. To my mind, Idle No More offers a productive case study against which to explore

what a resurgent Indigenous politics might look like on the ground. Before I turn to this analysis, however, providing a bit of context to the movement is required.

On December 14, 2012, the Canadian senate passed the Conservative federal government's controversial omnibus Bill C-45. Bill C-45, also known as the Jobs and Growth Act, is a four-hundred-plus-page budget implementation bill that contains comprehensive changes to numerous pieces of federal legislation, including, but not limited to, the Indian Act, the Fisheries Act, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, and the Navigable Water Act.³² From the perspective of many Indigenous people and communities, the changes contained in Bill C-45 threaten to erode Aboriginal land and treaty rights insofar as they reduce the amount of resource development projects that require environmental assessment; they change the regulations that govern on-reserve leasing in a way that will make it easier for special interests to access First Nation reserve lands for the purposes of economic development and settlement; and they radically curtail environmental protections for lakes and rivers.³³

Indigenous opposition to Bill C-45 began in the fall of 2012 as a grassroots education campaign initiated by four women from the prairies—Jessica Gordon, Sylvia McAdam, Sheelah McLean and Nina Wilson—under the mantra “Idle No More.” The campaign's original aim was to provide information to Canadians about the impending impacts of Bill C-45 on Aboriginal rights and environmental protections before the legislation was passed by the Canadian senate. Then, on December 4, Chief Theresa Spence of the Attawapiskat Cree Nation announced that she would begin a hunger strike on December 11 to bring attention to the deplorable housing conditions on her reserve in northern Ontario, to raise awareness about the impacts of Bill C-45, and to demonstrate her support for the emerging Idle No More movement. During her hunger strike Chief Spence consumed only liquids—a combination of lemon water, medicinal teas, and fish broth—which she claimed she would continue to do until she secured a meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Governor-General David Johnson to discuss treaty rights. Her hunger strike took place in a teepee on Victoria Island, near Parliament Hill in Ottawa, and lasted from December 11 until January 24, 2013.

By the second week in December the movement had exploded on social media under the Twitter hash tag #IdleNoMore (or #INM for short), with the first national “day of action” called for December 10. Protests erupted in

cities across the country. At this point, the tactics favored by Idle No More participants involved a combination of “flash mob” round-dancing and drumming in public spaces like shopping malls, street intersections, and legislature grounds, coupled with an ongoing public education campaign organized through community-led conferences, teach-ins, and public panels. On December 21 an Idle No More protest involving thousands of Indigenous people and their supporters descended on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. During roughly the same time, Idle No More tactics began to diversify to include the use of blockades and temporary train and traffic stoppages, the most publicized of which involved a two-week railway blockade established in late December by the Aamjiwnaag First Nation near Sarnia, Ontario.³⁴

By late December it was clear the something truly significant was underway with the Idle No More movement. Indeed, Canada had not seen such a sustained, united, and coordinated nationwide mobilization of Indigenous nations against a legislative assault on our rights since the proposed White Paper of 1969. What had begun in the fall of 2012 as an education campaign designed to inform Canadians about a particularly repugnant and undemocratic piece of legislation had erupted by mid-January 2013 into a full-blown defense of Indigenous land and sovereignty. By early January the momentum generated by Idle No More, in combination with the media attention paid to Chief Spence’s hunger strike, had created such a national stir that the Prime Minister’s Office was forced to respond by calling a January 11 meeting with the Assembly of First Nations, although the prime minister never explicitly stated that his decision to call the meeting was a result of pressure mounted by the escalating protests.³⁵

At the height of the protest activities leading into the January 11 gathering, political analyses of the movement ranged from the entirely asinine to coverage that was both engaged and critically astute. Exemplifying the former, right-wing ideologue Christie Blatchford referred to Chief Spence’s peaceful hunger strike as an act of “intimidation, if not terrorism: She is, after all, holding the state hostage to vaguely articulated demands.”³⁶ The claim that Idle No More’s “demands” were somehow abstruse was (and, at the time of writing this chapter in March 2013, continues to be) popular among mainstream media critics. In an especially laughable piece written for the *National Post* in January 2013, Kelly McParland speculated that Idle No More’s lack of focus and clarity was a result of the movement having been “seized” by the forces of

Occupy Wall Street. "What are the aims of The Cause?" asks McParland condescendingly. "No one is really quite sure: just as with Occupy, the Idle forces are disparate and leaderless."³⁷ For others, however, it is precisely the diversity and bottom-up character of the movement that make decolonization movements like Idle No More so potentially transformative. Idle No More "is not led by any elected politician, national chief or paid executive director," explains Mi'kmaq legal scholar Pamela Palmater. "It is a movement originally led by indigenous women and has been joined by grassroots First Nations leaders, Canadians, and now the world."³⁸ Similarly, for Leanne Simpson, the strength of the movement lies in the fact that it is not led from above, but rather has "hundreds of eloquent spokespeople, seasoned organizers, writers, thinkers and artists acting on their own ideas in anyway and every way possible. This is the beauty of our movement."³⁹

As with any grassroots political movement, the diversity at the heart of Idle No More resulted in debates and disagreements over what types of strategies and tactics to use in our efforts to forge meaningful change. These debates intensified in the days leading up to the January 11 meeting. On the one side, there was the perspective among many Native people working within mainstream Aboriginal organizations that saw the January 11 meeting as an important space to get Aboriginal issues and concerns on the federal government's political agenda. On the other side of the debate, however, were the voices emanating up from the communities (with some chiefs following suit), that saw the turn to high-level political negotiations as yet another attempt by the state and Aboriginal organizations, in particular the Assembly of First Nations, to coopt the transformative potential of the movement by redirecting it in a more moderate and reformist direction.⁴⁰ Longtime Secwepemc activist and leader Arthur Manuel gets to the core of the debate when he writes that "one thing is clear: that certain Indigenous leaders only know how to meet with government and not fight with government. In situations like Friday [January 11] they say that it is important to 'engage' with government when they open the door to discussion. The real problem is that you get sucked into basically supporting the government's position unless you walk out. In this case it is just another 'process' and not 'change in policy' that the AFN left the room with."⁴¹ There is much historical evidence to support Manuel's concern. If we take a step back and look at the history that led to our present juncture, especially since the late 1960s, the state has always responded to increased levels of

Indigenous political assertiveness and militancy by attempting to contain these outbursts through largely symbolic gestures of political inclusion and recognition. Indeed, as we saw in chapter 4, this was precisely the manner in which the federal government attempted to address the fallout of the decade-long escalation of First Nations' militancy that culminated in the Meech Lake Accord and the conflict at Kanesatake in 1990. And if we push our view back a bit further yet, we see a similar strategy used by the federal government to quell the upsurge of struggle that eventually defeated the White Paper of 1969. It was at this time that the entire policy orientation of Canada's approach to solving the "Indian problem" began to shift from willfully ignoring Aboriginal peoples' rights to recognizing them in the manageable form of land claims and eventually self-government agreements. I suggest that Idle No More is an indication of the ultimate failure of this approach to reconciliation. After forty years the subtle lure of Canada's vacuous gestures of accommodation have begun to lose their political sway.

All of this is to say that the January 11 meeting did not transpire without major controversy. One of the most significant points of contention involved the refusal of Prime Minister Harper to include the participation of Governor-General David Johnson in the meeting, thwarting the demand of Chief Spence and a growing number of First Nations leaders and Idle No More supporters. As the Crown's official representative in Canada, the governor-general's roles and responsibilities are today largely symbolic in nature. However, from the perspective of treaty First Nations, securing a meeting with the governor-general would have emphasized the nation-to-nation character of the relationship between First Nations and the Crown. This is especially important given the manner in which Canada has failed to live up to the spirit and intent of these historic agreements. Prime Minister Harper's refusal to concede to Chief Spence's demand on this point signified a refusal by Canada to take the treaty relationship seriously more generally, which was the central point of demanding a meeting with the governor-general's participation to begin with. Combined with the previously mentioned concern of cooptation, the failure to invite the governor-general resulted in a boycott of the meeting by a number of prominent leaders within the Assembly of First Nations, including the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, which represents sixty-four First Nations in the province of Manitoba.⁴² Chief Spence also declined to attend the meeting as well as break with her hunger strike.

Native anger and frustration in the immediate lead-up to the January 11 gathering resulted in a call among some Idle No More supporters for an escalation in land-based direct action, including by Grand Chief Derek Nepinak of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs: "The Idle No More movement has the people," warned Nepinak at a January 10 press conference, "it has the people and the numbers that can bring the Canadian economy to its knees. . . . We have the warriors that are standing up now that are willing to go that far."⁴³ Apparently many activists shared Chief Nepinak's sentiment, and on January 16 another national day of action was called, this time focusing on more assertive forms of Indigenous protest. Actions including rallies, railway blockades, and traffic stoppages swept across the country, including railway barricades erected in Manitoba, Ontario, and British Columbia; highway and bridge stoppages in British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick, and Alberta; as well as the now regular display of marches, flash-mob round-dances, drumming, and prayer circles.⁴⁴

By the last week in January media speculation was beginning to circulate about the possibility of Chief Spence ending her hunger strike after securing a "Declaration of Commitment" by the executive committee of the Assembly of First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and the caucuses of two of Canada's federal opposition parties, the New Democrats and the Liberals. On January 23 it was confirmed that Chief Spence (along with Raymond Robinson of Cross Lake, Manitoba, who was also on a hunger strike) would be ending her strike the following day. The "Declaration of Commitment" that ended the two hunger strikes was the culmination of a week's worth of negotiations led by Native leader Alvin Fiddler and interim Liberal Party leader Bob Rae. Among the thirteen points of the declaration is a call for a "national inquiry" into the hundreds of cases of murdered and missing Aboriginal women that have gone unsolved in Canada; improving Aboriginal education and housing; fully implementing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; reform of the federal government's comprehensive lands claims policy; the establishment of an implementation framework for First Nations' treaty rights; and, of course, a comprehensive review of Bill C-45, undertaken with meaningful consultation with Aboriginal peoples.⁴⁵

As I was a close observer of the movement in general and a regular participant in the Idle No More events and teach-ins in the Vancouver area in particular, by late January it had become clear to me that a relative decline in Idle

No More's more overt and thus publically conspicuous forms of protest was underway. Somewhat predictably, this was interpreted by many outlets of Canada's corporate media as a decline in the movement itself. In newspeak, Idle No More had "lost its legs." At that time, I sensed that a moment of pause and critical reflection was underway, yes, but this should not be interpreted as a deterioration of the movement's spirit and resolve. Prime Minister Stephen Harper has stated that, despite the outcry of informed concerns emanating from Indigenous communities and their allies through spring 2013, Bill C-45 is not up for negotiation. Business, in other words, will proceed as usual. As long as the land remains in jeopardy, supporters of movements like Idle No More will continue the struggle. "We're in this for the long haul," explains Pamela Palmater. "It was never meant to be a flashy one month, then go away. This is something that's years in the making. . . . You'll see it take different forms at different times, but it's not going away anytime soon."⁴⁶ Indeed, the recent escalation and increased public visibility of Indigenous anti-fracking protests in places like Elsipogtog, New Brunswick, along with the ongoing anti-oil sands activism led by Native communities in northern Alberta, and the unrelenting antipipeline campaigns mounted by First Nations communities across British Columbia, are a clear demonstration of Indigenous peoples' continued resolve to defend their land and sovereignty from further encroachments by state and capital.

FIVE THESES ON INDIGENOUS RESURGENCE AND DECOLONIZATION

As a conclusion to this study I want to critically reflect on the Idle No More movement in light of what we have discussed up to this point. With this as my aim, I will organize my thoughts around five theses on Indigenous resurgence. These theses are not meant to be overly prescriptive or conclusive. Instead I propose them with the aim of both consolidating and contributing to the constructive debates and critical conversations that have already animated the movement to date. They also indicate areas where future research is required.

Thesis 1: On the Necessity of Direct Action

I am going to structure my comments on direct action around a discursive restraint that has increasingly been placed on movements like Idle No More (both from within and from without) since the debates that emerged leading

into the January 11 meeting with Prime Minister Harper and the January 16 national day of action. This constraint involves the type of tactics that are being represented as morally legitimate in our efforts to defend our land and rights as Indigenous peoples, on the one hand, and those that are increasingly being presented as either morally illegitimate or at least politically self-defeating because of their disruptive, extralegal, and therefore potentially alienating character, on the other hand.

With respect to those approaches deemed “legitimate” in defending our rights, emphasis is usually placed on formal “negotiations”—usually carried out between “official” Aboriginal leadership and representatives of the state—and if need be coupled with largely symbolic acts of peaceful, nondisruptive protest that abide by Canada’s “rule of law.” Those approaches that are increasingly deemed “illegitimate” include, but are not limited to, forms of “direct action” that seek to influence power through less mediated and sometimes more disruptive and confrontational measures. In the context of Indigenous peoples’ struggles, the forms of “direct action” often taken to be problematic include activities like temporarily blocking access to Indigenous territories with the aim of impeding the exploitation of Indigenous peoples’ land and resources, or in rarer cases still, the more-or-less permanent reoccupation of a portion of Native land through the establishment of a reclamation site which also serves to disrupt, if not entirely block, access to Indigenous peoples’ territories by state and capital for sustained periods of time. Even though these actions may be oriented toward gaining some solid commitment by the state to curtail its colonial activities, I think that they still ought to be considered “direct action” for three reasons: first, the practices are directly undertaken by the subjects of colonial oppression themselves and seek to produce an immediate power effect; second, they are undertaken in a way that indicates a loosening of internalized colonialism, which is itself a precondition for any meaningful change; and third, they are prefigurative in the sense that they build the skills and social relationships (including those with the land) that are required within and among Indigenous communities to construct alternatives to the colonial relationship in the long run. Regardless of their diversity and specificity, however, most of these actions tend to get branded in the media as the typical Native “blockade.” Militant, threatening, disruptive, and violent.

The following positions are typical of those that emerged in the wake of the January 11 meeting regarding use of these direct action tactics to defend

Indigenous peoples' land and interests. The first position is drawn from a statement made by the former national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Ovide Mercredi, at an Aboriginal leadership gathering in the spring of 2013. In his speech Mercredi boldly stated that it is "only through talk, not through blockades that [real] progress will be made."⁴⁷ The assumption here, of course, is that the most productive means to forge lasting change in the lives of Indigenous people and communities is through the formal channels of negotiation. The second example is slightly more predictable. It is drawn from a statement made by Prime Minister Stephen Harper: "People have the right in our country to demonstrate and express their points of view peacefully as long as they obey the law, but I think the Canadian population expects everyone will obey the law in holding such protests."⁴⁸

There are three arguments that typically get used when critics rail against the use of more assertive forms of Indigenous protest actions. The first is the one clearly articulated by Mercredi in the statement I just quoted: negotiations are, objectively speaking, simply more effective in securing the rights and advancing the interests of Indigenous communities. This is simply false. Historically, I would venture to suggest that all negotiations over the scope and content of Aboriginal peoples' rights in the last forty years have piggybacked off the assertive direct actions—including the escalated use of blockades—spearheaded by Indigenous women and other grassroots elements of our communities. For example, there would likely have been *no* negotiations over Aboriginal rights and title in British Columbia through the current land claims process (as problematic as it is) if it were not for the ongoing commitment of Indigenous activists willing to put their bodies on the line in defense of their lands and communities. There would have likely been *no* Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples without the land-based direct actions of the Innu in Labrador, the Lubicon Cree in Alberta, the Algonquin of Barrier Lake, the Mohawks of Kanasatake and Kahnawake, the Haida of Haida Gwaii, the Anishanaabe of Temagami, and the countless other Indigenous communities across Canada that have put themselves directly in harm's way in the defense of their lands and distinct ways of life. Likewise, there would have likely been *no* provincial inquiry (there has yet to be a national one) into the shameful number of murdered and missing Indigenous women in Vancouver and across the province if it were not for the thousands of Native women and their allies who have formed lasting networks of mutual care and support and taken to the streets

every year on February 14 for more than two decades to ensure that state-sanctioned sexual violence against Indigenous women ends here and now. All of this is to say that if there has been any progress in securing our rights to land and life—including through the largely male-dominated world of formal negotiations—this progress is owed to the courageous activists practicing their obligations to the land and to each other in these diverse networks and communities of struggle.

The second argument that gets used to denounce or criticize more “disruptive” forms of Indigenous direct action involve these actions’ supposedly “self-defeating” or “alienating” character.⁴⁹ The idea this time is that insofar as these tactics disrupt the lives of perhaps well-intentioned but equally uninformed non-Indigenous people, First Nations will increasingly find themselves alienated and our causes unsupported by average, working-class Canadians. I have two brief points to make here.

First, I think that getting this reaction from the dominant society is unavoidable. Indigenous people have within their sights, now more than ever, a restructuring of the fundamental relationship between Indigenous nations and Canada. For more than two centuries the manifestations of this relationship have run roughshod over the rights of Indigenous peoples, which has resulted in a massive stockpiling of power and privilege by and for the dominant society. Land has been stolen, and significant amounts of it must be returned. Power and authority have been unjustly appropriated, and much of it will have to be reinstated. This will inevitably be very upsetting to some; it will be incredibly inconvenient to others. But it is what needs to happen if we are to create a more just and sustainable life in this country for the bulk of Indigenous communities, and for the majority of non-Indigenous people as well. To my mind, the apparent fact that many non-Indigenous people are “upset” or feel “alienated” by the aims of decolonization movements like Idle No More simply means that we are collectively doing something right.

My second point is that this criticism or concern smells of a double standard. I suspect that equally “disruptive” actions undertaken by various sectors of, for example, the mainstream labor movement, including job actions ranging from the withdrawal of teaching, transit, and healthcare services to full-blown strike activity, does not often undergo the same criticism and scrutiny by progressive non-Natives that Indigenous peoples’ movements are subjected to.

When these sectors of society courageously defend their rights outside of the increasingly hostile confines of imposed labor legislation—actions that also tend to disproportionately “disrupt” the lives of ordinary Canadians—it is crucial that we educate ourselves about the causes that inform these efforts. All Indigenous people ask is that the same courtesy and respect be offered our communities in our struggles.

The third critique involves what we might characterize as a neo-Nietzschean concern over the largely *reactive* stance that such acts of resistance take in practice. On the surface, blockades in particular appear to be the epitome of *reaction* insofar as they clearly embody a resounding “no” but fail to offer a more *affirmative* gesture or alternative built into the practice itself. The risk here is that, in doing so, these *ressentiment*-laden modalities of Indigenous resistance reify the very structures or social relationships we find so abhorrent. In Nietzsche’s terms, insofar as this “No” becomes our “creative deed” we end up dependent on the “hostile world” we have come to define ourselves *against*.⁵⁰ We become dependent on “external stimuli to act at all—[our] action is fundamentally *reaction*.”⁵¹

This concern, I claim, is premised on a fundamental misunderstanding of what these forms of direct action are all about. In his own creative engagement with Nietzsche at the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon exclaims that, yes, “man is an *affirmation*. . . and that we shall not stop repeating it. Yes to life. Yes to love. Yes to generosity.” “But man,” he continues on to insist, “is also a *negation*. No to man’s contempt. No to the indignity of man. To the exploitation of man. To the massacre of what is most human in man: freedom.”⁵² Forms of Indigenous resistance, such as blockading and other explicitly disruptive oppositional practices, are indeed *reactive* in the ways that some have critiqued, but they are also very important. Through these actions we physically say “no” to the degradation of our communities and to exploitation of the lands upon which we depend. But they also have ingrained within them a resounding “yes”: they are the affirmative *enactment* of another modality of being, a different way of relating to and with the world. In the case of blockades like the one erected by the Anishinaabe people of Grassy Narrows in northwest Ontario, which has been in existence since 2002, they become a *way of life*, another form of *community*. They embody through praxis our ancestral obligations to protect the lands that are core to who we are as Indigenous peoples.

Thesis 2: Capitalism, No More!

What the recent direct actions of First Nation communities like Elsipogtog in New Brunswick demonstrate is that Indigenous forms of economic disruption through the use of blockades are both a negation and an *affirmation*.⁵³ They are a crucial act of negation insofar as they seek to impede or block the flow of resources currently being transported to international markets from oil and gas fields, refineries, lumber mills, mining operations, and hydroelectric facilities located on the dispossessed lands of Indigenous nations. These modes of direct action, in other words, seek to have a negative impact on the economic infrastructure that is core to the colonial accumulation of capital in settler-political economies like Canada's.⁵⁴ Blocking access to this critical infrastructure has historically been quite effective in forging short-term gains for Indigenous communities. Over the last couple of decades, however, state and corporate powers have also become quite skilled at recuperating the losses incurred as a result of Indigenous peoples' resistance by drawing our leaders off the land and into negotiations where the terms are always set by and in the interests of settler capital.

What tends to get ignored by many self-styled pundits is that these actions are also an affirmative gesture of Indigenous resurgence insofar as they embody an enactment of Indigenous law and the obligations such laws place on Indigenous peoples to uphold the relations of reciprocity that shape our engagements with the human and nonhuman world—the land. The question I want to explore here, albeit very briefly, is this: how might we begin to scale up these often localized, resurgent land-based direct actions to produce a more general transformation in the colonial economy? Said slightly differently, how might we move beyond a resurgent Indigenous politics that seeks to inhibit the destructive effects of capital to one that strives to create *Indigenous alternatives* to it?

In her recent interview with Naomi Klein, Leanne Simpson hints at what such an alternative or alternatives might entail for Indigenous nations: "People within the Idle No More movement who are talking about Indigenous nationhood are talking about a massive transformation, a massive decolonization"; they are calling for a "resurgence of Indigenous political thought" that is "land-based and very much tied to that intimate and close relationship to the land, which to me means a revitalization of sustainable local Indigenous economies."⁵⁵

Without such a massive transformation in the political economy of contemporary settler-colonialism, any efforts to rebuild our nations will remain parasitic on capitalism, and thus on the perpetual exploitation of our lands and labor. Consider, for example, an approach to resurgence that would see Indigenous people begin to reconnect with their lands and land-based practices on either an individual or small-scale collective basis. This could take the form of “walking the land” in an effort to refamiliarize ourselves with the landscapes and places that give our histories, languages, and cultures shape and content; to revitalizing and engaging in land-based harvesting practices like hunting, fishing, and gathering, and/or cultural production activities like hide-tanning and carving, all of which also serve to assert our sovereign presence on our territories in ways that can be profoundly educational and empowering; to the reoccupation of sacred places for the purposes of relearning and practicing our ceremonial activities.

A similar problem informs self-determination efforts that seek to ameliorate our poverty and economic dependency through resource revenue sharing, more comprehensive impact benefit agreements, and affirmative action employment strategies negotiated through the state and with industries currently tearing up Indigenous territories. Even though the capital generated by such an approach could, in theory, be spent subsidizing the revitalization of certain cultural traditions and practices, in the end they would still remain dependent on a predatory economy that is entirely at odds with the deep reciprocity that forms the cultural core of many Indigenous peoples’ relationships with land.

What forms might an Indigenous political-economic alternative to the intensification of capitalism on and within our territories take? For some communities, reinvigorating a mix of subsistence-based activities with more contemporary economic ventures is one alternative.⁵⁶ As discussed in chapter 2, in the 1970s the Dene Nation sought to curtail the negative environmental and cultural impacts of capitalist extractivism by proposing to establish an economy that would apply traditional concepts of Dene governance—decentralized, regional political structures based on participatory, consensus decision-making—to the realm of the economy. At the time, this would have seen a revitalization of a bush mode of production, with emphasis placed on the harvesting and manufacturing of local renewable resources through traditional activities like hunting, fishing, and trapping, potentially combined with and

partially subsidized by other economic activities on lands communally held and managed by the Dene Nation. Economic models discussed during the time thus included the democratic organization of production and distribution through Indigenous cooperatives and possibly worker-managed enterprises.⁵⁷

Revisiting Indigenous political-economic alternatives such as these could pose a real threat to the accumulation of capital on Indigenous lands in three ways. First, through mentorship and education these economies reconnect Indigenous people to land-based practices and forms of knowledge that emphasize radical sustainability. This form of grounded normativity is antithetical to capitalist accumulation. Second, these economic practices offer a means of subsistence that over time can help break our dependence on the capitalist market by cultivating self-sufficiency through the localized and sustainable production of core foods and life materials that we distribute and consume within our own communities on a regular basis. Third, through the application of Indigenous governance principles to nontraditional economic activities we open up a way of engaging in contemporary economic ventures in an Indigenous way that is better suited to foster sustainable economic decision-making, an equitable distribution of resources within and between Indigenous communities, Native women's political and economic emancipation, and empowerment for Indigenous citizens and workers who may or must pursue livelihoods in sectors of the economy outside of the bush. Why not critically apply the most egalitarian and participatory features of our traditional governance practices to all of our economic activities, regardless of whether they are undertaken in land-based or urban contexts?

The capacity of resurgent Indigenous economies to challenge the hegemony of settler-colonial capitalism in the long term can only happen if certain conditions are met, however. First, all of the colonial, racist, and patriarchal legal and political obstacles that have been used to block our access to land need to be confronted and removed.⁵⁸ Of course, capitalism continues to play a core role in dispossessing us of our lands and self-determining authority, but it only does so with the aid of other forms of exploitation and domination configured along racial, gender, and state lines. Dismantling all of these oppressive structures will not be easy. It will require that we continue to assert our presence on all of our territories, coupled with an escalation of confrontations with the forces of colonization through the forms of direct action that are currently being undertaken by communities like Elsipogtog.

Second, we also have to acknowledge that the significant political leverage required to simultaneously block the economic exploitation of our people and homelands while constructing alternatives to capitalism will not be generated through our direct actions and resurgent economies alone. Settler colonization has rendered our populations too small to affect this magnitude of change. This reality demands that we continue to remain open to, if not actively seek out and establish, relations of solidarity and networks of trade and mutual aid with national and transnational communities and organizations that are also struggling against the imposed effects of globalized capital, including other Indigenous nations and national confederacies; urban Indigenous people and organizations; the labor, women's, GBLTQ2S (gay, bisexual, lesbian, trans, queer, and two-spirit), and environmental movements; and, of course, those racial and ethnic communities that find themselves subject to their own distinct forms of economic, social, and cultural marginalization. The initially rapid and relatively widespread support expressed both nationally and internationally for the Idle No More movement in spring 2013, and the solidarity generated around the Elsipogtog antifracking resistance in the fall and winter of 2013, gives me hope that establishing such relations are indeed possible.

It is time for our communities to seize the unique political opportunities of the day. In the delicate balancing act of having to ensure that his social conservative contempt for First Nations does not overwhelm his neoconservative love of the market, Prime Minister Harper has erred by letting the racism and sexism of the former outstrip his belligerent commitment to the latter. This is a novice mistake that Liberals like Jean Chrétien and Paul Martin learned how to manage decades ago. As a result, the federal government has invigorated a struggle for Indigenous self-determination that must challenge the relationship between settler colonization and free-market fundamentalism in ways that refuse to be coopted by scraps of recognition, opportunistic apologies, and the cheap gift of political and economic inclusion. For Indigenous nations to live, capitalism must die. And for capitalism to die, we must actively participate in the construction of Indigenous alternatives to it.

Thesis 3: Dispossession and Indigenous Sovereignty in the City

In Canada, more than half of the Aboriginal population now lives in urban centers.⁵⁹ The relationship between Indigenous people and the city, however, has always been one fraught with tension. Historically, Canadian cities were

originally conceived of in the colonial imagination as explicitly non-Native spaces—as *civilized* spaces—and urban planners and Indian policy makers went through great efforts to expunge urban centers of Native presence.⁶⁰ In 1911, for example, Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier announced in Parliament that “where a reserve is in the vicinity of a growing town, as is the case in several places, it becomes a source of nuisance and an impediment to progress.”⁶¹ This developmentalist rationale, which at the time conceived of Native space, particularly reserves, as uncultivated “waste” lands, justified an amendment to the Indian Act a month later, which stipulated that the residents of any “Indian reserve which adjoins or is situated wholly or partly within an incorporated town having a population of not less than eight thousand” could be legally removed from their present location without their consent if it was deemed in the “interest of the public and of the Indians of the band for whose use the reserve is held.”⁶² This situated Indian policy in a precarious position, as by the turn of the nineteenth century the reserve system, originally implemented to isolate and marginalize Native people for the purpose of social engineering (assimilation), was increasingly being seen as a failure because of the geographical distance of reserves from the civilizational influence of urban centers.⁶³ Here you have the economic imperatives of capitalist accumulation through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples’ land come into sharp conflict with the white supremacist impulses of Canada’s assimilation policy and the desire of settler society to claim “the city for themselves—and only themselves.”⁶⁴

The civilizational discourse that rationalized both the theft of Indigenous peoples’ land base and their subsequent confinement onto reserves facilitated a significant geographical separation of the colonizer and the colonized that lasted until the mid-twentieth century.⁶⁵ As Sherene Razack notes, the segregation of urban from Native space that marked the colonial era began to break down with the increase in urbanization that took hold in the 1950s and 1960s, which resulted in a new racial configuration of space. Within this new colonial spatial imaginary,

The city belongs to the settlers and the sully of civilized society through the presence of the racialized Other in white spaces gives rise to a careful management of boundaries within urban space. Planning authorities require larger plots in the suburbs, thereby ensuring that larger homes and wealthier families live there. Projects and Chinatowns are created, cordoning off the racial poor.

Such spatial practices, often achieved through law (nuisance laws, zoning laws, and so on), mark off the spaces of the settler and the native both conceptually and materially. The inner city is racialized space, the zone in which all that is not respectable is contained. Canada's colonial geographies exhibit this same pattern of violent expulsions and the spatial containment of Aboriginal peoples to marginalized areas of the city, processes consolidated over three hundred years of colonization.⁶⁶

The dispossession that originally displaced Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories either onto reserves or disproportionately into the inner cities of Canada's major urban centers is now serving to displace Indigenous populations from the urban spaces they have increasingly come to call home. To this end, I suggest that the analytical frame of *settler-colonialism* developed throughout the previous chapters offers an important lens through which to interrogate the power relations that shape Indigenous people's experiences in the city, especially those disproportionately inhabiting low-income areas. As we learned in previous chapters, defenders of settler-colonial power have tended to rationalize these practices by treating the lands in question as *terra nullius*—the racist legal fiction that declared Indigenous peoples too “primitive” to bear rights to land and sovereignty when they first encountered European powers on the continent, thus rendering their territories legally “empty” and therefore open for colonial settlement and development.

In the inner cities of Vancouver, Winnipeg, Regina, Toronto, and so forth, we are seeing a similar logic govern the gentrification and subsequent displacement of Indigenous peoples from Native spaces within the city. Commonly defined as the transformation of working-class areas of the city into middle-class residential or commercial spaces, gentrification is usually accompanied by the displacement of low-income, racialized, Indigenous, and other marginalized segments of the urban population.⁶⁷ Regardless of these violent effects, however, gentrifiers often defend their development projects as a form of “improvement,” where previously “wasted” land or property (rooming houses, social housing, shelters, small businesses that cater to the community, etc.) and lives (sex-trade workers, homeless people, the working poor, mentally ill people, those suffering from addictions, etc.) are made more socially and economically productive. This Lockean rationale has led scholars like Neil Smith, Nicholas Blomley, and Amber Dean to view the gentrification of urban space

through a colonial lens, as yet another “frontier” of dispossession central to the accumulation of capital.⁶⁸ Through gentrification, Native spaces in the city are now being treated as *urbs nullius*—urban space void of Indigenous sovereign presence.

All of this is to say that the efficacy of Indigenous resurgence hinges on its ability to address the interrelated systems of dispossession that shape Indigenous peoples’ experiences in *both* urban and land-based settings. Mi’kmaq scholar Bonita Lawrence suggests that this will require a concerted effort on the part of both reserve- and urban-based Indigenous communities to reconceptualize Indigenous identity and nationhood in a way that refuses to replicate the “colonial divisions” that contributed to the urban/reserve divide through racist and sexist policies like enfranchisement.⁶⁹ Although Lawrence’s work has shown how Native individuals, families, and communities are able to creatively retain and reproduce Indigenous traditions in urban settings, she also recognizes the importance for urban Native people to have “some form of mutually agreed upon, structured access to land-based communities.”⁷⁰ Access to land is essential.

Similar struggles are seen in land-based communities, which would no doubt benefit from the numbers and human capital offered through the forging of political relations and alliances with the over 50 percent of Indigenous people now living in cities.⁷¹ For Lawrence, all of this suggests that urban Native people and First Nations need ways of forging national alliances strategically in a manner that does not demand that First Nation governments endlessly open their membership to those who grew up disconnected from the life and culture of their original communities, or urban Indigenous people having to engage in the arduous struggle of maintaining an Indigenous identity cut off from the communities and homelands that ground such identities.⁷² In other words, we need to find ways of bringing together through relations of solidarity and mutual aid “the strengths that urban and reserve-based Native people have developed in their different circumstances, in the interests of our mutual empowerment.”⁷³

Thesis 4: Gender Justice and Decolonization

According to Anishinaabe feminist Dory Nason, if Idle No More showed us anything, it is the “boundless love that Indigenous women have for their families, their lands, their nations, and themselves as Indigenous people.”

This love has encouraged 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.” Nason is also quick to point out, however, that the same inspirational power of Indigenous women’s love to mobilize others to resist “settler-colonial misogyny’s” inherently destructive tendencies has also rendered them subjects of “epidemic levels of violence, sexual assault, imprisonment and cultural and political disempowerment.”⁷⁴

The violence that Indigenous women face is both systemic and symbolic. It is systemic in the sense that it has been structured, indeed institutionalized, into a relatively secure and resistant set of oppressive material relations that render Indigenous women more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to suffer severe economic and social privation, including disproportionately high rates of poverty and unemployment, incarceration, addiction, homelessness, chronic and/or life-threatening health problems, overcrowded and substandard housing, and lack of access to clean water, as well as face discrimination and sexual violence in their homes, communities, and workplaces.⁷⁵ Just as importantly, however, the violence that Indigenous women face is also “symbolic” in the sense that Pierre Bourdieu used the term: “gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized as such, chosen as much as undergone.”⁷⁶ Symbolic violence, in other words, is the subjectifying form of violence that renders the crushing materiality of systemic violence invisible, appear natural, acceptable.

As we saw in chapter 3, the symbolic violence of settler-colonial misogyny, institutionalized through residential schools and successive Indian Acts, has become so diffuse that it now saturates all of our relationships. The misogyny of settler-colonial misrecognition through state legislation, writes Bonita Lawrence, “has functioned so completely—and yet so invisibly—along gendered lines” that it now informs many of our struggles for recognition and liberation.⁷⁷ In such contexts, what does it mean to be “held accountable” to our “responsibilities to protect the values and traditions that serve as the foundation for the survival of the land and Indigenous peoples”? To start, it demands that Indigenous people, in particular Native men, commit ourselves *in practice* to uprooting the symbolic violence that structures Indigenous women’s lives as much as we demand *in words* that the material violence against Indigenous women come to an end. This is what I take Nason to mean when she asks

that all of us “think about what it means for men, on the one hand, to publicly profess an obligation to ‘protect our women’ and, on the other, take leadership positions that uphold patriarchal forms of governance or otherwise ignore the contributions and sovereignty of the women, Indigenous or not.”⁷⁸ Here, the paternalistic and patriarchal insistence that we “protect *our* women” from the material violence they disproportionately face serves to reinforce the symbolic violence of assuming that Indigenous women are “ours” to protect. Although many Native male supporters of Idle No More have done a fairly decent job symbolically recognizing the centrality of Indigenous women to the movement, this is not the recognition that I hear being demanded by Indigenous feminists. The demand, rather, is that society, including Indigenous society and particularly Indigenous men, stop collectively *conducting ourselves* in a manner that denigrates, degrades, and devalues the lives and worth of Indigenous women in such a way that epidemic levels of violence are the norm in too many of their lives. Of course, this violence must be stopped in its overt forms, but we must also stop practicing it in its more subtle expressions—in our daily relationships and practices in the home, workplaces, band offices, governance institutions, and, crucially, in our practices of *cultural resurgence*. Until this happens we have reconciled ourselves with defeat.

Thesis 5: Beyond the Nation-State

We are now in a position to revisit the concern I raised at the end of chapter 1 regarding a problematic claim made by Dale Turner in *This Is Not a Peace Pipe*. Turner’s claim is that if Indigenous peoples want the political and legal relationship between ourselves and the Canadian state to be informed by and reflect our distinct worldviews, then we “will have to engage the state’s legal and political discourses in more effective ways.”⁷⁹ This form of engagement, I claimed, assumes that the structure of domination that frames Indigenous–state relations in Canada derives its legitimacy and sustenance by excluding Indigenous people and voices from the legal and political institutional/discursive settings within which our rights are determined. Seen from this light, it would indeed appear that “critically undermining colonialism” requires that Indigenous peoples find more effective ways of “participating in the Canadian legal and political practices that determine the meaning of Aboriginal rights.”⁸⁰

Yet, I would venture to suggest that over the last forty years Indigenous peoples have become incredibly skilled at participating in the Canadian legal

and political practices that Turner suggests. In the wake of the 1969 White Paper, these practices emerged as the *hegemonic* approach to forging change in our political relationship with the Canadian state. We have also seen, however, that our efforts to engage these discursive and institutional spaces to secure recognition of our rights have not only failed, but have instead served to subtly reproduce the forms of racist, sexist, economic, and political configurations of power that we initially sought, through our engagements and negotiations with the state, to challenge. Why has this been the case? Part of the reason has to do with the sheer magnitude of discursive and nondiscursive power we find ourselves up against in our struggles. Subsequently, in our efforts to *interpolate* the legal and political discourses of the state to secure recognition of our rights to land and self-determination we have too often found ourselves *interpellated* as subjects of settler-colonial rule.

What are the implications of this profound power disparity in our struggles for land and freedom? Does it require that we vacate the field of state negotiations and participation entirely? Of course not. Settler-colonialism has rendered us a radical minority in our own homelands, and this necessitates that we continue to engage with the state's legal and political system. What our present condition does demand, however, is that we begin to approach our engagements with the settler-state legal apparatus with a degree of critical self-reflection, skepticism, and caution that has to date been largely absent in our efforts. It also demands that we begin to shift our attention away from the largely rights-based/recognition orientation that has emerged as hegemonic over the last four decades, to a resurgent politics of recognition that seeks to practice decolonial, gender-emancipatory, and economically nonexploitative alternative structures of law and sovereign authority grounded on a critical refashioning of the best of Indigenous legal and political traditions. It is only by privileging and grounding ourselves in these normative lifeways and resurgent practices that we have a hope of surviving our strategic engagements with the colonial state with integrity and as Indigenous peoples.

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