

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.”