

# Indigenous Resurgence and Co-resistance

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LEANNE BETASAMOSAKE SIMPSON

This article was created by a correspondence between Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Eve Tuck between December 2015 and February 2016. Simpson was writing from Peterborough and Montreal, and Tuck was writing from Atlantic City and then Toronto. Tuck worked with K. Wayne Yang to develop an initial set of prompts, and the conversation launched from there. We have presented a tidied-up version of the correspondence here, keeping back parts that were just for us, and fine-tuning other portions for a public audience. We are grateful to K. Wayne Yang, LeKeisha Hughes, Eric Ritskes, and Nisha Toomey, who did some filling-in on references, formatting, notes, and editing of this correspondence to bring it into manuscript form.

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson is a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg storyteller, scholar, and activist and a member of Alderville First Nation. In her acclaimed book *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence and a New Emergence* (2011), Simpson critically and actively engages resistance and resurgence through the context of Nishnaabeg theories, philosophies, and stories. Utilizing storytelling as a decolonizing process with the power to recall, envision, and create modes of resurgence and contesting cognitive imperialisms, Simpson has utilized this power throughout her short stories and poetry. Along with actively writing on Nishnaabeg pedagogy through stories, notions of land, and collectivity, Simpson has written on a breadth of topics including Indigenous resistance and resurgence through and beyond the Idle No More movement, the estimated four thousand missing and murdered Indigenous women in Canada,<sup>1</sup> and the accompanying four hundred years of gendered colonial violence. Also a musician, songwriter, and performer, Simpson accompanied her first book of short stories, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (2013), with a full-length album featuring Indigenous musicians from across Canada. Simpson's publications include *The Gift Is in the Making: Anishinaabeg Stories* (2013),

*Lighting the Eighth Fire: The Liberation, Resurgence, and Protection of Indigenous Nations* (2008, editor), *This Is an Honour Song: Twenty Years since the Blockades* (2010, edited with Kiera Ladner), and *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* (2014, contributor, edited by Kino-nda-niimi collective). Simpson's next book of short stories and poetry, *This Accident of Being Lost*, will be published by the House of Anansi Press in the spring of 2017.

EVE TUCK: One of the things that K. Wayne Yang and I have learned in editing this themed issue of *Critical Ethnic Studies* on “what justice wants” is that writing as directly as possible about what is meant by social justice is a challenge. What is your sense of what is difficult about this task?

LEANNE BETASAMOSAKE SIMPSON: It's difficult because the state has co-opted narratives of justice in complex ways, especially against Indigenous and Black peoples. For example, the Canadian state land claims processes purport to be about righting the wrongs of the past, but they are really just a way of terminating Indigenous rights and bringing legal certainty to land conflicts. The criminal justice system is another narrative of justice that ends up not being about justice at all; it ends up murdering Black people and Indigenous peoples at high rates, and criminalizing our communities. “Social justice” work is often about righting some of these wrongs, and inequalities, but in my own mind, this is different than the movements that are built and maintained within marginalized communities. As Indigenous communities, we often have social justice groups wanting to help, but they fall into a white savior complex by centering whiteness or being unwilling to join in the ways that Indigenous peoples are already organizing at the community level.

Many of the scholars and activists reading these words likely work in social justice, and likely they are doing valuable work with the communities of which they are a part. My contribution here is not meant to challenge good work. In my life as a scholar, a writer, an activist, and a mom within the Indigenous community, I haven't ever been a part of a group that uses the frame “social justice” for its work. I trust that those working in social justice will take my thoughts here in the spirit that they are intended—to share different modalities of thinking and practicing. My experience lies in using Indigenous theory, thought, and processes to rebuild Indigenous conceptualizations of nationhood. I am interested in movement building and mobilization as a mechanism to dismantle settler colonialism, and in using Indigenous practices to do so. I am a

member of Alderville First Nation and I work within the practices and ethics of Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg people.

Justice is a concept within Western thought that is intrinsically linked to settler colonialism. Indigenous thought systems conceptualize justice differently. We have experienced four centuries of apocalyptic violence in the name of dispossession in the part of the Nishnaabeg nation I am from and live in. White supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy have targeted and continue to murder, disappear, attack, criminalize, and devalue our bodies, minds, and spirits. Several of the plant and animal nations we share territory with have been exterminated. “Justice” to me, in the face of all that, means the return of land, the regeneration of Indigenous political, educational, and knowledge systems, the rehabilitation of the natural world, and the destruction of white supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy. “Justice” within the confines of settler colonialism gets paralytically overwhelmed in the face of that. So I don’t think about justice very much. I think about resurgence and movement building.

I don’t want to say a lot here about settler-colonial narratives around justice because there are scholars, public intellectuals, and activists who’ve spent much more time analyzing these narratives, but I think for Indigenous peoples, when Canada or the United States talks about justice in terms of Indigenous peoples, it’s never about justice for us. A lot of the time state justice is about white people feeling better about themselves. State narratives of justice are processes that are about injustice for us—a system that steals our people and locks them up so the state can access our land for the exploitation of natural resources. In Canada, we’ve just gone through a truth and reconciliation process around residential schools where the conversation focused on individual pain and suffering. We were unable to account for how residential schools were a strategic tool of dispossession. We were unable to talk about regenerating the damage caused to Indigenous political systems, languages, or spirituality, for instance. Now we are about to embark on a national inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, and scholar Sarah Hunt recently asked on Twitter, “What does ‘justice’ look like within a [government]-led inquiry when violence against us continues to be a daily reality?”<sup>2</sup> Hunt’s longer interview talks about the limitations of the national inquiry, the steps we can take to make it more meaningful to Indigenous women, and the concrete short-term steps that can be taken right now to improve things.<sup>3</sup> Hunt was also questioning the state’s ability to address the root causes of violence against Indigenous women, when it is actively engaged

in violences against Indigenous women in order to maintain dispossession. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson's work on the murdering, disappearing, and erasing of Indigenous women's fleshly bodies because they are symbols of Indigenous political orders that call into question the legitimacy of state sovereignty is crucial to this set of ideas because it points directly to the limitations of government-led inquiries into obtaining justice for these kinds of violence.<sup>4</sup> Audra's work seems to me to be so important right now. To me, dispossession is a structural relationship Indigenous peoples have to the state. The destruction of Indigenous bodies takes place to remove us from our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual relationships to land primarily so that the land can be exploited for natural resources. How can we utter the word "justice" in Canada and not be talking about that?

#### JUSTICE THAT STARTS FROM GROUNDED NORMATIVITY

My thinking starts with reflecting on the idea of justice within Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg thought, because this is the area I work in. It starts with how we live in the world. Relationships within Indigenous thought are paramount. I think for Indigenous peoples, whether we are talking about justice or solidarity or whatever, we need to start within our intelligence systems, or what Dene scholar Glen Sean Coulthard calls "grounded normativity"—the systems of ethics that are continuously generated by a relationship with a particular place, with land, through the Indigenous processes and knowledges that make up Indigenous life.<sup>5</sup> For me, it's these theories and practices that form Indigenous constructions of reality, of life, and of how to ethically relate to the plant and animal nations, our families, the waters, the skyworld, communities, and nations. Decolonizing, to me, means centering grounded normativity in my life and in the life of my community, while critically analyzing and critiquing the ways in which I'm replicating white supremacy, antiblackness, heteropatriarchy, and capitalisms—structures that are ethically horrific and profoundly unjust within Nishnaabeg grounded normativity. Indigenous resurgence, in its most radical form, is nation building, not nation-state building, but nation building, again, in the context of grounded normativity by centring, amplifying, animating, and actualizing the processes of grounded normativity as flight paths or fugitive escapes from the violences of settler colonialism. This resurgence creates profoundly different ways of thinking, organizing, and being because the Indigenous processes

that give birth to our collective resurgence are fundamentally nonhierarchical, nonexploitative, nonextractivist, and nonauthoritarian.

Grounded normativity generates nations as networks of complex, layered, multidimensional, intimate relationships with human and non-human beings. Our societies work very well when those relationships are balanced. Our legal system isn't a series of "laws" based on authoritarian power with punishments for when the laws are broken. It is an embedded and interwoven spiritual, emotional, and social system of intelligence that fosters independence, community, and self-determination in individuals. It is centered around individuals, a diversity of individuals acting in a way that promotes and brings about more life, and more creation. This way of living in individuals amplifies out into families, communities, and nations. The well-being of individuals is directly linked to the well-being of collectives. When an individual is hurt or sick or having a hard time, there is impact throughout the system, and the community has the obligation to respond.

When there is conflict or something goes wrong, we have processes to hear from everyone involved. These processes allow the community of people impacted by the imbalance to learn the context of the individuals directly involved. It allows the individuals to account for themselves and their actions. It focuses on repairing and regenerating relationships and this restoration is something that happens repeatedly across scales with individuals, their interactions with plants and animals, and their families, communities, and nations. It is a supportive system of processing trauma, of taking measures spiritually, and of accounting for loss or hurt. These are the same processes of Nishnaabeg diplomacy we use in conflicts internationally.

### PLACE-BASED INTERNATIONALISM

EVE: One idea that Wayne and I floated in our call for papers is that how a person or community understands the roots or source of injustice will have implications for how they go about undoing that injustice. Does this make sense to you? Might it be too simplistic or problematic?

LEANNE: I think we need to be a bit careful here, particularly in the academy. I think Indigenous peoples understand pretty well injustice in their own lives whether or not they can articulate it using the language of colonialism or decolonization. I think movements that link social realities with political systems and focus on creating real-world-on-the-ground alternatives

are powerful. I worry that too much of our energy goes into trying to influence the system rather than creating the alternatives. It matters to me how change is achieved. Change achieved through struggle, organizing, and creating the alternatives produces profoundly different outcomes than change achieved through recognition-focused protest, and pressuring the state to make the changes for us. That is a recipe for co-option.

I think it is important to understand root causes of injustice, but it is also important to understand think strategically and intelligently about approaches to undoing that injustice. I think that diagnosis and strategic action must be done within grounded normativity. Indigenous thought has a tradition of place-based internationalism that I think is this beautifully fertile spot because it links place-based thinking and struggle with the same decolonial pockets of thinking throughout the world. Nishnaabeg have been linking ourselves to the rest of the world since the beginning of time, and throughout our resistance to colonialism we have our people traveling throughout the world to link with other communities of resisters. Grassy Narrows First Nation comes to mind in their nearly four-decade fight against mercury poisoning in their river system and the relationship they have made with the Japanese community in Mnimata.<sup>6</sup>

We need to use our experiences in the past to think critically about how we respond to injustice today. Right now, Indigenous peoples in Canada need to be thinking critically about the implications of seeking recognition within the colonial state because we have a government that is very good at neoliberalism and seducing our hope for their purposes. Again, Glen Sean Coulthard, in *Red Skin, White Masks*, using the Dene nation's experience in the 1970s, provides a blistering critique of the pitfalls of seeking political recognition within state structures. He makes the point that continually seeking recognition with the settler-colonial state is a process of co-option and neutralization, and is a way of bringing Indigenous peoples into the systems that guts our resistance movements, for instance, and we get very little in return.<sup>7</sup> In fact, in terms of dispossession—that is, the removal, murdering, displacement, and destruction of the relationship between Indigenous bodies and Indigenous land—this serves only to facilitate land loss, not improve things. Engagement with the system changes Indigenous peoples more than it changes the system. This can be destructive in terms of resurgence because resurgent movements are trying to do the opposite—we are trying to center Indigenous practices and thoughts in our lives as everyday acts of resistance, and grow those actions and processes into a mass mobilization.

I think it is useful to apply this same critique of recognition to organizing and mobilizing with the purpose of making a switch from mobilizing around victim-based narratives—that is, publically demonstrating the pain of loss as a mechanism to appeal to the moral and ethical fabric of Canadian society (which has over and over again proven to be morally bankrupt when it comes to Indigenous peoples)—to using that same pain and anger to fuel resurgent actions. This organizing from within grounded normativity has always fueled Indigenous resistance and continues to happen all the time in Indigenous communities—it is just often misread by others. The community of Hollow Water First Nation created the Community Holistic Circle of Healing as a Nishnaabeg restoration of relationships, or a restorative justice model to address sexual violence in their community.<sup>8</sup> Christi Belcourt's *Walking with Our Sisters* exhibit has created a traveling display of 1,800 moccasin vamps as a way of honoring and commemorating missing and murdered Indigenous women and children in Canada and the United States. The exhibit does not rely on state funding.<sup>9</sup> Thousands of volunteers made the vamps. The exhibit works with local communities and their cultural and spiritual practices to install the exhibit and do the necessary ceremony and community processes. *Walking with Our Sisters* works with local organizers a year in advance of installation, using Indigenous processes to embed the art in community on the terms of the local community. There is also the work of countless urban Indigenous organizations supporting the families of MMIWG2S people. The Native Youth Sexual Health Network provides on-the-ground, community-embedded, peer-to-peer support around sexual health and addiction for youth.<sup>10</sup> The Akwesasne Freedom School provides Mohawk education for Mohawk children.<sup>11</sup> The Iroquois national and Haudenosaunee women's lacrosse teams travel using Haudenosaunee passports instead of American or Canadian ones.<sup>12</sup> The Unist'ot'en Camp pursues land protection resurgent action and the reclamation of the original name of Mount Douglas, PKOLS, in the city of Victoria, British Columbia.<sup>13</sup>

#### COLLECTION OF COLLECTIVES

EVE: Might you also discuss the relationship between the personal and the collective with regard to justice? Particularly for Indigenous peoples, the collective is a fundamental unit of being and knowing—and the collective extends beyond human life. What do you think about the relationship

between the personal and the collective when it comes to justice? Furthermore, might there be times when the personal and the collective desires for justice are incommensurable with one another? How might we rethink the personal and the collective in imagining justice?

LEANNE: When I consider this within Anishinaabeg thought, my understanding is that we are more a collection of collectives, so I don't see a tension between individuals or collectives. Individuals are hubs of networks. When an individual is hurt, then the system is out of balance. These things are directly linked in Anishinaabeg thought. Of course we can push it to the point where an individual is having a huge negative impact on the community and something has to be done. We have processes for that, but I believe those situations are rare. In reality, if you set up a society that fosters individual diversity, promotes individual self-determination, encourages self-actualization and accountability, and nurtures intimate relationships among individuals, you might not ever encounter such a situation in your lifetime. The Nishnaabeg have a huge body of stories that surround us and provide so many different ways of solving problems and conflicts within our communities. I'm not sure that focusing on the rare occasions that an individual has to be removed from society is so important. I am much more interested in building the conditions that support the regeneration of these social, political, spiritual, and legal systems within our communities and creating a generation of individuals that has the intelligence to create the alternatives.

I don't want to be too prescriptive here because for Indigenous peoples this kind of knowledge has to be learned in a particular way. You can't read an academic paper or a book about it and think you know what you are talking about. That's not the way our intelligence systems work. This kind of knowledge needs to be learned in relationship to the place that generated it, with or in our languages, using Indigenous processes and expertise. It is different for unique Indigenous nations and communities. There are different ways of interpreting knowledge that collectives of people need to figure out. My point here is that I think it is important for Indigenous peoples to do this work individually and in community with others. The point of resurgence isn't to present case studies and then have them replicated in other communities. That won't work. It is for Indigenous peoples to regenerate the processes and ways of living of our ancestors, our practices, our grounded normativity, within an Indigenous criticality (so we aren't mistakenly replicating the logics of settler colonialism) and figuring out how to center this in our individual lives and in



the collectives of which we are a part. This is a different way of living in the world. It changes us. Engaging in different processes and practices changes not only those involved but the outcome. Resurgence is an emergent and generative process.

## RESURGENCE AND CONSTELLATIONS

I'm actually not interested in justice. I'm interested in Indigenous resurgence, nation building, addressing gender violence, movement building, linking up and creating constellations of co-resistance with other movements. I'm interested in making sure the movement around Indigenous resurgence is not replicating gender violence by placing bodies at our center. I'm interested in making sure we are not replicating heteropatriarchy or antiblackness by learning how to engage in constellations of co-resistance. I'm interested in freedom and creating a social, economic, political, artistic, spiritual, and physical space for futures of Anishinaabe people to be Anishinaabe on our land, unharassed and undeterred.

I'm in the process of writing a new book on resurgent mobilization and I've been thinking a lot about constellations within Nishnaabeg thought. Dene/Cree scholar Jarrett Martineau's dissertation, "Creative Combat: Indigenous Art, Resurgence, and Decolonization," uses the artistic practices of a diverse series of Indigenous provocateurs to examine the decolonizing potential of art-making to disrupt and interrogate forms of settler colonialism and advance the project of resurgence and Indigenous nation building.<sup>14</sup> He really advances this idea of the constellation drawing upon the work of Indigenous artists' collectives and folks like Black Constellation. Jarrett uses particular concepts and theories to create constellations that are flight paths or doorways out of settler-colonialist representation and thought. That's interesting to me. What happens when we make a constellation out of, say, Audra Simpson's work on the politics of refusal, Glen Coulthard's work on recognition, and Jarrett Martineau's work on constellated relationships in the context of my own work on Nishnaabeg resurgence? I'm trying to figure that out.

To me, in terms of organizing, this idea resonates both within Nishnaabeg thought but also in the aftermath of Idle No More. It is clear to me that we need to think about what resurgent mobilizing looks like. What does solidarity look like within grounded normativity?<sup>15</sup> How do we use Indigenous place-based internationalism to build constellations of co-resistance with non-Indigenous communities who are fighting different

aspects of the same system? This idea that you can bring particular theories or concepts together fits so well with Nishnaabeg star mapping and story. I'd like to apply this on the ground in terms of organizing—individuals or small collectives (stars) organizing within grounded normativity and connected to other individuals or collectives (stars) through Indigenous internationalism makes a lot of sense in terms of creating doorways out of settler colonialism.

EVE: I am particularly excited by this last set of ideas—I think it makes sense to continue the rest of our discussion with the terms that you have laid out, including resurgence, nation building, addressing gender violence and antiblackness, movement building, and creating constellations of co-resistance. Jeff Corntassel and others have been writing/speaking about everyday acts of resurgence—these are acts that are usually land based and/or language based, which enlivens Indigenous sovereignty. Can you address the everydayness of resurgence, but also the more occasional, the *not everydayness* of resurgence?

LEANNE: I first began thinking about resurgence in a serious way when I was working on *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*.<sup>16</sup> I thought of resurgence as a new theory or lens through which to think about Indigenous liberation. I set out to explore the idea of turning inward and rebuilding Indigenous nations on Indigenous terms using our intelligence and political thought. Through the course of thinking about resurgence from within Nishnaabeg thought I came to understand that it is an assemblage of meta-processes that encapsulates how one constructs and lives in the world. Indigenous worlds aren't institutions or states, they are relationships, movement, processes—life itself. I came to understand that the theories or stories or philosophies of resurgence inherent in Indigenous thought were the ways my ancestors had always lived. Recognizing this was important for me. The emergent qualities of Indigenous intelligence systems means that we have to be engaged with our physical bodies, minds, emotions, and spiritual selves in processes for new ideas and the alternatives to capitalism or heteropatriarchy or settler colonialism to emerge. We have visions and then build the alternatives.

Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel's research on Indigenous pathways of resurgence recently focused on identifying "everyday practices of renewal and responsibility within native communities today" by asking "how will your ancestors and future generations recognize you as Indigenous?"<sup>17</sup> His challenge is for communities and individuals to reject state affirmation and recognition and the performativity of the rights-based

discourse, to move beyond political awareness and symbolic gestures to everyday place-practices of resurgence. He warns against the politics of distraction—states’ attempts to move us away from the renewal of place-based practices—and encourages us to center our individual and communal lives around renewal.

#### REAL-WORLD RELEVANCE OF COULTHARD’S CRITIQUE OF RECOGNITION

EVE: Glen Coulthard’s book *Red Skin, White Masks* makes a critique of recognition that you seem to be engaging at different points in our correspondence so far. Might you say more about what you are learning from this important critique?

LEANNE: *Red Skin, White Masks* really changed the way I thought in the way George Manuel’s *Fourth World* did, Lee Maracle’s *I Am Woman* did, and Taiaiake Alfred’s *Peace, Power and Righteousness* did before.<sup>18</sup> Glen provides us with a stellar critique of recognition in Indigenous politics in relation to the Canadian state. *Red Skin, White Masks* is a book that I’ve thought constantly about over the past year and it’s generated a lot of new thinking in me—especially the last chapter of that book, the resurgence that he gets to at the very end.<sup>19</sup> Indigenous peoples are often stuck in the position of having to make the best of things or of having to react to the state because the state holds power over our lives and our land. A great deal of our strategies for change hinge on state recognition and I think Glen really clearly and meticulously points out why that is problematic. As much as it is problematic, it is epidemic in how we think and organize, and I think that’s likely what resonated with me so profoundly in this book. The idea that engagement with the settler-colonial political system changes you more than you can change it is something I continue to try and think very deeply about because while Glen confined his critique to politics, you can take his theoretical intervention and apply it to all of the intertwined systems of oppression that make up settler colonialism—including education, organizing, and mobilization. This is timely particularly in Canada because we have a government that is signaling (at least in superficial ways) that liberal recognition is the cornerstone of its interactions with Indigenous peoples. A number of radical scholars and organizers predict that in these situations of liberal recognition, mass movements that might have existed under Stephen Harper will all but collapse.

Some people have criticized *Red Skin, White Masks* as a book that is just for academics or that is too theoretical to be relevant to the real

world. My reaction to the work was the opposite. To me it is shockingly real-world relevant. If we take Glen's analysis to heart, then what we should be doing right now is interrogating state recognition in our organizing and our responses to liberalism and figuring out what resurgent mobilization looks like. Perhaps Justin Trudeau is an opportunity, but how we use this opportunity and who benefits from it are important things to think about.

It is also significant to me that the Trudeau government, while signaling a new relationship with Indigenous peoples, has engaged in anti-blackness. This has happened through racist stereotypical comments on violence against women, the erasure of issues of concern to the Black community throughout the campaign, and in the complete absence of Black MPs in the "most diverse cabinet" in Canadian history.<sup>20</sup> Within Indigenous thought, within resurgence, it matters how change is achieved and with whom we achieve it. Indigenous nationhood cannot replicate heteropatriarchy or antiblackness.

#### CREATING MATERIAL BASES FOR THE NATIONS WE WANT

EVE: Every time I do a talk on theories of change, especially on Indigenous feminist theories of change, someone in the audience asks me to talk about what settlers can do to aid in Indigenous repatriation. This is not that type of question! But I do want to learn more from you about how you see your understandings of change in relation to other theories of change—more about Martineau's constellation that you mentioned. It seems that you are saying that theories of change/justice/injustice are specific—both historically and land specific. But is there anything to be said for how all of this specificity coheres with other specificities? Latches with other movements?

LEANNE: I get that first type of question about what settlers can do a lot and I hate it because it erases everything I've said in my talk and tries to recenter the talk on whiteness; we need to stop providing the space for that.

We have to create material bases for the nationhoods we want. We can't rely on the culture that capitalism creates. We just can't. We can't achieve Indigenous nationhoods while replicating antiblackness. We can't have resurgence without centering gender and queerness, and creating alternative systems of accountability for sexual and gender violence. Therefore, we need to create constellations of connections with other radical thinkers and doers and makers. We need to build mass movements with

radical labor, with Black communities, with radical communities of color. We need to stop providing space for the “What can white allies do” questions and set up spaces where we can connect with other social movements and create constellations of mutual support and co-resistance. My experience as an Indigenous woman is with colonialism, settler colonialism, occupation and gender violence, and connecting with radical Black feminists, for instance, is rich ground for me because we have different but intimately related experiences with white supremacy. I watched the recent Black Radical Tradition conference online and I thought, wow, these comrades are thinking and writing similar things to me and my Indigenous comrades and maybe there is something in that.<sup>21</sup> Not that I want to take and exploit their intellectual work, but more of a, hey—they have their shit together, they have public intellectuals, they have movements on the ground. They aren’t afraid to talk about the root of things.

That’s why resurgence is so important. I am not particularly interested in holding states accountable because the structure, history, and nature of states is exploitative by nature. I’m interested in alternatives, I’m interested in building new worlds. That’s not to say that movements that are working to hold states accountable should do something differently—only they would know that. It’s not my place to critique that. I’m saying on a very personal level, this is not where my skills and thinking lie. I work exclusively with Indigenous peoples and theoretically my thinking and work is based in Indigenous resurgence.

Indigenous peoples standing up on our lands in a principled, strategic, and articulate way, embodying change, is a fundamentally different approach than begging the colonizer for their pity, or centering whiteness in solidarity or in allyship. We are not relying on victim narratives. We need to come at this from a place of principled strength having done the work, and we need to have the backs of other communities and movements, instead of continuing to dance for whiteness. There are other movements doing a better job of this right now than we are. Grounded normativity has no space for exploitation, heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, or antiblackness.

#### WHAT WE ARE MAKING THROUGH CONSTELLATIONS OF CO-RESISTANCE

EVE: Two of the ideas that you have described in other interviews have been deeply resonant with me—I think of them all the time with great

appreciation. The first comes in an interview you did with Naomi Klein. Speaking about Mi'kmaq mothers, grandmothers, aunts, sisters, and daughters—armed with drums and feathers against the pointed rifles of the RCMP—and their choice to lay their bodies on their land to protest and protect their land from fracking, you said, “Our bodies should be on the land so that our grandchildren have something left to stand upon.”<sup>22</sup>

The other idea came up in an interview-conversation between you, Glen Coulthard, and Eric Ritskes in which you talk about how your children have learned about being Nishnaabeg on Denendeh land—perhaps even more than when they are home. You said:

One of the things I noticed with my kids when they're in Denendeh, is that they operate as Nishnaabeg people more so than I think they do at home sometimes. They notice different changes in traditions and different cultural changes, and I think they feel really, really proud of who they are at Dechinta. They have an opportunity to practice how to live respectfully in someone else's territory, according to Nishnaabeg traditions. They recognize Dechinta as a safe place to be who they are and express their opinions and perspectives.<sup>23</sup>

To close this correspondence, I wonder if you might bring these ideas together to talk about the kinds of present and kinds of futurities we might go about making for our children, and their children?

LEANNE: The primary way my ancestors and I have interacted with the state is through dispossession—the removal of Indigenous bodies from Indigenous lands. My disconnection from Indigenous thought, languages, and practices has been orchestrated by dispossession, as had the erasure of Indigenous bodies from the present. This is a dispossession of every meaningful relationship from my life. In building a radical resurgent movement—and by radical I mean one that addresses the root—I think we need to be centering our attachment to each other, the land, and our intelligence systems. We need to be creating a present that will inspire a radically different future than the one settler colonialism sets out for us. This means taking on heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism, and antiblackness, and actualizing Indigenous alternatives on the ground, not in the future but in the present. Indigenous alternatives that are rooted in Indigenous intelligence, or to again use Coulthard's term, grounded normativity. This means a land base, and nations that are physical, emotional, spiritual, artistic, and creative spaces where Indigenous peoples can be Indigenous. This means not centering white allyship but building

relationships with our comrades in other communities that are already doing this work in the context of their own communities and movement-constellations of co-resistance. And it means doing this work in the present so our kids know what freedom feels like, so they know what it feels like to be from a particular Indigenous nation whether they are in downtown Toronto, in the bush, or behind a blockade, so they know what to fight for.

## NOTES

1. John Paul Tasker, “Confusion Reigns over Number of Missing, Murdered Indigenous Women,” *CBC News*, February 16, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/mmiw-4000-hajdu-1.3450237>.

2. Sarah Hunt, Twitter post, December 7, 2015, 5:32 p.m., <https://twitter.com/thesarahhunt/status/674037137059090433>.

3. Sarah Hunt, “Do We Need an Inquiry to End Violence against Indigenous Women?,” interview by Jim Brown, *CBC/Radio-Canada*, November 1, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/the180/mmiw-inquiry-debunking-electoral-reform-and-what-is-the-west-1.3295363/do-we-need-an-inquiry-to-end-violence-against-indigenous-women-1.3295403>.

4. Audra Simpson, *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life across the Borders of Settler States* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2014); Audra Simpson, “The Chief’s Two Bodies” (keynote presented at “International R.A.C.E. Conference,” Edmonton, October 2015).

5. Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 60.

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