

THE POLITICS OF RECOGNITION: A COLONIAL GROUNDHOG DAY



DISCUSSION PAPER
Prepared for Chiefs of Ontario

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The Chiefs of Ontario is a coordinating body for 133 First Nation communities located within the boundaries of the Province of Ontario. The main objective of the Chiefs of Ontario office is to facilitate the discussion, planning, implementation and evaluation of all local, regional and national matters affecting the First Nations people of Ontario.

The activities of the office are governed by the Political Confederacy (PC), composed of the Grand Chiefs of the four political territorial organizations and a representative of the independent First Nations, overseen by the Regional Elder and chaired by the Ontario Regional Chief. The Chiefs of Ontario office is operated by the Executive Director who is responsible for establishing and maintaining liaison and communications between both levels of government and the Political Confederacy. The office is actively involved in Provincial/Federal/First Nation tripartite discussions. The intention of basing the central office in Toronto is to maintain a presence for First Nations in Ontario that is non-government and non-political in order to communicate with government officials on an urgent basis.

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In this paper, we will question the idea of “inherent jurisdiction” and show how it is neither possible to achieve nor desirable to seek the recognition and validation of Indigenous nationhood by Canadian governments and courts. Canadian sovereignty as it is presently conceived cannot accommodate the inherent rights and autonomous existence of First Nations. We will explain the risks of engaging in negotiations seeking to formalize the recognition of First Nations’ inherent rights and jurisdiction, and also explain how distinctive and authentic Indigenous ways of viewing and being in the world are threatened when First Nations choose to participate in Canadian government processes of recognition. Finally, we will offer examples of ways in which First Nations can live out their nationhood, or inherent jurisdiction, in a manner that is consistent with and supports the regeneration of Indigenous ways, values and philosophies while at the same time working to remove the authority and undermine the legitimacy of the Canadian state on Indigenous peoples and territories.

The invasion, seizing control and exploitation of Indigenous land and populations by successive generations of non-indigenous people, and the institutionalizing of this situation into a form of government and law define what is called “colonialism” in Canada. Colonialism continues today because Settlers – the descendents of European colonizers and more recent immigrant populations – have rewritten histories, have created a legal system that justifies their rule, and have normalized a racist and unjust socio-economic system. Unlike the more open forms of violence used to support white power in years past, contemporary colonialism maintains control over Indigenous peoples primarily by causing Indigenous people to forget who they are, whether that forgetting is the end result of unthinking cooperation with the colonial system, allowing oneself to be used by the system, “cooptation,” or assimilation as the result of cultural or spiritual surrender to the lies and power of the dominant society. It is the main job of the colonial state to, through any means possible, force First Nations to comply with their demands and conform to their culture in order to develop a sense of legitimacy – the belief that things are proper and right – within the entire population. Indigenous peoples rooted in a strong cultural foundation have always been obstacles to the full conquest of this continent, and they (we?) continue to represent a dangerous challenge to the legitimacy of colonial power. It is this spiritual, political and cultural bedrock of true Indigeneity that provides the only solid base on

which to develop and activate a successful challenge to the unjustified rule of Settlers over First Nations' lands and people. As such, the survival of the current system of oppression requires that Settlers and their governments work to achieve the cooperation, cooptation and eventual assimilation of First Nations and the erasure of Indigenous ways of seeing and being in the world.

Definitions

We recognize that there is much debate surrounding a politics of recognition approach versus a resistance, cultural strengthening and nationhood politics – what we will call a “regeneration” approach. At root, there is a disagreement among Indigenous thinkers and politicians over the definition of colonialism and the ways in which colonial oppression plays out in First Nations communities. Therefore, it makes sense to focus in on the meaning and use of key terms of this argument before proceeding. As indicated above, *colonialism* is a system of domination that involves the destruction and/or theft of Indigenous forms of governance, economies, spiritualities, resources, legal systems, territories, languages, values, goals and perspectives, and efforts to supplant them with those of the colonial power through violent means. Up until recently, most of the academic literature on colonization focused on the disparity in “outcomes” between Indigenous peoples and Settlers and how Indigenous people are suffering deprivations because of being left behind in the supposed natural progress of industrial civilization. The supposedly objective outcomes and measures used to determine success were entirely Eurocentric, including financial wealth, unemployment rates, and levels of education, among others. Conceiving of the problem of colonial oppression in this way of course pre-determines the kinds of solutions that were and are still mostly offered in expert circles and in theories of decolonization, including those undergirding the mainstream neo-liberal business development approach typified by the so-called Harvard Project and argued by entrepreneur/author Calvin Helin.

The problem with these models is that they fundamentally misunderstand the central problem, and the basic source of colonial oppression. The reason that Indigenous people in North America suffer disproportionate levels of violence, illness and poverty, and unhappy and unhealthy lives is not from a lack of recognition of their “sovereignty”. It is also not because Indigenous peoples have not or can not succeed based on mainstream standards. The central source of oppression derives from a broadly affecting *spiritual crisis* caused by the dispossession and disconnection of First Nations people from their lands and their alienation from Indigenous ways of life, and the normalization of this injustice in mainstream society and increasingly even within First Nations society itself. This disconnection and the *psychophysical effects* (harms to both the mind and the body) it causes are only intensified when First Nations politicians choose to play the recognition game with their Canadian counterparts in politics.

The inability of academics and leaders to conceptualize decolonization as *regeneration* has led us to a situation where Aboriginal politicians in Canada have taken to thinking and speaking in ways that are derived from European intellectual traditions rather than their own. For example, the catchall term for Aboriginal politicians in the 1980s and 1990s was *sovereignty*. The problem with sovereignty as a concept is that it implies that Indigenous nations are seeking recognition of their sovereign authority, indistinguishable from the kind of nationhood conceived by Canada and the United States, for example. According to the Western political tradition from which it originates, a state becomes sovereign when it wields the legitimate use of coercive force, the control of a specific territory and population, and is recognized as legitimate by other sovereign states. The result is a form of governance that is based on superior-inferior relations, is confrontational, and inherently violent; these are values that go totally against Indigenous philosophies and traditions of governance. So, the pursuit of the goal of sovereignty by Aboriginals is not a good thing for First Nations. In fact, it is doing the work for the colonizer in guaranteeing that, even if First Nations are successful in achieving their political objectives, they are losers in the long run because they will be helping to assimilate Indigenous ways.

Closely related to the concept of sovereignty is the notion of *self-government*. When Aboriginal politicians talk about self-government as the end game of their struggle, they should know that by accepting such a delegated “gift” of subordinate power they must also, necessarily, positively affirm and support the authority and legitimacy of the colonial state’s control over themselves and their territories. It is illogical and political hypocrisy to both condemn Canada as an unjust colonial power while at the same time accepting political and legal concessions offered by that same power! Self-government is simply not a solid pathway to recovering as self-determining nations unbound from colonial authority.

In contrast to the self-defeating concepts of sovereignty and self-government are the linked notions of *nationhood* and *self-determination*. A *nation*, as distinct from the governments and countries which form the global system of nation-states, is a group of people, conscious of its membership, based on shared understandings of history, culture, language, territory and governance. Self-determination is the physical manifestation of nationhood; it is about (re)constructing individual, collective and social identities in ways that reflect Indigenous values and teachings. Therefore, self-determination is a self-actualizing notion: it exists if First Nations believe it does and comes into reality when they act as nations. Self-determination is not contingent on the approval of Canada, and it is not dependent on the understandings of power reflected in European and Euroamerican notions of sovereignty.

We must also say that while recognizing its currency among the Chiefs of Ontario, we do not like the term “inherent jurisdiction”. Jurisdiction is essentially a legal term denoting the power or right of a person or group to administer legal matters over a particular area, whether it is over people, territories or subject matter. For example, within the Canadian federal system, jurisdiction over health care is constitutionally accorded to the provinces. Therefore, jurisdiction as a concept finds its roots within the European legal tradition enforced by state sovereignty. The underlying sense is that jurisdiction, whether it is granted to First Nations or other groups, is handed down from the nation-state and thus depends for its existence on the continued recognition of and toleration by the government and courts of that nation-state.

The inclusion of the word “inherent” before jurisdiction goes part way in getting around this problem; however, the fact remains that it is difficult to disentangle the word “jurisdiction” from its European root. We suggest that self-determination is a far better term to convey a nearly identical concept. Despite this complaint, for the purposes of this paper we understand *inherent jurisdiction* to mean the fundamental and indispensable right of First Nations to govern all matters related to lands, people, governance structures, and laws, among others. We do not see this right as being derived from a higher power (the Canadian government), but rather we view it as instead being rooted from below in the irrefutable fact that Indigenous peoples have populated Turtle Island since time immemorial, based on complex and identifiable values and worldviews, transmitted through traditional teachings.

Finally, a term that is vital to our analysis is *assimilation*. To us, assimilation means “the process of receiving new facts or of responding to new situations in conformity with what is readily available to consciousness.”¹ The strength of this definition is that it acknowledges the way that assimilation happens in its less obvious form. When the world that surrounds you is made up of Settlers with their European thoughts and Judeo-Christian capitalist values, the path of least resistance is to conform and not to challenge these ways of thinking and acting. Pretty soon, these non-indigenous ways become normalized; the foreign does not look foreign anymore and one begins to see the world through the eyes of a foreigner instead of as a Native person. This is how assimilation works in the politics of recognition today.

Recognition: The Friendly Face of Assimilation

Considering the political framework described above, it is clear that seeking recognition for First Nations’ inherent jurisdiction from either provincial or federal governments is a contradictory

¹ "assimilation." Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. 2009. Merriam-Webster Online. 23 November 2009 <<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/assimilation>>.

strategy bordering on conscious hypocrisy. For example, authorities delegated to First Nations in such areas as band membership assigned through the Indian Act are not enhancements of First Nations power or in any way an exercise of “inherent jurisdiction” because they rely on sanction from colonial governments to exist and function. For Canada to recognize the inherent jurisdiction of First Nations they would be in effect working to undermine their own entrenched interests; they would be weakening or potentially eliminating their own authority over Indigenous peoples and their lands. It is irrational, from a Canadian perspective, to undermine the state’s own sovereign authority, however legally or morally unjust that sovereignty and authority.

Opposing our solid Indigenous definition of inherent jurisdiction, the Crown offers a range of weak responses to Indigenous peoples’ demands for recognition. Dene scholar Glen Coulthard defines the *politics of recognition* as:

the now expansive range of recognition-based models of liberal pluralism that seek to reconcile Indigenous claims to nationhood with Crown sovereignty via the accommodation of Indigenous identities in some form of renewed relationship with the Canadian state. Although these models tend to vary in both theory and practice, most involve the delegation of land, capital and political power from the state to Indigenous communities through land claims, economic development initiatives, and self-government processes.²

What we can say of these supposedly respectful models is that they, quite simply, have nothing to do with the real recognition of inherent jurisdiction. In fact, these models detract from the realization of inherent jurisdiction in a number of ways. First, as was stated above, gaining recognition from the state through these initiatives requires Indigenous groups to simultaneously recognize the legitimacy of the colonial state. And, you cannot, with any

² Glen S. Coulthard, “Subjects of Empire: Indigenous Peoples and the ‘Politics of Recognition’ in Canada,” *Contemporary Political Theory* (2007): 438-439.

consistency, say, “We will sign this economic benefits sharing agreement, but we still don’t recognize your legitimacy on these lands.” These positions simply cannot be reconciled. The net result of such cooperation is the further entrenchment of the profoundly unfair and illegal colonizer/colonized relationship.

More than being theoretically inconsistent, continued engagement with the state aimed at convincing them of Indigenous peoples’ rightful jurisdiction works to assimilate Indigenous peoples unique and important ways of being in the world. This is perhaps the most insidious consequence of engaging in the politics of recognition. Colonialism has always required that Indigenous peoples operate in the language of the colonizer. This goes beyond the use of English. To engage with the Crown is to speak the languages of capitalism, private property, Western science, individualism, male dominance, and anti-spiritualism, just to name a few. The need to operate within these frameworks continues despite the increasing lip service paid to the incorporation of Indigenous knowledges into policy decisions. The very real risk to Indigenous peoples when engaging with the Crown on this level is that of the assimilation of Indigenous identities and the eventual loss of any meaningful sense of difference and of distinctive rooted nationhood. To fully comprehend just what is at stake for First Nations, we must understand what Indigenous identities are made up of; that is, how our Anishnaabe, Onkwehonwe and Nehiyow identities are formed, and also how they can be deformed.

What Is It to Be Indigenous?

Mainstream society’s understanding of identity formation is based on Western liberalism’s mythological notion of the “self-made man”. This vision sees identity formation as a kind of self-serve buffet, where individuals are free to take up whatever identities and however much culture they choose. In this sense, identities reflect the person’s own perception of his or herself. This notion of identity formation focuses on individuals seeing themselves as unique and empowered to build a sense of oneself as a person and as a citizen on their own – their

rights and obligations selected from among the buffet of items provided by the state. It is hardly concerned with one's membership in a group. Ignoring the centrality of collectives in the formation of identities shapes the way we think about the world or our responsibilities to others. Even though it is the foundation of Canadian political culture today, this understanding of identity is false; it is guided more by liberal theory and ideology than any realistic experience of the reality of identity formation.

It is becoming better understood that Indigenous identity construction is a relational process built in and on *community*. Community in this case extends beyond the human community to include water, mountains, animals and plants, things often referred to as the "natural world". Vine Deloria Jr. identified Indigenous ways of understanding and thus acting in the world, what he calls "tribal knowledge," as rooted in physical interactions with the land:

The vast number of experiences we have with land, and in particular with places, are of the reflective kind... There we begin to meditate on who we are, what our society is, where we came from, quite possibly where we are going, and what it all means. Land somehow calls forth from us these questions and gives us a feeling of being within something larger and more powerful than ourselves. We are able to reflect upon what we know, and in our reflection we see a different arrangement, perhaps a different interpretation of what life can mean.³

To land and community, we must add the importance of language in the formation of Indigenous identities. Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong has described the importance of speaking her language when she states, "it is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks. It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die. We survived and thrived by listening intently to its teachings- to its language- and then inventing human words to retell its

³ Vine Deloria Jr., *For This Land: Writing on Religion in America* (New York: Routledge, 1999): 251.

stories to our succeeding generations.”⁴ Speaking Indigenous languages is more than just describing the world as it is now, for it brings to bear cultural teachings and historical memory of a people who were not supposed to have survived into this millennia. The difference between the structures of Indigenous versus non-indigenous languages is significant here because, as Armstrong states, the feeling and experiences of being Indigenous do not present themselves in words, but rather as “the colour, patterns, and movements of a beautiful, kind Okanagan landscape.”⁵ English adjectives are incapable of accurately reflecting these sorts of Indigenous experiences and feelings.

How You Lose Through Recognition Politics

There are many ways in which colonial domination is perpetuated by recognition politics. These state projects are part of a relatively new but sophisticated effort to maintain colonial domination by obscuring their real intent to assimilate Indigenous ways of being. One of the fundamental assumptions undergirding the recognition game is the false premise that Canada has any legitimate claim to the land on which it sits. To engage in negotiations with the Crown on these terms validates the racist and self-serving assumptions that make up Canada (such as the idea that Indigenous peoples were uncivilized and therefore had no legitimate claim to their territories). A framework of integrity actually concerned with justice would have the Crown asking First Nations for permission to be on their territory.

Historical and contemporary experiences with negotiations have proven that the Crown will never cede a substantial degree authority to First Nations using a framework of recognition. We’ve touched on this point in our section above defining and discussing self-government and sovereignty. In order to appear to be conceding to Indigenous requests to a certain degree,

⁴ Jeannette Armstrong, “Land Speaking,” in *Speaking for the Generations: Native Writers on Writing* edited by Simon Ortiz (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1998): 176.

⁵ Armstrong, 176.

these models use cleverly veiled language as a smokescreen obscuring their real goal of assimilation. Their colonial motives are more difficult to identify than the more open violence of decades past. For example, the Crown likes to affirm its commitment to “fairness and democracy.” However, the standards of fairness are based on Eurocentric standards, and judged by (largely) non-indigenous bureaucrats and politicians. In addition, the state’s vision of democracy in this case extends to the larger Settler population, a population that, because of the genocide of Indigenous populations, far outnumbers the Indigenous population. What does it say about the Crown’s commitment to justice when the legitimate claims of Indigenous peoples are contingent on the “democratic will” of the very people that participate(d) in, and benefit(ted) from, their colonization? Where was their commitment to democracy when First Nations people were in the majority?

Another coded phrase popular in recognition politics is that of Indigenous peoples’ “self-sufficiency.” Similar terms include “bridging the gap,” “development,” “integration,” and “building capacity”. It’s difficult to disagree with the proposition that that there is a need for communities to become self-sufficient. Building capacity within communities is necessary; bridging the gap in health outcomes, suicide rates, incarceration rates, for instance, are of course sound goals. But this gets at the insidiousness of recognition politics, because the kind of self-sufficiency on offer is not a vision of self-sufficiency determined by communities based on Indigenous values. Rather, it is a Western capitalist, individualist, integrationist model imposed by the colonial state. Canadian models offering to help First nations become self-sufficient should be seen for what they really are; another strategy to assimilate Indigenous peoples into mainstream society, and a way in which the Crown attempts to absolve itself of its fiduciary obligation and financial responsibilities to Indigenous peoples. Also, despite the rhetoric around shared decision-making, the fact remains that the final authority in making decisions devolving any amount of authority, wealth, and land rests entirely with the colonial power.

The only way to arrive at an Indigenous notion of justice is to start the discussion, and to develop a plan of action, based on Indigenous principles. The current framework is skewed

through the limitations it places on the language used, financing of the process, the ideas circulated and the laws that frame the discussion of the problem and potential solutions; it guarantees that all possible outcomes, no matter how much creative energy and good will is put into the process, will be colonial. Canada's inherent right policy and self-government framework are not intended to advance justice; they are designed by government bureaucrats and lawyers to limit the damage and losses to the state. They have stolen the language of liberation and misappropriated and misused Indigenous teachings and concepts, such as the Two Row Wampum, in order to concoct a false notion of justice that allows them to promote the idea of positive change without giving up any power. In this context, the Crown's advocacy of a legalistic approach is a distraction tactic for them to maintain their authority as long as possible in the face of First Nations' challenges and movements to restore their inherent rights and to regenerate their nationhood within their homelands. Terminology has evolved over time, but the relations of control and subservience have stayed virtually the same, except that First Nations have become even more answerable to white power. All of the supposed court victories in the last few decades have not resulted in any substantial increase in either the recognition of or ability to exercise First Nations governance. Realizing all of this, the suggestion that First Nations should be "pragmatic" or "realistic" equates to taking the easy way out, turning your back on the ancestral struggle for survival as distinct peoples, and lacking the guts to take on the hard fight for political justice.

A Colonial Groundhog Day

If the idea, that participating in bureaucratic politics deforms of Indigenous ways, sounds familiar- that is because it is. The earlier stage of assimilation began with the *Indian Act* in 1876, and has led us to a situation where a colonized ideology is so pervasive in contemporary Indigenous politics that we can give it a name. We call it aboriginalism.

First, the *Indian Act* subjugated First Nations through the denial of traditional governance, increasing bureaucratization of Indigenous life and the replacement of traditional chiefs –

through a “recognition” strategy even then – with cooperative leaders to form band councils. The traditional economic system with its values of reciprocity and sharing was replaced by capitalism. Characteristics of European leadership styles and the values of European and Euroamerican political culture began to be taken-up and integrated into Indigenous political life. The defining characteristics of political elites within this colonized political culture are:

- jealously guard your reputation and status;
- constantly analyze resources and the opportunity structure;
- make others aware of their dependence on you; and,
- create a web of relationships to support your power.

Unfortunately, these characteristics do ring true in many Indigenous organizations today. This kind of disconnection from land, families, histories and languages is central to the colonial project of creating self-justifying fantasies and mythologies of Settler society. Aboriginalism brings to life the white fantasy of Indigenous people as nothing more than models of economic poverty, social instability and mental pathology. Aboriginalism ignores the fact that any dysfunction that does exist within Indigenous communities is caused by the loss of connection to the land, communities and cultures which sustained Indigenous peoples. The blame is squarely on Canadians and their greed for First Nations’ land and resources for any problems that do exist. Yet where is the movement among Canadians to address the dispossession of First Nations of their homelands? Aboriginalism masks over everything that is meaningful about indigeneity and replaces it with Settler society’s own racist vision of The Aboriginal formed out of social Darwinism (“survival of the fittest”), outmoded notions of progress and Eurocentric racial and cultural superiority. Slowly these hateful, inaccurate and disempowering understandings of what it is to be Indigenous have become normalized in communities across Canada.

Then and Now

When First Nations leaders, technicians and activists spend their lives immersed in these vastly unequal relationships of power with provincial and federal bureaucrats, the way of viewing the world that is most readily available to them has been, for years, a foreign one; it has been the that of the colonizer. Engaging with the state in a legalistic or bureaucratic way means that people are forced into meeting rooms and offices, are drowned in a flood of paperwork, and assaulted by a barrage of “consultations”, audits, funding proposals, the required daily interactions with INAC, DFO, MNR, Health Canada, among other annoyances and indignities. First Nation politicians must be well versed in Canadian law today to be effective at their jobs. Ironically, it is more likely that an Indigenous person in Canada today can summarize the *Delgamuukw* decision than can speak their own language. Leaders understand the *Indian Act* and can recite the “constitutional rights” accorded Indigenous peoples through the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but few and far between can demonstrate real knowledge about their sacred responsibilities to the land and those living on it.

It is almost certain that those people performing the everyday tasks required by band council governance do not have time to live out their cultural teachings in a way that would be recognizable to their ancestors. Being in an office leaves little time for fishing, hunting, or picking medicines, much less teaching the youth to do these things. It physically, mentally and linguistically separates you from what it is to be Indigenous. We must constantly ask ourselves, when does the shift happen from, talking about trees and fish as resources as a political strategy or because it is necessitated by government interactions, to actually perceiving and treating them as resources and no longer as sacred relationships that must be maintained?

Another oft-pursued avenue for recognition is through the judicial system. It is disheartening to see the number of Indigenous commentators that continue to invest their hopes in the courts. The *Delgamuukw* decision was considered a win for Indigenous peoples. *Sparrow* was a win. *Haida* was a win. *Taku* was a win. *Van Der Peet* was a win. *Marshall* was a win. Given all of

these supposed wins in Canadian courts you would think Indigenous peoples would be free from the colonial oppression by now. We all know this is not so. The Tsilhqot'in case took years in and out of court, it cost \$29 million, and still the court stopped short of declaring legal title for the Tsilhqot'in people. Even if title had been granted, or “recognized,” 1997s *Delgamuukw* decision created the infringement principle within the doctrine of Aboriginal Title which allows title to be infringed upon for any one of an expansive list of reasons including:

The development of agriculture, forestry, mining, and hydroelectric power, the general economic development of the interior of British Columbia, protection of the environment or endangered species, the building of infrastructure and the settlement of foreign populations to support those aims.⁶

It is hard to imagine what kinds of developments do not fit into any of the categories of justifiable infringement! The fact is that Canadian legal rulings are determined by Canadian judges. These judges are most often men, and all white. Their commitment to Canada is demonstrated by their chosen careers as judges. They are certainly trained in the Western legal tradition, and almost certainly know little of Indigenous legal traditions. Judges are privileged both in terms of status and monetarily. Even if judges could see beyond a lifetime's worth of ideological training, we must not lose sight of the fact that it is simply not in the interest of colonial judges, appointed by colonial powers, trained by colonial institutions to recognize and limit the existence and exercise of Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination in any way that negatively affects the power and authority of the Canadian state.

Alternatives

Our fundamental recommendation to First Nations in Ontario in defining and exercising their inherent jurisdiction is this: just do it. Begin to live as self-determining peoples. If the colonial

⁶ *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010 at para. 165.

drive in the politics of recognition is to assimilate Indigenous peoples' identities, then the response must be to strengthen those identities through reinvigorating traditional ways and forms of governance that go beyond lip service and tokenism. This can only be achieved through recommitting to sacred relationships with the land and all of the other elements of the natural world and spiritual universe, and by renewing strength and balance in families by stopping the forms of violence that are the products of colonialism. Some ways in which these social transformations can be achieved are:

1. Work to re-root young people to the traditions. This will allow them to engage with the mainstream world from a position of strength rather than a position of weakness.
2. On a collective level, communities must engage in projects to fundamentally transform the colonized political culture within their communities and reinvigorate governance based on traditional values. Go out on the land; fish for the community; remember place-names and how they got them. It may sound simplistic, but in the context of highly divided communities, just sitting together and having a conversation with Elders, neighbours, and young people can sometimes be transformative. It is these actions that set the stage for structural reform.
3. Non-indigenous electoral politics must be dismantled in favour of traditional decision-making structures that are built on notions of consensus-building, accountability and trust. Again, this is a collective project that centrally involves the development of capacity within the community based on values determined by the community.
4. The regeneration of Indigenous languages is not merely a matter of cultural interest; it is the very content of nationhood. Making language real, useful, even necessary to fully participate in community life must be a top priority.
5. Economic coercion is the stock in trade of colonial governments. Therefore, economic self-sufficiency projects generated apart from colonial administrators, based on traditional values eliminates the ability of the state to coerce cooperation (or

cooptation). This may include the need to expand Indigenous land bases. Work to make the state redundant in the lives of First Nations people.

6. Finally, acting on inherent jurisdiction requires confidence in your position. Negotiating with the state on any terms but *nation-to-nation* is conceding to their illegitimate authority. To ignore this point means that it is not a matter of whether or not your Indigeneity will be assimilated; rather, it is a question of when and to what extent.

Rejecting the politics of recognition means simply refusing to ask permission to be Native. Within contemporary political discourse, despite the Indigenous root and historical lineage of our position, it is our model of regeneration that is considered unrealistic. Regeneration in the way we are promoting it in this paper is not seen by most Indigenous politicians and experts as politically feasible; it is not the pragmatic solution. However, we believe that the totally unrealistic stance, a real pipe dream, is the aboriginalist ideology, and the illogical belief that the same institutions that colonize(d) Indigenous people, and the same people that benefit from ongoing oppression, will be the ones to eventually and willingly give up their power and privileges. You can try to change the system of your oppression through recognition politics, but experience and simple common sense prove that the system will end up changing you instead. The question for First Nations leaders today is, how much more of yourself and your people are you willing to lose before turning away from recognition politics and getting serious about acting on your inherent jurisdiction and nationhood?