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“No, do you know what *your* treaty rights are?” Treaty consciousness in a decolonizing frame

Chris Hiller

Idle No More represents a watershed moment of treaty education, with treaty-related teach-ins, direct actions, and information sharing happening in diverse public spaces across Canada and around the globe. Although unprecedented in scope, depth, and intensity, *Idle No More* rests in a centuries-old continuity of Indigenous treaty pedagogy: efforts on the part of Indigenous peoples, going back to the time of first contact, to educate newcomers to their territories regarding the principles, meanings, protocol, and implications of treaty relationships. Yet despite centuries of such efforts, as well as more recent efforts on the part of solidarity organizations and even mainstream educational institutions, treaty ignorance and denial remain rampant in Canada, and treaties themselves continue to constitute a lightning rod of contention and entrenched conflict between Indigenous and settler peoples.

Such conflict is everywhere in evidence: in the hundreds of specific claims regarding federal breaches of treaty agreements—some decades and even centuries old—that remain unresolved (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2014), a situation regularly denounced by international human rights observers; in the failed mechanisms of the current comprehensive claims system and so-called modern BC Treaty Process—processes decried by Indigenous and settler scholars alike as present-day instantiations of colonial “concepts of title acquisition” predicated on the extinguishment of Aboriginal title (Alfred 2000; Venne 2001; Little Bear 2004, 34; Woolford 2006);¹ in the reality that although treaty rights are recognized constitutionally and upheld by the highest courts in Canada and internationally, their enactment by Indigenous peoples—at Oka, Ipperwash, Gustafson Lake, Burnt Church—continues to evoke outrage, panic, and state-backed violence.

Collectively, such treaty-related actions and inactions reflect a broader agenda that has defined Canada as a settler colonial nation: that of trying to solve or simply do away with “the Indian problem” (Regan 2010, 86). As a sign of the discursive success of this agenda, assimilationist impulses remain alive and well in the Canadian popular imagination.² These desires are produced by and productive of a pervasive ignorance of treaty history and an amnesiac settler culture shorn up by a number of treaty-related “cultural pedagogies” (Kincheloe and McLaren 2000, 285): foundational mythologies,

national narratives, cultural repertoires, and discursive practices that work to dismiss, deny, or disavow the ongoing significance of treaties, and especially any obligations that they might infer for settler peoples.

In recent years, scholars from across a number of culturally informed disciplines have worked to map and deconstruct the social and discursive context underlying and constituted by dominant forms of cultural pedagogy associated with treaties. Against the backdrop of this dominant pedagogy, such work suggests, treaties figure in the settler imagination in a number of problematic ways: as real estate deals “that extinguished the property rights of the original occupiers” (Ray, Miller, and Tough 2000, 205) and conveniently “eliminate [d] the legal impediment to settling Indigenous lands” (Regan 2010, 91; see also Asch 2014, 154); as ‘special rights’ for Indians (Flanagan 2000, 141)—perks arising from antiquated agreements made in faraway and now largely irrelevant histories of early encounter, and allocated now by a magnanimous nation-state;³ as yet another self-reinforcing sign of Canada as the “benevolent peacemaker” nation, with its continued and defining generosity towards Indigenous people (Regan 2010, 83). Settler scholar Paulette Regan (2010) argues that despite shifts in settler colonial discourses over time, this myth, with its underlying assumptions of fairness and innocence, remains embedded in government policy and practices as well as popular discourse and consciousness:

On the political right, [this myth] is manifested in disingenuous rhetoric about the problem of race-based rights and the need for one law for all, which of course is superior Western law. On the political left, it is the well-intentioned hand-wringing over the plight of ‘our Aboriginal people,’ those victims of progress whom we must now help. Either way, cultural arrogance and a denial of colonial history drives both agendas. (106)

In their most malevolent form, these mythologies converge with a “rhetoric of generosity” cross-cut with reactionary discourses of equality (Furniss 1999, 144) and race to dismiss, denigrate, or decry treaties as (racialized) threats to national cohesion and the rightful access of all (read: white) citizens to (Indigenous) lands and resources (Flanagan 2000, 141). Underlying this continuity of symbolic violence, as well as the material violence that it feeds upon and undergirds, is a pervasive disrespect for Indigenous peoples—their histories, knowledges, diplomatic traditions and protocol, their sovereignties and status as nations, their very humanity (Youngblood Henderson 2000, 2002; Alfred 2005; Regan 2010, 143).

For critical educators committed to dismantling colonial mindsets, practices, and structures, then, the question remains: given the entrenched nature of this dominant treaty pedagogy, how might it be possible to prompt a “decolonizing treaty” (Sehdev 2011, 273) consciousness among non-Indigenous people? What kinds of critical praxis might disrupt mythologizing settler narratives and the colonial discourses and practices conducive of ignorance and denial? Further, given Tuck and Yang’s (2012) admonition that “decolonization is not a metaphor” (1),

what forms of reflection and action might foster and support concrete efforts among settlers to bring about a full and just recognition of treaty rights, relationships, and responsibilities?

To explore these questions, I begin by reflecting upon interviews with Euro-Canadian solidarity activists who have been engaged for at least two years in supporting Indigenous struggles over land, title, and sovereignty. These interviews were conducted as part of a broader critical narrative inquiry exploring the processes by which non-Indigenous people come to grips with, and come to actively support, Indigenous sovereignty, title, and territory (Hiller 2013). These actors each claim a white racialized identity as well as ties to European (primarily, British) ancestors who arrived on the shores of Turtle Island at least a century ago;⁴ as such, and despite other forms of diversity among them, they share a common location as white settlers who are positioned as racially, spatially, and materially dominant within Canada as a settler colonial nation. At the time of the interviews, each was living in Southern Ontario and thus was negotiating home and place in relation to similar histories of treaty making, disavowal, and contention;⁵ each narrative is also positioned in relation to a historically-specific convergence of treaty-related developments on local, national, and international fronts.⁶ Given this common positioning, the stories of these actors collectively contribute to the theorizing of localized decolonizing pedagogies: pedagogies that engage with the precise forms of treaty disavowal that arise in relation to “the specificity of neocolonial domination and exploitation in the social spaces” (Tejeda, Espinoza, and Gutierrez 2003, 34) that they inhabit.⁷

For the purpose of this article, I focus on the narratives of five white settlers whose stories pivot on engagements with the meaning and implications of the treaties and treaty relationships. While tracing the overall arc of these narratives, I attend in particular to what these actors identify as critical turning points in their processes of learning and unsettlement: pivotal moments that spark or mark their shift into a decolonizing praxis in relation to the treaties. I then move to reading the narratives collectively against the backdrop of dominant treaty pedagogy. Next, I consider the synergies, tensions, and contradictions within and among these stories, casting critical light on what such processes of learning unsettle as well as reinforce in relation to settler constructions of history, space, land, and place. Finally, I consider questions of what the narratives as a whole say about the role of situated forms of treaty praxis in processes of decolonizing settler attitudes, practices, and commitments.

“No, do you know what *your* treaty rights are?” Facing one’s embeddedness in a colonial frame

The first narrative I will consider here is that of Corvin.⁸ A consummate and highly politicized activist, Corvin begins his narrative of coming to treaty

consciousness with a story about his involvement in efforts to build a national “activist school” in Canada, a project he comes to with a strong conviction regarding the potential of a broad-based struggle for Indigenous rights to profoundly unsettle and transform how Canadians imagine ourselves. Looking back now at that early involvement, Corvin cringes, recognizing that despite his intellectual and political convictions, his early interactions with Indigenous community members and activists were plagued by an unintentional yet pernicious form of inattentiveness—a quality he ties to a broader popular consciousness that fails to engage with Indigenous realities: “I didn’t know anything about the policy frameworks or the history on that level, except intuitively, I think the way that most people have grown up with a consciousness that an injustice was *done*. That’s sort of the level of the popular consciousness.”

For Corvin, this inattentiveness to the specificity of Indigenous experiences, analyses, and aspirations—born of an effacing settler consciousness—leads to “guilt-based” and paternalistic efforts to “manage” challenges put forth by Indigenous coalition members: “But we weren’t engaging them on Indigenous issues, we weren’t speaking to Indigenous issues, and weren’t engaging on the land.”

It is through reflecting upon these early encounters that Corvin comes to undertake concrete actions to undo troubling colonial relations: first, by seeking to involve more Indigenous people in organizing efforts; then, by working to reshape the educational initiatives themselves to engage Indigenous peoples and “their issues” in a more comprehensive way. In doing so, he seeks the advice of a prominent Mohawk scholar/activist, who initiates for him a complex and ongoing process of “being educated,” and later becomes both a mentor and a friend. Corvin highlights one particularly unsettling exchange regarding treaty rights as setting him on a new path of decolonization:

She sat down, and one of the first things she said was, “Do you know what your treaty rights are?” And I said, “You mean, do I know what *your* treaty rights are?” She says, “No, do you know what *your* treaty rights are?” It went back and forth a couple of times and I thought, “*Oh. Oh. Now* I get what she’s saying.” And that was a real *light bulb* moment. I saw right there—it was a *very powerful* moment ... [2 s] What that *says* is, it brings out how you have been raised to think about treaty rights in particular as a *privilege* that *Indians* have, rather than a *reciprocal* arrangement between *equals*. So it’s already in a *paternalistic* frame. And it also disappears your *own* role in the process. Yeah, it disappears the reciprocity and the *agency* [2 s] and a lot of other things.

As a moment always already overdetermined by histories of contact and colonization (Ahmed 2000), this pivotal face-to-face encounter between Corvin and the Mohawk scholar is powerfully direct, demanding risk as well as accountability. Beyond simply an interaction between people or even peoples, this engagement represents an encounter between Western and Indigenous thought worlds (Ermine 2007), between opposing constructions of space-time. For Corvin, this moment of facing provokes his awareness

of—and demands that he account for—his socially produced and reinforced ignorance in relation to the treaties. The encounter also brings into view Corvin’s own deep formation and embeddedness in colonial assumptions, narratives, and relations of paternalism—relations that, prior to this intervention, had been commonsensical to the point of being invisible to him: “But just to *realize* that you’re so deeply in the *frame* that you—there are things you never even *thought* of. Right? That was a very powerful *moment*.”

For Corvin, this light bulb moment serves as a central turning point marking the beginning of a deeper and prolonged form of treaty praxis. He begins to grapple with Indigenist versions of treaty history that privilege the ongoing continuity of Indigenous worldviews, cultures, values, frameworks, aspirations, and societies (Churchill 1996, 509; Doxtador 2001; Hill 2005, 46). What’s more, Corvin is spurred to take up treaty relationships as a decolonizing lens: one that not only recalibrates his construction of the past and renders visible his own colonizing assumptions, but also enables him to re-envision present and future relations based on reciprocity and equality. Through personal and collective reflection with other Indigenous and non-Indigenous activists, and in the context of deepening engagements with Indigenous peoples across a variety of expressly Indigenous contexts and spaces, Corvin begins to pull apart colonizing assumptions within his own mindset and within broader left movements that engage with Indigenous struggles over land. As an educator, Corvin describes drawing upon that formatively unsettling question as a critical “launching pad” for educational workshops with non-Indigenous people, aiming to “provoke a consciousness of your own ignorance—[2 s] provoke a consciousness of the tremendous weight of assumptions and the tremendous weight of the colonial framing of that relationship that we carry with us.”

“I’m an *inheritor* of this *agreement*”: Living (up to) a treaty inheritance

Rebecca’s story of coming to treaty consciousness similarly pivots on an unexpected and very personal encounter, this time with the chief of a local First Nation in the municipal administration office of her hometown in northern Ontario, where she worked at the time:⁹

And I don’t know how we got in this conversation—[chuckles] I think now that *he* certainly knew what he was doing.... And he said to me, “You know, you have treaty rights *too*.” Like probably my face just sort of went—[look of shock]. He says, “*Yeah*, I mean the fact that you have—I mean, we’re sitting here, in this municipal building, that there’s sidewalks and streets and that you have a town here. And that’s a *treaty* right.”

Similar again to Corvin’s experience, Rebecca’s face-to-face engagement with this Anishinaabe leader is strikingly direct and personal—again, a

meeting of thought worlds as well as people/s. Part of the unsettling power of this chance encounter comes from its location: comments that might have had less impact in the safer confines of a workshop or educational seminar are unanticipated and jarring in the context of the municipal administration building, a commonsensical site and sign of settler spatial regimes if ever there was one. As she conveys the story, I imagine the ground shifting beneath Rebecca's feet: the familiar places and taken-for-granted spaces around her—sidewalks, streets, public buildings, towns—suddenly becoming unfamiliar and strange (Gelder and Jacobs 1998, 23), the material manifestations of her own treaty rights. Looking back now, Rebecca sees that moment as sparking a process that ultimately shifted how she “emplaces” (Blomley 2004, 109) herself—historically, on the land, and in relation to Indigenous peoples—all in and through treaty relationships: “So he was educating *me* [laughs] and I'm *understanding* something there. So I'm understanding my *place* here—you know, as a *treaty* person, *also*.”

This early intervention initiates a cycle of engagement and learning that brings Rebecca into contact with Indigenous communities and people who offer multiple recountings of treaty relationships. Through listening to such recountings across a number of different contexts, Rebecca comes to read herself into treaty history in a new way, seeing treaties as ongoing nation-to-nation agreements to which she is a party, as their *inheritor*:

And so for me, although it was a few years yet before I saw a circuitous route yet happening, before I kind of got back here and doing Aboriginal justice work, that was a really pivotal *moment*. Because I saw—it had *never* occurred to me—[smiling] I'm sorry to say—that to understand the *treaty* is something that is between *nations*, and it means that I am an *inheritor*. I'm *one* of those nations, and I'm an *inheritor* of this *agreement* and have responsibilities and *rights*. What *he* was saying was *rights*.

Rebecca's treaty-related praxis is deepened through longstanding engagements in and with Indigenous communities. Her process of learning is shaped in particular by ongoing connections to the people of an Anishinaabe community in northern Ontario that has struggled to protect its territories from the ravages of government-sanctioned industrial logging and mercury contamination. The engagements she describes are multiple and multifaceted: from physically standing alongside of community members at blockades; to listening to teachings and community deliberations about principles, protocol, and tactics; to consulting about meaningful forms of solidarity and support; to witnessing and participating in ceremonies as well as political actions on the land. Through these diverse engagements, Rebecca comes to know, in an embodied though still limited way, how central relationships to land and territory are to the life of those specific Anishinaabe people, their knowledges, their ways of seeing and being, their community

and nation—their very selves. Rebecca also speaks of the challenges of negotiating conflicts and divisions within communities, and of grappling with the contradictory ways in which Indigenous practices of living on and with the land are envisioned and lived out. Thus, what she witnesses is not an airtight romanticized expression of Anishinaabe-ness on the land, but the ongoing negotiation and struggle—against the backdrop of the centuries-long ravages of colonialism—to reclaim, re-envision, and live out the complexity of all that it means to be and live as Anishinaabe in Anishinaabe places and territories.

What interests me about Rebecca’s narrative is not that she comes to the right understanding of Indigenous relations to land; rather, it is the way in which her practices of listening bring to the fore her own sense of difference, calling into question her deeply “settled expectations” (Harris 1993, 1713) regarding her place as a (white settler) person who is not Indigenous to the land of her birth and whose ancestors arrived to this land three and four generations ago: “But there’s—it’s *definitely* a *different* feeling of *placement* in this world, in this very *land* we’re on, here on Turtle Island, as it’s called, than Indigenous people here have. So that’s a really personal *feeling* that’s evoked and *understanding* that I’ve come to.”

These personally affecting experiences and understandings serve as the critical lens through which Rebecca comes first to perceive the gap between settler colonial and Indigenist interpretations of the treaties, and then to reject colonialist framings of them as extinguishment documents:

So whether we non-Native people—those who signed it and those who’ve inherited the treaties—*think* that that’s what it is about, *they* certainly didn’t and still don’t. And so I think that—I *believe* that there’s a lot of *integrity* on their part in their understanding, because of how I understand from *hearing* them speak about their understanding of their place *on* and *in* the land and part of creation. I *believe* that. So even if a treaty in *writing* said something that *they* say, ‘That’s not right,’ I believe that we need to deal with their version.

For Rebecca, treaty decolonization is a process of coming to listen for, believe in, and ultimately privilege Indigenist understandings of the spirit and intent of the treaties to share the land, over and against engagements with their specific content: “I don’t need to learn everything about a *legal* instrument of a treaty.” It is also a process of discerning and learning to take up her responsibilities as a treaty person—responsibilities that arise simply by virtue of continuing to live and move within Indigenous territories: “Now you’re supposed to *live* by the agreement. So personally for me, that was a big step in understanding something—it was like a building block, you know.” In Rebecca’s view and practice, being a non-Indigenous treaty person demands direct and on-going engagement in supporting the struggles of Indigenous peoples for the recognition and implementation of their specific understandings of treaty relationships and commitments.

“Not one has been kept by my side of the *Two Row*”: Fighting for the integrity of the Crown

As one whose geographical location does not afford him “the luxury of geographical distance” (Epp 2003, 229) from Indigenous-settler conflicts, Jim comes to treaty consciousness through a very different route.¹⁰ Growing up in Eagle’s Place—“just a football punt” from the site of a Haudenosaunee land reclamation—Jim recalls often walking unawares as a child past the now infamous *Mohawk Institute*.¹¹ Yet despite this proximity to the reserve for Six Nations on Grand River Territory, Jim’s social imaginary and lived experience growing up remained largely structured by what some might deem the two solitudes of Indigenous and settler communities. Outside of a bank of dominant stereotypes, Jim recalls no substantive connection to or knowledge of this neighbouring community until he began work as a reporter for the newspaper on reserve, a move precipitated largely by a need to find work in a down-turning economy.

For our interview, Jim and I meet in the plain building that houses the reserve newspaper. Sitting next to teetering piles of documents and surveying office walls crammed with community announcements, photographs, symbols, and posters advertising land-based actions, it is immediately apparent that this is a space deeply shaped by, and engaged in re-imagining, Haudenosaunee history, culture, and political struggle. From Jim’s perspective, it is spending time in this deeply Haudenosaunee context and overhearing conversations among colleagues that initially causes him to become suspicious of his own “skewed” and gap-ridden knowledge. Such suspicions become niggling questions that propel him into a process of listening to “find out who these people are and what they’re all about”—a process that leads him headlong into an exploration of treaty history. This search draws him into conversation with a wide variety of people from Six Nations: community members, band council members, elders, scholars, traditional knowledge keepers. For reasons that he does not elaborate—his training as a journalist, its basis in Western regimes of “truth,” or perhaps his temperament—Jim’s search for history takes him primarily to the archives, where he gathers and sifts through the copious documentary evidence of interactions since the 1600s between the Haudenosaunee, the British Crown, and later colonial governments.

Jim likens this process of learning to one of “turning over stones” to reveal a past intentionally buried and long forgotten: a reflexive praxis where stark and startling realizations draw him further into hidden chambers “full of things that we as Canadians should be embarrassed about.” This localized process of searching, unearthing, and learning is a cumulative one, leading Jim to what he describes as a number of “revelations” which serve as critical building blocks of understanding. One such revelation relates to the *Two Row Wampum*,¹² which Jim describes as “the hinge” that allows him to make

sense of everything else. Jim describes the *Two Row Wampum* as a clear, simple, and workable agreement developed by his ancestors and those of the Haudenosaunee—“brilliant in its simplicity”—that outlines and enacts principles required for respectful relationships between Indigenous (specifically, Haudenosaunee) and European/settler societies:

It’s just that we will be *friends*, we will be *brothers*, we will link our arms *together* and we will face the world together. However, you stay in your *boat*, I’ll stay in my *canoe*. And we won’t interfere with each other’s government, language or way of life. And we will travel down this road together. *That* is the *Two Row*.

Jim pours over the substantial documentary evidence pertaining to the *Two Row Wampum*, and comes to see Indigenous-European treaties in a new light: no longer as “quaint Indian relics” consigned to a distant and irrelevant past, but as binding international agreements—entered into by sovereign nations and formally recognized in the Canadian Constitution—that continue to have weight and purchase. This insight brings him to another revelation:

that we as Canadians have an obligation, and our government and our educational system has successfully divorced us from our obligations, at least in the hearts and minds of people. But they’re still there, they’re still there. Those are binding contracts. Those are binding agreements, which are upheld by Section 35 of the Constitution. But people don’t know ...

What’s more, he comes to view breaches of the treaties as a “past that is still present” (Regan 2010, 210) and that demands accountability, recourse, and response in the present: “these broken treaties aren’t *historical* events. They’re still happening *today*. And they’re still happening right underneath our *nose*, and we as Canadians don’t *know* it. Why? Because any trace of the true history of the building of Canada has been successfully *purged*.”

These unsettling revelations come to Jim in large part through countless hours spent sifting through archival documents, and so it is little wonder that his approach to educating other non-Indigenous would similarly centre on dispelling common settler misconceptions of treaties through the use of documentary evidence. Jim’s aim in making non-Indigenous people ‘aware’ of the specifics of treaty history is to provoke a crisis of sorts: “It brings them to that point where they have to make a decision to either ignore history or live up to it.” Further, as Jim understands it, specific knowledge—and specific *acknowledgement*—of treaty promises and obligations made, kept, and broken is a necessary precondition for full accountability regarding the harm done through their continued breach:

But you have to know what these treaties are. You have to know what these obligations are. That’s like saying, “Oh, I’m sorry for anything we may have done to your people, you know, to the people of Six Nations,” but then not knowing yourself what you’ve done to them. You know, it takes all the value out of the apology.

At the same time, Jim's multidimensional engagement with the people of Six Nation gives shape and context to his understanding of this documentary evidence. Such engagements lead him to two orienting premises: first, that the original intentions of the British Crown in entering into the *Two Row Wampum* were honourable;¹³ and second, that settlers and settler governments are responsible for *upholding* that original honourable intent. Thus, for Jim, treaty praxis involves “fighting for the integrity of the Crown,” with the *Two Row Wampum* serving as both a moral lens onto historical and current actions and a clear measure against which to judge that integrity, on both sides in the colonial relationship:

And out of all of the treaties that have been made over the years with the people of Six Nations, not *one* has been kept by *my* side of the Two Row. *Every one* of them has been kept by the *other* side. That tells me, who has the *integrity* here? It certainly ain't *my* side of the Two Row.¹⁴

Finally, through his identification with the Crown/European row of the *Two Row Wampum*, Jim comes to read his ancestors—and himself—directly into the historical continuity of treaty relations and responsibilities, constructing for himself a clearly located identity and sense of place on Haudenosaunee territory and in relation to Haudenosaunee sovereignty and jurisdiction.¹⁵ In this way, the *Two Row Wampum* affords Jim a legitimate though constrained position from which to speak and have agency—a demarcated place that entails rights but also demands responsibility and accountability. Within the social imaginary of the *Two Row Wampum*, Jim can and does call on his people and government to live up to our treaty commitments to the Haudenosaunee—in other words, to uphold *our* side of the *Wampum*:

I mean as much as I can *feel* for the people of Six, I can't *speak* for the people of Six. That's *their* world. That's *their* business. What I *can* do is speak for *my* world. And in my world, I'm saying, 'Not in my *name*. You're not doing this in *my* name. Not without *me* hollering about it.

“The *Two Row* means that we need to identify that we are separate communities”: Treaties as enabling and limiting common ground

A self-identified anarchist in his early twenties at the time of our interview, Adam¹⁶ describes his own process of engagement as emerging out of a “broad identification with a need for social justice” and shifting into a more explicit process of decolonization, in which he begins to “really take apart Canada's colonial history, and doing that in a sort of a personal way.” For Adam, this burgeoning analysis morphs into and informs what he describes as a radical anarchistic analysis of state power, colonialism, and industrial capitalism. He links the deepening of his analysis to practices of identifying settler responsibilities under the *Two Row Wampum*, a forging that is literally writ

large across the activist spaces that he and his allies create and inhabit: “If you go down to the community centre that we’re running in Kitchener the whole one wall is just a painting of the *Two Row*. So I think that, like, really informs a lot of the activism that we take on now.”

Adam describes coming into contact with Haudenosaunee activists at Six Nations, initially through gatherings bringing together radical activists, both Indigenous and settler, to “start to bridge the gap between struggles at Six Nations and other social justice struggles.” This engagement, followed by his participation in planning and carrying out specific solidarity actions, initiates for Adam a cycle of praxis that centres on identifying points of convergence between anarchistic goals, praxis, and utopian visions and those he sees as animating Indigenous struggles over land, self-determination, and sovereignty. This process of identifying points of common struggle—“things like mutual aid, consensus decision-making ... working to do away with hierarchy, non-participation or active resistance against the state form, probably the same with capitalism”—becomes a primary passion and preoccupation for Adam, serving as a focus for both his academic work and activist practice.¹⁷ It also serves as one of the central avenues by which Adam comes to Indigenous solidarity activism. As an anarchist, Adam gives priority to interpretations of the *Two Row Wampum* that emphasize autonomy, leading him to highlight what he sees as the treaty’s call for the “distinct separation” between Indigenous and settler cultures:

Yeah, my understanding would be that each of the purple lines represents one basically Indigenous society and the other being settler society, and that they’re perfectly parallel in the sense that they never will intersect, which basically means that individual communities will not interfere with other communities. And that doesn’t mean there can’t be solidarity and assistance and mutual aid and relationships built across the community, but it basically means, as some people characterize, it’s almost like two boats. And we’re not going to steer the other’s boat. Because we are autonomous communities, and we can make connections, but there is a distinct separation between that.¹⁸

Adam returns time and again to the *Two Row Wampum* as a historical agreement between settlers and Indigenous people that continues to have import and to demand accountability in the present: “I think it’s working to uphold that agreement in the modern colonial context.” Unlike Jim, but similar to others I spoke with whose politics include a deep critique of and resistance to the inherent violence of the settler colonial state, Adam’s depiction of the *Two Row Wampum* refuses notions of “the honour of the Crown.” Rather, he approaches the *Two Row Wampum* as a foundational schema for orienting non-Indigenous activism and efforts to build solidarity. He understands settler responsibilities under the *Two Row Wampum* to include a willingness to remain open to Indigenous perspectives—an openness that he sees as underlying the very basis of solidarity—as well as challenging dominant settler

narratives and perspectives and acknowledging the ways in which we as non-Indigenous people continue to benefit from on-going colonization. According to Adam, this last process of situating oneself as beneficiary of an unfolding history of colonization is especially important in the context of Indigenous solidarity work:

I mean, going back to the *Two Row*: the *Two Row* means that we need to identify that we are separate communities, that there's a *difference* between our communities, that our communities have different *histories* and that part of *my* history is *settling*. Therefore, down the historical line, I'm a *settler*.

Finally, the *Two Row Wampum*, as Adam imagines it, serves as a means to “navigate” the complexities of both recognizing and protecting difference in contexts of common struggle. Within the political and social minefield of efforts to construct tenuous forms of common ground, Adam sees his identification with the settler row of the *Two Row Wampum*, and his investment in what he understands to be its central principles of separation and autonomy, as safeguarding against the inevitable dangers of over-identification, imposition, and conflating difference. For him and for the activists he connects with, the *Two Row Wampum* represents a touchstone that enables disparate yet interconnected struggles to be articulated together within a context of respect for Indigenous sovereignty, territory, and treaty relationships.

“There’s always an element of force”: Suspicions of treaty making as a colonizing practice

Finally, Leslie, a white woman in her mid-forties at the time of our interview, describes her own process of coming to a critical treaty consciousness as being shaped by, and serving as an extension of, a decades-long process of trying to understand “the ‘why’ of white racism/violence.” Leslie¹⁹ describes herself as a white teenager growing up economically poor who, at the promptings of her father, becomes increasingly uncomfortable with and seeks to understand the “hegemonic bargain” (Chen 1999, 584) that she makes against Indigenous people as the racialized other in her community. These promptings initiate what becomes for Leslie a long-term process of grappling with the ways in which she is implicated in the violent re-production of white privilege and supremacy. Later, as a doctoral student immersed in the work of critical race and Indigenous scholars, Leslie comes to recognize for the first time how, in white settler societies, white violence and supremacy are based in and tied to the ongoing colonization of Indigenous lands and peoples, and how she herself is implicated in these processes:

I remain astonished that a white Canadian such as myself—someone who is concerned about white violence—can live forty years without ever seeing myself

as connected to colonialism or land. The key is to see that colonialism is on-going, not at all dead. So it is only within the last ten years that I've been on this steep learning curve regarding Canada as a white settler state and my identity as a white settler/occupier of land.

Through this personal and scholarly exploration, as well as through her interactions with Indigenous activists, Leslie also becomes increasingly suspicious of “shape-shifting” colonial assumptions and structures (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 601) that appear in one moment to be progressive, but that ultimately reify settler privilege and Indigenous displacement. For Leslie, this critical suspicion about Western arrogance and the inherent illegitimacy of the settler state shapes the trajectory of her narrative of coming to treaty consciousness in specific ways. Rather than culminating in the view that treaties are nation-to-nation agreements that must be upheld, Leslie's narrative begins from that understanding, and then shifts as she becomes increasingly skeptical of colonial assumptions underlying treaty making. Drawing upon the work of Indigenous scholars who situate treaty making in an already coercive and unjust context of settler encroachment, Leslie becomes pointedly suspicious of what the resulting agreements accomplish for settlers and settler governments, both historically and in the present:

Yeah, I used to think treaties were just agreements between nations that were respectful and non-problematic. And then as I learned more, I learned that [*exhales*] even as some were made with those kind of good understandings, they don't get *upheld*—I don't know, I've just heard a lot of *critique* about the treaties, and the assumption that those are—[3 s] those make our relations non-problematic. And I've heard more mainstream people say, and *push* the idea that we are a treaty people, but [2 s] I just think there's always an element of force in those initial [1 s] in those treaties, you know?

For Leslie, the experience of coming face-to-face with her own deeply held investments in white settler privilege leads her to remain dubious of white settler claims to a treaty-based identity and the “too easy” sense of belonging, legitimacy, and even innocence that such claims afford. As she has come to understand it, identifying as a treaty person without first interrogating and working to pull apart one's privilege as a settler and occupier of Indigenous lands—indeed, doing so before the structures that perpetuate such privilege are fully dismantled—reiterates a fundamental and defining colonial arrogance.

During our conversation, I recall feeling increasingly uneasy with what seemed to be Leslie's dismissal of treaties as inherently (and essentially) colonizing agreements. Knowing of her involvement in efforts to support the land reclamation on Six Nations territory, I push her on this point, asking for her perspective on the *Two Row Wampum*. Leslie responds haltingly—aware, perhaps, that to question treaties is to tread on dangerous ground. She clarifies that she is skeptical not of Indigenous understandings of the

treaties, but of the assumptions, investments, and intentions of settler peoples and governments in signing them:

In terms of Six Nations, I saw “A Dish with One Spoon”²⁰ ... it’s really good, and a lot of their background material, they have a lot of explanations of things. And I really do understand that’s where they’re coming from, right? They’re *nations*, and they welcome coexistence and parallel lives, that kind of thing. But I think from the perspective of *Europeans*, it means something different. And, again, this could be just my simplistic, or one way of thinking, but I think it always means [chuckles] somehow and always involves somehow us [inhales] being in *control* of things, in the way that we *want* it. I think they’re always *problematic*. I think they’re problematic from the [standpoint of the] European because of who we are and maybe what our intentions were in signing treaties. Also, I mean even if they are a good thing, there’s not *enough* of them, right? And I’m thinking of the BC Treaty Process and how horrid that is, how *unjust* that is. So I’m very skeptical about treaties, and I don’t know.

In Leslie’s view, treaty implementation alone does not address the past and present injustice of the settler collective’s on-going physical occupation of land;²¹ nor does it adequately address the question of Indigenous sovereignty: “I don’t think that settlers understand that really honouring treaties means taking Indigenous sovereignty seriously, which means placing serious limitations on settler sovereignty, if settler sovereignty survives at all.” Leslie clarifies in a final email: “I definitely think that Canada needs to honour and implement the treaties. I just don’t think that amounts to decolonization.”

Unsettling treaty consciousness: Engaging the gap

Despite the similar positioning of these actors, each of their narratives traces a unique pathway to treaty consciousness that mobilizes and challenges a distinct set of repertoires and assumptions and sparks specific cycles of treaty reflection and action. Each conveys a unique process of grappling with cherished national mythologies at the constitutive heart of settler colonialism. At the same time, each narrative also builds around a moment or moments in which the narrators come to see how non-Indigenous people are formed in and through dominant treaty pedagogy: the way we buy into discourses relegating treaties to the past (Epp 2003, 234); the reality that even our most sincere desire to see justice done so often masks deep-seated assumptions of paternalism (Regan 2010, 106); and the recognition that whether as dodgy land surrenders or actionable agreements, we so often see treaties as pertaining only to Indigenous people, with little or nothing to do with us or our privilege (Regan 2010, 11; see also Epp 2003).

Each story also traces a process of encountering the gap between dominant/colonial understandings of the treaties and Indigenous treaty pedagogies: pedagogies that challenge constructions of treaties as technologies of surrender (Little Bear 2004, 36); that privilege oral traditions and Indigenous principles

and protocols of treaty diplomacy; that highlight the continuity of agency and intent of Indigenous peoples, in processes at once political and sacred; and that frame treaties themselves as living and evolving agreements between peoples to coexist and share the land, in the past, present, and future. Many of these pedagogies center ancient principles embedded in the early Peace and Friendship Treaties—principles that many Indigenous scholars, activists, and knowledge keepers argue lay the groundwork for a transformative re-imagining of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies (Youngblood Henderson 2000; Alfred 2005; Regan 2006, 31; Cannon and Sunseri 2011). Indeed, some refer to the refusal of settler peoples and governments to respect and uphold the ancient principles of the *Two Row Wampum* as the very definition of racism against Indigenous peoples in Canada (Cannon and Sunseri 2011, xv). Yet despite this common emphasis on ancient treaty principles, Indigenist treaty pedagogies remain as diverse as the peoples who carry them forward. Although many highlight the original spirit and intent of the treaties, others emphasize the ways in which these fundamental principles and relations continue to be twisted, disparaged, or disregarded, rendering treaty making—as imagined and enacted by the colonizers—a central tool of dispossession, assimilation, and genocide, in the past as well as the present (Venne 2001; Little Bear 2004).²²

Such diversity in perspective itself reflects the evolving nature of treaty making practices under settler colonialism, particularly from the standpoint of colonial agents and governments. Regan (2010) traces these shifts in detail, noting that the earliest Peace and Friendship Treaties of Eastern Canada involved some genuine intercultural engagement and efforts to recognize Indigenous diplomatic practices. However, as treaty making moved westward, colonial governments began increasingly to view Indigenous peoples as “obstacles to settlement” (89) and thus began to approach treaty negotiations and obligations in increasingly prescriptive, paternalistic, and pragmatic terms: as a matter of “helping and elevating Indians towards civilization” through wise and frugal public policy (97).²³ Regan (2010) aptly summarizes these shifts: “Encounter-era treaty making illustrates how trust forms the basis for a principled relationship; the numbered treaties show us how colonial practices broke that trust” (160). Yet counter to the widespread “faith in the unmitigated factuality of statements ... in the numbered treaties regarding the extinguishment of the sovereignty and jurisdiction of Indigenous peoples” (Asch 2014, 105), Chickasaw legal scholar James (Sákéj) Youngblood Henderson (2007), and others continue to challenge dominant readings of even the numbered treaties: “These treaties ... did not transfer to the British sovereign blanket authority to govern First Nations or peoples. They did not grant to anyone any vast executive authority or legislative authority over Treaty First Nations” (518).

Given this complexity, the narratives that these actors share touch upon a central challenge for those of us who would-be-allies: that of negotiating not

only complex histories of treaties and treaty making, but the multiple and at times competing Indigenous discourses, understandings, and aspirations with regards to those treaties—conceptions that reflect specific histories, traditions, cultures, and contexts of de/colonization. These stories of coming to treaty consciousness also gesture toward the different processes by which non-Indigenous people engage with Indigenist pedagogies. Some of the narrators describe singularly unsettling experiences of ‘facing’ Indigenous people and their specific readings of treaty relationships: moments that pull at the fissures within dominant treaty pedagogies, demanding that non-Indigenous people account for our own specific stakes (personal, familial, national) in treaty relationships. Other narrators describe slow, iterative, even immersive cycles of engaging with, listening to, and witnessing Indigenous peoples as they attempt to enact and convey their diverse understandings of the treaties. In delineating these processes, the stories also raise questions about the contexts and conditions that give rise to moments of coming to treaty consciousness. Would the question initiating Corvin’s lightbulb moment—“What are *your* treaty rights?”—have the same potency, for example, if it were issued by a non-Indigenous person, perhaps in the relative safety of an educational workshop, rather than by an Indigenous leader in a face-to-face encounter? What difference do different conditions of engagement make for unsettling the settler imaginary regarding treaties?²⁴

One tension within and among the stories pertains to the use of documentary evidence in ascertaining the ‘truth’ about treaties. On the one hand, pedagogical and political strategies that emphasize efforts to unearth the ‘buried’ archival record are inevitable in some treaty contexts, such as the centuries-old and extensively documented sovereignty struggle of the Haudenosaunee.²⁵ In such contexts, non-Indigenous efforts to stand in solidarity with Indigenous peoples often require specific knowledge of treaty promises and provisions. Thus, many solidarity activists—Jim among them—contend that Canadians need to know the specific content of the treaties, beginning with those pertaining to the Indigenous land beneath their feet (Davis and Shpuniarsky 2010, 341).

On the other hand, strategies of seeking documentary truth about the treaties feed into broader discursive systems that privilege written forms of history over oral traditions, a partiality that works in other contexts—first and foremost, legal ones—to discredit Indigenous assertions to their territories and rights (Cruikshank 1992; Fisher 1992; Ray 2003). One might ask what effects such strategies have, for example, in contexts shaped by an *absence* of written records—a void caused by the very workings of the colonial apparatus itself²⁶—or more significantly, when the written record simply contradicts versions of treaty history put forth by the keepers of Indigenous knowledge and memory. Cree/Nehiyaw legal scholar Sharon Venne (2002) echoes many others in noting, “the written text expresses only the government of Canada’s view of treaty

relationship: it does not embody the negotiated agreement” (173). In reaction to such contradictions, some non-Indigenous people—like Rebecca—take up a treaty hermeneutics that privileges what they have come to understand as the original spirit and intent of the treaties, over engagements with their written content. Yet in the same breath, how might these approaches to treaty engagement work against the formation of a critical praxis that explicitly addresses specific treaty contexts and demands? These are complex questions with political as well as pedagogical implications.

A similar fault line exists regarding practices of calling upon the ‘honour of the Crown’ in relation to the treaties. Again one might ask, how might an emphasis on fighting for the Crown’s integrity inadvertently bolster the *legitimacy* of that Crown and its assertions of sovereignty over Indigenous territories—assertions bitterly contested by other Indigenous peoples? What does it mean to use that phrase in relation to treaties that were made in already coercive and unjust contexts of settler encroachment on Indigenous lands? From a broader perspective: on what terms is it even possible to imagine an honourable Crown, given the implication of the British empire and its successive dominions and settler governments within myriad and on-going histories of Indigenous dispossession around the globe? And yet since the ancient treaties were first enacted, Indigenous elders, leaders, and knowledge keepers have consistently advocated for this “core legal principle, which implies that the Government of Canada must act honourably in its dealings with aboriginal peoples” (Venne 2002; KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives 2014).

Further, Jim’s efforts to fight for the honor of the Crown by reclaiming instances (however limited and fleeting) in which the *Two Row Wampum* was recognized by colonial governments—through the actions of Sir William Johnson, for example²⁷—serve to unearth a submerged *alternative* history of relations: one that recognizes the diplomatic practices of Indigenous peoples, acknowledges their agency, and honours their traditions and ways of relating; most importantly, one that recognizes and affirms their status as *nations*.²⁸ As Epp (2003) argues, such practices of re/membering—like the recounting of early histories of cooperation and coexistence—can be even more unsettling than a delineation of colonial violence and control, in that they

might then bear on the contemporary understanding of treaties or else recommend the recognition of Aboriginal “nations” within a renovated Canadian federation: even the memory of reciprocity apparently is dangerous... Certainly it flies in the face of the myth of North America as a blank slate, as *terra nullius*, before the Europeans arrived, and the complementary myth of conquest. (233)

Another important tension among the stories pertains to the conditions by which settlers construct and lay claim to treaty-based identities. Most of the stories—Jim’s and Adam’s narratives of identifying with the settler/

European side of the *Two Row Wampum*, Rebecca's tale of coming to see herself as an inheritor of the treaties, Corvin's account of recognizing himself as their beneficiary—describe processes of recognizing and actively claiming such identities. These identity claims specifically disrupt settler narratives that construct treaties as antiquated and irrelevant to non-Indigenous realities in the present. As conscious efforts to situate themselves within the continuity of treaty history, claims that “we are all treaty people”²⁹ work to denaturalize settler constructions of space-time, challenge and delimit settler jurisdiction and sovereignty, and demand accountability to Indigenist readings of treaty obligations and relations.

Against this narrative trend, Leslie's story highlights the need to maintain a critical skepticism about the comfortable and reinforcing sense of belonging and legitimacy, even innocence (Tuck and Yang 2012, 9), that such treaty-based identity claims afford those already positioned as dominant in settler colonial states. Borrowing from Tuck and Yang (2012), I too feel suspicious about how these comforting claims might represent another way of securing a “settler futurity” (1)—a means by which “the settler, disturbed by her own settler status, tries to escape or contain the unbearable searchlight of complicity, of having harmed others just by being one's self” (9). Indeed, treaty suspicions are born of and reflect an awareness of the chameleon-like nature of settler colonialism and its enduring aim of securing that futurity by asserting control and ownership over Indigenous lands (Alfred 2000; Venne 2001; Little Bear 2004). Yet in their most cut-and-dried forms, treaty suspicions can also inadvertently reinforce reactionary discourses that diminish the legitimacy of Indigenous understandings of the treaties, especially the ancient ones, or dismiss them as sources of practical principles for co-existence.³⁰ Such skepticism also positions as naïve or duped those Indigenous people who continue to call for such treaties to be honoured in the present. Indeed, settler of color scholar Robinder Kaur Sehdev (2011) cautions: “Failing to recognize the significance of treaty to Aboriginal political philosophies and practices amounts to another act of colonization” (270).

These narratives similarly raise questions about the lenses that non-Indigenous people draw on to ‘make sense’ of these ancient treaties and the relations and principles that inform them—lenses that inevitably are shaped by our own socio-political formation, agenda, and investments. Take, for example, Jim's efforts to frame treaties as “binding contracts.” For non-Indigenous members of a settler society steeped in the liberal philosophy, such framings of treaties have clear traction: contractual language is something that we understand, relate to, and take seriously. Although these analogies spark engagements that open up further opportunities for shifting attitudes and building alliances, they can also have troubling effects. Contractual treaty analogies depend upon assumptions of Western law that privilege certainty, clarity, and finiteness (Woolford 2006)—assumptions that many Indigenous

scholars deem incapable of, and anathema to, a full recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, knowledges, diplomacy, and territory (Youngblood Henderson 2000; Turner 2006). By casting treaties in economic (and indeed, capitalist) terms, such analogies risk reducing agreements between sovereignties that set out principles for coexistence and mutual recognition to a tally of pay or benefits owed.³¹ Menno Boldt (1993, 41) cautions that “to apprehend the treaties in terms of the sum of the specific provisions is to miss entirely the chiefs’ spirit and intent when they negotiated the treaties” (41). Further, such frameworks elide the sacred contexts and meanings of treaties as they are imagined in Indigenous philosophies—their spiritual context as symbols, reminders, and enactments of a sacred covenant (Borrows 1997). Indeed, as settler political scientist Roger Epp (2003) notes, the tension between contractual and covenantal understandings of the treaties remains one of the “subtler, deeper, more elusive reconciliations or cultural divides that [is] very much at play” (227) in settler–Indigenous relations.

These tensions point to a further principle of decolonizing treaty praxis: that is, that non-Indigenous people be willing to loosen our grasp of those readings of the treaties that feel most familiar to us— and those that echo our own political and philosophical commitments and to remain open to being unsettled by other Indigenous interpretations. How, for example, might we come to understand Indigenous readings of the *Two Row Wampum* that privilege the unwavering autonomous space between the two rows of purple wampum³² in relation to those that highlight the intervening three rows of white wampum representing respect, trust, and friendship?³³ How might we work to remain radically open to other “context-breaking” (Youngblood Henderson 2000, 33) treaty teachings, such as Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson’s (2011) poignant story of learning from a Nishinaabeg elder—and then experiencing for herself—that breastfeeding is “the very first treaty” (106): the primary site where children (and thus, all of us) learn treaty principles of mutual benefit, balance, patience, persistence, passion, and a commitment to keeping the long haul of relationship always in view (106–109)?

Ultimately, any attempt to fix the meaning of the treaties—to foreclose their possible meanings by confining them to sure knowledge—disarticulates them from the never-ending process of learning and re-learning what they demand of us here and now. Rather than detailing a set of conditions agreed upon in advance and thus set in stone, the treaty as covenant represents a “force in the everyday”: a set of evolving relations that cannot be determined in advance, but instead must be lived, enacted, and re-enacted, through time-space-specific readings of its on-going meaning (Simon 2010)—or, as Haudenosaunee knowledge keepers say in relation to the *Covenant Chain*, it must be continually re-polished (Hill 2008) in the present. According to Sehdev (2011, 270), it is the “recursiveness” of treaties as understood by Indigenous peoples—the ways in which treaties evolve over time and demand

continual renewal, in tune with a dynamic relationship and an ever-changing environment—that offers hope for a righting of relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples: “Just as a circle has no end, treaty is a process to be made and reaffirmed. It is recursive. The potential to recover neglected relations or repair abused one is therefore alive” (269). And yet it is also this recursive quality that provokes unbridled anxieties in settler citizens and governments invested in ‘settling’ the matter of treaties once and for all.

Implications for decolonizing praxis: Treaties as a complex inheritance

The stories of coming to treaty consciousness explored here offer a partial glimpse of the processes by which white settlers come to decolonizing reflection and action in relation to the treaties. The narrators describe processes that are racially, historically, spatially, and relationally specific and that gesture towards the complexities of working against the overbearing weight of dominant settler pedagogy to (re)claim the treaties: to come to know themselves, and actively position themselves, in a continuity of treaty history that is itself multiple, contradictory, and ever-shifting within an unfolding settler colonial project.

What’s more, these stories construct the notion of treaty inheritance as a dual concept: one that demands an acknowledgement of one’s position as benefactor of bargains struck through deceit, fraud, enforced starvation, colonial arrogance, and bureaucratized violence; and one that also entails practices of remembering, reclaiming, and carrying forward ancient principles, recursive obligations, never-ending promises, and responsibilities from the past and into the future. In a related way, these stories conjure a two-pronged process of treaty decolonization. On the one hand, decolonizing treaties involves interrogating and debunking the paternalistic and racist assumptions that animate our received notions of treaty history and that perpetuate a refusal to acknowledge or enact treaty obligations in the present—in other words, decolonizing our understanding and enactment of the treaties. On the other hand, the process entails taking up Indigenous readings of the treaties as a decolonizing lens: one through which to recalibrate received understandings of the past, analyze and disrupt colonizing assumptions and relations in the present, and re-envision a future based upon ancient principles of reciprocity, mutual respect, and responsibility. When read collectively, these narratives also point to treaty decolonization as a rigorously open-ended process—one that demands that we continually interrogate the terms on which we come to ‘know’ the treaties, looking always to unsettle our secure claims and understandings in order to learn anew what it means to uphold and live into covenantal relationships.

Finally, these narratives point to the importance of attending to the diversity of Indigenous pedagogies and discourses regarding the treaties, and balancing

a critical suspicion of colonizing practices and intents with tangible practices of recognizing, respecting, and “making decolonizing space for Indigenous history—counter-narratives of diplomacy, law, and peacemaking practices—as told by Indigenous peoples themselves” (Regan 2010, 6). Youngblood Henderson (2000) describes the early treaty commonwealth as a “context-breaking explanation of the law of nature and nations that respected our sovereignty, our humanity, and our choices to preserve peace” (33)—a true alternative to the history of colonization and on-going colonial social relations. Hill (2008) expands this vision further, arguing that ancient treaties like *Two Row Wampum* and the *Covenant Chain* carry forward original teachings that “hold the key to repairing those damaged relationships in a way that will benefit all, including the rest of Creation” (29). Thus, working against settler mythologies and centuries-old relations of symbolic and material violence to re-orient our imaginaries and actions as settlers to be in line with Indigenist visions of this treaty commonwealth, and particularly the principles reflected in the ancient treaties of peace and friendship, represents a fundamental and profound act of decolonization—a means of righting relationships not only with Indigenous peoples (Alfred 2005, 156), but with all of Creation.

Notes

1. Michael Asch (2014) notes the colonizing framework undergirding this process: “the British Columbia Process requires the parties to begin on the understanding that Canada and British Columbia already have sovereignty and jurisdiction on these lands, and that, moreover, Settlers are in legitimate occupation of the lands they already occupy” (106).
2. According to a recent survey, 42% of Canadians would prefer simply to “do away with Aboriginal treaty rights and [treat] Aboriginal people the same as other Canadians,” rather than to resolve outstanding land claims and “give [Aboriginal people] the powers they need to govern their own communities” (Centre for Research and Information on Canada 2004, 12).
3. Within this mythological framework, the growing number of unresolved specific claims figures not as evidence of government intransigence and efforts to stall the negotiation process, but as the result of First Nations communities making spurious and trivial demands—part of a “thriving claims industry” that “encourages First Nations to focus on the past rather than on the future, to see themselves as victims, and to put their best efforts into proving victimization” (Flanagan 2000, 150).
4. One narrator complicates this positionality by simultaneously situating himself in relation to processes of “deracination and severing from your roots” that separate him from the Anishinaabe culture of his grandfather. He constructs this complex lineage not to claim Anishinaabe identity or to “attempt to deflect a settler identity, while continuing to enjoy settler privilege and occupying stolen land” (Tuck and Yang 2012, 11), but as part of an activist politic of location that demands “being very clear about where we stand” in relation to complex histories of colonization.
5. For example, at the time of the interviews all of the narrators lived on lands supposedly “ceded” by Indigenous nations through the Upper Canada Treaties (1764–1836) prior to Confederation, or “allocated” to Six Nations on Grand River Territory through the *Haldimand*

Proclamation of 1764 (Johnston 1964). These lands also continue to be subject to ongoing disputes over unresolved specific land claims or struggles over sovereignty and self-determination, such as those involving the Chippewa at Stony and Kettle Point, the Haudenosaunee at Six Nations on Grand River Territory, the Mississaugas of the New Credit, among others.

6. Such developments include, among others: the enshrining of treaty rights in section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*, and subsequent Supreme Court decisions that uphold, define, and at times curtail such rights; Canada's erstwhile 2010 endorsement of the *2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, and ongoing struggles for the recognition of treaty rights at the international level; the 2007 release of *The Report of the Ipperwash Inquiry* into the death of land defender Dudley George, and the subsequent return of misappropriated lands to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point.
7. The study expressly focuses on white settlers as opposed to racialized newcomers to Turtle Island, or "settlers of colour," who are situated in the overarching project of settler colonialism in very different ways, given their positioning within multiple and competing histories of colonialism and racist exclusion. Such differences do not alter the responsibility to learn about and to live the treaties—for after all, the treaties remain the basis for all newcomer belonging to this land, regardless of our specific arrival times—but perhaps shape what one must learn, the processes that facilitate such learning, and what inevitably gets in the way. For an exploration of these complexities, see Phung (2011) and Sehdev (2011).
8. Corvin Russell is an activist, writer, and translator based in Toronto whose current focus is Indigenous solidarity and environmental justice work. He is one of several allies working with the Defenders of the Land, a network of Indigenous communities and activists in land struggle across Canada, including elders and youth, women and men, that is dedicated to building a fundamental movement for Indigenous rights. Corvin is also involved in numerous efforts to build a broad base of informed support among non-Indigenous people for this Indigenous-led movement, including playing a key role in organizing the annual Indigenous Sovereignty Week in Toronto.
9. At the time of our interview, Rebecca Johnson had served for several years as the project support coordinator for Christian Peacemaker Team's Aboriginal Justice Team, an organization mandated with undoing colonialism and supporting Indigenous communities seeking justice and defending their lands against corporate and government exploitation without community consent.
10. Jim Windle is a journalist who works for a newspaper serving Six Nations of the Grand River territory. For over a decade, he has been on a journey of understanding and educating others about Canada's hidden history with regard to the Haudenosaunee and other First Peoples. He and his wife, Marilyn Vegso, founded *Two Row Understanding through Education (TRUE)*, which hosts educational seminars utilizing the expertise of constitutional lawyers, historians, church leaders, residential schools researchers and victims, and Six Nations political leaders to promote understanding of the *Two Row Wampum* and related Crown and settler responsibilities.
11. The Mohawk Institute Residential School—known in Indigenous circles as the "Mush Hole"—operated in Brantford, near the Six Nations of Grand River Territory reserve, from 1831 to 1970. The former institute now houses the Woodland Cultural Centre.
12. Referred to as the *Kaswentha* or *Guswentha*, the *Two Row Wampum* is a treaty made first between the Haudenosaunee and Dutch traders in 1613 and later transferred to the British in 1664 (Williams and Nelson 1997; Borrows 1997). In physical terms, the *Two Row Wampum* is represented by a belt of wampum shells nine rows wide, with two purple rows running parallel along the length of the belt against a background of white, representing the British sailing ship and the Haudenosaunee canoe. These two parallel lines are divided by three rows of white wampum. Haudenosaunee historian Susan Hill

(2008, 30) describes the meaning of the *Two Row Wampum* in this way: “Within the oral record of the Haudenosaunee, it is noted that the relationship was to be as two vessels travelling down a river—the river of life—side by side, never crossing paths, never interfering in the other’s internal matters. However, the path between them, symbolized by three rows of white wampum beads in the treaty belt, was to be a constant of respect, trust, and friendship.” Together with the *Covenant Chain of Friendship* (symbolized by a silver chain with three links representing “peace and friendship forever”), the *Two Row Wampum* serves as the central metaphor for the relationship between the Haudenosaunee and the British Crown (32).

13. Jim refers specifically to the role that Sir William Johnson, the first superintendent of the British Imperial Indian Department, had in elaborating and upholding treaty principles and protocols related to the *Covenant Chain*: “And William Johnson agreed with that, and built his whole understanding of the people of Six Nations and the Mohawks in particular on that idea, on that principle.” For further elaboration of the significance of Sir William Johnson’s personal relations, reputed fair dealings, and transcultural diplomacy with the Haudenosaunee, see Hall 2003, 8–11.
14. Here, Jim echoes words attributed to Lakota chief Sitting Bull: “What treaty that the whites have kept has the red man broken? Not one. What treaty that the whites ever made with us red men have they kept? Not one” (Johnson 1891, 201; see also Chamberlin 2006, 34).
15. This sense of place is rendered all the clearer through its relation to the demarcated lands of the Six Nations. Under the *Haldimand Proclamation of 1764*, the lands of the Six Nations of Grand River are deemed to be six miles on either side of the Grand River (Johnston 1964), although the Haudenosaunee at Six Nations have a much broader definition of what constitutes their traditional territory.
16. Adam Lewis is an anarchist working towards settler decolonization in social movements and academic contexts. Twenty-two at the time of our interview, Adam is currently working on a PhD at York University in environmental studies on anarchist engagements with Indigenous struggles of resistance and the possibilities of developing anarcha-Indigenism as a form of anti-authoritarian and anti-colonial politics. Adam works toward decolonization with GRIS (Grand River Indigenous Solidarity) in Kitchener where he lives and serves as a co-editor of *Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action*.
17. In drawing these connections, Adam is strongly influenced by the work of Indigenist scholars of resurgence such as Alfred (2005).
18. Here, Adam’s description of the *Two Row Wampum* echoes that of Teme-Augama Anishinaabe scholar Dale Turner (2006, 54; emphasis in original): “Because [we] share the same space, [we] are inextricably entwined in a relationship of interdependence—but [we] remain distinct political entities.”
19. At the time of the interview, Leslie Thielen-Wilson was a doctoral student in sociology and equity studies and is currently an assistant professor at Nipissing University, where she currently researches and teaches in the areas of contemporary settler colonialism, critical race studies, socio-legal studies, and feminist theory. Leslie was co-founder of the London Coalition in Solidarity with Indigenous Peoples: Anti-racism Education and Action. This coalition of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and organizations across Southwestern Ontario engaged in public education initiatives to raise awareness and generate support for Indigenous land reclamation, language renewal, justice for missing/murdered Indigenous women and their families, and survivors of Indian residential schools.
20. Here, Leslie refers to *Sewatokwa’tshera’t: The Dish with One Spoon* (Martin-Hill et al. 2008), a film on the Haudenosaunee reclamation of *Kanonhstaton* (‘the protected place’) at Caledonia, Ontario.

21. For a further exploration of Leslie's understanding of how the very presence of white bodies on Indigenous lands represents a "triadic relation of land—terror—white identity" that undergirds settler colonialism and Indigenous dispossession, see Thielen-Wilson (2012, 10).
22. Many scholars and activists have denounced in particular the nefarious ways in which this approach to treaty interpretation and implementation was extended to provisions for education, particularly in relation to residential schooling, which, as Sehdev (2011) points out, "worked to diminish and transform treaty into a smokescreen for genocide" (271).
23. In a discursive shift that reverberates to this day, binding treaty obligations were reframed in the colonial mindset as "policy options to be fulfilled to the extent that we alone determine, based on what we ourselves, and no one else, believe is prudent politically as well as fiscally" (Asch 2014, 156).
24. Responding to an earlier draft of this article, Corvin rightfully challenged the practice implications of these questions, arguing that non-Indigenous people cannot leave those already weighed down by the fight to protect lands, cultures, and communities against colonialism to shoulder the burden of addressing non-Indigenous ignorance and racism. This critique is valid and essential to relations of solidarity; at the same time, as critical educators we must give careful thought to the ways in which historical, political, cultural, and relational contexts—the embodied locations of those addressed relative to those doing the addressing—shape and limit our strategies for settler unsettlement.
25. For an exploration of instances in which the colonial record itself supports Indigenous understandings of the spirit and intent of the treaties, see Asch 2014, Chapter 9.
26. The absence of such documentary evidence—and the insatiable colonial demand for it—has proven most deleterious when Indigenous people have attempted to prove title to their lands in settler courts or sought compensation for their internment and experiences of abuse in residential schools.
27. According to Michael Asch (2014, 111), Sir William Johnson's written correspondence also confirms that he recognized that concepts of "subjection" were anathema to Haude-nosaunee understandings and intentions regarding the treaties.
28. Alternatively, Regan (2010) views such early calls to uphold the honor of the Crown in treaty negotiations as continuous with the benevolent peacemaker myth which positioned "government negotiators as upright and reasonable, and Indigenous peoples as malcontents or pitiable supplicants" (93).
29. In recent years, this notion has circulated in a wide array of cultural and pedagogical forms, including: in treaty commission information pamphlets (Office of the Treaty Commissioner 2002, 2008); through videos, songs, and art exhibits; on buttons, banners, and protest placards; within high school curricula; and as the underlying theme for everything from children's picture books to scholarly texts on cultural criticism. For other examples of this proliferating discourse, as well as related critiques, see Switzer 2011; Epp 2003; Tupper and Cappello 2008; Sherman 2010).
30. Venne (2001, 81), for example, notes that treaty making with the Crown "was largely discounted by the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Instead, the commissioners supported the Canadian state's perception of treaty making, treaties, and the legal capacity of Indigenous nations."
31. Such treaty analogies have particular purchase among non-Indigenous people engaged in the labor movement. Indigenous blockades, occupations, and refusals to comply with legal injunctions—actions that generally appear incorrigible or baseless to the general public—become newly intelligible to unionized workers when paralleled with strikes or factory occupations designed to force intransigent employers to uphold their end of a collective agreement. Such parallels enable trade union activists to advocate for treaty rights from a

standpoint based not in altruism, but in a shared desire—born of conscious self-interest—to work for a society in which all collective agreements and rights are recognized and respected, as noted in this comment by a treaty educator in a national labour organization: “We have to uphold their collective agreements called treaties in order for our own to be upheld and respected.” At the same time, such parallels risk downplaying in the settler imagination the level and extent of genocidal violence endured by Indigenous communities, or papering over the ways in which these workers are themselves implicated in and continue to benefit from Indigenous dispossession.

32. This reading closely aligns that of Indigenous scholars like Alfred (1999, 52), for whom the treaty represents a “coexistence of power in a context of respect for the autonomy and distinctive nature of each partner.”
33. Haudenosaunee scholar Hill (2008, 30) describes these three intervening rows in this way: “Some might say that is what kept the two vessels apart, but in fact, it is what kept them connected to each other. Without those three principles, the two vessels could drift apart and potentially be washed onto the bank (or crash into rocks).”

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