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Red Skin, White Masks

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Seeing Red

Reconciliation and Resentment

Our greatest critics and commentators are men and women of resentment. . . . Our revolutionaries are men and women of resentment. In an age deprived of passion . . . they alone have the one dependable emotional motive, constant and obsessive, slow-burning but totally dependable. Through resentment, they get things done.

—ROBERT SOLOMON, *Living with Nietzsche*

The person who most forcefully expressed the discourse of resentment is Frantz Fanon.

—MARC FERRO, *Resentment in History*

On June 11, 2008, the Conservative prime minister of Canada, Stephen J. Harper, issued an official apology on behalf of the Canadian state to Indigenous survivors of the Indian residential school system.¹ Characterized as the inauguration of a “new chapter” in the history of Aboriginal–non-Aboriginal relations in the country, the residential school apology was a highly anticipated and emotionally loaded event. Across the country, Native and non-Native people alike gathered in living rooms, band offices, churches, and community halls to witness and pay homage to this so-called “historic” occasion. Although there was a great deal of Native skepticism toward the apology in the days leading up to it, in its immediate aftermath it appeared that many, if not most, observers felt that Harper’s apology was a genuine and necessary “first step” on the long road to forgiveness and reconciliation.²

The benefit of the doubt that was originally afforded the authenticity of the prime minister’s apology has since dissipated. Public distrust began to escalate following a well-scrutinized address by Harper at a gathering of the G20 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on September 25, 2009. It was there that Harper made the somewhat astonishing (but typically arrogant and self-congratulatory)

claim that Canadians had “no history of colonialism.” Harper continued: “We have all of the things that many people admire about the great powers but none of the things that threaten or bother them.”³ On October 1, 2009, the National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, Shawn Atleo, responded to the prime minister’s claim: “The Prime Minister’s statement speaks to the need for greater public education about First Nations and Canadian history. . . . The future cannot be built without due regard to the past, without reconciling the incredible harm and injustice with a genuine commitment to move forward in truth and respect.”⁴ In this chapter, I explore some of the issues raised by these two seemingly contradictory events—the residential school apology and call for forgiveness and reconciliation on the one hand, and the selective amnesia of Harper’s G20 address on the other—and how they speak to the current entanglement of settler coloniality with the politics of reconciliation that began to gain traction in Canada during the 1990s.

Over the last three decades, a global industry has emerged promoting the issuing of official apologies advocating “forgiveness” and “reconciliation” as an important precondition for resolving the deleterious social impacts of intra-state violence, mass atrocity, and historical injustice.⁵ Originally, this industry was developed in state contexts that sought to undergo a formal “transition” from the violent history of openly authoritarian regimes to more democratic forms of rule—known in the literature as “transitional justice”—but more recently has been imported by somewhat stable, liberal-democratic settler polities like Canada and Australia.⁶ In Canada, we have witnessed this relatively recent “reconciliation politics” converge with a slightly older “politics of recognition,” advocating the institutional recognition and accommodation of Indigenous cultural difference as an important means of reconciling the colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state. Political theorist Andrew Schaap explains the convergence of these two discourses well: “In societies divided by a history of political violence, political reconciliation depends on transforming a relation of enmity into one of civic friendship. In such contexts the discourse of *recognition* provides a ready frame in terms of which reconciliation might be conceived.”⁷

In Canada “reconciliation” tends to be invoked in three distinct yet inter-related ways when deployed in the context of Indigenous peoples’ struggles for self-determination. First, “reconciliation” is frequently used to refer to the diversity of individual or collective practices that Indigenous people undertake

to reestablish a positive “relation-to-self” in situations where this relation has been damaged or distorted by some form of symbolic or structural violence. Acquiring or being afforded due “recognition” by another subject (or subjects) is often said to play a fundamental role in facilitating reconciliation in this first sense.⁸ Second, “reconciliation” is also commonly referred to as the act of restoring estranged or damaged social and political relationships. It is frequently inferred by proponents of political reconciliation that restoring these relationships requires that individuals and groups work to overcome the debilitating pain, anger, and resentment that frequently persist in the wake of being injured or harmed by a perceived or real injustice.⁹ In settler-state contexts, “truth and reconciliation” commissions, coupled with state arrangements that claim to recognize and accommodate Indigenous identity-related differences, are viewed as important institutional means to facilitate reconciliation in these first two senses.¹⁰ These institutional mechanisms are also seen as a crucial way to help evade the cycles of violence that can occur when societal cultural differences are suppressed and when so-called “negative” emotions such as anger and resentment are left to fester within and between disparate social groups.¹¹ The third notion of “reconciliation” commonly invoked in the Canadian context refers to the process by which things are brought “to agreement, concord, or harmony; the fact of being made consistent or compatible.”¹² As Anishinaabe political philosopher Dale Turner’s recent work reminds us, this third form of reconciliation—the act of rendering things *consistent*—is the one that lies at the core of Canada’s legal and political understanding of term: namely, rendering consistent Indigenous assertions of nationhood with the state’s unilateral assertion of sovereignty over Native peoples’ lands and populations. It is the state’s attempt to impose this third understanding of reconciliation on the institutional and discursive field of Indigenous–non-Indigenous relations that is effectively undermining the realization of the previous two forms of reconciliation.

Thomas Brudholm’s recent book, *Resentment’s Virtue: Jean Améry and the Refusal to Forgive*, offers an important critique of the global turn to reconciliation politics that has emerged in the last thirty years. Specifically, Brudholm’s study provides a much-needed “counterpoint” to the “near-hegemonic status” afforded “the logic of forgiveness in the literatures on transitional justice and reconciliation.”¹³ Focusing on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Brudholm shows how advocates of transitional justice often base

their normative assumptions about the presumed “good” of forgiveness and reconciliation on a number of uncritical assumptions about the supposed “bad” of harboring reactive emotions like anger and resentment: that these feelings are physically and mentally unhealthy, irrational, retrograde, and, when collectively expressed, prone to producing increased social instability and political violence. Brudholm challenges these assumptions through a fascinating engagement with the writings of essayist and holocaust survivor Jean Améry, whose own work challenges the scathing and very influential portrayal of *resentment* as an irredeemably vengeful, reactionary, and backward-looking force by Friedrich Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887).¹⁴ According to Brudholm, Améry’s work forces us to consider that under certain conditions a disciplined maintenance of resentment in the wake of historical injustice can signify “the reflex expression of a moral protest” that is as “permissible and admirable as the posture of forgiveness.”¹⁵

In this chapter, I undertake a similar line of argumentation, although with two significant differences. First, as a critique of the field and practice of *transitional justice*, Brudholm’s study is “limited to the *aftermath* of mass atrocities” and to the “*time after* the violence has been brought to an end.”¹⁶ In the following pages, the political import of Indigenous peoples’ emotional responses to settler colonization is instead explored against the “nontransitional” backdrop of the state’s approach to reconciliation that began to explicitly inform government policy following the release of the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) in 1996.¹⁷ I show that in settler-colonial contexts—where there is no period marking a clear or formal transition from an authoritarian past to a democratic present—state-sanctioned approaches to reconciliation must ideologically manufacture such a transition by allocating the abuses of settler colonization to the dustbins of history, and/or purposely disentangle processes of reconciliation from questions of settler-coloniality as such. Once either or both of these conceptual obfuscations have been accomplished, holding the contradictory position that Canada has “no history of colonialism” following an official government apology to Indigenous survivors of one of the state’s most notoriously brutal colonial institutions begins to make sense; indeed, one could argue that this form of conceptual revisionism is *required* of an approach that attempts to apply transitional justice mechanisms to nontransitional circumstances. In such conditions, reconciliation takes on

a temporal character as the individual and collective process of overcoming the subsequent *legacy* of past abuse, not the abusive colonial structure itself. And what are we to make of those who refuse to forgive and/or reconcile in these situations? They are typically cast as being saddled by the damaging psychological residue of this legacy, of which anger and resentment are frequently highlighted.

The second difference is that I use the work of Frantz Fanon as my central theoretical referent instead of that of Jean Améry. As Améry himself perceptively noted in an important 1969 essay, Fanon held a very nuanced perspective on both the potentially transformative and retrograde aspects of colonized peoples' "hatred, contempt and resentment" when expressed within and against the subjective and structural features of colonial power.¹⁸ This chapter builds on Fanon's insights to demonstrate two things. First, far from being a largely disempowering and unhealthy affliction, I show that under certain conditions Indigenous peoples' individual and collective expressions of anger and resentment can help prompt the very forms of self-affirmative praxis that generate rehabilitated Indigenous subjectivities and decolonized forms of life in ways that the combined politics of recognition and reconciliation has so far proven itself incapable of doing. And second, in light of Canada's failure to deliver on its emancipatory promise of postcolonial reconciliation, I suggest that what implicitly gets interpreted by the state as Indigenous peoples' *ressentiment*—understood as an incapacitating inability or unwillingness to get over the past—is actually an entirely appropriate manifestation of our *resentment*: a politicized expression of Indigenous anger and outrage directed at a structural and symbolic violence that still structures our lives, our relations with others, and our relationships with land.

I develop this argument in three sections and a conclusion. In the first section, I discuss the ways in which "negative emotions" like anger and resentment get taken up in the literature on forgiveness and reconciliation in Canada. In the next section, I provide a reading of Fanon's theories of internalized colonialism and decolonization in order to counter the largely unsympathetic interpretation of Indigenous peoples' negative emotional responses to settler-colonial rule in the Canadian discourse on reconciliation. This section will also provide a historical account of the transformative role played by Indigenous peoples' anger and resentment in generating self-affirmative acts of resistance

and Indigenous direct action that prompted the state to respond with pacifying gestures of recognition and reconciliation. And finally, I provide an analysis of the “turn to reconciliation” in Aboriginal policy following the release of the RCAP report in 1996. Here I develop my claim that Indigenous peoples’ resentment represents a legitimate response to the neocolonial politics of reconciliation that emerged in the wake of RCAP.

DWELLING ON THE NEGATIVE: RESENTMENT AND RECONCILIATION

In common usage, “resentment” is usually referenced negatively to indicate a feeling closely associated with anger.¹⁹ However, where one can be *angry* with any number of things, resentment is typically reserved for and directed against instances of perceived wrongdoing. The *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example, defines resentment as a feeling of “bitter indignation at having been treated *unfairly*.”²⁰ One could argue, then, that resentment, unlike anger, has an in-built *political* component to it, given that it is often expressed in response to an alleged slight, instance of maltreatment, or injustice. Seen from this angle, resentment can be understood as a particularly virulent expression of *politicized anger*.²¹

The political dimension of resentment has not gone unnoticed within the Western philosophical tradition; philosophers such as Adam Smith, John Rawls, Robert Solomon, Jeffrie Murphy, Alice MacLachlan, and Thomas Brudholm (to name only a few) have all written extensively on the “moral” significance of emotions like resentment.²² In *A Theory of Justice*, for example, Rawls writes that “resentment is a moral feeling. If we resent our having less than others, it must be because we think that their being better off is the result of unjust institutions, or wrongful conduct on their part.”²³ In a similar vein, Jeffrie Murphy argues that resentment can be both a legitimate and valuable expression of anger in response to the unjust abrogation of one’s rights; it is an affective indicator of our sense of self-worth or self-respect.²⁴ And Alice MacLachlan writes: “In emphasizing the moral function of resentment as one kind of anger . . . philosophers have offered an important service to angry victims of political violence, who are often voiceless except in their ability to articulate and express resentment.”²⁵ Thomas Brudholm notes that, although these theorists vary regarding “the conditions and circumstances under which

anger or resentment is appropriate," they nonetheless all draw an important "distinction between excessive and pathological forms of anger and resentment, on the one hand, and appropriate and valuable forms, on the other hand."²⁶

Discussions within the field of recognition and reconciliation politics, however, rarely treat reactive emotions like anger and resentment even-handedly. Indeed, in such contexts, anger and resentment are more likely to be seen as pathologies that need to be overcome. However, given the genealogical association of feelings like resentment with political and moral protest, why have they received such bad press in the literature on reconciliation? I think there are at least two reasons to consider here. First, as several scholars have noted, in the transitional justice and reconciliation literature our understanding of resentment has been deeply shaded by Nietzsche's profoundly influential characterization of *ressentiment* in *On the Genealogy of Morals*.²⁷ There, *ressentiment* is portrayed as a reactive, backward, and passive orientation to the world, which, for Nietzsche, signifies the abnegation of freedom as self-valorizing, life-affirming action. To be saddled with *ressentiment* is to be irrationally preoccupied with and incapacitated by offences suffered in the past. "*Ressentiment*," writes Jean Améry, "nails" its victims to "the past," it "blocks the exit . . . to the future" and "twists" the "time-sense" of those trapped in it.²⁸ This theme is taken up again in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, where Nietzsche describes the so-called "man of *ressentiment*" as an "angry spectator of everything past."²⁹ For Nietzsche, *ressentiment* is an expression of one's "impotence" against "that which *has been*."³⁰ For the resenting subject, "memory" is a "festering wound."³¹ In Nietzsche's view, to wallow in resentment is to deny one's capacity to actively "forget," to "let go," to *get on with life*.³² In the third section below I show how state reconciliation policy in Canada is deeply invested in the view that Indigenous peoples suffer from *ressentiment* in a way not entirely unlike Nietzsche describes.

The second reason why negative emotions like anger and resentment find few defenders in the field of reconciliation politics is because they sometimes *can* manifest themselves in unhealthy and disempowering ways. My argument here does not deny this. Individual narratives highlighting the perils associated with clinging to one's anger and resentment appear too frequently in the Canadian reconciliation literature to do so. Consider, for example, the following account by Ojibwe author Richard Wagamese, which speaks to the

personal necessity of overcoming anger and resentment as a precondition in his own healing journey:

For years I carried simmering anger and resentment. The more I learned about the implementation of [Indian residential school] policy and how it affected Aboriginal people across the country, the more anger I felt. I ascribed all my pain to residential schools and those responsible. . . . But when I was in my late forties, I had enough of the anger. I was tired of being drunk and blaming the residential schools and those responsible. . . . My life was slipping away on me and I did not want to become an older person still clinging to [such] disempowering emotion[s].³³

Taken together, these are all very serious concerns. It makes no sense at all to affirm the worth of resentment over a politics of recognition and reconciliation if doing so increases the likelihood of reproducing internalized forms of violence. Nor could one possibly affirm the political significance of Nietzschean *ressentiment* if doing so means irrationally chaining ourselves “to the past.” While I recognize that Indigenous peoples’ negative emotional responses to settler colonization can play out in some of these problematic ways, it is important to recognize that they do not always do so. As we shall see in the next section, these affective reactions can also lead to forms of anticolonial resistance grounded on transformed Indigenous political subjectivities. I suggest that the transformative potential of these emotions is also why Frantz Fanon refused to dismiss or condemn them; instead he demanded that they be *understood*, that their transformative potential be *harnessed*, and that their structural referent be *identified* and *uprooted*.

THE RESENTMENT OF THE COLONIZED AND THE RISE OF RECONCILIATION POLITICS IN CANADA

Understanding Fanon’s views regarding the political significance of what he calls “emotional factors” in the formation of anticolonial subjectivities and decolonizing practices requires that we briefly revisit his theory of internalized colonialism.³⁴ Recall from chapter 1 that, for Fanon, in contexts where the reproduction of colonial rule does not rely solely on force, it requires the production of “colonial subjects” that acquiesce to the forms of power that have been imposed on them. “Internalization” thus occurs when the social relations

of colonialism, along with the forms of recognition and representation that serve to legitimate them, come to be seen as “true” or “natural” to the colonized themselves. “The status of ‘native’ is a neurosis,” explains Sartre in his preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, “introduced and maintained by the colonist in the colonized *with their consent*.”³⁵ Similar to how the Italian Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci viewed the reproduction of class dominance in situations absent ongoing state violence, colonial hegemony is maintained through a combination of coercion and consent.³⁶ Under such conditions, colonial domination appears “more subtle, less bloody,” to use Fanon’s words.³⁷

For Fanon, this “psychological-economic structure” is what produces the condition of stagnancy and inertia that characterizes the colonial world.³⁸ *The Wretched of the Earth*, for example, is littered with passages that highlight the fundamentally passive and lethargic condition that the colonial situation produces. The “colonial world,” writes Fanon, is “compartmentalized, Manichaeian and *petrified*”; it is a world in which the “colonial subject” is “penned in,” lies “coiled and robbed,” taught “to remain in his place and not overstep his limits.”³⁹ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon describes this Manichaeian relation as “locked” or “fixed” by the assumptions of racial and cultural inferiority and superiority held by the colonized and colonizer, respectively.⁴⁰ Unlike racist arguments that attribute the supposed inertia of colonized societies to the cultural and technological underdevelopment of the colonized themselves, Fanon identifies the colonial social structure as the source of this immobility.⁴¹

Although the internalized negative energy produced by this “hostile” situation will first express itself against the colonized’s “own people”—“This is the period when black turns on black,” writes Fanon, when colonial violence “assumes a black or Arab face”—over time, it begins to incite a negative *reaction* in the colonial subject.⁴² It is my claim that this reaction indicates a breakdown of the psychological structure of internalized colonialism. The colonized subject, degraded, impoverished, and abused, begins to look at the colonist’s world of “lights and paved roads” with envy, contempt, and resentment.⁴³ The colonized begin to *desire* what has been denied them: land, freedom, and dignity. They begin dreaming of revenge, of taking their oppressor’s place:

The gaze that the colonized subject casts at the colonist’s sector is a look of lust, a look of envy. Dreams of possession. Every type of possession: at sitting at the colonist’s table and sleeping in his bed, preferably with his wife. The colonized

man is an envious man. The colonist is aware of this as he catches the furtive glance, and constantly on his guard, realizes bitterly that: "They want to take our place." And it is true that there is not one colonized subject who at least once a day does not dream of taking the place of the colonist.⁴⁴

Although Fanon is quick to insist that the "legitimate desire for revenge" borne of the colonized subject's nascent "hatred" and "resentment" toward the colonist cannot alone "nurture a war of liberation," I suggest that these negative emotions nonetheless mark an important turning point in the individual and collective coming-to-consciousness of the colonized.⁴⁵ More specifically, I think that they represent the *externalization* of that which was previously *internalized*: a purging, if you will, of the so-called "inferiority complex" of the colonized subject. In the context of internalized colonialism, the material conditions of poverty and violence that condition the colonial situation appear muted to the colonized because they are understood to be the product of one's own cultural deficiencies. In such a context, the formation of a colonial "enemy"—that is, a source external to ourselves that we come to associate with "our misfortunes"—signifies a collapse of this internalized colonial psychic structure.⁴⁶ For Fanon, only once this rupture has occurred—or, to use Jean Améry's phrase, once these "sterile" emotions "come to recognize themselves" for "what they really are . . . consequences of social repression"⁴⁷—can the colonized then cast their "exasperated hatred and rage in this new direction."⁴⁸

Importantly, Fanon insists that these reactive emotions can also prompt the colonized to revalue and affirm Indigenous cultural traditions and social practices that are systematically denigrated yet never fully destroyed in situations of colonial rule. After years of dehumanization the colonized begin to resent the assumed "supremacy of white values" that has served to ideologically justify their continued exploitation and domination. "In the period of decolonization," writes Fanon, "the colonized masses thumb their noses at these very values, shower them with insults and vomit them up."⁴⁹ Eventually, this newfound resentment of colonial values prompts the colonized to affirm the worth of their own traditions, of their own civilizations, which in turn generates feelings of pride and self-certainty unknown in the colonial period. For Fanon, this "anti-racist racism" or "the determination to defend one's skin" is "characteristic of the colonized's response to colonial oppression" and

provides them with the motivating “reason the join the struggle.”⁵⁰ Although Fanon ultimately saw this example of Indigenous cultural self-recognition as an expression akin to Nietzschean *ressentiment*—that is, as a limited and retrograde “reaction” to colonial power—he nonetheless claimed it as necessary for the same reason he affirmed the transformative potential of emotional factors like anger and resentment: they signify an important “break” in the forms of colonial subjection that have hitherto kept the colonized “in their place.”⁵¹ In the following chapters, I delve further into what I claim to be Fanon’s overly “instrumental” view of culture’s value vis-à-vis decolonization in light of the more substantive position held by contemporary theorists and activists of Indigenous resurgence.

In the context of internalized colonialism, then, it would appear that the emergence of reactive emotions like anger and resentment can indicate a breakdown of colonial subjection and thus open up the possibility of developing alternative subjectivities and anticolonial practices. Indeed, if we look at the historical context that informed the coupling of recognition with reconciliation politics following Canada’s launch of RCAP in 1991, we see a remarkably similar process taking place. Let us now turn briefly to this important history of struggle.

*Managing the Crisis: Reconciliation and
the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*

The federal government was forced to establish RCAP in the wake of two national crises that erupted in the tumultuous “Indian summer” of 1990. The first involved the legislative stonewalling of the Meech Lake Accord by Cree Manitoba Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Elijah Harper. The Meech Lake Accord was a failed constitutional amendment package negotiated in 1987 by the then prime minister of Canada, Brian Mulroney, and the ten provincial premiers. The process was the federal government’s attempt to bring Quebec “back in” to the constitutional fold in the wake of the province’s refusal to accept the constitutional repatriation deal of 1981, which formed the basis of the the Constitution Act, 1982. Indigenous opposition to Meech Lake was staunch and vocal, in large part due to the fact that the process failed to recognize the political concerns and aspirations of First Nations.⁵² In a disruptive act of legislative protest, Elijah Harper was able to prevent the province from endorsing the package within the three-year ratification deadline stipulated in

the Constitution Act. The agreement subsequently tanked because it failed to gain the required ratification of all ten provinces, which is required of all proposed constitutional amendments.⁵³

The second crisis involved a seventy-eight-day armed “standoff” beginning on July 11, 1990, between the Mohawk nation of Kanesatake, the Quebec provincial police (Sûreté du Québec, or SQ), and the Canadian armed forces near the town of Oka, Quebec. On June 30, 1990, the municipality of Oka was granted a court injunction to dismantle a peaceful barricade erected by the people of Kanesatake in an effort to defend their sacred lands from further encroachment by non-Native developers. The territory in question was slated for development by a local golf course, which planned on extending nine holes onto land the Mohawks had been fighting to have recognized as their own for almost three hundred years.⁵⁴ Eleven days later, on July 11, one hundred heavily armed members of the SQ stormed the community. The police invasion culminated in a twenty-four-second exchange of gunfire that killed SQ Corporal Marcel Lemay.⁵⁵ In a display of solidarity, the neighboring Mohawk nation of Kahnawake set up their own barricades, including one that blocked the Mercier Bridge leading into the greater Montreal area. Galvanized by the Mohawk resistance, Indigenous peoples from across the continent followed suit, engaging in a diverse array of solidarity actions that ranged from information leafleting to the establishment of peace encampments to the erection of blockades on several major Canadian transport corridors, both road and rail. Although polls conducted during the standoff showed some support by non-Native Canadians outside of Quebec for the Mohawk cause,⁵⁶ most received their information about the so-called “Oka Crisis” through the corporate media, which overwhelmingly represented the event as a “law and order” issue fundamentally undermined by Indigenous peoples’ uncontrollable anger and resentment.⁵⁷

For many Indigenous people and their supporters, however, these two national crises were seen as the inevitable culmination of a near decade-long escalation of Native frustration with a colonial state that steadfastly refused to uphold the rights that had been recently “recognized and affirmed” in section 35 (1) of the Constitution Act, 1982. By the late 1980s this frustration was clearly boiling over, resulting in a marked rise in First Nations’ militancy and land-based direct action.⁵⁸ The following are some of the better-documented examples from the time:

1. The Innu occupation and blockade of the Canadian Air Force/NATO base at Goose Bay in present-day Labrador. The occupation was led largely by Innu women to challenge the further dispossession of their territories and subsequent destruction of their land-based way of life by the military industrial complex's encroachment onto their homeland of Nitassinan.⁵⁹
2. The Lubicon Cree struggle against oil and gas development on their traditional territories in present-day Alberta. The Lubicon Cree have been struggling to protect a way of life threatened by intensified nonrenewable development on their homelands since at least 1939, when they first learned that they were left out of the negotiations that led to the signing of Treaty 8 in 1899. In defending their continued right to the land, the community has engaged in a number of very public protests, including a well-publicized boycott of the 1988 Calgary Winter Olympics and the associated Glenbow Museum exhibit, *The Spirit Sings*.⁶⁰
3. First Nations blockades in British Columbia. Through the 1980s First Nations in present-day British Columbia grew extremely frustrated with the painfully slow pace of the federal government's comprehensive land claims process and the province's racist refusal to recognize Aboriginal title within its claimed borders. The result was a decade's worth of very disruptive and publicized blockades, which at their height in 1990 were such a common occurrence that Vancouver newspapers felt the need to publish traffic advisories identifying delays caused by First Nation roadblocks in the province's interior. Many of the blockades were able to halt resource extraction on Native land for protracted periods of time.⁶¹
4. The Algonquins of Barriere Lake. By 1989 the Algonquins of Barriere Lake were embroiled in a struggle to protect their way of life by resisting clear-cut logging operations within their traditional territories in present-day Quebec. Under the leadership of customary chief Jean-Maurice Matchewan, the community used blockades to successfully impede clear-cutting activities adversely affecting their lands and community.⁶²
5. The Temagami First Nation blockades of 1988 and 1989 in present-day Ontario. The Temagami blockades were set up to protect their nation's homeland from further encroachment by non-Native development. The blockades of 1988–89 were the most recent assertions of Temagami sovereignty in over a century-long struggle to protect the community's right to land and freedom from colonial settlement and proliferating economic development.⁶³

From the vantage point of the colonial state, by the time the seventy-eight-day standoff at Kanesatake started, things were already out of control in Indian Country. If settler-state stability and authority is required to ensure “certainty” over Indigenous lands and resources to create an investment climate friendly for expanded capitalist accumulation, then the barrage of Indigenous practices of disruptive countersovereignty that emerged with increased frequency in the 1980s was an embarrassing demonstration that Canada no longer had its shit together with respect to managing the so-called “Indian Problem.” On top of this, the material form that these expressions of Indigenous sovereignty took on the ground—the *blockade*, explicitly erected to impede the power of state and capital from entering and leaving Indigenous territories respectively—must have been particularly troubling to the settler-colonial establishment. All of this activity was an indication that Indigenous people and communities were no longer willing to wait for Canada (or even their own leaders) to negotiate a just relationship with them in good faith. In Fanon’s terms, Indigenous peoples were no longer willing to “remain in their place.”⁶⁴ There was also growing concern that Indigenous youth in particular were no longer willing to play by Canada’s rules—especially regarding the potential use of violence—when it came to advancing their communities’ rights and interests. As Georges Erasmus, then national chief of the Assembly of First Nations, warned in 1988: “Canada, if you do not deal with this generation of leaders, then we cannot promise that you are going to like the kind of violent political action that we can just about guarantee the next generation is going to bring to you.” Consider this “a warning,” Erasmus continued: “We want to let you know that you’re playing with fire. We may be the last generation of leaders that are prepared to sit down and peacefully negotiate our concerns with you.”⁶⁵ Erasmus’s warning was ignored, and the siege at Kanasatake occurred two years later.

In the wake of having to engage in one of the largest and costliest military operations since the Korean War, the federal government announced on August 23, 1991, that a royal commission would be established with a sprawling sixteen-point mandate to investigate the abusive relationship that had clearly developed between Indigenous peoples and the state.⁶⁶ Published two years behind schedule in November 1996, the \$58-million, five-volume, approximately four-thousand-page *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* offers a vision of reconciliation between Aboriginal peoples and

Canada based on the core principles of “mutual recognition, mutual respect, sharing and mutual responsibility.”⁶⁷ Of the 440 recommendations made by RCAP, the following are some of the more noteworthy:

- Legislation, including issuing a new Royal Proclamation, stating Canada’s commitment to a new relationship with companion legislation establishing a new treaty process and recognition of Aboriginal Nations’ governments;
- Recognition of an Aboriginal order of government, subject to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, with authority over matters relating to the good government and welfare of Aboriginal peoples and their territories;
- Replacement of the federal Department of Indian Affairs with two departments, one to implement the new relationship with Aboriginal nations and one to provide services to non-self-governing communities;
- Creation of an Aboriginal parliament;
- Expansion of the Aboriginal land and resource base;
- Recognition of Metis self-government, provision of a land base, and recognition of Metis rights to hunt and fish on Crown land;
- Initiatives to address social, education, health, and housing needs, including the training of ten thousand health professionals over a ten-year period, the establishment of an Aboriginal peoples’ university, and recognition of Aboriginal peoples’ authority over child welfare.⁶⁸

RCAP’s vision of a reconciled relationship premised on mutual recognition is not without flaw—indeed, many critics have convincingly argued that its vision still ultimately situates Indigenous lands and political authority in a subordinate position within the political and economic framework of Canadian sovereignty.⁶⁹ However, RCAP still offers the most comprehensive set of recommendations, informed by five years of research involving 178 days of public hearings in 96 communities across Canada, aimed at reforming the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state to date. The extensive public consultations employed by RCAP subsequently produced a set of recommendations with a significant degree of democratic legitimacy to them, especially to those Indigenous people and communities who would be most affected by RCAP’s proposals. At the very least, then, the RCAP report provides a potentially productive point of entry into the much more challenging conversation that we need to collectively have about what it will take to truly

decolonize the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. This conversation has yet to happen.

The decade of heightened First Nations militancy that culminated in the resistance at Kanesatake created the political and cultural context that RCAP's call for recognition and reconciliation sought to mitigate—namely, the simmering anger and resentment of the colonized transformed into a resurgent affirmation of Indigenous difference that threatened to disrupt settler-colonialism's sovereign claim over Indigenous peoples and our lands. In light of this, to suggest that we replace these emotions by a more a conciliatory and constructive attitude like “forgiveness” seems misplaced to me.⁷⁰ Of course, individual and collective expressions of anticolonial anger and resentment can be destructive and harmful to relationships; but these emotional forces are rarely, if ever, as destructive and violent as the colonial relationship they critically call into question. “The responsibility for violence,” argues Taiaiake Alfred, “begins and ends with the state, not with the people who are challenging the inherent injustices perpetrated by the state.”⁷¹ Yet, as the history of First Nations' struggle that led to RCAP demonstrates, these emotions can also play an important role in generating practices of resistance and cultural resurgence, both of which are required to build a more just relationship with non-Indigenous peoples on and in relation to the lands that we now share. I return to this discussion in my concluding chapter.

RIGHTEOUS RESENTMENT? THE FAILURE OF RECONCILIATION FROM GATHERING STRENGTH TO CANADA'S RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL APOLOGY

The critical importance of Indigenous peoples' emotional reactions to settler colonization appears even more pronounced in light of Canada's problematic approach to conceptualizing and implementing reconciliation in the wake of the RCAP report. There have been two broad criticisms of the federal government's approach to reconciling its relationship with Indigenous peoples: the first involves the state's rigid historical temporalization of the problem in need of reconciling (colonial injustice), which in turn leads to, second, the current politics of reconciliation's inability to adequately transform the structure of dispossession that continues to frame Indigenous peoples' relationship with the state.⁷² Stephanie Irlbacher-Fox captures these concerns well when she writes that “by conflating specific unjust events, policies, and laws with

'history,' what is unjust becomes temporally separate from the present, unchangeable. This narrows options for restitution: we cannot change the past."⁷³ In such a context, I argue that Indigenous peoples' anger and resentment represents an entirely understandable—and, in Fanon's words, "legitimate"—response to our settler-colonial present.⁷⁴

The federal government officially responded to the recommendations of RCAP in January of 1998 with *Gathering Strength: Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*.⁷⁵ Claiming to "build on" RCAP's core principles of "mutual respect, mutual recognition, mutual responsibility, and sharing," *Gathering Strength* begins with a "Statement of Reconciliation" in which the Government of Canada recognizes "the mistakes and injustices of the past" in order "to set a new course in its policies for Aboriginal peoples."⁷⁶ This is the first policy statement by the federal government that explicitly applies the conceptual language typically associated with "transitional justice" to the nontransitional context of a formally liberal democratic settler state. The result, I suggest, is an approach to reconciliation that goes out of its way to fabricate a sharp divide between Canada's unscrupulous "past" and the unfortunate "legacy" this past has produced for Indigenous people and communities in the present.

The policy implications of the state's historical framing of colonialism are troubling. If there is no colonial present, as *Gathering Strength* insists, but only a colonial past that continues to have adverse effects on Indigenous people and communities, then the federal government need not undertake the actions required to transform the current institutional and social relationships that have been shown to produce the suffering we currently see reverberating at pandemic levels within and across Indigenous communities today.⁷⁷ Rather than addressing these structural issues, state policy has instead focused its reconciliation efforts on repairing the psychologically injured or damaged status of Indigenous people themselves. Sam McKegney links this policy orientation to the increased public interest placed on the "discourse of healing" in the 1990s, which positioned Aboriginal *people* as the "primary objects of study rather than the system of acculturative violence."⁷⁸ Hence, the only concrete monetary commitment made in *Gathering Strength* includes a one-time grant payment of \$350 million allocated "for community-based healing as a first step to deal with the legacy of physical and sexual abuse at residential schools."⁷⁹ The grant was used to establish the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in March of 1998.⁸⁰ The Conservative government of Canada announced in

2010 that additional funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation would not be provided.

According to Taiaiake Alfred, Canada's approach to reconciliation has clearly failed to implement the "massive restitution, including land, financial transfers, and other forms of assistance to compensate for past and continuing injustices against our peoples."⁸¹ The state's lack of commitment in this regard is particularly evident in *Gathering Strength's* stated position on Canada's land claims and self-government policies. Rather than affirm Aboriginal title and substantially redistribute lands and resources to Indigenous communities through a renewed treaty process, or recognize Indigenous autonomy and redistribute political authority from the state to Indigenous nations based on the principle of Indigenous self-determination, *Gathering Strength* essentially reiterates, more or less unmodified, its present policy position as evidence of the essentially just nature of the current relationship between Indigenous peoples and the state.

For example, regarding the comprehensive claims process, although *Gathering Strength* states Canada's "willingness to discuss its current approach with Aboriginal, provincial, and territorial partners in order to respond to concerns about the existing policy," the "alternatives" that have since been pursued are even more restrictive than was the original policy.⁸² At the time of *Gathering Strength's* publication in 1998, the "concerns" alluded to by the federal government involved more than two decades' worth of First Nations' criticisms regarding the comprehensive claims policy's "extinguishment" provisions, which at the time explicitly required Aboriginal peoples to "cede, release and surrender" all undefined Aboriginal rights and title in exchange for the benefits clearly delineated in the text of the settlement itself. The state has pursued two alternatives to formal extinguishment: the so-called "modified" rights approach developed during negotiations over the Nisga'a Final Agreement (2000), and the "nonassertion" approach developed during negotiations over the Tlicho Agreement (2003).

With respect to the former, Aboriginal rights and title are no longer formally "extinguished" in the settlement but rather "modified" to include *only* those rights and benefits outlined in the claim package. The provisions detailed in the settlement are the only legally binding rights that the signatory First Nation can claim after the agreement has been ratified. Regarding the latter, in order to reach a settlement a First Nation must legally agree to not "assert"

or “claim” any Aboriginal rights that are not already detailed in the text of the agreement. Again, the provisions specified in the settlement exhaust all claimable Aboriginal rights. Although the semantics of the comprehensive claims policy have changed, the legal and political outcomes remain the same.⁸³ Peter Kulchyski suggests that these alternative approaches to formal extinguishment may be even worse than the original policy, given that the latter at least left open the possibility of making a claim for an Aboriginal right that was originally unforeseen at the time of signing an extinguishment agreement. “Leave it to the state,” Kulchyski concludes, “to find a way to replace one of its oldest, most outdated, ineffective and unjust policies—the extinguishment clause—with something worse.”⁸⁴

A similar colonial trend can be seen in *Gathering Strength*’s stated commitment to implementing an Aboriginal right to self-government. Here the federal government simply reaffirms its previous 1995 policy position on the matter, which claims to “recognize” the “inherent right of self-government for Aboriginal people as an existing Aboriginal right within section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.” The use of the term “inherent” here is nonsense when considered in light of the scope of the policy, as there is really nothing “inherent” about the limited range of rights that Canada claims to recognize. The stated purpose of the federal government’s position is to clearly establish the terms under which Aboriginal governments might negotiate “practical” governing arrangements in relation to their own communities and with other governments and jurisdictions. In setting out these terms, however, the state unilaterally curtails the jurisdictional authority made available to Aboriginal nations through the so-called “negotiation” process. As a result, Indigenous sovereignty and the right of self-determination based on the principle of equality between peoples is explicitly rejected as a foundation for negotiations: “The inherent right of self-government *does not* include a right of sovereignty in the international law sense.” Instead, what the state grants is recognition of an Aboriginal right “to govern themselves in relation to matters that are *internal to their communities, integral to their unique cultures, identities, traditions, languages and institutions*.”⁸⁵

One should recognize a familiar pattern here. Instead of proceeding with negotiations based on the principle of Indigenous self-determination, Canada’s policy framework is grounded in the assumption that Aboriginal rights are subordnately positioned within the ultimate sovereign authority of the Crown. On this point, Michael Asch has suggested that the policy clearly takes its cues

from recent Aboriginal rights jurisprudence: “All court decisions rest on the presumption that, while it must be quite careful to protect Aboriginal rights, Parliament has the ultimate legislative authority to act with respect to any of them.”⁸⁶ This restrictive premise coincides with the Supreme Court of Canada’s own articulation of the meaning and purpose of “reconciliation” outlined in *R. v. Van der Peet* in 1996. As the court states, “what s. 35(1) does is provide the constitutional framework through which the fact that aboriginals lived on the land in distinctive societies, with their own practices, traditions and cultures, is acknowledged and reconciled with the Crown. The substantive rights that fall within the provision must be defined in light of this purpose; the aboriginal rights recognized and affirmed by s. 35(1) must be directed towards reconciliation of the pre-existence of Aboriginal societies with the sovereignty of the Crown.”⁸⁷ And how, might we ask, does the court propose to “reconcile” the “pre-existence of Aboriginal societies with the sovereignty of the Crown”? Or, stated slightly differently, how does the court propose to *render consistent* Indigenous nationhood with state sovereignty? By refusing that the “aboriginal societies” in question had anything akin to sovereignty worth recognizing to begin with. Instead, what the court offers up is an interpretation of Aboriginal rights as narrowly construed “cultural” rights that can be “infringed” on by the state for any number of legislative reasons—ranging from conservation to settlement, to capitalist nonrenewable resource development, and even to protect white interests from the potential economic fallout of recognizing Aboriginal rights to land and water-based economic pursuits. Like all Aboriginal rights in Canada, then, the right of self-government is not absolute; even if such a right is found to be constitutionally protected, it can be transgressed in accordance with the justifiable infringement test laid out in *R. v. Sparrow* in 1990 and later expanded on in decisions like *R. v. Gladstone* in 1996, *Delgamuukw v. British Columbia* in 1997 and *R. v. Marshall (No. 2)* in 1999.⁸⁸ When all of these considerations are taken into account it becomes clear that there is nothing “inherent” about the right to self-government recognized in Canada’s “Inherent Right” policy.

At least in *Gathering Strength* the federal government acknowledges that Canada has a colonial past. The same cannot be said about the state’s next major gesture of reconciliation: the federal government’s official 2008 “apology” to Indigenous survivors of the Indian residential school system. Informed by a similarly restrictive temporal frame, the 2008 “apology” focuses exclusively

on the tragedy of residential schools, the last of which officially closed its doors in 1996. There is no recognition of a colonial past or present, nor is there any mention of the much broader system of land dispossession, political domination, and cultural genocide of which the residential school system formed only a part. Harper's apology is thus able, like *Gathering Strength* before it, to comfortably frame reconciliation in terms of overcoming a "sad chapter" in our shared history. "Forgiveness" and "reconciliation" are posited as a fundamental step in transcending the painful "legacy" that has hampered our collective efforts to "move on"; they are necessary to "begin anew" so that Indigenous peoples can start to build "new partnerships" together with non-Indigenous peoples on what is now unapologetically declared to be "our land."⁸⁹

Thus, insofar as the above two examples even implicitly address the problem of settler-colonialism, they do so, to borrow Patrick Wolfe's useful formulation, as an "event" and not "a structure": that is, as a temporally situated experience which occurred at some relatively fixed period in history but which unfortunately continues to have negative consequences for our communities in the present.⁹⁰ By Wolfe's definition, however, there is nothing "historical" about the character of settler colonization in the sense just described. Settler-colonial formations are *territorially acquisitive in perpetuity*. As Wolfe explains, "settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event. In its positive aspect, elimination is an organizing principle of settler-colonial society rather than a one-off (and superseded) occurrence."⁹¹ In the specific context of Canadian settler-colonialism, although the *means* by which the colonial state has sought to eliminate Indigenous peoples in order to gain access to our lands and resources have modified over the last two centuries—ranging from violent dispossession to the legislative elimination of First Nations legal status under sexist and racist provisions of the Indian Act to the "negotiation" of what are still essentially land surrenders under the present comprehensive land claims policy—the *ends* have always remained the same: to shore up continued access to Indigenous peoples' territories for the purposes of state formation, settlement, and capitalist development.

Identifying the persistent character of settler-colonialism allows us to better interrogate the repeated insinuation made in both *Gathering Strength* and the

federal government's 2008 apology about how the "legacy" of Canada's troubled history has injured Indigenous subjects so deeply that many of us are now unable or unwilling to put the events of the past behind us. This returns us to our previous discussion of *ressentiment*. If *ressentiment* is characterized by a pathological inability to "get over the past," then according to the state-sanctioned discourse of reconciliation, Indigenous peoples would appear to suffer from *ressentiment* writ large. We just cannot seem to get over it. However, for most critics what makes *ressentiment* so problematic is that it is also an *irrational* attitude. "*Ressentiment*, by definition, is an irrational and base passion," writes Jeffrie Murphy, "It thus makes no sense to speak of rational or justified or honourable *ressentiment*."⁹² This has led moral philosophers like Murphy and Brudholm to distinguish between irrational expressions of *ressentiment*, on the one hand, and more righteous expressions of "resentment," on the other. This distinction is useful for our present purposes. In the context of Canadian settler-colonialism, I contend that what gets implicitly represented by the state as a form of Indigenous *ressentiment*—namely, Indigenous peoples' seemingly pathological inability to get over harms inflicted in the past—is actually a manifestation of our *righteous resentment*: that is, our bitter indignation and persistent anger at being treated unjustly by a colonial state both historically and in the present. In other words, what is treated in the Canadian discourse of reconciliation as an unhealthy and debilitating incapacity to forgive and move on is actually a sign of our *critical consciousness*, of our sense of justice and injustice, and of our awareness of and unwillingness to *reconcile* ourselves with a structural and symbolic violence that is still very much present in our lives. Viewed in this light, I suggest that Indigenous peoples' individual and collective resentment—expressed as an angry and vigilant *unwillingness to forgive*—ought to be seen as an affective indication that we care deeply about ourselves, about our land and cultural communities, and about the rights and obligations we hold as First Peoples.

CONCLUSION

Prime Minister Harper's 2008 "apology" on behalf of the Government of Canada to Indian survivors of the residential school system was delivered under the shadow of the 2007 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. The settlement agreement was negotiated in response to more than twelve thousand abuse cases and more than seventy thousand former students

represented in numerous class-action lawsuits against the federal government and church organizations that ran the schools. The settlement, which is currently being implemented under court supervision, includes money allocated for “common experience” payments to students who attended residential schools; a compensation process for students who can demonstrate that they suffered sexual or serious physical and/or mental abuse while attending a residential school; a health support system for survivors and their families; a residential school commemoration project; and the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to research, document and preserve the testimony and experiences of residential school survivors.⁹³

The specific commemorative and educational goals outlined in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s (TRC) mandate are important and admirable. However, many of the shortcomings that plagued both *Gathering Strength* and the 2008 apology also plague the mandate’s terms of reference. In particular, the TRC temporally situates the harms of settler-colonialism in the past and focuses the bulk of its reconciliatory efforts on repairing the injurious legacy left in the wake of this history. Indigenous subjects are the primary object of repair, not the colonial relationship. These shortcomings have produced many critics of the TRC. Taiaiake Alfred, for example, warns that genuine reconciliation is impossible without recognizing Indigenous peoples’ right to freedom and self-determination, instituting restitution by returning enough of our lands so that we can regain economic self-sufficiency, and honoring our treaty relationships. Without these commitments reconciliation will remain a “pacifying discourse” that functions to assuage settler guilt, on the one hand, and absolve the federal government’s responsibility to transform the colonial relationship between Canada and Indigenous nations, on the other.⁹⁴

If this were not enough to raise concern, since negotiating the 2007 Residential School Settlement Agreement and offering the 2008 apology, the federal government has intensified its colonial approach to dealing with Indigenous peoples in practice. This intensification is most evident in the federal government’s recently passed omnibus Bill C-45, otherwise known as the Jobs and Growth Act. Bill C-45 is a nearly 450-page budget implementation bill that makes significant changes to Canada’s Navigable Water Act, the Indian Act, and the Environmental Assessment Act, among other pieces of federal legislation. Of concern to Indigenous people and communities in particular are

the ways that Bill C-45 unilaterally undermines Aboriginal and treaty rights by making it easier for First Nations' band councils to lease out reserve lands with minimal community input or support, by gutting environmental protection for lakes and rivers, and by reducing the number of resource development projects that would have required environmental assessment under previous legislation.

Bill C-45 thus represents the latest installment of Canada's longstanding policy of colonial dispossession. This has led Indigenous people from all sectors of Indian Country to organize and resist under the mantra that we are "Idle No More!" Through social media, the Idle No More movement emerged with force in December 2012 as a result of the initial educational work of four women from the prairies—Nina Wilson, Sylvia McAdam, Jessica Gordon, and Sheelah McLean. Then, on December 11, Chief Theresa Spence of the Attawapiskat Cree Nation began a hunger strike to protest the deplorable living conditions on her reserve in northern Ontario, which she argued was the result of Canada's failure to live up to the "spirit and intent" of Treaty No. 9 (signed in 1905). Building on the inspirational work of these women, what originally began as an education campaign against a repugnant piece of federal legislation has since transformed into a grassroots struggle to transform the colonial relationship itself.

Drawing off the insights of Fanon, I have argued two points in this chapter. First, I claimed that Indigenous peoples' anger and resentment can generate forms of decolonized subjectivity and anticolonial practice that we ought to critically affirm rather than denigrate in our premature efforts to promote forgiveness and reconciliation on terms still largely dictated by the colonial state. And second, in light of the failure of Canada's approach to implement reconciliation in the wake of RCAP, I suggest that critically holding on to our anger and resentment can serve as an important emotional reminder that settler-colonialism is still very much alive and well in Canada, despite the state's repeated assertions otherwise.

In the next chapter I return to Fanon, although in a more critical light. I argue that although Fanon saw colonized people's anger and resentment as an important catalyst for change he nevertheless remained skeptical as to whether the rehabilitated forms of Indigenous subjectivity constructed out of this anger and resentment ought to inform our collective efforts to reconstruct decolonized relationships and communities. In contradistinction to Fanon,

I argue that insofar as these reactive emotions result in the affirmation and resurgence of Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices, they ought to be seen as providing the substantive foundation required to reconstruct relationships of reciprocity and peaceful coexistence within and against the psycho-affective and structural apparatus of settler-colonial power. In my concluding chapter I defend this claim in light of the recent Idle No More movement.

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