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### The Revitalization of Indigenous Resistance

Since the late 1960s, the Canadian state has been challenged by the direct mobilization of Indigenous peoples, characterized by political action outside the institutions of the state. Intensified in the 1990s, including sustained physical occupations of disputed territory and blockades. Indigenous direct action has been an ongoing public policy concern but recently there has been an upsurge in popular interest driven by events. In late 2012 and early 2013, the *Idle No More* (INM) movement sparked direct action on a large scale, occurring throughout the country. The Canadian Security Intelligence Service counted over “400 separate protest events by Indigenous peoples and allies, in the space of approximately two months” (Morden, 2015). The INM movement propelled Indigenous anger at the lingering effects of colonialism on to the main stage of public life in Canada and internationally. Despite interest in the phenomenon of Indigenous direct action, there has been limited systematic scholarly enquiry. Indigenous politics is often studied in isolation, or solely in comparison with other Indigenous movements – “in many ways oppressed by theory” (Morden, 2015). The autonomous nature of scholarship on Indigenous peoples has been helpful in developing a more “robust and accurate image of the historical, cultural and epistemological distinctiveness of Indigenous peoples in the context of settler-colonialism” (Morden, 2015). But there are both normative and scholarly objections to studying Indigenous peoples only in isolation. This paper seeks to help close this gap in research by understanding direct action as political mobilization outside state institutions, in defense of group identity and interests. It excludes legal action and institutionalized protest, such as petitioning, lobbying and litigation. It includes land occupations, road blockades, resource extraction deemed illegal by the Canadian state, marches and demonstrations. Direct action is selected as the focus of this study first to remedy the empirical knowledge gaps described

above. It will become apparent that direct-action outside dominant state institutions and irrespective of material outcomes will empower resistance, organization against colonization, the restoration of Indigenous nationhood and self-determination. Moreover, the INM movement will be employed as a case-study that confronts the fundamental question asked which is how to resist further dispossession and disconnection when the effects of colonial assaults on Indigenous existence are so pronounced and still so present in the lives of all Indigenous peoples. This paper will argue that the INM movement should not be dismissed as a name or as a movement, but rather should be discussed as an effective set of efforts to innovate and revitalize Indigenous traditions of resistance, while staying true to core precepts of place-based, third-space politics. It will reveal that the movement illustrated the systemic constraints and the false affinity of solidarity that exists within the left and the role of the media in framing Indigenous direct action.

Howard Ramos in his paper *What Causes Canadian Aboriginal Protest* addresses the research gap by testing what factors influenced Indigenous protests during the 1951-2000 period. Drawing on social movement literature, he examines whether “resource mobilization, political opportunities, or the construction of Pan-Aboriginal collective identity account for direct action” (Ramos, 2006). The literature and theoretical framework he applied will contribute to my investigation of direct action and political mobilization. The resource mobilization perspective accounts for contentious action by looking at the resources needed to organize and coordinate actions. Usually this perspective links “protest to the availability of financial assets but also examines other types of resources, such as social or human capital and the availability of organizations” (Ramos, 2006). In fact, many advocates of this perspective measure the success of resource mobilization by the presence of organizations that act as hubs of interactions and assets. Proponents of this line of thought, like those looking at civil society, argue that political participation increases according to the availability of resources. In the case of Indigenous mobilization in Canada, resources include a number of different factors, such as the presence of “national organizations, the availability of government funding, and human capital that can be drawn upon” (Ramos, 2006). This leads to the authors first hypothesis: the greater the availability of resources, the more protest. However,

there is debate over whether organizations mobilize people to act contentiously or instead to participate in dominant institutions. Ramos, for example cautioned that formal organizations get co-opted and generate greater participation in the polity, rather than contentious action against it. These concerns are echoed by a number of people who look at the role civil society plays in stable states. Researchers have associated the presence of organizations and their resources with greater participation in dominant institutions rather than protest. As a result, “although resource mobilization may lead to contention, it may also contribute to incorporation into dominant political processes” (Ramos, 2006). For Indigenous peoples, many institutional and political opportunities emerged over the years, as a result of both opening and closing of the polity. For instance, from the 1970s onwards, Indigenous peoples increasingly accessed federal funds. Pierre Trudeau’s ‘just society’ initiative saw “unprecedented amounts of money lent or granted to newly emerging organizations” (Ramos, 2006). Indigenous peoples also experienced new openness of courts to their land claims and lawsuits. The successful recognition of past treaties in the “Calder decision, the victory of the James Bay Cree fight against Hydro Quebec, and a seat at the table in drafting and ratifying section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 are all examples of this” (Ramos, 2006). Yet at the same time, much openness came in response to unprecedented protest against closing opportunities, such as the proposed “dissolution of the Indian Act in 1969 or failure to include Indigenous peoples in the 1990 Meech Lake accord” (Ramos, 2006). Thus, Ramos notes, for Indigenous mobilization and protest, it is difficult to anticipate the direction of this relationship. Political opportunities may have both positive and negative effects on direct action. As a result, opening and closing opportunities in dominant institutions significantly affect the rate of Indigenous direct action in Canada. The collective identity literature, by contrast, accounts for some of these omissions by trying to understand micro-mobilization. It looks at how movements and bystander publics interact in order to assert and build identities. Ramos notes that mobilization is bound to everyday interactions and social networks. People act on identities and bonds constructed through mundane interactions. Without a common identity, or shared social capital, there is little success in getting people to act contentiously. In a postmodern world grievance have moved from “material issues to those based on identity...[what] Inglehart calls a cultural shift” (Ramos, 2006).

Whereas movements at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were grounded in class inequalities, movements of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are based on the assertion and reaffirmation of denied identities. Some proponents of collective identity even go so far as arguing that “participation in contentious action is a part of the social construction of that very identity” (Ramos, 2006). Thus, the goal of direct action is recognition of disenfranchised identities rather than attaining more measurable material outcomes.

Drawing on Ramos’s study, Adam Barker in his paper *Reflections on Idle No More, Indigenous Activism, and Canadian Settler Colonialism*, argues that from Indigenous nationhood movements that extended back through five centuries, INM represents a renewed assertion of Indigenous sovereignty in opposition to settler colonization. Through transgressive actions, INM has brought online activism into alignment with embodied defenses of land and place, challenging Canadian sovereignty and settler identity in multiple and creative ways. However, settler colonial tendencies in Canadian politics reinscribes INM within established, generic political binaries – as Ramos asserted earlier in his examination. The INM is a ‘movement moment’ that reveals significant insights about Indigenous activism, conservative policies, leftist resistance and persistent settler colonialism in Canada. INM, an iteration of Indigenous resistance to settler colonialization that extends back through five centuries, began as social media rumblings, spread into community meetings and teach-ins, and then rapidly expanded into direct action “flash mobs, significant political rallies, and media presence that was impossible to ignore” (Barker, 2014). Barker’s paper seeks to contribute to the debates around the meaning of this important protest movement by contextualizing it through the lens of contemporary Canadian settler colonialism and ongoing Indigenous resurgence. It combines geopolitical, scholarly analysis of Indigenous resistance movements in Canada with voices of INM activists to consider the role that INM has and continues to play in shaping Indigenous-Canadian relations. Barker considers Keven Bruyneel’s ‘third space’ of Indigenous sovereignty, examining the ways that INM has effectively deployed tactics of “transgression, as well as the ways that Settler Canadian political discourses have attempted to counter these transgressions by re-inscribing Indigenous demands into mainstream political structures and identities” (Barker, 2014). The INM is characterized by innovative uses of online and direct-action tactics designed

to disrupt settler colonial space. This is juxtaposed with trends in settler Canadian leftist politics, and with specific reactions to the federal government under Prime Minister Harper may ultimately “seek to define Indigenous politics through settler colonial political binaries” (Baker, 2014). As both state and imagined community, Canada stands as a settler colonial structure of invasion, and in this state, Indigenous people face constant threats to their existence, as both formal power invested in the state and informal socio-cultural discourses on the Canadian nation seek to erase Indigenous claims to the land in order to transfer legitimate possession to colonial authorities. Despite centuries of concerted and evolving efforts, the “settler colonial project has never succeeded, evidence of powerful, multifaceted and enduring Indigenous resistance” (Barker, 2014).

In order to understand the significance of the INM, one must first understand the tradition of Indigenous resistance that has constantly stood opposed to settler colonial processes. During the twentieth century, Indigenous activists fought for their collective survival and recognition of their basic existence, often by re-claiming a particular place or site. Occupying contentious sites is one of the most powerful and long-standing tactics of Indigenous resistance in Canada. An analogous event in the Canadian context in terms of its impact on social discourses and general awareness is the “78-day standoff between Mohawk Warriors and Canadian police and military in 1990, known as the Oka Crisis” (Barker, 2014). Many other examples could be found of Indigenous peoples occupying in particular places; none of these incidents are isolated. Neither are Indigenous occupations limited to rural or wilderness areas; while the longest running Indigenous occupation, site is that of “Grassy Narrows, an Anishinaabe resistance action against logging in their traditional territory, other sites are common” (Barker, 2014). Anishinaabe scholar Leanne Simpson, in an interview with noted Canadian activist and journalist Naoi Klein, drew connections between INM and the transfer of land through the metaphor of extraction as a key colonial process that affects both land and people: “extraction and assimilation go together. Colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating. My land is seen as a resource. My relatives in the plant and animal worlds are seen as resources. My culture and knowledge are a resource. My body is a resource because they have the potential to grow, maintain, and uphold the extraction-assimilation

system” (Barker, 2014). The act of extraction removes all of the relationships, that give whatever is being extracted meaning. Against the extractive current of settler colonial transfer, Brooker situates Indigenous peoples’ tradition and strategies of resistance in Canada as a parallel affective process. Affective resistance is premised on the understanding that social relationships – the foundations of the spaces that people occupy – are a crucial site of struggle. Phenomenological attachments to place can form the basis of affinity politics, as attachments to place can bring together into “spontaneous, creative action and contention, inspired by their own engagements with Indigenous geographies, activism, and place of knowledge” (Barker, 2014). In the tradition of place-based reconnection and resurgence, indigeneity need not compete directly with Canadian sovereignty because it poses a more fundamental challenge to state territorialism; “Indigenous being on the land refuses to legitimate and recognize the absolutist, static boundaries of settler states” (Barker, 2014). It is important to understand the radical challenge that the assertion of Indigenous political autonomy poses to settler colonial political structures, and also to settler Canadian identity and culture. Canada, as a state and nation, is built on the premise that Indigenous people are either absent or that Indigenous political challenges are settled. While the colonial state – with that grudging of some Canadians – can accommodate “aboriginal political claims as a demand for minority rights within the multicultural structure of Canadian law and policy, and social spaces challenge the core of both Canadian political economy and settler identity” (Barker, 2014). Indigenous resistance simultaneously disrupts settler colonial space while reasserting Indigenous spaces, altering the spatialities of both. Indigenous people exercise a “third space of sovereignty by both holding colonial systems to account and also challenging those systems as unjust in their basic imposition of independent Indigenous nationhood” (Barker, 2014). Barker discusses what he calls “colonial ambivalence; a product of colonial rule and an opening for post-colonial resistance” (Barker, 2014). It is the assertion of a colonial state through the assertion of both “spatial and temporal boundaries of Indigenous peoples, without willingness to engage with Indigenous peoples after or beyond the assertion of those boundaries” (Barker, 2014). Colonial ambivalence clearly marks average Settler Canadians ideas of indigeneity. While often happy to claim a relationship to aboriginal peoples through a narrative of Canada as a “peaceful, liberal,

multicultural polity defined by peace making – but dominated by whiteness, capitalist property ownership, and individual rights” (Barker, 2014). Canadians have often reacted with hostility to assertions of Indigenous sovereignty that challenge this narrative. It is no surprise, then, that INM – one of the most visible, multi-vocal, and politically challenging Indigenous protest movement seen in Canada – should inspire passionate reactions from many quarters.

The INM movement, primarily directed at the Canadian federal government, has been largely driven by Indigenous communities, especially large grassroots, non-hierarchical effort. It all began with the story of Chief Theresa Spence, the elected Chief of the Attawapiskat First Nation, “an isolated reserve community in northern Ontario, which has been sparring with the Canadian government for years” (Barker, 2014). Alongside the growing use of the #INM as a rallying cry, she was preparing for her own form of protest, one that would ultimately lead to have a great deal of resonance with INM. There has been a longstanding “housing shortage on the reserve, a boil water advisory, pollution from nearby mining activity, and extreme economic depression” (Barker, 2014). After several years of bureaucratic and legal frustration, “on December 11, 2012, Chief Spence and a small group of supporters set up a tent and fire on an Island behind the House of Commons in Ottawa, and began a hunger strike” (Barker, 2014). Subsisting only on medicinal tea and fish broth, the Chief demanded to speak directly with Prime Minister Harper, and the Governor General, David Johnston. This protest immediately captured a great deal of media attention and polarized political commentary. Chief Spences hunger strike, though not officially under the banner of the INM, was clearly coordinated to enhance the growing protest movement. As INM gained momentum, several days of action were called. The first of these was on “December 10, and it was during the day-long set of protests, occupations, demonstrations and rallies that Spence’s hunger strike was announced” (Barker, 2014). Between the Day of Action and Spence’s protest, INM and Indigenous peoples concerns began to capture the attention of many Canadians. The mainstream media was still slow to cover these events “until December 17 – when a new form of protest rally took Canadians by surprise. On that day in Regina, Saskatchewan, a flash mob organized inside a shopping mall filled with Christmas traffic and began performing a round dance. Round dances are a public dance

shuffling circle around the drummers. This tactic quickly spread – dubbed the ‘Round Dance Revolution’” (Barker, 2014). On December 21, a second Day of Action was called, and a massive rally was held outside the House of Commons in Ottawa, the capital, with supporting protests around Canada and the world. In January 2013, amidst the backdrops of ongoing flash mobs, blockades, and local rallies and teach ins, Prime Minister Harper “announced that he would meet with representatives of the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the government-sanctioned and funded representative body for recognized First Nations bands made up of elected Chiefs and council members” (Barker, 2014). The day of the meeting between Harper and AFN under Grand Chief Shaw A-in-chut (Nuu-chah-nulth), on January 11, marked the single most concentrated day of protest and involvement in INM, as rallies were held around the country “organized under the hashtag #J11; the hashtag #INM was used a record 55,334 times that day” (Barker, 2014). Despite this energy, with the outcome of the meeting between AFN and Harper left ambiguous, and with legislation such as C-45 already passed, the discourse around INM began to fragment. Further, a series of scandals not directly related to Indigenous issues rocked the federal government, distracting from the protests. However, INM’s impact and relationship to broader currents of Indigenous activism and resistance continues to be both felt and debated. Re-focusing back on the argument this paper presides, INM should not be dismissed as a name or as a movement but rather should be discussed as one particular set of efforts to innovate and revitalize Indigenous traditions of resistance in Canada, while stay true to core precepts of place-based, third-space politics.

Social media played a major role in both the development of INM as a focal point for action, and of specific action tactics and strategies. First, it is important to recognize that mainstream media in Canada has traditionally been silent on issues of concern to Indigenous peoples, only engaging with Indigenous communities when they can be portrayed as threatening to the interests of corporations or framed as destabilizing settler Canadian society. The movement often went around “mainstream media, engaging in online and independent publications as articles, essays, and interviews” (Barker, 2014). This was the first time Indigenous activists had the capacity and technological tools to represent themselves and broadcast those voices throughout Canada. Social media was also used for more than sharing

information and engaging in dialogue; “it was used as an effective organizational tool to coordinate protests and direct action on short timelines, in multiple locations, and with limited resources” (Barker, 2014). In addition to media bias, the colonial geography of Canada has often played a role in fragmenting Indigenous resistance. Against this, the speed and accessibility of social media helped to spread word through often spatially dispersed Indigenous communities. The problems of distance from major media and populations in southern Canada made the speed and accessibility of social media organizing a valuable tool. While these online social movement dynamics remain an important feature of analysis in their own right, it is important to understand how these acts of transgression – “by eliding mainstream media and by creatively co-opting technological resources – correspond to the wider land-based movement in the tradition of centuries of Indigenous activism and resistance” (Barker, 2014). While social media activism may be dismissed by some as banal or problematic, it played a key role in the way that INM’s impact was felt in cyberspace and in physical spaces. Activist and communities “organized online, but danced and marched in public, crossing multiple boundaries in the process” (Barker, 2014). INM, in bringing indigeneity into electronic forums, as well as physically into shopping malls and urban intersections, “disrupted the settler colonial relationship by which those spaces integrated into settler colonial geographical imaginaries” (Barker, 2014). As Simpson recounted “people within the INM movement who are talking about Indigenous nationhood are talking about a massive transformation, a massive decolonization, A resurgence of Indigenous political thought that is very much land-based and tied to that intimate and close relationship to the land, which to [her] means a revitalization of sustainable local Indigenous economies that benefit local people” (Barker, 2014). INM has been especially effective at transgressing settler boundaries to empower assertions of Indigenous ‘third space’ sovereignty. The nation-to-nation and treaty-based understanding of Canadian sovereignty was perfectly demonstrated by an INM re-reading of the Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples, RCAP. It explicitly referenced the recommendations of RCAP, including those that called for a revitalization of nation-to-nation relationships through the use of treaties: “the government of Canada must remove formal and informal restrictions placed on treaty negotiations with Indigenous governments over rights to land and culture. A

refusal to negotiate in good faith amounts to a bare assertion of colonial sovereignty, which stands as an affront to international law and the Constitution of Canada itself” (Barker, 2014).

Given the challenges the INM posed to fundamental premises of the Canadian nation state, the responses by the settler people have been predictably complicated. INM has shown that there is support among Canadians for a movement that embodies principled opposition to the destruction of the land and the extension of social justice to Indigenous peoples. However, it must be remembered that transgressive acts like spatial occupations – “whether in malls or at the border crossing – are intended to provoke an effective response from settler colonial ambivalence” (Barker, 2014). This response may be revealing, but it is not necessarily positive, supportive or decolonizing. Further, as successful as INM has been in rallying support from the settler population, “the majority of Canadians have continued to disagree with and oppose INM and Indigenous sovereignty more generally” (Barker, 2014). Sociologist Jeff Denis had detailed some of the more overt crimes – “from violent assaults with vehicles to rapes – in which settler perpetrators either explicitly targeted INM protesters or referenced INM as their motive, alongside opinion polls indicating that most Canadians did not support INM or Theresa Spence, and in fact blame Indigenous peoples for the social injustices they face” (Barker, 2014). Settler Canadians are not a homogeneous group, so variance is expected, but there are some important trends to consider in understanding how INM tactics’ and messaging have created affective responses in place of colonial ambivalence. Settler people are very good at identifying diverse spaces of opportunity in the midst of Indigenous spaces, at times representing themselves as staunch allies while in fact embodying practices that further Indigenous transfer and displacement. Social movement scholars have increasingly engaged in criticism of activists, “including various anarchists’ organizers or members of Occupy projects, who have demonstrated a tragic inability to take direction from or work respectfully with Indigenous communities, regardless of their stated intent” (Barker, 2014). With that in mind, Barker turns away from settler opposition to INM – a predictable response – towards an interrogation of some of the positions asserted by settler Canadians seeking to act in solidarity with INM. Settler people have a long history of appropriation and false affinity with respect to Indigenous peoples and symbols for the purpose of

expressing anti-establishment discontent. Indigeneity is held up as that which is outside and Other, and thus, an object that can be extracted and appropriated. It is likely impossible to understand Settler Canadian responses to INM, without also understanding parallel backlash “against the unpopular federal government of the Conservative Party of Canada and Prime Minister Harper, which generated the false appearance of affinity between a variety of political actors and activists” (Barker, 2014). Throughout 2012 and 2013, Harper’s popularity plummeted along with confidence in the CPC government. This may have actually been sparked off by the events that also catalyzed INM in 2012. As a result, there is a growing body of the Canadian public who are galvanized against Harper specifically and the CPC more generally. Many settler people and communities have gravitated towards INM in no small part because of its vocal, pointed and long-standing opposition to Harper. Even relatively mainstream aboriginal organizations, like the AFN, “have sparred with Harper dating back to his scrapping of the Kelowna Accord upon taking office in 2006, and his subsequent speech that declared Canada has no history of colonialism” (Barker, 2014). By mid-2013, as the “senate scandals spiraled, and protests under the banner of INM tailed off, interest in Indigenous issues among mainstream Canadians plummeted” (Barker, 2014). Many movements what might be called the “generic Canadian political left seek political engagements with Indigenous peoples through larger social justice or anti-racism movements, usually at the national or international level, and often demanding structural reform” (Barker, 2014). For example, the left-nationalist Council of Canadians was very vocal and supportive of INM. These political organizations, even when they press for changes in policy, law, or political leadership often reinforce other hidden or ignored structures of colonial power. Many supposedly progressive political organizations – “while proclaiming that there are alternatives to free markets, free trade and transnational corporate power and that another world is possible – reproduce dominant colonial worldviews and resist challenges by Indigenous peoples and activists to address colonial injustices. While some have asked whether global justice and anti-globalization movement is anti-capitalist, it is also important to ask whether it is anti-colonial” (Barker, 2014). In this way, critiques of Harper and his government can excuse systemic settler-colonialism. Voting against the Conservative government and campaigning against Harper specifically

becomes a “move to innocence by which settler Canadians can excuse their own complicity in ongoing colonialism” (Barker, 2014). By contrast, INM certainly frustrated and directly contested the political agenda of Harper, but as the movement progressed beyond a narrow focus on Bill C-45, this was articulated more and more in terms of Indigenous autonomy than political critique. For example, Simpson clearly framed Spence’s hunger strike “as not much an act against Harper, but as a selfless act of bravery and sacrifice for our nations and our children” (Barker, 2014). This illustrated the systemic constraints and the false affinity of solidarity that exists within the left and the role of the media in framing Indigenous direct action.

Rather than a self-contained political movement, INM must be seen as a rallying cry within a long trajectory of Indigenous resistance and organization against colonization and for the revitalization of Indigenous nationhood and self-determination, a ‘movement moment’. As a rallying cry, it allowed for widespread and diverse challenges to settler-colonial space, drawing inspiration and ideas from each other, and encouraging these actions to proliferate. It revealed that the generic Canadian political left seeks political engagements with Indigenous peoples through larger social justice or anti-racism movements, usually at the national or international level, and often demanding structural reform. While proclaiming that there are alternatives to free markets, free trade and transnational corporate power and that another world is possible – reproduce dominant colonial worldviews and resist challenges by Indigenous peoples and activists to address colonial injustices. The INM movement should not be dismissed as a name or as a movement, but rather should be discussed as an effective set of efforts to innovate and revitalize Indigenous traditions of resistance, while staying true to core precepts of place-based, third-space politics. It will reveal that the movement illustrated the systemic constraints and the false affinity of solidarity that exists within the left and the role of the media in framing Indigenous direct action.

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