

Decolonizing Antiracism

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Introduction

IN CONTINUOUS CONVERSATIONS OVER THE YEARS, WE HAVE DISCUSSED OUR DISCOMFORT with the manner in which Aboriginal people and perspectives are excluded within antiracism. We have been surprised and disturbed by how rarely this exclusion has been taken up, or even noticed. Due to this exclusion, Aboriginal people cannot see themselves in antiracism contexts, and Aboriginal activism against settler domination takes place without people of color as allies. Though antiracist theorists may ignore the contemporary Indigenous presence, Canada certainly does not. Police surveillance is a reality that all racialized people face, and yet Native communities are at risk of direct military intervention in ways that no other racialized community in Canada faces.² This article represents a call to postcolonial and antiracism theorists to begin to take Indigenous decolonization seriously. Because we are situated differently in relation to decolonization and antiracism, we are beginning with our own locations.

Bonita: I first encountered antiracism and postcolonial theory when I began attending university, in my early thirties. I looked to antiracism, as I earlier did to feminism, to “explain” the circumstances my family has struggled with, but ultimately both sets of perspectives have simply been part and parcel of an education system that has addressed male and white privilege, while ignoring my family’s Indigeneity.

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To say this is to acknowledge that several factors—notably immigration and urbanization—have already been at work in delineating relations between Aboriginal people and people of color. In the 1960s, when Canada was overwhelmingly white, my mother, who was Mi'kmaq and Acadian, clearly felt marginalized and inferiorized by Anglo-Canadians and ostracized by many French-Canadians. In the city, she welcomed the new presence of people of color as potential friends and allies, and she saw a common struggle for survival and adaptation to the dominant culture. There were not many of us, Aboriginal people or people of color, brown islands in a white sea.

Fast forward to 2005. For many Native people in Eastern Canada, the urbanization and assimilation pressures of the 1950s and 1960s meant that our parents married white people. This interval also featured large-scale immigration of people of color, so that today urban Native people form tiny, paler islands floating in a darker “multicultural” sea. Over the past 15 years or so since the Oka Crisis, in common with many urban mixed-bloods, I have struggled to learn about my own Indigeneity. In this context, my light skin separates me from the people of color that my mother would have viewed as allies. There is nothing new about racial ambiguity among mixed-bloods of any background. For Aboriginal peoples in Canada, though, something else is at work: the generations of policies specifically formulated with the goal of destroying our communities and fragmenting our identities.

For years, I have witnessed the result of these policies, as my family, friends, and many of my Aboriginal students have struggled with our lack of knowledge about our heritage due to our parents' silence, the fact that our languages were beaten out of our grandparents' generation, that we may have been cut off from access to the land for generations, that we may know little of our own ceremonies, and that our Indigeneity is ultimately validated or denied by government cards that certify “Indian” status. Neither these policies nor their repercussions are topics for discussion at antiracism conferences. It is difficult not to conclude that there is something deeply wrong with the manner in which, in our own lands, antiracism does not begin with, and reflect, the totality of Native peoples' lived experience—that is, with the genocide that established and maintains all of the settler states within the Americas.

Yet, even to begin to address decolonizing antiracism, I must first acknowledge that I am one of a handful of Aboriginal scholars within academia; as such, I am routinely asked to “speak for” and represent Indigeneity to outsiders in a manner that is inherently problematic. Because of this, I must always begin by referencing the traditional elders and community people—and other Indigenous scholars—for whom Indigenous (rather than academic) knowledge is most central. They would begin by asking: What does postcoloniality and antiracism theory have to do with us? An academic article addressing these issues is therefore aimed primarily at antiracism scholars and activists, who for the most part are not Indigenous. More problematically, it would use the rhythms and assumptions of academic discourse,

without cultural resonance or reference to Mi'kmaw or other specific Indigenous frameworks. As such, my fear is that this article will continue to homogenize Indigenous peoples in all their diversity into a singular and meaningless entity known as "First Nations people" to outsiders, in exactly the manner that is currently common within antiracism discourse. The tensions between who I can claim to speak for, how I speak in arguing academic theory, and to whom I am speaking in this article thus remain ongoing.

Ena: I came to Canada as a 16 year old. I was born in India, and en route to Canada we resided in the United States. In all three contexts, I came across references to Aboriginal peoples. In India, people wondered of another place where people were also called Indian. Growing up in the United States and Canada, I was bombarded with colonialist history. From school curriculum to television programs to vacation spots, a colonialist history of conquer and erasure was continually reenacted. I resided in a city in which the main streets were named after Aboriginal leaders and communities. As the houses that we resided in exited onto these streets, such naming of space was important as it inserted us as settlers into the geography of colonialism. Much of this made me uncomfortable. I was given a similar history of India and other Indians, and I knew that this history was not accurate. I was vaguely conscious that the same processes were shaping the lives of Aboriginal people and people of color. I saw myself as allied with Aboriginal people. However, what I did not see was how I might be part of the ongoing project of colonization. I did not place myself in the processes that produced such representations, or relations.

As a young woman, my experiences with racism, sexism, and imperialism led me to become engaged in a project of developing antiracist feminism. This site, I hoped, would enable us to look at the ways in which different kinds of oppressions intersected. Looking back, I realize that we failed to integrate ongoing colonization into this emerging body of knowledge. For example, in a collaborative book project I edited, antiracist feminist scholars explored the intersections of "race" and gender. At the time, I felt that we were doing a good task of centering Aboriginal issues. The anthology first examined the ways in which Aboriginal women had been racialized and gendered historically. Another article investigated questions of Aboriginal self-government. I now think we failed to make Aboriginality foundational. We did not ask those who wrote on work, trade unions, immigration, citizenship, family, etc., to examine how these institutions and relationships were influenced by Canada's ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples. More recently, I turned to cultural theory, critical race theory, and postcolonial studies, but I fear that these approaches, like my earlier work, also fail to center the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples.

My approach in this article, as someone committed to antiracist feminist struggles, is to examine my complicity in the ongoing project of colonization. My complicity is complex. First, as an inhabitant of Canada, I live in and own land that has been appropriated from Aboriginal peoples. As a citizen of Canada, I have rights and

privileges that are denied to Aboriginal peoples collectively, and that are deployed to deny Aboriginal rights to self-government. Second, as someone involved in antiracist and progressive struggles, I wonder about the ways in which the bodies of knowledge that I have worked to build have been framed so as to contribute to the active colonization of Aboriginal peoples. I need to read, write, teach, and be politically active differently.

Despite our different positioning, experiences, and concerns, we have reached a common conclusion: that antiracism is premised on an ongoing colonial project. As a result, we fear that rather than challenging the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples, Canadian antiracism is furthering contemporary colonial agendas. We will argue that antiracism theory participates in colonial agendas in two ways. First, it ignores the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples in the Americas; second, it fails to integrate an understanding of Canada as a colonialist state into antiracist frameworks. In this article, we seek ways to decolonize antiracism theory. Our goal in writing this is to begin to lay the groundwork that might make dialogue possible among antiracist and Aboriginal activists.

What Does It Mean to Look at Canada as Colonized Space? What Does It Mean to Ignore Indigenous Sovereignty?

Antiracist and postcolonial theorists have not integrated an understanding of Canada as a colonialist state into their frameworks. It is therefore important to begin by elaborating on the means through which colonization in Canada as a settler society has been implemented and is being maintained. We also need to reference how Indigenous peoples resist this ongoing colonization.

Settler states in the Americas are founded on, and maintained through, policies of direct extermination, displacement, or assimilation. The premise of each is to ensure that Indigenous peoples ultimately disappear *as* peoples, so that settler nations can seamlessly take their place. Because of the intensity of genocidal³ policies that Indigenous people have faced and continue to face, a common error on the part of antiracist and postcolonial theorists is to assume that genocide has been virtually complete, that Indigenous peoples, however unfortunately, have been “consigned to the dustbin of history” (Spivak, 1994) and no longer need to be taken into account. Yet such assumptions are scarcely different from settler nation-building myths, whereby “Indians” become unreal figures, rooted in the nation’s prehistory, who died out and no longer need to be taken seriously.

Being consigned to a mythic past or “the dustbin of history” means being precluded from changing and existing as real people in the present. It also means being denied even the possibility of regenerating nationhood. If Indigenous nationhood is seen as something of the past, the present becomes a site in which Indigenous peoples are reduced to small groups of racially and culturally defined and marginalized individuals drowning in a sea of settlers—who needn’t be taken

seriously. At the heart of Indigenous peoples' realities, then, is nationhood. Their very survival depends on it.

To speak of Indigenous nationhood is to speak of land as Indigenous, in ways that are neither rhetorical nor metaphorical. Neither Canada nor the United States—or the settler states of “Latin” America for that matter—which claim sovereignty over the territory they occupy, have a legitimate basis to anchor their absorption of huge portions of that territory (Churchill, 1992: 411). Indeed, nationhood for Indigenous peoples is acknowledged in current international law as the right of inherent sovereignty: the notion that peoples known to have occupied specific territories, who have a common language, a means of subsistence, forms of governance, legal systems, and means of deciding citizenship, are nations—particularly if they have entered into treaties. As Churchill notes (*Ibid.*: 19–20), only nations enter into treaty relationships.

In contrast, the legal system in Canada, a settler state, is premised on the need to preempt Indigenous sovereignty. The legal system does this through the assertion of a “rule of law” that is daily deployed to deny possibilities of sovereignty and to criminalize Indigenous dissent. Because this rule of law violates the premises on which treaties were signed with Aboriginal people, the Supreme Court occasionally is forced to acknowledge the larger framework of treaty agreements that predate assertions of Canadian sovereignty.⁴ Historically, however, court decisions have been a chief instrument of the disenfranchisement of Aboriginal peoples. Recently, they have alternated between enlarging the scope of the potential for a renewed relationship between the Crown and Aboriginal peoples and drastically curtailing those possibilities.

It is important to understand how Native rights to land were legally nullified in Canada, and when this changed. In 1888, the ruling in the *St. Catherines Milling and Lumber*⁵ court decision was that Aboriginal peoples' rights to the land were so vague and general that they were incapable of remedy. This decision codified in law that Aboriginal peoples were on a path to extinction; the only way for “Indians” to acquire legal rights was to assimilate into Canadian society.

The *Calder* decision⁶ of 1973 redefined the relationship between Canada and Aboriginal peoples. It clarified that Canada had a legal obligation to recognize the rights of Aboriginal peoples to their traditional lands, to redress where these rights had been violated, and to enter, belatedly, negotiations with Aboriginal nations in regions where no treaties had been historically signed. Canada's response to this obligation, however, was to deliberately maintain a colonialist stance. Instead of seriously entering into new relationships with Indigenous peoples based on equal stature, Canada issued a unilateral policy whereby Aboriginal peoples must formally submit a “land claim” to redress land theft. Far from being “progressive,” the land claims process involves Canada's refusal to negotiate with Indigenous peoples as equals and instead asserts the right to control how their own land theft from Indigenous peoples should be redressed. The colonial nature of the process is masked by

liberal pluralist notions that Native peoples are an “interest group” whose “claims” must be measured against the needs of other “groups” of citizens.

Other important developments after the *Calder* decision had potentially huge consequences for the relations of Indigenous nations with Canada. In 1982, Section 35 of the Constitution Act recognized and affirmed existing Aboriginal and treaty rights as originating before colonization; it included future rights that may be recognized in land claims or other agreements. From the start, however, there was little clarity about what this would mean. In Sections 91 and 92 of the Constitution Act, jurisdiction over the land remained divided between Canada and the Provinces, as had been the case since Confederation. Given this preemptive division of power, where could space be made for Aboriginal jurisdiction over lands?

The courts could have addressed these changes in positive ways. Instead, in the 1990s, several important court decisions were instrumental in drastically curtailing the promises of *Calder* and Section 35 of the Constitution Act. For example, *Van der Peet*⁷ clarified that Aboriginal rights were not general and universal, and therefore would have to be proved by each band specifically for their own territories; these rights would also be restricted to pre-contact practices (Mainville, 2001: 29). Meanwhile, the *Delgamuuk’w* decision⁸ began the process of defining the content of Aboriginal title, in highly restrictive ways.⁹ Because of these and other recent decisions, Aboriginal rights are being delineated without the political and cultural framework of an Aboriginal government (Monture-Angus, 1999: 120), and without the cultural/spiritual framework at the heart of Indigenous societies.

Large portions of territory, particularly in British Columbia, but also in Quebec and the Maritimes, are currently claimed by Canada without formal land-based treaties ever having been signed. Since *Calder*, Canada should have been formally negotiating new treaties; instead, it has consolidated its hold on these territories through the comprehensive claims policy. Given the inherently colonial nature of the land “claims” process, it is perhaps not surprising that land claims settlements are exercises in “municipalization.” Returning land is never on the agenda. Rather, cash awards are offered to “sweeten” the status quo, if Nations formally assume the status of municipalities. Cash settlements may provide communities with resources to repair some of the worst excesses of colonialism; this route does not, however, enable them to re-create a new future. As Taiaiake Alfred (1999) succinctly states, Canada’s basic policies of assimilation and destruction remain unchanged. The government continues to divest responsibility for the effects of colonialism on Aboriginal peoples, while holding onto their land base and resources, redefining without reforming, and further entrenching in law and practice the real basis of its power.

The immediate problem facing Aboriginal peoples in Canada is that the status quo of a colonial order continues to target them for legal and cultural extinction, while undermining the viability of communities through theft of their remaining lands and resources.¹⁰ Aboriginal people need to reestablish control over their own

communities: have their land returned to them, making communities viable and rebuilding nationhood, with a legal framework that brings Aboriginal peoples' existing and returned lands under their own authority. This requires a total rethinking of Canada; sovereignty and self-determination must be genuinely on the table as fundamental to Indigenous survival, not as lip service. If they are truly progressive, antiracist theorists must begin to think about their personal stake in this struggle, and about where they are going to situate themselves.

We also need a better understanding of the ways in which Aboriginal peoples resist ongoing colonization. At the core of Indigenous survival and resistance is reclaiming a relationship to land. Yet, within antiracism theory and practice, the question of land as contested space is seldom taken up. From Indigenous perspectives, it speaks to a reluctance on the part of non-Natives of any background to acknowledge that there is more to this land than being settlers on it, that there are deeper, older stories and knowledge connected to the landscapes around us. To acknowledge that we all share the same land base and yet to question the differential terms on which it is occupied is to become aware of the colonial project that is taking place around us.

Indigenous stories of the land are spiritual and political, and have tremendous longevity. For example, Mi'kmaki, the "land of friendship," which encompasses what is now called the Atlantic provinces, was viewed by the Mi'kmaq as a sacred order, flowing from a creation story that moves seamlessly from mythical time into historical time around the end of the last ice age (Henderson, 1997: 16). Mi'kmaki is "owned" in a formal sense only by unborn children in the invisible sacred realm (*Ibid.*: 32); however, its seven regions are also traditionally governed by a Grand Council, or Mawiomi, and it has historically been part of the Wabanaki Confederacy, a larger geopolitical unit that extends into what is now the northeastern United States. At another level, to resist invasion the Mawiomi negotiated a Concordat in 1610 that consolidated Mi'kmaki formally as a Catholic republic under Rome (*Ibid.*: 87). All of these spiritual and geopolitical relations, past and present, connect Mi'kmaq people with Mi'kmaki.

These lands carry more than the imprint of an ancient and contemporary Indigenous presence. Focusing on the land reveals important gaps between Western and traditional knowledges that shape how we see these relationships to land. For example, land for many Native peoples is profoundly connected to language. Jeannette Armstrong (1997: 175–176; 178) explains this from her own people's perspective:

As I understand it from my Okanagan ancestors, language was given to us by the land we live within.... The Okanagan language, called N'silxchn by us, is one of the Salishan languages. My ancestors say that N'silxchn is formed out of an older language, some words of which are still retained in our origin stories. I have heard elders explain that the language changed as

we moved and spread over the land through time. My own father told me that it was the land that changed the language because there is a special knowledge in each different place. All my elders say that it is land that holds all knowledge of life and earth and is a constant teacher. It is said in Okanagan that the land constantly speaks. It is constantly communicating. Not to learn its language is to die. We survived and thrived by listening intently to its teachings—to its language—and then inventing human words to retell its stories to our succeeding generations.... In this sense, all Indigenous peoples' languages are generated by a precise geography and arise from it.

This linking of land and language, of memory and history, has implications for Indigenous peoples and settlers. Part of the profound strength that has helped Indigenous peoples to maintain their identity despite five centuries of colonization derives from the fact that they have retained knowledge of who they are due to their longstanding relationship to the land. Settlers find a remapping of traditional territories to earlier names, boundaries, and stories by Indigenous peoples to be profoundly unsettling. It reveals the Canadian nation as still foreign to this land base. Even after five centuries of colonization, the names the colonizer has bestowed on the land remain irrelevant to its history. It calls into question notions of settler belonging-as-whites *or* as peoples of color, based simply on Canadian citizenship.

Cherokee theologian Jace Weaver (1998: 20–21) has asserted that until postcolonial theory takes seriously both the collective character of Native traditional life and the importance of specific lands to the cultural identities of different Native peoples, it will have little meaning for Native peoples. In the next section, we will begin to examine how postcolonial and antiracist theory fails to address Aboriginal people's presence and concerns.

How Has Antiracism/Postcolonial Theory Been Constructed on a Colonizing Framework?

Our discussion will refer to a vast body of literature: critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and theories of nationalism. This diverse literature has many different arguments and has been subject to many critiques (see, for example, Ahmad, 1992; Chambers and Curti, 1996; Frankenberg and Mani, 1992; McClintock, 1997; Parry, 1987). In our reading, this literature shares crucial ontological underpinnings. All of these writers fail to make Indigenous presence and ongoing colonization, particularly in the Americas, foundational to their analyses of race and racism. As a result, we fear that there is a body of work that is implicitly constructed on a colonizing framework and participates in the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples.

International critical race and postcolonial theory has failed to make Indigenous presence and colonization foundational in five areas. First, Native existence is

erased through theories of race and racism that exclude them. Second, theories of Atlantic diasporic identities fail to take into account that these identities are situated in multiple projects of colonization and settlement on Indigenous lands. Third, histories of colonization are erased through writings on the history of slavery. Fourth, decolonization politics are equated with antiracist politics. Finally, theories of nationalism contribute to the ongoing delegitimization of Indigenous nationhood. Though often theorizing the British context, these writings have been important for shaping antiracist/postcolonial thinking throughout the West.

To illustrate the ways in which critical race theorists erase the presence of Aboriginal peoples, we have chosen Stuart Hall's essay, "The West and the Rest" (1996a). Hall introduces a postcolonial approach to "race," racialized identities, and racism. For him, the emergence of "race" and racism is located in the historical appearance of the constructs of "the West and the Rest." Thus, the inhabitants of the Americas are central to the construction of notions of the West. He links the colonization of the Americas with Orientalism. Moreover, the strength of Hall's chapter is that in elaborating a theory of "race," he makes the connection between colonialism and knowledge production, between the historical construction of the idea of "race" and the present articulations of "race."

Despite these strengths, Hall fails to examine the ways in which colonialism continues for Aboriginal peoples in settler nations. Indeed, he posits colonialism as having existed in the past, only to be restructured as "postcolonial." For example, in commenting on the last of five main phases of expansion, Hall defines "the present, when much of the world is economically dependent on the West, even when formally independent and decolonised" (*Ibid.*: 191). No mention is made of parts of the world that have not been decolonized. As a result, Aboriginal peoples are relegated to a mythic past, whereby their contemporary existence and struggles for decolonization are erased from view and thus denied legitimacy. Moreover, he fails to explore how the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples shapes contemporary modes of "race" and racism in settler nations (including those in the Caribbean, where people of African and Asian descent have established political authority). Rather, the relationship between colonialism and the articulation of "race" is limited to the ways in which the colonial past is rearticulated in the present. What are the consequences of such omissions for Aboriginal peoples in settler societies and for their struggles for nationhood? How do such omissions distort our understanding of the processes of "race" and racism?

A similar ontological assumption about colonialism and Indigenous peoples exists in theories of Atlantic diasporic identities. Most of these works on the Americas fail to raise, let alone explore, the ways in which such identities have been articulated through the colonization of Aboriginal peoples, or the ways in which the project of appropriating land shaped the emergence of black/Asian/Hispanic settler formations. Paul Gilroy's (1993: 17) influential text, *The Black Atlantic*, illustrates this. In it, Gilroy explicates two interrelated projects. The first is to

rethink modernity via the history of the black Atlantic and the African diaspora, and the second is to examine the ways in which diasporic discourses have shaped the political and cultural history of black Americans and black people in Europe. However, Gilroy's history of the black transatlantic does not make any significant reference to Indigenous peoples of the Americas or Indigenous nationhood. Similar to Hall, when Gilroy mentions Indigenous peoples or colonization, it is to locate them in the past. In one of the few references to Indigenous peoples, Gilroy states, "striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness.... If this appears to be little more than a roundabout way of saying that the reflexive cultures and consciousness of the European settlers and those of the Africans they enslaved, the 'Indians' they slaughtered, and the Asians that they indentured were not, even in situations of the most extreme brutality, sealed hermeneutically from each other, then so be it" (*Ibid.*: 2–3). Reducing Indigenous peoples to those slaughtered suggests that Indigenous people in the Americas no longer exist, renders invisible their contemporary situation and struggles, and perpetuates myths of the Americas as an empty land.

In *Routes*, James Clifford (1997) extends Gilroy's work on diasporic identities. Importantly, Clifford opens up the possibilities for exploring how Indigenous leaders/theorists have shaped black counterculture and how black counterculture may be premised on a colonizing project. "For the purposes of writing a counter-history in some depth," he suggests, "one can imagine intersecting histories." Clifford also acknowledges the presence of Indigenous peoples and their struggle for decolonization: "Tribal or Fourth World assertions of sovereignty and 'first nationhood' do not feature in histories of travel and settlement, though these may be part of the Indigenous historical experience" (*Ibid.*: 252). A closer look at Clifford's treatment of these issues is disappointing, however. Concerning how diasporic claims intersect with other histories, Clifford's work lacks significant references to Indigenous writers, leaders, or resistance movements. Rather, he references Jewish, Islamic, and South Asian histories in the making and critique of modernity (*Ibid.*: 267). Despite the importance of Clifford's insight that diasporic visions cannot be studied in isolation from one another, he does not ask how these diasporic visions, the processes of constructing home away from home, are premised on the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples.

There is also a curious ambiguity in terms of integrating issues of Indigenous sovereignty. "The claims made by peoples who have inhabited the territory since before recorded history and those who arrived by steamboat or airplane," Clifford notes, "will be founded on very different principles" (*Ibid.*: 253). Rather than elaborate on such principles, Clifford focuses more on assertions that Aboriginal peoples are also diasporic, which leads him to raise what he sees as ambiguities in Indigenous nationhood. For example, in contrasting Indigenous and "diasporic" claims to identity, Clifford suggests that Indigenous claims are primordial. For him, Indigenous claims "stress continuity of habitation, Indigeneity, and often a 'natural'

connection to the land,” while “diaspora cultures, constituted by displacement, may resist such appeals on political principle” (*Ibid.*: 252). Such a characterization of Indigenous claims ignores the contemporary political, social, and economic realities of Indigenous peoples, and fails to address the ways in which diasporic claims are premised on a colonizing social formation. Thus, despite exploring how diasporic identities articulate with or resist colonization projects, Clifford fails to take into account that these identities are situated in multiple projects of colonization and settlement on Indigenous lands.

We can see a similar erasure of colonialism and Indigenous peoples in writings on slavery. Writers such as Gilroy, Clifford, and others have emphasized the ways in which the enslavement of Africans has shaped European discourses of modernity, European identity, and contemporary articulations of racism. As Toni Morrison powerfully states, “modern life begins with slavery” (cited in Gilroy, 1993b: 308). We do not contest the importance of slavery, but we wonder about the claim that modernity began with slavery, given the significance of colonialism and Orientalism in constructing Europe’s sense of itself as modern. Equally important, the claim that modernity began with slavery, rather than with the genocide and colonization of Indigenous peoples in the Americas that preceded it, erases Indigenous presence. The vision evoked is one in which the history of racism begins with the bringing of African peoples as slaves to what became the United States and Canada.

How does such theorizing about slavery fail to address the ways in which modes of slavery, and the anti-slavery movement in the United States, were premised on earlier and continuing modes of colonization of Indigenous peoples? For example, out of whose land would the “40 acres” be carved? How do we account for the fact that the same week President Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, he approved the order for the largest mass hanging in U.S. history, of 38 Dakota men accused of participating in an uprising in Minnesota (Cook-Lynn, 1996: 63)? Such events suggest connections between the anti-slavery movement, the ongoing theft of Indigenous land, and the forced relocation or extermination of its original inhabitants. There was also a resounding silence among anti-slavery activists, women’s suffragists, labor leaders, and ex-slaves such as Frederick Douglas concerning land theft and Indigenous genocide. Such silences reveal an apparent consensus among these diverse activists that the insertion of workers, white women, and blacks into U.S. (and Canadian) nation-building was to continue to take place on Indigenous land, regardless of the cost to Indigenous peoples. In short, the relationship between slavery, anti-slavery, and colonialism is obscured when slavery is presented as the defining moment in North American racism.

Thus, critical race and postcolonial scholars have systematically excluded ongoing colonization from the ways in which racism is articulated. This has erased the presence of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing struggles for decolonization, precluding a more sophisticated analysis of migration, diasporic identities, and diasporic countercultures. Equally disturbing, when we look at the few scholars

who include Aboriginal peoples and decolonization in their theoretical frameworks, decolonization politics are equated with antiracist politics. Such an ontological approach places decolonization and antiracism within a liberal-pluralist framework, which decenters decolonization.

Frankenberg and Mani's (1992) classic article on the possibilities and limits of postcolonial theory is an example of this. Notably, these authors attempt to analyze slavery, racialization, and identity in conjunction with colonization. Importantly, they acknowledge the limits of applying the term postcolonial to white settler societies. In their view, the term cannot account for the forms of antiracist and Aboriginal struggles in the United States: "the serious calling into question of white/Western dominance by the groundswell of movements of resistance, and the emergence of struggles for collective self-determination most frequently articulated in nationalist terms" (*Ibid.*: 480). For them, the term "post-civil rights" may be more applicable. "Let us emphasize that we use the term 'post-Civil Rights' broadly to refer to the impact of struggles by African Americans, American Indian, La Raza, and Asian-American communities," which, they argue, collectively produce "a 'great transformation' of racial awareness, racial meaning, racial subjectivity" (*Ibid.*: 480–481).

Frankenberg and Mani take seriously the need to bring ongoing colonization into antiracist and postcolonial theory, yet our concern is that they place decolonization struggles within a pluralistic framework. As a result, decolonization struggles become one component of a larger antiracist struggle. Such pluralism, while utopian in intent, marginalizes decolonization struggles and continues to obscure the complex ways in which people of color have participated in projects of settlement. In contrast, we believe ongoing colonization and decolonization struggles must be foundational in our understandings of racism, racial subjectivities, and antiracism.

Finally, theories of nationalism render Indigenous nationhood unviable, which has serious ramifications in a colonial context. The postcolonial emphasis on deconstructing nationhood furthers Indigenous denationalization for those targeted for centuries for physical and cultural extermination, and facing added fragmentation through identity legislation (Grewal and Kaplan, 1994; Jackson and Penrose, 1993; Anderson, 1991; Hall, 1994). Such deconstructions can ignore settler state colonization (Anderson, 1991). Or they theorize, from the outside, about how communities "become" Indigenous solely because of interactions with colonialist nationalist projects (Anderson, 2003; Warren, 1992). If the epistemologies and ontologies of Indigenous nations do not count, Indigeneity is evaluated through social construction theory. More problematic still are works that denigrate nationalism as representing only technologies of violence (McClintock, 1997), or a reification of categories that can degenerate into fundamentalism and "ethnic cleansing" (Penrose, 1993; Nixon, 1997). There is also the simple dismissal of "ethnic absolutism" as an increasingly untenable cultural strategy (Hall, 1996b: 250, quoted in Weaver, 1998: 14), which calls into question the very notion of national identity. None of

these perspectives enable Indigenous peoples in the Americas to envision a future separate from continuous engulfment by the most powerful colonial order in the world, or their continuous erasure, starting with Columbus, from global international political relations (Venne, 1998). In this respect, postcolonial deconstructions of nationalism appear to be premised on what Cree scholar Lorraine Le Camp calls “*terranullism*,” the erasure of an ongoing post-contact Indigenous presence (Le Camp, 1995). Perhaps it is not surprising that from these perspectives, decolonization, nationhood, and sovereignty begin to appear ridiculous and irrelevant, impossible and futile (Cook-Lynn, 1996: 88).

For Aboriginal peoples, postcolonial deconstructions of nationalism simply do not manifest any understanding of how Aboriginal peoples actualize nationhood and sovereignty given the colonial framework enveloping them. According to Oneida scholar Lina Sunseri (2005), Indigenous nationhood existed before Columbus; when contemporary Indigenous theorists on nationalism explicate traditional Indigenous concepts of nationhood, they redefine the concept of a nation by moving beyond a linkage of a nation to the state and/or modernity and other European-based ideas and values.

In summary, critical race and postcolonial theory systematically erases Aboriginal peoples and decolonization from the construction of knowledge about “race,” racism, racial subjectivities, and antiracism. This has profound consequences. It distorts our understanding of “race” and racism, and of the relationship of people of color to multiple projects of settlement. It posits people of color as innocent¹¹ in the colonization of Aboriginal peoples. Left unaddressed is the way in which people of color in settler formations are settlers on stolen lands. It ignores the complex relationships people of color have with settler projects. Although marginalized, at particular historical moments they may have been complicit with ongoing land theft and colonial domination of Aboriginal peoples. It distorts our writing of history; indeed, the exclusion of Aboriginal people from the project of antiracism erases them from history.

Beyond Innocence: The Failure of Canadian Antiracism to Make Colonialism Foundational

The refusal of international scholarship to address settler state colonization and Indigenous decolonization is problematic, especially since the same epistemological and ontological frameworks are reproduced in Canadian antiracism theory, which is written on land that is still colonized. The failure of Canadian antiracism to make colonization foundational has meant that Aboriginal peoples’ histories, resistance, and current realities have been segregated from antiracism. In this section, we will explore how this segregation is reflected in theory, as well as its implications for how we understand Canada and Canadian history. Second, we shall complicate our understandings of how people of color are located in the settler society.

Antiracism’s segregation from the knowledge and histories of resistance of

Aboriginal peoples is manifested in various ways. Aboriginal organizations are not invited to participate in organizing and shaping the focus of most antiracism conferences. Indigeneity thus receives only token recognition. Their ceremonies feature as performances to open the conference (regardless of the meaning of these ceremonies for the elders involved). Usually, one Aboriginal person is invited as a plenary speaker. A few scattered sessions, attended primarily by the families and friends of Aboriginal presenters, may address Indigeneity, but they are not seen as intrinsic to understanding race and racism. At these sessions, Aboriginal presenters may be challenged to reshape their presentations to fit into a “critical race” framework; failure to do so means that the work is seen as “simplistic.” In our classes on antiracism, token attention—normally one week—is given to Aboriginal peoples, and rarely is the exploration of racism placed in a context of ongoing colonization. In antiracist political groups, Aboriginal issues are placed within a liberal pluralist framework, where they are marginalized and juxtaposed to other, often-contradictory struggles, such as that of Quebec sovereignty.

These practices reflect the theoretical segregation that underpins them. Within antiracism scholarship, the widespread practice of ignoring Indigenous presence at every stage of Canadian history fundamentally flaws our understandings of Canada and Canadian history. In this view, Canadian history is replete with white settler racism against immigrants of color. If Aboriginal peoples are mentioned at all, it is at the point of contact, and then only as generic “First Nations,” a term bearing exactly the degree of specificity and historical meaning as “people of color.” The “vanishing Indian” is as alive in antiracism scholarship as it is in mainstream Canada.

A classic example is James Walker’s 1997 text, “*Race, Rights and the Law in the Supreme Court of Canada*,” which considers four historic Supreme Court rulings that were instrumental in maintaining racial discrimination and anti-Semitism in Canada. Disturbingly, legal decisions affecting Native peoples are ignored in this text. By comparison, Constance Backhouse’s 1999 work, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900–1950*, goes a long way toward filling this gap. In this text, Backhouse addresses crucial cases such as the legal prohibition of Aboriginal Dance, *Re: Eskimos*, which ruled on whether “Eskimos” were legally “Indians,” as well as other instances of colonial and racial discrimination in the law against Aboriginal peoples and people of color. Backhouse’s approach reveals a more in-depth view of the embeddedness of racism in a colonial regime. Unfortunately, this kind of inclusive perspective is rare.

These practices of exclusion and segregation reflect the contradictory ways in which peoples of color are situated within the nation-state. Marginalized by a white settler nationalist project, as citizens they are nonetheless invited to take part in ongoing colonialism. The relationship of people of color to Indigeneity is thus complex. We turn now to the dynamic interaction between people of color, Indigeneity, and colonialism.

People of color are settlers. Broad differences exist between those brought as slaves, currently work as migrant laborers, are refugees without legal documentation, or émigrés who have obtained citizenship. Yet people of color live on land that is appropriated and contested, where Aboriginal peoples are denied nationhood and access to their own lands. This section will examine how people of color, as settlers, participate in, or are complicit in, the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples. Histories of the settlement of people of color have been framed by racist exclusion and fail to account for the ways in which their settlement has taken place on Indigenous land. As citizens, they have been implicated in colonial actions. Moreover, there are current, ongoing tensions between Aboriginal peoples and people of color, notably in terms of multiculturalism policy and immigration.

Let us turn to the history of settler formation in Canada and the role of people of color in the colonial project. The Canadian nation-state project was one of white settlement. It displaced Aboriginal peoples and targeted them for physical and cultural extermination to open land for settlers, while marginalizing and restricting the entry into Canada of people of color. Much of Canadian antiracist scholarship has attempted to document the exclusion and marginalization of people of color from the emerging nation. However, this work does not examine the ways in which the entry of people of color into Canada put them in colonial relationships with Aboriginal peoples.

Take, for example, the discussion of black loyalists in Nova Scotia who were denied lands promised to them, or awarded poor lands that whites did not want (Hill, 1981: 10; 63–64; Walcott, 1997: 35–36; Mensah, 2002: 46). Failure to reference who was being forced off the territories being settled erases the bloodiest interval of genocide in Canadian history.¹² The black settler population in Nova Scotia, ex-slaves with few options, was largely denied the opportunity to appropriate Native land, so that many eventually left for Sierra Leone (Mensah, 2002: 47). However, to speak of the loss of black land rights without referencing those being exterminated to “free up” the land for settlement is to be complicit in erasing genocide.

Another example is how the “head tax” and other legislation and policies restricting non-European immigration in Western Canada are decontextualized from the suppression of the Cree and Blackfoot peoples after the 1885 rebellion.¹³ Military subjugation of Native peoples on the plains made possible the settlement of newcomers and was the precondition for restrictions that ensured that the settler population replacing Native peoples would be white. To efface this history of bloody repression and focus solely on those whose presence eclipsed Native realities, regardless of the levels of discrimination they faced, is segregationist and highly inaccurate. Always present, Native eyes watched each wave of newcomers—white, black, or Asian—establish themselves on their homelands. Histories of racist exclusion facing peoples of color must detail the removal of Native peoples. This cannot be a meaningless generic statement such as “First Nations were here

before the settlers.” Exact information is needed on how the lands settled by people of color were removed from the control of *specific* Indigenous nations.

The way people of color understand themselves as colonists further complicates how they have participated in colonial projects. For example, in challenging the early 20th-century discourse of whiteness and nation, South Asian male migrants constructed a parallel discourse in which they referred to themselves as colonists and defined their project in Canada as one of constructing an Indian colony (see Dua, 2003). Other groups, such as Japanese Canadians and Jewish Canadians, deployed the discourse of colonization to situate themselves within a white settler formation (for Jewish Canadians, see Canadian Jewish Alliance, Annual Report, 1917; for Japanese Canadians, see *Winnipeg Free Standard*, June 1916: 1).

Recently, people of color have been implicated as citizens in colonial actions. For example, those with citizenship rights participated in constitutional reform that denied efforts on the part of Aboriginal peoples to fundamentally reshape Canada’s approach to decolonization. The Charlottetown Accord proposed constitutional changes that contained important features for Aboriginal peoples: recognition of Aboriginal governments as a third order of government in Canada, a definition of self-government in relation to land, the environment, language, and culture, as well as representation in the Senate. Although the Accord was the result of years of negotiations between Aboriginal leaders and the Canadian government, the government proposed that it be ratified through a national referendum. In essence, all Canadian citizens, including people of color, were invited to decide on whether the Canadian government should honor its commitments to Aboriginal peoples.¹⁴ We do not know how, or even whether, people of color voted with respect to the Accord. However, this illustrates the complexities for people of color living in a settler society. Those with citizenship rights in Canada were in a position to make decisions on Aboriginal sovereignty, which should have been made by Aboriginal peoples. Antiracist groups failed to note this contradiction.

Perhaps the most difficult and contentious area in which Aboriginal realities conflict with the interests of people of color regards immigration and multiculturalism. Aboriginal theorists and activists, particularly in Canada, have largely been silent on these issues. This reflects the discomfort and ambivalence of many Aboriginal people when official policies and discourses of multiculturalism and immigration obscure Native presence and divert attention from their realities, and when communities of color resist their marginalization in ways that render Aboriginal communities invisible. Canadian language policy is a classic example. Multiculturalism policy overrides the redressing of assaults on Indigenous languages, with funding provided first for “official” languages and then for “heritage” languages. Only then are the dregs divided up among the 50-odd Indigenous languages in Canada currently at risk of extinction given ongoing cultural genocide.

Ongoing settlement of Indigenous lands, whether by white people or people of color, remains part of Canada’s nation-building project and is premised on

displacing Indigenous peoples. Regarding immigration, Aboriginal peoples are caught between a rock and a hard place. Either they are implicated in the anti-immigrant racism of white Canadians, or they support struggles of people of color that fail to take seriously the reality of ongoing colonization. Often overlooked by antiracist activists is that the *Delgamuuk'w* decision clearly set out instances in which Aboriginal title could be infringed (i.e., limited or invalidated) by continuing immigration (Persky, 1998: 20). Canada's immigration goals, then, can be used to restrict Aboriginal rights. Antiracist activists need to think through how their campaigns can preempt the ability of Aboriginal communities to establish title to their traditional lands. Recent tendencies to advocate for open borders make this particularly important. Borders in the Americas are European fictions, restricting Native peoples' passage and that of peoples of color. However, to speak of opening borders without addressing Indigenous land loss and ongoing struggles to reclaim territories is to divide communities that are already marginalized from one another. The question that must be asked is how opening borders would affect Indigenous struggles aimed at reclaiming land and nationhood.

Scholarship is needed on ending segregation practices and on the complex histories of interactions between peoples of color and Aboriginal peoples. How did passage of the Multiculturalism Act in 1969 connect with Canada's attempt, in the same year, to pass the White Paper to eliminate "Indian" status and Canada's fiduciary responsibility to status Indians? To what extent did black-Mi'kmaq intermarriage in Nova Scotia represent resistance to extermination policies against Mi'kmaw people and the marginalization of black loyalists? How did Chinese men and Native communities interact during the building of the Canadian railroad? Is there a connection at the policy level between the denial of West Coast Native fishing rights and the confiscation of Japanese fishing boats during the internment? In what ways did people of color support or challenge policies used to colonize Aboriginal peoples? What were the moments of conflict and of collaboration?

With these questions, we are asking antiracism theory to examine how people of color have contributed to the settler formation. We are not asking every antiracism writer to become an "Indian expert." This is not desirable. Nor should histories of blacks, South Asians, or East Asians in Canada focus extensively on Aboriginal peoples. Yet, when speaking of histories of settlement, an explicit awareness and articulation of the intersection of specific settlement policies with policies controlling "Indians" is needed. This requires recognition of ongoing colonization as foundational. Such a clear rendition of the bigger picture naturally sacrifices any notion of the innocence of people of color in projects of settlement and colonial relations.

Summary: Taking on Decolonization

This article has addressed the multiple ways in which postcolonial and antiracist theory has maintained a colonial framework. We would like to suggest the following areas as topics to be taken up.

1. Aboriginal sovereignty is a reality that is on the table. Antiracist theorists must begin to talk about how they are going to place antiracist agendas within the context of sovereignty and restoration of land.
2. Taking colonization seriously changes antiracism in powerful ways. Within academia, antiracist theorists need to begin to make ongoing colonization central to the construction of knowledge about race and racism. They must learn how to write, research, and teach in ways that account for Indigenous realities as foundational.
3. This article has focused on antiracism theory, but the failure of antiracist activists to make the ongoing colonization of Indigenous peoples foundational to their agendas is also important. Most antiracist groups have not included Indigenous concerns; when they do, they employ a pluralist framework. There is a strong need to begin discussions between antiracist and Aboriginal activists on how to frame claims for antiracism in ways that do not disempower Aboriginal peoples.

The aim of this article was to facilitate dialogue between antiracism theorists and activists and Indigenous scholars and communities. We chose to write it in one voice, rather than coming from our different perspectives (with Bonita Lawrence rooted in Indigenous perspectives, and Ena Dua in antiracism and postcolonial theory) because we sought to go beyond a pluralistic method of presenting diverse views without attempting a synthesis. For Ena, working in a collective voice meant attempting to take on Indigenous epistemological frameworks and values, a process that was difficult and incomplete. For Bonita, working in a collective voice meant viewing Indigenous concerns from within antiracism, instead of attempting to critique of it from the outside. However, because our dialogue was a critique of existing trends in postcolonial and antiracism theory, a centering of issues within Indigenous frameworks was sacrificed. As we worked within the framework of antiracism and postcolonial theory, we continually struggled over the fact that Indigenous ontological approaches to antiracism, and the relationship between Indigenous epistemologies and postcolonial theory, could not be addressed.

We have learned that dialogue between antiracism theorists/activists and Indigenous scholars/communities requires talking on Indigenous terms. Aboriginal people may find little relevance in debating antiracism and postcolonial theory, which excludes them and lacks relevance to the ongoing crises facing Aboriginal communities. They may prefer to speak to the realities of contemporary colonization and resistance. The conversation they may wish for would take place within Indigenous epistemological frameworks and values—addressing culture, traditional values, and spirituality—as central to any real sharing of concerns. For true dialogue to occur, antiracist theorists cannot privilege or insist on the primacy of postcolonial or critical race theory as ultimate “truths.”

A final word must be said about antiracism *within* Native communities. Aboriginal

peoples have long and bitterly resisted the racism shaping Canada's colonial project, yet colonial legislation on Native identity has profound implications in terms of racialization, and the forms that racism can take, within Native communities. This article has focused on the need to decolonize antiracism as we now know it. Aboriginal peoples may also wish to ask how their communities would shape an antiracism project to address the violence colonization has inflicted on Indigenous identity. The legacy of cultural genocide and legal classification by "blood" and descent means that Aboriginal peoples must find their way through a morass of "racial thinking" about basic issues relating to Native identity and nationhood. Their ways of doing this may move between re-traditionalization and deconstruction, between Indigenous and Western ways of addressing how Indigenous identity has been reduced to biology. Most of all, it means finding ways of working "with a good heart."

Wel'altieq!—Thank you.

NOTES

1. This project represents an equal collaboration by both authors. The choice to put Bonita Lawrence's name first was explicitly political. Because antiracism is named here as part of a colonial project, and the positioning of peoples of color as innocent of colonizing relationships is challenged, both authors struggled with a sense that Bonita Lawrence would face greater criticism and marginalization from antiracism circles if her name came first, than Enakshi Dua would, as a woman of color with a long history of antiracism theory and activism. We decided to challenge these practices by situating the Aboriginal person first in the byline.

2. The specter of "Native unrest" appears to have haunted the Canadian government since the 1885 uprising, so that the military is usually on the alert whenever Native activism appears to be spreading. As Sherene Razack has noted, the Canadian government, in sending the Airborne Regiment to Somalia in 1993, was highly aware that they might not have enough military power left at home in the event that the country was faced with another Oka (Razack, 2004: 147).

3. The meaning of the term "genocide," as coined by Raphael Lemkin in 1944 during the discussions leading to the United Nations Genocide Convention, was given as follows: "Generally speaking, genocide does not necessarily mean the immediate destruction of a nation, *except when* accomplished by mass killing of all the members of a nation. It is intended rather to signify a coordinated plan of different actions aimed at destruction of the essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves. The objective of such a plan would be disintegration of the political and social institutions, of culture, language, national feelings, religion, and the economic existence of national groups, and the destruction of personal security, liberty, health, dignity, and the lives of individuals belonging to such groups.... Genocide has two phases: one, destruction of the national pattern of the oppressed group; the other, the imposition of the national pattern of the oppressor" (Lemkin, 1944, quoted in Churchill, 1994: 12–13).

4. In the 1999 *Marshall* decision, for example, concerning the rights of Mi'kmaw people in the Maritimes to fish, the courts upheld the integrity of 18th-century treaties between Britain and the Mi'kmaw nation (Coates, 2000: 7) as superceding the authority that Canada had vested in institutions such as the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

5. The *St. Catherines Milling and Lumber* case involved a dispute between Canada and the Province

of Ontario over timber revenues. Canada, in its defense, invoked the federal government's relationship to Aboriginal peoples; however, the decision, in Ontario's favor, defined Aboriginal rights virtually out of existence, stating that Indigenous people merely had a right to use their land, and that legally this right was no more than a "burden" on absolute Crown title, like a lien that must be discharged before land can be legally acquired. For over a century after this case, every Native litigator was forced to argue against this ruling, drastically limiting the possibilities for asserting Indigenous peoples' rights to their territories.

6. With *Calder*, the Nisgaa people took British Columbia to court for recognition of their rights to their traditional lands, which they had petitioned about for over a century. The Supreme Court, on appeal, denied their title on narrow procedural grounds, but ruled that there is a preexisting Aboriginal right and title to the land that does not flow from any rules enacted by a non-Aboriginal government.

7. When Dorothy Van der Peet, a member of the Sto:lo Nation charged with violating the Fisheries Act, asserted that these restrictions violated her Aboriginal rights as defined by Section 35, the Supreme Court decision began the process of defining how Aboriginal rights would be interpreted in the courts (Mainville, 2001: 26).

8. The original case involved the claim by the Gitksan and Wet'sowet'en Houses to ownership and jurisdiction over the entire 58,000 square kilometers of their traditional land base in central British Columbia. Their tireless attempt to have elders address the courts on their own terms, using oral traditions as "proof," was summarily dismissed by the B.C. court. When the case was appealed to the Supreme Court, however, the court decision, without actually addressing Gitksan/Wet'sowet'en self-government, defined Aboriginal title simply as the right to exclusive use and occupancy of the land, rather than outright political control (Mainville, 2001: 32).

9. As part of the ruling, a stringent set of criteria were developed that had to be met to prove title (Persky, 1998: 19). The court also demanded that land covered by Aboriginal title could only be used for land-based activities that were part of the court's vision of a "distinct" relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the land. For example, any form of resource development in ways that the courts deem to be contrary to the nation's "traditional" activities was prohibited; finding new ways to survive in the face of ongoing colonization is not "permitted" under *Delgamuuk'w*. Finally, Aboriginal title has been conceptualized within a narrow frame of collective ownership/use that is not constitutive of an Indigenous nation's identity (Macklem, 2001: 103–104), such as Canadians enjoy with Canada.

10. The combined acreage of all existing Indian reserves in Canada is less than one-half the amount in the Navajo reservation in Arizona (St. Germain, 2001).

11. Sherene Razack (2004: 10; 14) states that a critical way in which power relations can be ignored is when individuals assume that they can stand outside hierarchical social relations, and therefore are innocent of complicity in structures of domination. Individuals are often involved in a "race to innocence," in which they emphasize only their own subordination and disregard how they may simultaneously be complicit in other systems of domination. When we disregard how systems of oppression interlock, it is relatively easy to focus on our own oppression and disregard how we are privileged over others.

12. Mi'kmaw people fought the English for over a century, up and down the Eastern Seaboard, in conjunction with other allied nations of the Wabanaki confederacy. With the 18th-century peace treaties, the British Crown unleashed a concentrated campaign of extermination efforts, including the posting of a bounty for the scalps of Mi'kmaw men, women, and children in 1744, 1749, and 1756, "scorched earth" policies to starve out survivors (Paul, 2000: 182–184), the absolute denial of land for reserves for most of a century after asserting military control in 1763, and the accompanying spread of epidemics that brought the Mi'kmaw people to near extinction. Daniel Paul notes that by 1843, only 1,300 were left of a people whose numbers had been estimated at 30,000 to 200,000. Extermination efforts were most concentrated in periods immediately preceding the settling of loyalists, white and black, in Nova Scotia.

13. Among the actions needed to subjugate the Indigenous people of the prairies were the

implementation of pass laws, the policing of reserves by the Northwest Mounted Police, the outlawing of spiritual ceremonies and other policies that strengthened the heavy hand of the “Indian Agent” (Miller, 1989: 190–194), the erroneous labeling of 28 Cree bands as traitorous and the starvation policies implemented against them, the mass hanging of eight Cree men and the imprisonment of approximately 50 other Crees that accompanied the hanging of Louis Riel and the crushing of the Métis (Stonechild and Waiser, 1997: 214–237), as well as the denial of matrimonial rights and the labeling of Aboriginal women as prostitutes in efforts to drive Native women out of white settlements (Carter, 1997: 186–193).

14. The Accord was subject to intense debate, particularly the sections on Aboriginal self-government. These sections were questioned first by Aboriginal women’s organizations and then by national feminist groups, as they were seen to potentially prevent gender rights within Aboriginal communities because the Accord might allow Aboriginal governments to opt out of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Since the Charter was seen as a protector of Aboriginal women’s rights, granting government powers to Aboriginal communities could potentially threaten Aboriginal women (NWC, n.d.: 2–7). It was argued that self-government in the Accord was presented as a new right, rather than as a recognition and affirmation of an existing right, and therefore should be challenged. The platform of the national feminist organization, the National Action Committee, therefore stated that the “Charlottetown Accord is a bad deal for Aboriginal women” (NAC, n.d.). Notably, NAC failed to address the significance of the Accord with respect to Aboriginal decolonization. Rather, gender rights were seen as paramount, even in relation to Aboriginal self-government. In 1992, Canadians voted against the Accord. Nationally, 54% of the votes cast opposed the Accord.

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