
Examining the Effects of Violence and Nonviolence in Indigenous Direct Action

The Red Power Movement and Idle No More

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Abstract: A focalizing debate within social movement theory considers the efficacy of violence versus nonviolence in direct action. This is especially important to consider in a settler-colonial context where the state is systematically designed to repress mobilizations of Indigenous sovereignty. It often attempts to frame such movements as either vaguely-defined discontent or national security threats - both of which attempt to invalidate the movements' demands. I use the case studies of the Red Power movement of the 1960s/1970s in the U.S. and the Idle No More movement of 2012/2013 in Canada to explore the ways the settler state responds to violent and non-violent forms of Indigenous resistance. It is my hope that these observed patterns of response are critically read not only by Indigenous Peoples, but also by non-Indigenous folx who wish to actively support these movements rather than passively consume and re-produce the colonial re-narrativization of movement events and intentions.

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Introduction

It is posited that democracy, as a form of socio-political organization, has the potential to provide social cohesion while protecting individual liberty.^{1,2} However, democracy's majoritarian principle can also (re)produce hegemonic privilege at the expense of dissenting minorities.³ This representational deficiency compels minority groups to pursue their visions of justice outside electoral channels — often leading to attention-seeking acts such as civil disobedience.⁴ Particularly within settler-colonial countries, the voices most often repressed are those with original title to the paramount resource of territory. First Nations' continued presence and resistance mires the settler state with existential anxiety; the colonial logic of elimination undergirds ongoing systemic strategies of assimilation and erasure.⁵ George Manuel (Secwepemc) maintains, however, that these schemes have continuously been met with creative Indigenous resistance and independent assertions of sovereignty that defy the state's constructed authority of legitimizing recognition.⁶ Large Indigenous resistance initiatives fit within the broader category of social movements, which are "organized yet informal social entities" engaged in extra-institutional conflict with a particular aim.⁷

A focalizing debate within social movement theory considers the efficacy of violence versus nonviolence; the former is typically attributed to civil resistance against undemocratic regimes, while the latter is often associated with civil disobedience within a democracy.⁸ The 'civil' in

¹ I respectfully acknowledge that this paper was researched and produced on the unceded territories of the Lekwungen-speaking Songhees and WSÁNEĆ peoples, whose historic relations with the land and water continue to this day.

² Bernard Crick, *Democracy: A Very Short Introduction* (2002), <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/lib/uvic/detail.action?docID=232920>.

³ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1971), 312.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 321.

⁵ Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native", in *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006).

⁶ George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019).

⁷ Jonathan Christiansen, *Four Stages of Social Movements* (EBSCO Publishing Inc.: EBSCO Research Starters, 2009), 2.

⁸ Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (East Boston: Albert Einstein Institution, 2010), 1, <https://www.aeinstein.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/FDTD.pdf>; James Tully, "On Global Citizenship," in *On Global Citizenship: James Tully in Dialogue* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 19, <https://www.bloomsburycollections.com/book/on-global-citizenship-james-tully-in-dia>

civil disobedience links this noninstitutionalized practice of challenging unilateral power relationships to a conception of nonviolence and peacefulness.⁹ However, Celikates also cautions against the uncritical acceptance of this essentializing dichotomy, for it allows governments to favour and promote certain types of minimally-challenging protest over the more status-quo-destabilizing types that usually come from marginalized groups who lack equitable access to the political opportunity structure.¹⁰ This caveat must be kept in mind, particularly in the context of Indigenous movements. Mobilizations of Indigenous sovereignty and social capital are repressed systematically by the settler-colonial regime, which leads it to frame such movements as threats to (uni)national security via a discourse of violence that renews savagery stereotypes. Sharp explains that since governments derive legitimacy from the cooperation, submission, and obedience of civil society and institutions, political defiance is better able to end government domination than violence.¹¹

Direct action sits within the sphere of political defiance and features extra-institutional protest, persuasion and intervention activities such as blockades, occupations, marches, and demonstrations.¹² Indigenous peoples have always acted to re-occupy their lives, lands, and waters; this direct action proclivity gaining increasing media coverage since the 1960s.¹³ According to John Borrows (Anishinaabe), Indigenous Peoples engage in civil disobedience and pragmatic direct action to create new spaces of representation in response to external domination and incongruous Indigenous-government relationships.¹⁴ He emphasizes the transformative potential inherent in Indigenous mobilization: “the shift from the assembly hall to the highway highlights the relationship between cooperation and rebellion in reproducing domination and freedom.”¹⁵

logue/ch1-on-global-citizenship.pdf; Robin Celikates, “Learning from the Streets: Civil Disobedience in Theory and Practice,” in *Global Activism: Art and Conflict in the 21st Century*, ed. Peter Weibel (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 66.

⁹ Robin Celikates, “Learning from the Streets: Civil Disobedience in Theory and Practice,” in *Global Activism: Art and Conflict in the 21st Century*, ed. Peter Weibel (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹¹ Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, 30.

¹² Michael Morden, “Rights and Resistance: Norms, Interests and Indigenous Direct Action in Canada,” *Ethnopolitics* 14, no. 3, (2015): 256.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 269.

¹⁴ John Borrows, *Freedom and Indigenous Constitutionalism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 51.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

Morden notes that despite the unique potentiality of Indigenous resistance, there has been little scholarly inquiry into this phenomenon beyond normative analyses that focus on the ethical need for decolonization.¹⁶ I intend to expand upon this by using a decolonial lens to comparatively analyze the development of two Indigenous movements of the past century that drew global attention: the Red Power movement (RPM) of the 1960s/1970s in the U.S. and the Idle No More movement (INM) of 2012/2013 in Canada. Considering the recent international wave of Indigenous resistance and rights discourse from Mi'kmaq fishery attacks in Nova Scotia¹⁷ to protests against President Bolsonaro in Brazil,¹⁸ it is important for Indigenous land defenders and allies to glean lessons from these previous movements: Red Power for its emergent novelty and Idle No More for its use of modern communications technology. Dina Gigilo-Whitaker (Colville Confederated Tribes) describes how although arising out of different events and often diverging in expression, both movements pursued a vision of justice rooted in sustainable self-determination.¹⁹ A critical difference between the two worth exploring is their respective employment of direct action tactics: the Red Power movement is frequently associated with militant leadership and a violent style of intervention, while non-violent tactics of disruption are attributed to Idle No More.²⁰ With consideration for the ways settler media, police and state frame Indigenous resistance, I will analyze the connection between violent and nonviolent direct action and the colonial state's method of response to such movements' demands. I will use Jonathen Christiansen's lifecycle model²¹ to chronologically examine the two campaigns through a decolonial comparativist lens by highlighting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous analyses of events and general mobilization theories. This historicization will include examining leadership and mobilization styles, media framing and reception, and the political opportunity structures that incentivized violent/nonviolent

¹⁶ Morden, "Rights and Resistance," *Ethnopolitics*, 256.

¹⁷ "Dear non-Mi'kmaq fishers: Mi'kmaq in Nova Scotia have an inherent right to fish, you do not," *APTN Nation to Nation*, October 8, 2020. <https://www.aptnnews.ca/nation-to-nation/dear-non-mikmaq-fishers-mikmaq-in-nova-scotia-have-an-inherent-right-to-fish-you-do-not/> (accessed November 23, 2020).

¹⁸ Mídia Ninja, "Indigenous movements in Brazil to stand up to Bolsonaro's 'project of genocide'," *Nationalia*, January 20, 2020. <https://www.nationalia.info/new/11284/indigenous-movement-in-brazil-to-stand-up-to-bolsonaros-project-of-genocide>

¹⁹ Dina Gigilo-Whitaker, "Idle No More and Fourth World Social Movements in the New Millennium," *South African Quarterly* 114, no. 4, (2015): 871.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 868.

²¹ Christiansen, *Four Stages of Social Movements*.

action. While I cannot attest to the experience of land defenders and their ancestors as a cisgender white settler and therefore cannot make fully-informed prescriptions for how their resistance should be performed, I have examined and synthesized Indigenous and non-Indigenous accounts of past movements to draw out patterns that could inform contemporary and future movements. It is my hope that these patterns, in elucidating the way the settler state moves to invalidate Indigenous sovereignty assertion(s), are critically read not only by Indigenous peoples, but also by non-Indigenous folk who wish to actively support these movements rather than passively consume and re-produce the colonial re-narrativization of events and intentions. Considering my positionality, this research has helped me interrogate my long-conditioned understanding of the relationship between violence and disobedience. Far from the universal and categorical allegorical dichotomy it is painted as, obedience often upholds violence — which raises the important questions of obedience to *whom* and for *whom*? I argue that the ability of an Indigenous resistance movement such as Red Power or Idle No More to overpower colonial neutralization attempts is dependent on its garnering and maintenance of public support for its anticolonial objective(s), which can be impacted by settler-constructed media images of reckless violence, or conversely, by allowing supporters to over-broaden the struggle identity and dilute specificity.

His/Herstorical-Contextual Genesis

Red Power Movement

In comparing Red Power and Idle No More, it is crucial to resist equivocating the historical contexts of the countries they originated in, which are indeed similar but also crucially distinctive. In the United States, Indigenous resistance to settler expansion sparked the Indian Wars, which carried throughout the 17th - 19th centuries, and ended with the Wounded Knee massacre of 1890. From this point forward, the settler government adopted an assimilation strategy that systematized the colonial logic of elimination until it was challenged during the “revolutionary fever” of the 1970s.²² The peak of unrest was in the generational wake of the 1953 *House Concurrent Resolution 108*, which advanced total assimilation as

²² Brian Ward, “1968: The Rise of the Red Power Movement,” para. 2, last modified August 8, 2018, <https://socialistworker.org/2018/08/08/1968-the-rise-of-the-red-power-movement>.

an end to the “Indian Problem” calling for the immediate disassembly of reservations and the ceasing of federal services and protections in order to eliminate all autonomy embedded in land claims and treaty rights.²³ While the policy of termination did devastate rural communities, it also brought Indigenous masses to the cities and consequently facilitated the emergence of a strong urban pan-indigenous collective empowered to seek justice.²⁴ Radicalized by termination, police brutality, over-incarceration and unemployment in the 1960s, the Black Power movement’s message of ethnic nationalism inspired young educated urban Indigenous communities.²⁵ As the National Indian Youth Council began articulating a vision of self-determination, the group Indians of All Tribes nestled itself at the heart of the emerging Red Power movement when they took over Alcatraz Island, announcing reclamation and emphasizing the deserted prison’s ironic likeness to reservations.²⁶ Although the occupation only lasted for a few hours, its successful garnering of attention was noted by another emerging group that came to define the RPM: the American Indian Movement (AIM).²⁷

AIM formed in Minneapolis in 1968 with the mission of protecting Indigenous people from police brutality and over-incarceration, adopting the Black Panther Party’s community self-defence patrol style.²⁸ With rapid national chapter proliferation and popularity gain, it quickly centred itself as the RPM’s organizational expression.²⁹ Acting as a local social service of sorts, it aided community members in job searches, education attainment and loan bargaining while pursuing an ultimate vision of cultural preservation and disavowal of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA).³⁰ Five years after the original Alcatraz invasion,

²³ Ibid., para. 8.

²⁴ Ibid., para. 16.

²⁵ Ward, “1968: The Rise of the Red Power Movement,” para. 21; Gigilo-Whitaker, “Idle No More and Fourth World,” 870.

²⁶ Kelly Rios, “The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement,” *Perspective: A Journal of Historical Inquiry* 35, (2008): 45-46, <http://www.calstatela.edu/sites/default/files/groups/Perspectives/Vol35/rios.pdf>.

²⁷ Ibid., 47

²⁸ Ward, “1968: The Rise of the Red Power Movement,” para. 16.

²⁹ Rios, “The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement,” 48.

³⁰ Jason A. Heppler, “Framing Red Power: The American Indian Movement, the Trail of Broken Treaties, and the Politics of Media,” (Unpublished master’s thesis, University of Nebraska, 2009), 35, <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1020&-context=historydiss> ; Dean J. Kotlowski, “Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond: The Nixon and Ford Administrations Respond to Native American Protest,” *Pacific Historical Review* 72, no. 2, 211, doi: 10.1525/phr.2003.72.2.201.

AIM organized a second occupation that lasted nineteen months.³¹ This occupation drew attention to the policy of termination and insisted on the establishment of Indigenous colleges, museums, cultural centres and other preservation programs.³² The U.S. government did not address these demands or attempt to remove the protestors, but instead took on a stand-by approach that proved successful when AIM eventually lost the social capital of public captivation as the press moved on.³³ Despite this ultimate secession, AIM had successfully motivated a large collective to take direct action, which undoubtedly frightened the federal government. Following the occupation, President Richard Nixon, eager to aid the Indigenous population (as a ‘safe’ minority that, unlike African Americans, did not seek integration), urged Congress to pass eight bills rejecting termination, promoting tribal autonomy, and strengthening the BIA.³⁴ These concessions were also notably influenced by the Cold War’s political context, in which domestic troubles limited the state’s ability to participate in the international arena.³⁵ Despite these reforms’ progressive appearance, Nixon’s slogan of “self-determination without termination” disappointed radicals who desired treaty renegotiation and emancipation from the BIA as a structure of Anglo wardship and normalized colonialism.³⁶ In response to Nixon’s seeming attempt to neutralize these concerns, the RPM gained collective capacity and a greater willingness to engage in confrontational actions.³⁷ AIM, never too concerned with the principle of nonviolence, encouraged civil disobedience as a core strategy of liberation³⁸ — which came to shape the repertoire of contentious action that defined the Red Power movement and predetermined both its efficacy and its ultimate downfall.

Idle No More

In Canada, the settlement process was uneven but continuous; the settler government announcing its sovereignty by virtue of the Doctrine of Discovery first through the *Royal Proclamation* (1763),³⁹ and then

³¹ Ibid.

³² Rios, “The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement,” 48.

³³ Kotlowski, “Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond,” 208.

³⁴ Ibid., 206-209.

³⁵ Heppler, “Framing Red Power,” 21.

³⁶ Kotlowski, “Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond,” 210.

³⁷ Ibid., 210.

³⁸ Gigilo-Whitaker, “Idle No More and Fourth World,” 870.

³⁹ Arthur Manuel, Ronald M Derrickson, and Naomi Klein, *Unsettling Canada: A National*

through the *British North America Act* (1867).⁴⁰ Its initial legislative attempts at Indigenous assimilation and elimination were eventually amalgamated under the *Indian Act* (1876), which seeks to control every aspect of Indigenous life. Lisa Monchalin (Algonquin, Huron, Métis) notes that amendments motivated by post-war societal introspection in the 1950s removed the worst restrictions.⁴¹ In 1969, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau proposed the *White Paper on Indian Policy*, which resembled the *United States House Concurrent Resolution 108* (1953) in its attempt to terminate all federal responsibility and special accommodations for First Nations (including reservations, Indian status and Indian Affairs).⁴² Sparking outrage within the Indigenous community, President of the Indian Association of Alberta Harold Cardinal (Cree) drafted the ‘Red Paper’ in response, which proposed the concept of First Nations as “Citizens Plus” deserving all the rights of Canadians and then some.⁴³ This political declaration seemed to empower many to pursue greater articulation and protection of these special rights through juridico-political channels, resulting in a slew of lawsuits that produced widespread reform: adding s.35 to the *Constitution Act* in 1982 recognizing existing Aboriginal and Treaty rights; Bill C-31 in 1985 restoring the status of some Aboriginal women; forming the 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples to investigate the *Indian Act* (1876); and the 1999 *First Nations Land Management Act* allowing limited self-government, among other legislation. Arthur Manuel (Secwepemc) cautions that despite this progress, every move forward has been accompanied by caveats that delimit the full expression of any right that could potentially threaten state sovereignty, which effectively further systematizes colonialism under an image of conscientious reform.⁴⁴ As a result, state institutions have low legitimacy within Indigenous communities; this illegitimacy norm produces a collective inclination towards engaging in extra-institutional action without requiring the stimulus of new threats to political or material resources.⁴⁵ It was within this context of historically-grounded discontent that Idle No More arose.

Wake-up Call (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015), 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁴¹ Lisa Monchalin, *The Colonial Problem: an Indigenous Perspective on Crime and Injustice in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 111.

⁴² Arthur Manuel, & Ronald Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto: Recovering the Land, Rebuilding the Economy* (Toronto: James Lorimer Limited, 2018), 94-95.

⁴³ Monchalin, *The Colonial Problem*, 120.

⁴⁴ Manuel and Derrickson, *The Reconciliation Manifesto*.

⁴⁵ Morden, “Rights and Resistance,” 272.

Compared to the RPM, Idle No More had a much softer emergence. It began as a series of emails between a group of nêhiyaw (Cree) women Nina Wilson, Sylvia McAdam, and Jessica Gordon, and one white settler woman Sheelah Mclean in Saskatchewan, who sought to contest the omnibus Bill C-45. Bill C-45 proposed a series of unilateral amendments to various environmental protection acts that would have significant repercussions for Indigenous nations and their treaty rights.⁴⁶ Wilson, McAdam, Gordon and McLean started a Facebook page that quickly garnered mass support, and by the late fall of 2012, #IdleNoMore had become a popular social media campaign as well as the focus of contentious political debate in Canada.⁴⁷ Although specifically arising to contest Bill C-45, the movement's rapid gathering of support led to a strategic broadening of its goals: nesting the targeted mission within the larger imperatives of environmental preservation, Indigenous sovereignty, and colonial status quo disruption.⁴⁸ The first site-based collective action was a mass teach-in in Saskatoon on November 10th, which precipitated a series of other protests and rallies.⁴⁹ On December 11th — International Human Rights Day — (Mushkego Cree) Chief Theresa Spence of Attawapiskat First Nation, which is located on James Bay in northern Ontario, capitalized on the juncture between symbolism, momentum and media attention by beginning a hunger strike to solicit a meeting with Prime Minister Stephen Harper and the Governor General David Johnston in regards to rectifying Treaty 9 infringements.⁵⁰ Spence's hunger strike was a form of psychological nonviolent intervention that is often credited as the seminal initiating action of INM, carrying a symbolic meaning that Sharp contends is characteristic of emerging nonviolent protest movements.⁵¹ Indeed, Spence's peaceful resistance imbued calls for justice

⁴⁶ Gigilo-Whitaker, "Idle No More and Fourth World," 867; Jarrett Martineau, "Rhythms of Change: Mobilizing Decolonial Consciousness, Indigenous Resurgence and the Idle No More Movement," in *More Will Sing Their Way to Freedom*, ed. Elaine Colburn (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 232.

⁴⁷ Martineau, "Rhythms of Change," 231.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴⁹ Febna Caven, "Being Idle No More: The Women Behind the Movement," *Cultural Survival Quarterly Magazine*, March 2013, para. 3, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/being-idle-no-more-women-behind-movement>.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, para. 1.

⁵¹ Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, 60.

with greater urgency, and soon the movement's message spilt over into the international arena, becoming a powerful Fourth World social movement in which other Indigenous nations felt empowered to demand respect of their inherent rights.⁵²

Development & Peak

Red Power Movement

Following the Alcatraz occupation and subsequent Nixon reforms, AIM leaders — like those of the Black Power movement — realized that the most effective way to capture and maintain visibility and relevancy was through confrontational politics that drew press coverage, for better or worse.⁵³ Russell Means (Oglala Lakota), a prominent AIM leader explained: “the only way we could get publicity was by threats... we had to threaten the institutions we were trying to change.”⁵⁴ In November of 1972, they initiated their second mass direct action, the ‘Trail of Broken Treaties’: a cross-country caravan collecting hundreds of supporters to stage events in Washington D.C.⁵⁵ A central objective was to present their focalizing ‘Twenty Points’ document to the government, which cumulatively called for the restoration of Indian treaty-making authority and dissolution of the BIA.⁵⁶ The action’s intent was nonviolence, but a series of miscommunications led to their hostile takeover of the BIA headquarters, which lasted seven days.⁵⁷ They left after being paid \$66,000 and promised that their demands would be given formal attention.⁵⁸ While the occupation did put a spotlight on the RPM, images of \$2 million worth of damages to the building and stolen files released after their departure were what endured in the public mind rather than the purpose of the action.⁵⁹ This prevailing image eroded support received

⁵² Caven, “Being Idle No More,” para. 1; Gigilo-Whitaker, “Idle No More and Fourth World,” 866.

⁵³ Heppler, “Framing Red Power,” 36; August H. Nitz, “Violence and/or Nonviolence in the Success of the Civil Rights Movement: The Malcolm X–Martin Luther King, Jr. Nexus,” *New Political Science* 38, no. 1, (2016).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁵ Rios, “The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement,” 49.

⁵⁶ Ward, “1968: The Rise of the Red Power Movement,” para. 33.

⁵⁷ Kotlowski, “Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond,” 211.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁵⁹ Rios, “The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement,” 50.

from both the American and Native American public as they became associated with reckless violence and militancy.⁶⁰ This also led Nixon to frustratedly abandon Native American issues as a policy focus,⁶¹ and indeed represented a decisive turning point in the RPM. Its objectives and methods were cognitively separated from popular conceptions of justice, and consequently heightened calls for (settler-colonial) law and order.⁶²

Both informing and informed by popular sentiment, the relationship between AIM and the press began to decay after the Trail. However, they did retain relevance as a news item and exploded back onto the scene a year later with their most infamous action: the occupation of Wounded Knee.⁶³ In response to community requests to highlight tribal government corruption, 300 armed Oglala Lakota and AIM activists travelled to Wounded Knee, where they set up roadblocks, took over the trading post and church, and announced it a liberated territory.⁶⁴ Despite the site's extraordinary symbolic significance limiting the socially-acceptable paths of action the government could take in response,⁶⁵ they were also highly motivated by concerns that the powerful moment would initiate a true revolution or erosion of government legitimacy and authority.⁶⁶ These concerns led the government to run the risk of condemnation and respond with crushing force, surrounding Wounded Knee with masses of FBI agents, federal marshals, BIA police and tribal police, who took the lives of two activists, wounded several others, and eventually arrested 120 people.⁶⁷ Perhaps to counteract the public denunciation of this violent suppression, Congress approved a string of Indian reforms between 1973 and 1975: restoring terminated tribes and approving the *Indian Financing Act* (1974) and *Indian Self-Determination and Education Act* (1975).⁶⁸ This reformist response showed that despite AIM's post-Trail loss of public support due to media stereotyping and lawlessness and factionalism frames,⁶⁹ Native American activists had successfully drawn political gains by appealing to the sympathies of the

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Kotlowski, "Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond," 212.

⁶² Rios, "The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement," 50; Heppler, "Framing Red Power," 73.

⁶³ Heppler, "Framing Red Power," 52.

⁶⁴ Ward, "1968: The Rise of the Red Power Movement," para. 35.

⁶⁵ Rios, "The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement," 52.

⁶⁶ Ward, "1968: The Rise of the Red Power Movement," para. 38.

⁶⁷ Ibid., para. 38.

⁶⁸ Kotlowski, "Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond," 217.

⁶⁹ Gigilo-Whitaker, "Idle No More and Fourth World," 869.

American public by capitalizing on the symbolic irony of the Wounded Knee situation.⁷⁰ Alcatraz had incentivized the President to articulate an intention regarding Indigenous rights, but Wounded Knee pushed Congress to begin implementing it in earnest.⁷¹

Idle No More

Compared to AIM's violent guidance of the RPM, Idle No More remained committed to a nonviolence principle that informed its performance strategy of brief place-based actions that invoked the *language* of occupation rather than the protracted *presence*. Much like Gandhi⁷² (1909), INM's leaders posited nonviolence as a code of conduct that drew on the spiritual strength of self-suffering and a doctrine of love to bring about sovereignty, or 'home-rule'.⁷³ It had also allowed connection to the environmental movement and Leftist ideology as a whole, which furnished partnerships with other renowned activists and effectively broadened their support base, but also diluted their message in the global news coverage.⁷⁴ While the RPM was characterized by a paradoxically violent sympathy-gathering strategy of action that focalized around their original demands, INM focused on a nonviolent alliance-based development strategy that gained wide support at the expense of co-opting their initiating demands to a degree. Regardless, the political capital of this broad support base was evident on the "Global Day of Action" in solidarity on January 13th, 2013, which saw rallies in Australia, New Zealand, Chile and the U.S.⁷⁵ Months later, the leaders organized the "Sovereignty Summer" campaign to publicize their list of six demands invoking the 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* principle of "free, prior, and informed consent".⁷⁶ According to Sharp, the main nonviolent methods used in INM's campaigns were formal statements, drama and music, public assemblies, symbolic strikes, rejection of authority, psychological interventions, physical interventions,

⁷⁰ Rios, "The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement," 52.

⁷¹ Kotlowski, "Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond," 217.

⁷² Gandhi, M. (1909). *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*. Retrieved from https://coursespaces.uvic.ca/pluginfile.php/2251089/mod_resource/content/1/Gandhi-excerpts-1-Hind-Swaraj.pdf

⁷³ Caven, "Being Idle No More."

⁷⁴ Gigilo-Whitaker, "Idle No More and Fourth World," 872.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 868.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 873.

and social interventions.⁷⁷ Jarrett Martineau (Plains Cree) explains the special significance of dance and music-based physical interventions, as the “Round Dance Revolution” disrupted commercial centres across the country.⁷⁸ While these representational gestures of Indigenous resistance and struggle continuity produced effective appeal, their fleeting temporality limited their ability to bring about systemic change.⁷⁹ The hypervisibility and technological reliance of this previously private court-based struggle made Indigenous repertoires of contentious action legible and therefore vulnerable to state surveillance and repression.⁸⁰

“Decline” & Legacy

Red Power Movement

Following Wounded Knee, the RPM began to fade as a direct action movement, shifting to the type of legal-judicial activism that had characterized the pre-INM era in Canada — but critically with less independent prerogative. AIM members arrested at Wounded Knee were forced into court battles that the government prolonged in order to weaken and bankrupt the organization.⁸¹ This first government repression tactic was buttressed by an FBI COINTELPRO infiltration scheme that served to foster paranoia and compound internal divisions within AIM.⁸² Although AIM did not achieve its original desires of BIA abolishment and treaty renegotiation, and despite their volatile relationship with the American and Native American public, the RPM as a whole did result in policy changes that brought greater power and attention to First Nations in the U.S.⁸³

⁷⁷ Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy*, 79-86.

⁷⁸ Martineau, “Rhythms of Change,” 232.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁸⁰ Martineau, “Rhythms of Change,” 235.

⁸¹ Kotlowski, “Alcatraz, Wounded Knee, and Beyond,” 218; Ward, “1968: The Rise of the Red Power Movement,” para. 46.

⁸² Ward, “1968: The Rise of the Red Power Movement,” para. 43-47.

⁸³ Gigilo-Whitaker, “Idle No More and Fourth World,” 870; Rios, “The Efficacy of the Red Power Movement,” 35.

According to Christiansen's delineation of social movements,⁸⁴ the RPM moved through all four lifecycle stages in order: emerging from collective discontent; coalescing through leadership and strategy development; bureaucratizing through the formalization of principles in an organization; and declining both through repression and establishment within the governmental mainstream (via the *Indian Self-Determination and Education Act* of 1975.) These concurrent government strategies of repression and institutionalization do show, however, that Indigenous social movements profoundly threaten state sovereignty and government legitimacy. This threat is powerful enough that the language of self-determination must be recast within government frameworks of accommodation that perpetuate the colonial power imbalance.

Idle No More

While the Red Power Movement resulted in sweeping policy changes, Idle No More seemed to plateau and fade from the media spotlight. Scholars such as Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) and Arthur Manuel (Secwepemc) believe this was due to the fact that Chief Spence, having been granted a meeting with the Harper government but not the Governor General (of great symbolic significance), eventually joined with the Assembly of First Nations and the Opposition parties to draft and sign a reformist '13 Point Declaration' that outlined steps forward and divided movement supporters.⁸⁵ Despite, once again, bringing attention to Canada's colonial mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples, the initial expression of the movement had not succeeded in stopping the legislation it rose to contest.⁸⁶ Scholars such as Jarrett Martineau (Plains Cree) also find that INM's social media-based organization allowed for the neutralizing control of radicalism within colonial-capitalist media's networked logics, facilitating state surveillance and anticipation of

⁸⁴ Christiansen, *Four Stages of Social Movements*, 1-5.

⁸⁵ Gerard Taiaiake Alfred, "Indigenous Nationhood: Beyond Idle No More," *Common Dreams* (January 29, 2013): 2. <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2013/01/29/indigenous-nationhood-beyond-idle-no-more>; Arthur Manuel, "Idle No More, the Effective Voice of Indigenous Peoples: Current AFN Negotiations with Prime Minister a Go-No-where Approach," *The Media Co-op*, January 14, 2013, <http://www.mediacoop.ca/story/idle-no-more-effective-voice-indigenous-peoples/15603>.

⁸⁶ Gerard Taiaiake Alfred, "Indigenous Nationhood: Beyond Idle No More," *Common Dreams* (January 29, 2013): 2. <https://www.commondreams.org/views/2013/01/29/indigenous-nationhood-beyond-idle-no-more>.

actions.⁸⁷ A significant challenge for INM was coordinating between social media's temporal support and offline place-based organizing within an economy of fleeting attention.⁸⁸ Tufekci identifies the inability of media-based protests to produce substantive policy or institutional changes as a problem of adaptive capacity plaguing contemporary social movements in general.⁸⁹ Following a final national day of action on January 16th, there was a decline in direct action as leaders called for the movement to scale back and relocalize action within communities — which the mainstream news media took as a signal of cessation.⁹⁰ Accepting this interpretation of INM's decline perhaps dangerously reinscribes indigeneity as an inherently political identity and a normalized subject of oppression.

However, Idle No More did not die: it reconstructed itself as the Indigenous Nationhood Movement, which continues to champion a “Reclaim, Rename, Reoccupy” mission.⁹¹ Pamela Palmater (Mi'kmaq) asserts that INM “was never meant to be a flashy one month, then go away. This is something that's years in the making... You'll see it take different forms at different times, but it's not going away anytime soon.”⁹² Palmater, alongside other Indigenous feminists such as Leanne Simpson (Anishinaabe) and Dory Nason (Anishinaabe) claim that the female-led grassroots nature of such movements are what imbibe decolonization with such transformative potential.⁹³ Furthermore, the movement provoked a

⁸⁷ Martineau, “Rhythms of Change,” 232.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁹⁰ Martineau, “Rhythms of Change,” 247; Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 165.

⁹¹ “Indigenous Nationhood Movement.” n.d. Accessed November 24, 2020, <https://www.nationsrising.org/>.

⁹² Natalie Stechyson, “Idle No More Movement Fizzles Out Online, Analysis Finds,” *Vancouver Sun*, February 10, 2013, <http://www.vancouversun.com/news/national/Idle+More+movement+fizzles+online+analysis+finds/7945480/story.html>, quoted in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, 165.

⁹³ Pamela Palmater, “Why We Are Idle No More,” *Ottawa Citizen*, December 29, 2012, <http://www.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/archives/story.html?id=63dd9779-10eb-4807-bd47-223817524aa2> and Leanne Simpson, “Fish Broth and Fasting,” *DividedNoMore Blog*, January 16, 2013, <http://dividednomore.ca/2013/01/16/fish-broth-fasting/>, quoted in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, 162; Dory Nason, “We Hold Our Hands Up: On Indigenous Women's Love and Resistance,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, and Society Blog*, February 12, 2013, <http://decolonization.wordpress.com/2013/02/13/we-hold-our-hands-up-on-indigenous-womens-love-and-resistance>, quoted in Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, 176.

massive transformation in Indigenous representation in Canada: leading to the genesis of “CBC Indigenous”, flooding the Canadian arts scene with decolonial work, and creating room for critical alliances and discussion regarding settler-colonialism and Indigenous (re)surgence.⁹⁴ Despite the passing of Bill C-45, INM was (and is) the largest sustained Indigenous nationhood movement to arise in response to oppressive colonial legislation since the proposed White Paper of 1969.⁹⁵

According to Christiansen’s model,⁹⁶ INM moved through the social movement stages differently than the RPM: emerging as a sentiment of both general and targeted discontent; coalescing through the leadership of the four women who created the Facebook group and articulated a vision of nonviolence; and declining through reterritorialization and cooptation framed by corporate media as failure. If the end of a social movement ideally signals its success, then the systematic adoption of UNDRIP’s principle of FPIC according to the six demands would hypothetically mark the end of INM.

Conclusion

Comparing the use of violence and nonviolence between the Red Power Movement and Idle No More is a useful way of exploring how the settler state responds to different expressions of Indigenous sovereignty. As the RPM progressed from Alcatraz to the Trail of Broken Treaties to Wounded Knee, it adopted increasingly violent direct action methods that surprisingly did not cause a complete erosion of support — likely due to the powerful symbolism of the Wounded Knee site and the government’s violent response. The true cause of their decline was incorporation into the policy mainstream (which eroded incentive), and government repression (which eroded resources). Comparatively, Idle No More was a decentralized movement of nonviolent resistance marked by brief performance-based physical interventions that, although also misrepresented by the media, managed to attract a diverse support base both domestically and internationally. In some ways, its rise in popularity paradoxically contributed to its failure in terms of stopping Bill C-45: that focalizing goal was subsumed within the larger less immediately-actualizable language of self-determination as the movement entered the Fourth World sphere of political dispute. Furthermore, this broadening of

⁹⁴ Christine Sy, email message to the author, November 19, 2020.

⁹⁵ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, 161.

⁹⁶ Christiansen, *Four Stages of Social Movements*.

the struggle identity also incorporated non-Indigenous environmentalists with less explicitly decolonial agendas. However, it is impossible to make definitive statements regarding the effects of this massive network creation, as a more open and conscientious government than Harper's might have responded more actively to the widespread external pressure. Comparing the policy reform initiated by the Red Power Movement's centralized leadership and the sustained solidarity network created through Idle No More's dynamic character might suggest that a combination strategy of direct-action based civil resistance could most peacefully and productively pressure settler governments to accept and engage with Indigenous sovereignty assertions.

Whether violent or nonviolent, Indigenous social movements create critical moments of acute attention to seams in the political power matrix which have the potential to widen and produce new forms of peaceful relationality. The two forms of protest also importantly do not exist in isolation of each other: Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene) importantly notes that preceding most nonviolent negotiations are so-called 'violent' disruptions of the colonial status quo.⁹⁷ The transformative potentiality embedded in Fourth World nations' calls for self-determination explains why they are often met with confusion and apprehension, as there is no designated place for them in the state-centric international system.⁹⁸ Indigenous movements, therefore, face unique challenges that require them to assert resistant subjectivities through their ontological practices⁹⁹ and be more flexible than the colonial homeostatic logics that try to absorb them. Alfred argues that due to this systemic proclivity for absorption, Indigenous social movements must formulate a dynamic land-based strategy of action that includes political, economic, social, and legal resistance schemes.¹⁰⁰ Supported by an anticolonial mission-driven solidarity network, this comprehensive land-based strategy of action could pave a politics of sustainable self-determination that the settler-colonial government will not be able to 'recognize'/redefine or invalidate out of its way.

⁹⁷ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, 167.

⁹⁸ Gigilo-Whitaker, "Idle No More and Fourth World," 857.

⁹⁹ Martineau, "Rhythms of Change," 251.

¹⁰⁰ Gerard Taiaiake Alfred, *Wasa'se: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005)

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