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From Reconciliation to 'Idle No More': 'Articulation' and Indigenous Struggle in Canada[1]

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Abstract

How do different discourses lead to changes in understandings of the world, identity, meaning and practice in Indigenous politics in Canada? This article introduces the poststructuralist theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to Canadian Indigenous studies and demonstrates that it is a unique and effective theory for understanding this question. It finds that in the last few decades, two principal discourses regarding Indigenous peoples and colonialism have circulated in the Canadian body politic—namely, (1) "reconciliation" and (2) "Idle No More." These discourses shape the identities of both Indigenous peoples and settlers, construct understandings of the world, and determine the meaning of related political struggle, leading to real world practice and politics. The reconciliation discourse has at times been effective at becoming a dominant discourse and has often been able to constitute the meaning of important terms such as 'decolonization.' It serves to pacify Indigenous resistance to colonialism. Counter-hegemonic discourses on reconciliation such as 'Idle No More' have been able to challenge that discourse. Academic literature, newspaper articles, YouTube videos, podcasts developed by Indigenous scholars, public letters and speeches delivered by Canadian politicians are analyzed to examine the utterances and enunciations of the two discourses.

Keywords: reconciliation, indigenous, poststructuralism, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, resurgence

Introduction

Over the last few decades, two principal discourses regarding Indigenous peoples and colonialism have been circulated by state and non-state actors in Canada, leading to changes in understandings of the world, identity, meaning, and practice in the field of Indigenous politics. These discourses are (1) "reconciliation" and (2) "Idle No More." No major academic publications have yet made dedicated use of the theoretical contributions of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe to explore Indigenous issues in Canada. This paper introduces

1 The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Métis Nation of Ontario.

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the poststructuralist theory/discourse analysis of these two highly original thinkers[3] to Canadian Indigenous studies to provide a deeper analysis of these two discourses and their effects on Indigenous politics. Because Laclau and Mouffe have referred to their thought as "post-Marxist," Marxism will be used as an example of a more traditional theory, the limitations of which can be addressed by adopting poststructuralist insights. Academic literature; articles from leading newspapers and magazines; YouTube videos; podcasts developed by high-profile Indigenous scholars and activists; public letters, significant speeches of and interviews with both Canadian politicians at the helm of Indigenous affairs portfolios and leaders of national Indigenous representative organizations are analyzed to examine the utterances and enunciations of the two discourses.

This article is structured in six parts. First, it outlines the theoretical framework necessary to understand the larger discussion. Second, it applies that framework to explore how the reconciliation discourse has at times been effective at becoming a dominant discourse through which actors find their identities, derive meaning, and come to understand reality, leading to real-world practice. The article examines how the reconciliation discourse has been able to constitute the meaning of important terms such as "decolonization," "self-government," "justice," "self-determination," and "'nation-to-nation relationship," among others. In this paper, a discourse will be understood as an enunciation that stabilizes the meaning of significant terms, or "signifiers." I will explore how the reconciliation discourse has had the ultimate effect of (1) pacifying Indigenous resistance to colonialism and (2) enabling settler colonialism to continue, in part by erasing the existence of a settler colonial present—of an ongoing process of colonialism in Canada. To illustrate, examples will be drawn from important sources, such as the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. I will argue that, through the enunciations of the reconciliation discourse, colonialism represents itself as its opposite, as decolonization. This makes colonial institutions become articulated and seen as not adversaries, leading to reduced resistance against them. Third, I will discuss how "counter-hegemonic" discourses such as "Idle No More" have been able to challenge the reconciliation discourse's dominance. In so doing, they provide different actors with new identities, meaning, and renewed understandings of the world, while simultaneously providing the terms identified above with more progressive meanings. These counter-hegemonic discourses will be explored as examples of how Indigenous and setter identities change with the discursive representation of Self and Other. In these counter-hegemonic discourses, colonial institutions become articulated as adversaries, which leads to decolonial forms of identity. I will explore how the articulation of these discourses leads to increased resistance to colonialism. I will close with an analytical conclusion and a discussion of avenues for future research.

Critical Theory and Indigenous Issues

This section introduces the theoretical underpinnings of the article. Laclau and Mouffe stated that "post-structuralism is the terrain where we have found the main source of our

3 This research considers their work published between 1985 and 2018.

theoretical reflection" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, xi). They follow Jacques Derrida and other poststructuralists in their claim that "there is nothing outside the text" (Derrida 1997, 158; Smith 1998, 85; Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 113). This means that the world we know is socially constructed through language and that it is discourse that makes things meaningful and truthful (Laclau 1990). These insights stem from Saussurean principles, where signifiers can have a polysemy of signifieds (Smith 1998; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). A sign consists of two parts: a signifier, which is the sound it makes or the written symbol, and a signified, which is the concept/meaning/idea that comes into mind when the signifier is read or heard (Saussure 1959; Derrida 1997; Torfing 1999). The signified gives meaning to the object to which the sign refers in the world, or the "referent" (Derrida 1997; Smith 1998). An object cannot exist for the mind without a linguistic concept. The meaning of one sign depends upon its relation to and difference from other signs. For example, understanding the term "father" is possible only in relation to other signs, such as "mother," "son," and "daughter" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). When one writes or speaks, one makes use of a number of signifiers to convey the signified. For instance, to convey what a tree is, one makes reference to the bark, the branches, perhaps its difference from other kinds of trees, etc. Thus, since the meaning of one word is known by its difference from other words, we can know (have conscious knowledge of) objects or things in the world only through language. Therefore, there is no natural connection between signifier and signified; their relationship is arbitrary (Laclau 1990; Smith 1998; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). These insights can be taken further to imply that all consciousness is always consciousness of something, and that of which consciousness is always conscious is a sign. Our experience of the world—including our perception and cognition—involves signs; thus, our understanding of the world and of its objects is semiotic. In short, we have no immediate experience of objects without signs. Language constitutes what is known as "reality" and its objects and gives the world its meaning.[4] This means that society and the world around us cannot adequately be represented in language; therefore, any effort to represent it is an attempt to constitute it rather than a statement of what it actually is in an "objective" sense (Laclau 1990). Because our material surroundings and social world are understood through language, our consciousness develops through language, and social behaviour and practice follow. Social issues, practices, and the material conditions of social life are understood through language, and those semiotic understandings ground future practices.[5] As an example, Laclau and Mouffe use the term "dislocation" to describe an event or crisis that occurs in society. The event initially resists symbolization (being represented in the symbolic order) and cannot be made sense of except through language. Different discourses articulated by competing social forces will emerge in an effort to symbolize it and will present solutions for how to solve the crisis. Those discourses will be political projects of sorts, and the discourses that come to dominate following the crisis

4 For further discussion, see Derrida 1997; Smith 1998; Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Laclau 1990.

5 This also applies to understandings of the economy. The economy and the social relations of production will always be understood through symbolization. This is why I would disagree with recent criticisms of Laclau and Mouffe that argue that the economy has "extra-discursive properties" (Jessop 2019, 27).

could be considered the 'hegemonic' ones.[6] Social practices will flow from the representations of reality that are generated by those discourses.

This is not to say that there is no non-discursive matter in the world. What I argue instead is that matter and objects (referents) in the world are formless and cannot be grasped or made meaningful or intelligible except through the mediating articulation work of language. These insights are important for this article because, in Indigenous politics and struggle, discourse constructs understandings of the world, leading to changes in identity and determining the meaning of political struggle. In turn, the propagation of discourse related to Indigenous issues leads to real-world practice and politics. This essay uses the theory of Laclau and Mouffe to explore these themes.

Structures and Centres

A structure comprises the norms, procedures, and enduring relationships of a social system (Torfing 1999). In most non-poststructuralist or traditional social theory, the centre of a structure is what Derrida refers to as *the transcendental signified* (1978), which gives meaning to signifiers, identities (which are themselves signifiers), and everything else within that structure. The centre limits the meaning, or "play," of the signifiers and identities within the structure, thus providing them with one meaning/signified. One example of a transcendental signified is seen in the way the author of a book is said to give meaning to it, and to all the signifiers within.[7] We will see that, for orthodox Marxists, the economy plays the role of the transcendental signified for society, and we will use that as an example to further illustrate the meaning of the transcendental signified below. For Derrida, there cannot be such a fixed or centred structure; instead, there is just discourse, in which many signs can be substituted for or take the place of the centre (Derrida 1978; Torfing 1999). The meaning of the parts (signifiers and identities) of a structure can shift infinitely because they have free play in the absence of such a fixed centre. Their meaning can only ever be partially fixed (Torfing 1999). In other words, discourse lacks a permanent centre that limits the play of or sutures/fixes the meaning of signifiers and identities (Derrida 1978; Derrida 1997; Torfing 1999). The issue with the traditional conception of centred structures is that they leave no room for what we will refer to as a "constitutive outside" for identity, which is constructed through discourse (see below). Laclau and Mouffe delve into this theorization of identities:

> Derrida…starts from a radical break in the history of the concept of structure, occurring at the moment in which the centre—the transcendental signified in its

6 For a full discussion of dislocation, see Torfing (1999) and Howarth (2000).

7 However, because of the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, when we interpret a written or spoken text, each signifier contained therein can have many signifieds (Derrida 1997). The signified will depend upon the audience because each word in the text can be interpreted differently by different people depending on its relationship to other signifiers found within the text itself or signifiers not found in the text that come to the reader's mind. In this sense, each sign's meaning is derived from an infinite number of differences from other signs. Therefore, any text can have multiple meanings. As such, the author does not play the role of the transcendental signified, giving meaning to the text. For further discussion, see Derrida (1997), Smith (1998), Laclau and Mouffe (2001), and Laclau (1990).

> multiple forms… —is abandoned, and with it the possibility of fixing a meaning which underlies the flow of differences... it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play.... in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse. (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 112).

As mentioned, the transcendental signified can be illustrated using the example of orthodox Marxism[8] as a traditional/non-poststructuralist social theory. It is also important to make reference to Marxism in this paper because Laclau and Mouffe referred to their thought as "post-Marxist" and they spent a great deal of time describing the limitations of Marxism. One could not be fully introduced to the thought of these two thinkers without partly describing this dimension of their insight. Orthodox Marxism has perceived the economy as the fixed centre/transcendental signified of our social and political structure. The capitalist economy provides the essential identity of different social agents, such as the working class. Subjects have the identity of social classes (such as "proletariat") with interests determined by their structural position as workers in the economy—that is, by the exploitative relations of production (Laclau 1990; Smith 1998; Torfing 1999; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). The economy determines or reveals the essence of one's identity, suturing it and making it in essence a labourer (Laclau 1990; Smith 1998). For Laclau and Moufe, social classes are not created by pre-given interests but, rather, are constituted through the discursive articulation of "subject positions" (Torfing 1999; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Subject positions are identities that refer to the various beliefs "through which an individual interprets and responds to her structural positions within a social formation" (Smith 1998, 58). The articulation of subject positions in different discourses constitutes these subject positions, making them discursive positions with which people can identify (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). For example, the democratic discourse articulates the subject position of the voter and positions the subject as being a voter, and the subject identifies with the subject position of being a voter. In Marxist discourse, the subject position of the worker/proletarian is created/constituted by articulating a resistance to capital, the capitalist class (examples of the "constitutive outside," as I discuss in the next section) and exploitation. People come to identify with this subject position only once it is articulated in discourse (Laclau 2018). Discourse thus creates the proletarian identity and struggle. This is an example of how discourse makes the world intelligible, constitutes identity, and leads to social practice, something that discourses in Indigenous affairs also do.

We all have diverse subject positions because we identify with different subject positions as we encounter different discourses (Howarth 2000; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). I explore identification with subject positions further in our discussion of Idle No More below.

8 Of course, there is much variety in Marxist literature, and several Marxists such as Louis Althusser have been interpreted by some as having insights very close to poststructuralism. Stuart Hall was another Marxist who had many poststructuralist influences. My discussion is focused on the more traditional, or "orthodox," Marxists.

The orthodox Marxist conception of "false consciousness"[9] (that is, non-working class consciousness) can be used to explore the notion of identity as essential and fixed rather than contingent. For orthodox Marxists, the media and education system work in ideological ways to prevent the development of a full working-class consciousness. These Marxists assume that full class consciousness would develop if the media, religion, and other ideological mechanisms did not work to cause a false consciousness. For these thinkers, if class consciousness emerged, proletarian class struggle against capitalism would take place. This can be contrasted with the non-essentialist approach to identity of Laclau and Mouffe, which sees proletarian class consciousness as only one of many possible working-class identities (subject positions) that can develop, even in the absence of ideological manipulation. Therefore, class struggle is just one of the many meaningful forms in which political struggle can take place (Laclau 1990).

It is helpful to provide an illustration of forms of struggle that are not centred on resisting class exploitation. While there are certainly many Indigenous Marxists,[10] Indigenous struggle can often be characterized better in terms of resisting land dispossession than in terms of confronting class exploitation (Coulthard 2014). Indigenous struggles for land, sovereignty, and the recovery of languages and worldviews must be considered meaningful forms of struggle that are examples of neither false consciousness nor class struggle.

The Constitutive Outside

We have seen that, because many signs can be substituted for the centre, the meaning of signifiers and identities can only be partially fixed by such signs. A discourse is an attempt to build a centre that partially fixes meaning. Such a centre can come from a constitutive outside, or the "Other," which is an example of one of the signs that can substitute for the centre (Torfing 1999; Mouffe 2013). Identity and subjectivity are always constituted by something outside, making them unfixed/unsutured and non-essential (Torfing 1999; Nabers and Stengel 2019). The Other is an antagonistic outside that blocks the full realization of an identity (that is, prevents someone from being fully themselves) or even threatens its existence. The Other is a force that antagonizes an identity and simultaneously constitutes that subject's (or group's) identity.[11] The discursive representation of Self and Other leads to the Self-identity, and the latter cannot exist without opposing something (Laclau 1990; Laclau 2018). A discourse positions the subject in opposition to the Other, with one identifying with the subject position of opposing the Other. This constitutive outside can be a person, a group of people, or an institution. For example, an oppressive government can be

9 False consciousness refers to people's inability to recognize oppression and exploitation in a capitalist society. Class consciousness emerges when workers come to understand themselves as members of a proletarian social class who are oppressed and exploited as members of that class.

10 Coburn (2016) provides a thorough discussion of the relationship between Indigenous struggle and Marxism.

11 For a full discussion, see Laclau (1990), Laclau and Mouffe (2001), Torfing (1999), and Mouffe (2013).

perceived as a threat that is not allowing for the full realization of the identity of different groups because it is not meeting their demands (Torfing 1999).

Discourse Theory and the Contingency of Identity

In the next section, I will explore how the constitutive outside relates to Indigenous identity, which is why it is crucial to provide further analysis of the concept. The constitutive outside is contingent in that it does not have definite causes, such as the forces and relations of production in Marxism. As such, identities are relational and can form by accident as the Other changes, which serves as further explanation as to why they do not have an essence and enter into infinite play in discourse (Laclau 1990; Mouffe 2013; Mouffe 2018a, 15:00). To be clear, identities' relationality is always constructed and constituted through discourse (Mouffe 2018a, 15:00), and this unfixed character of identity is termed "overdetermination" (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). As mentioned, one issue with the traditional conception of centred structures is that it leaves no room for such a constitutive outside for identity. Because the position of the Other is *always* changing, identities are also in constant change (Laclau 1990; Torfing 1999). Thus, workers and other political subjects such as Indigenous peoples have non-essential identities that are always in flux (Torfing 1999). I will discuss this aspect of Indigenous identity in depth in section III of this article.

Floating Signifiers, "Articulation," and "Nodal Points"

A "floating signifier" is a signifier without a stabilized meaning/signified; it is an empty sign. Articulation is a process whereby floating signifiers (which Laclau and Mouffe refer to as "elements"; Howarth 2000; Laclau and Mouffe 2001) enter a discourse, where they in turn become what I will call "moments," whose meaning becomes temporarily stabilized in the discourse. A floating signifier's meaning is stabilized by its differential relation to other signifiers in the discourse (Torfing 1999; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). For example, "democracy" is a floating signifier whose meaning is stabilized when articulated differently in the discourses of liberalism (where it means that the government is democratically elected, but production is not democratically controlled) and socialism (where it means democratic control of both production and the state). In this sense, in discourse, a signifier becomes temporarily sutured to a signified (Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

The multiple and changing centres of discourse are called "nodal points,"[12] as explained below:

> The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations…Any discourse is constituted as an attempt to dominate the field of discursivity, to arrest the flow of differences, to construct a centre. We will call the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, nodal points. (Lacan has insisted on these partial fixations through his concept of points de capiton, that is, of privileged signifiers that fix the meaning of a signifying chain). (Laclau and Mouffe 2001, 112).

12 For a full discussion, see Laclau and Mouffe (2001), Torfing (1999), Laclau (1990), and Smith (1998).

A nodal point is a privileged sign or "master signifier" in an articulation around which the other signs are ordered and whose meanings are defined in relation to it. The nodal point limits the flux of signifieds under a signifier (Žižek 1989; Torfing 1999; Mouffe 2018b). The field of discursivity (or "the discursive") is composed of all possible discourses in a language existing together. This can be taken to mean that an articulated "moment" in one discourse can be rearticulated in another discourse; therefore, signifiers can have many meanings depending on the discourse in which they are articulated. In other words, signifiers have only a partial fixation or stabilization of meaning. The rearticulation of moments in new discourses in the field of discursivity is what enables different signifiers to become attached to various new signifieds (Smith 1998; Torfing 1999). Laclau and Mouffe explain the field of discursivity in relation to articulation:

> The practise of articulation consists in the construction of nodal points which partially fix meaning; and the partial character of this fixation proceeds from the openness of the social, a result, in its turn, of the constant overflowing of every discourse by the infinitude of the field of discursivity. (2001, 112).

They make clear that the field of discursivity contains an infinite number of discourses that can rearticulate moments articulated in other discourses, leading to new temporary fixations of meaning.

Through their articulation of different discourses, competing political groups work to assign their desired signifieds to floating signifiers (Jorgenssen and Phillips 2002). This is a process of discursive struggle, where a discourse of one social group will attempt to fix the meaning of a floating signifier, thereby limiting its ability to have multiple signifieds. This process will be illustrated below using the discourses of "reconciliation" and "Idle No More." It is crucial to elaborate on nodal points and floating signifiers further because social identities are examples of the latter (Smith 1998; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). As floating signifiers, social identities have overdetermined meanings in that they have different signifieds depending on the context (discourse) in which they are articulated. However, this overdetermination becomes restricted when attached to a particular nodal point. Because the nodal point partially fixes the identity of the different moments in a discourse, it also allows for social identities to become temporarily sutured to a signified (Torfing 1999).

Some concrete examples of how nodal points can master a discourse and guarantee meanings (Gunkel 2014) are found in the discourses of liberalism, nationalism, racism, and Leftism. These discourses demonstrate how nodal points are those often-repeated terms in a discourse that help to ground meanings (Hook and Vanheule 2016). In the discourse of liberalism, "freedom" and "liberty" play the role of a nodal point. These terms partially fix the meaning of floating signifiers such as "state," "individual," and "society." In nationalist discourse, "nation" is the nodal point, which gives other signifiers, such as "land," "state," "freedom," "democracy," and "culture," their meaning. In racist discourse, a particular race becomes the nodal point that gives meaning to other signifiers in that discourse (Stavrakakis 2017a; Stavrakakis 2017b). In section IV, "reconciliation" will be explored as the nodal point of the "reconciliation" discourse.

Having provided a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of this article, I now apply these ideas to the analysis of discourse, identity, and struggle in Indigenous politics in Canada.

Poststructuralism and Indigenous Identity

In this section, I will elaborate on how the identity of Indigenous peoples is always in play and open to articulation. Since identities as signifiers are relational and involve both subject positions and a constitutive outside, Indigenous identity can be explored as an articulation in different discourses and by its relationship to other signifiers, such as the colonial state, colonial society, settlers, and the land. Indigenous identities can be seen, in the words of Laclau, as "nothing but the unstable articulation of constantly changing positionalities" (Laclau 1990, 92). Alfred and Corntassel (2005) and Gaudry and Hancock (2012) point out that relationships are central to Indigenous identity, and these relationships are between Indigenous people and their communities, families, clans, individuals, and homelands. Moreover, Indigenous peoples[13] have often identified themselves in challenges to colonial institutions: "Indigenousness is reconstructed, reshaped and actively lived as resurgence against the dispossessing…processes of annihilation that are inherent to colonialism" (Alfred and Corntassel 2005, 612). Thus, colonial institutions can be considered the Other in many Indigenous struggles. This article will focus on the relationship of Indigenous peoples to colonial institutions, the land, and the state. For instance, in terms of dispossession, a key issue is land restitution, which, as Alfred (2009b) points out, can be successful only through conflict with the Canadian state and society (the Other) through a resurgence of Indigenous power. This illustrates how the identity of one social movement can be defined by the antagonism between itself and an opponent (Smith 1998). Below, I will provide examples of how Indigenous and settler identities change with the discursive representation of Self and Other (Laclau 1990). In this analysis, it is important to keep in mind the idea elaborated in the first section of this article. Because there is nothing outside the text, society cannot be adequately represented in discourse, and any attempt to state what society is cannot do so. Therefore, all attempts through discourse to state what society is are really just attempts to constitute or imagine society (Laclau 1990). Below, I will explore this concept in relation to Indigenous struggle.

Indigenous struggle is a signifier, and its meaning (as with the meaning of any struggle) has a partial character that depends on the discourse in which it is articulated (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). For instance, in different discourses, it can be constituted as a struggle for recognition, rights, decolonization, resurgence, or reconciliation, among others. As a signifier, a subject position can also be constructed and given meaning through its differential relations with the other subject positions that are found in a given discursive

13 Indigenous identity is not pan-Indigenous. For example, as a distinct form of Indigenous identity, Métis identity is related to land and relations with human and non-human beings, and Métis struggle has often been about regaining homelands and developing self-determining governance structures to resist an oppressive and colonial Canadian state (see Saunders and Dubois 2019, 43, 56-57; Gaudry 2013; Campbell 2021, 30:00; Campbell 2020, 13:00).

formation. Therefore, Indigenous subjects and settler subjects can be positioned in different ways in different discourses. Below, I outline two principal discourses and discuss how their articulation leads to changes in Indigenous politics and struggle in Canada: 1) the dominant discourse of "reconciliation" and 2) the "Idle No More" discourse. Idle No More will be considered within a broader discussion of "counter-hegemonic" discourses. This article focuses on these discourses because they have had profound effects in shaping understandings of reality, identity, meaning, and practice in the field of Indigenous politics.

The Dominant Discourse of Reconciliation

A dominant discourse is that whose interpretation of the world is perceived as "common sense" and truthful and has the ability to limit what can be thought and said in an era. This section will explore reconciliation as such a dominant discourse, the main features of which involve articulating the recognition of Indigenous rights as being the meaning of the signifiers "reconciliation"[14] and "decolonization." This essay will understand this discourse as having "reconciliation" as the nodal point; we will see how it temporarily sutures/fixes the meaning of floating signifiers such as "justice," "colonialism," "decolonization," "self-determination," and "nation-to-nation relationship." It is a prime example of how "certain discourses can come to dominate others and become 'the main guide for action'" (Tregidga, Milne, and Kearins 2013). We will see that the dominant discourse also articulates apologies for past colonial abuses[15] and the need for healing in the present, while it is silent regarding the need to address current colonial land dispossession and other ongoing harms. The articulation of the discourse leads to practices that include state recognition of Indigenous rights, and Canada's various official reconciliation measures and processes that flow from the discourse (such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada) are said to be a form of transitional justice that facilitates the transition from one harmful (colonial) period of history to a post-colonial one (A. Simpson 2017). However, we will see that Canadian "reconciliation" is occurring in a non-transitional setting. The reconciliation discourse manufactures a transition by articulating colonial abuses as having occurred only historically, while settler colonialism in fact persists in the present (Coulthard 2013b, 33:00). It is important to understand that settler colonialism is not a historical event but, rather, a structure that is premised on the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous land and political authority (Wolfe 2006; Coulthard 2014; Patel 2015a). It is fuelled by a white supremacist effort that may have the ultimate effect of removing or erasing Indigenous presence in order to facilitate settler dispossession of the land to enable wealth accumulation (Patel 2015a; Patel

14 See, for instance, the Government of Canada's *Principles Respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples,* which states that "The Government of Canada is committed to achieving reconciliation with Indigenous peoples through a renewed, nation-to-nation, government-to-government, and Inuit-Crown relationship based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership as the foundation for transformative change" (Government of Canada 2018, 3).

15 Examples of recent Government of Canada apologies to Indigenous peoples include those for residential schools, the tuberculosis epidemic among the Inuit, and for hanging Tsilhqot'in chiefs in 1864.

2015b; Patel 2017; Patel 2021a; Patel 2021b).[16] The relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state remains settler colonial because Canada continues to use various methods to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands so as to facilitate settlement and capital accumulation in the form of extraction, mining, forestry, agriculture, tar sands expansion, and pipeline construction, among others.[17]

It became commonplace for state officials to enunciate a reconciliation discourse based on the recognition of rights starting in 1996 with the release of the report of the findings of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples[18] (Green 2015). The few decades leading up to the Idle No More[19] movement of 2012-13 could be characterized by what Coulthard (2014) has referred to as the "politics of recognition." This is a politics whereby the state articulates a discourse that it will provide Indigenous peoples with the recognition of their Indigenous rights. The state enunciates that the recognition of rights will lead to the reconciliation of Indigenous claims of nationhood with settler state sovereignty (Coulthard 2014; Green 2015; Alfred 2018). Practices of rights recognition that flow from this discourse are the dominant means through which reconciliation is advanced in Canada, and Indigenous peoples themselves often articulate reconciliation through recognition of rights as constituting the meaning of signifiers such as "justice" and "decolonization" (Coulthard 2014; Coulthard 2015). Examples of the ways in which Indigenous peoples have reproduced the reconciliation discourse in this way will be provided below. Canadian state institutions similarly articulate reconciliation through the recognition of rights as leading to "decolonization" (Alfred 2013, 44:00). This dominant discourse of reconciliation is largely propagated by the Canadian state, and it generally has the ability to determine the terms by which reconciliation occurs in practice (Coulthard 2014; L. Simpson 2014; A. Simpson 2017).

The reconciliation discourse and the reconciliatory practices that flow from it attempt to make Indigenous peoples' struggles and demands consistent with state sovereignty over them and their lands. This means that Indigenous peoples are reconciling with (1) Canada's

16 Settler colonialism can be contrasted with colonialism, which is a project whereby wealth is extracted from one country by another but in which settlers do not come to stay in the newly colonized territories to engage in ongoing dispossession of the land (Patel 2017; Patel 2021a). British colonialism in India would be an example of colonialism as opposed to settler colonialism.

17 As Leanne Simpson writes, "Colonial governments and settler colonial governments require the taking of land from Indigenous peoples to propel their capitalist economies. Every year, Canada needs more land and more resources, and that comes domestically entirely from Indigenous lands" (2018, 117). Similarly, Snelgrove (2021, 189-190) outlines how the Canadian state can be viewed as structurally dependent on dispossession because of capitalism. For a full discussion, see Coulthard (2014), Coulthard (2018), Alfred (2018, 31:00), Palmater (2021), Gordon (2006).

18 This was a public inquiry that collected Indigenous testimony on topics including the Indigenous–settler relationship, Indigenous lands, and jurisdiction, among others. It was established partly in response to heightened Indigenous decolonial resistance in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

19 Idle No More was a large mobilization of Indigenous peoples and settlers seeking decolonization in Canada. It is the focus of the next section of the paper.

claims to sovereignty over lands they never surrendered and (2) Canada's sovereignty over them as peoples, a sovereignty[20] they never surrendered, by treaty or any other means (Alfred 2009b; Gaudry 2013; Coulthard 2014; Alfred 2016, 5:00).

In this discourse of reconciliation, we have seen that the state articulates apologies for the colonial wrongs that were committed in the past. However, the discourse of state officials never articulates the existence of a settler colonial present, an *ongoing* process of colonialism in Canada (Coulthard 2014). The reconciliatory practices, measures, and processes that flow from this discourse do not include offering Indigenous peoples land restitution in any meaningful way[21] or true self-determination/autonomy/sovereignty, issues that must be addressed for there to be true decolonization (Alfred 2013, 52:00; Coulthard 2014; Alfred 2016, 8:00; Alfred 2018, 25:00). In the same vein, the *Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* did not claim that the persistence of settler colonialism needed to be addressed for reconciliation with Indigenous peoples to occur (Coulthard 2015; Corntassel 2021).

The reconciliation discourse articulates that the priority is for Indigenous subjects to heal from harm suffered from *past* colonial actions, rather than addressing the current settler colonial relationship (Coulthard 2014; Alfred 2015; Cook, 2018). Canada prioritizes addressing Indigenous pain and trauma by managing with those issues on an individual basis rather than by dealing with the collective loss that Indigenous peoples face, and which fuels the same psychic disorders. Making amends for collective loss would require structural changes involving settler colonialism and land restitution for Indigenous nations (Alfred 2009a; Alfred 2013, 20:00; L. Simpson 2018).

The state discourse of reconciliation articulates colonialism as merely an isolated and temporary event that happened long ago. For instance, on the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in October 2021, Prime Minister Trudeau spoke of colonialism as an "evil that we did in the past" (Maloney 2021). Similarly, he and his government also commonly refer to colonialism as having legacy socioeconomic effects in terms of poverty, health issues, and other disparities in the present because of its occurrence in the past (e.g., Wilson-Raybould 2017b; Trudeau 2017; Hanson 2021). While these socioeconomic

20 In this paper, when the term "sovereignty" is applied to Indigenous polities, it must be understood that Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty often do not embrace the state. Such conceptions are more commonly about relationality rather than centralized government and political domination (see Fortier 2017, 78-9).

21 In October 2021, newly appointed Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations Marc Miller gave a speech where he articulated that there had been "land theft" by the Crown and that it was time to "give land back" (Forester and Needham 2021). Only time will tell if this indicates that Crown practices will change or if this is merely an effort by the Crown to co-opt the language of radical Indigenous movements so as to make the dominant discourse more stable and capable of pacifying resistance to continued colonialism. Given that settler colonialism is a structure premised on land acquisition, the second scenario is more likely. Indeed, comments Minister Miller gave about tackling land issues on December 7, 2021, indicate that no new important land reform processes will be developed (see Needham 2021). Moreover, in May 2022, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau dodged questions from a reporter who had asked if Canada exists on stolen land. It seems that the Prime Minister may disagree with Miller regarding perceptions of land theft, making land reform unlikely under his government (McSheffrey 2022). This is something that future research can explore.

issues are clearly the result of *ongoing* settler colonial processes and violence, there is a state articulation in which colonial violence is isolated to the past; in turn, this denial of present-day colonialism helps to facilitate it by promoting ignorance of it (Cook 2018). Another example occurred in 2017, when then Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould articulated in reference to Canada and Australia that "[o]ur countries are both still coming to terms with our colonial pasts…our post-colonial countries are stronger and more successful for embracing reconciliation" (Wilson-Raybould 2017a). The reconciliation narrative of the state is silent on the central wrong, settler colonial land theft and destruction of Indigenous sovereignty, because the state does not want to encourage discussion of those issues or broader decolonial structural change (James 2017).

The settler colonial state aims to make itself discursively invisible in an effort to hide its persistent colonial operations from settlers who, should they become knowledgeable of ongoing colonialism, might come to sympathize with Indigenous decolonial resistance (Cook 2018). Therefore, because of its false representations of the colonial world, the dominant discourse will only ever lead to state actions (such as rights recognition) that reduce the intensity of colonialism while the latter recurs (Coulthard 2014). Through its representations, the discourse is successful because it ultimately leads to practices that bring many Indigenous peoples to reconcile with a state that engages in ongoing and updated colonial practices in relation to Indigenous peoples and their lands, thus reconciling with colonialism (Coulthard 2014; L. Simpson 2014).[22] An example of such Indigenous reconciling with the state is seen in the number of Indigenous peoples in Canada who are engaging with the state to secure self-government agreements, economic development agreements, land claims settlements, and other forms of rights recognition.

Because of the reconciliatory practices that flow from the reconciliation discourse, it could be said that its purpose is to pacify Indigenous people into believing that real change is happening because of the recognition of rights. It provides a semiotic understanding of state policy (rights recognition = decolonization) that leads to the co-optation of many Indigenous people, thereby blunting and subduing their movements for land and sovereignty.[23] This is evidenced in how Indigenous resistance has weakened in Canada when the reconciliation discourse has been dominant.[24] Because of the number of Indigenous peoples who are struggling for mere rights recognition, the reconciliation discourse has

22 Snelgrove (2021) provides an analysis of critical Indigenous literature on reconciliation and notes how, for some, reconciliation is a trick to keep Indigenous peoples in their place so that dispossession and extraction can continue.

23 For a full discussion, see Coulthard (2014), L. Simpson (2014), Alfred (2009), Alfred (2016, 22:00), and James (2017).

24 There were countless occupations and blockades in Canada in the late 1980s and early 1990s, before the reconciliation discourse became dominant. This included the Oka crisis in Quebec (1990), where the Mohawk nation of Kanesatake engaged in a long standoff with the police and military to prevent further development on their lands (Coulthard 2014). Of course, this is not to ignore those Indigenous movements against colonial dispossession ongoing today, such as the Wet'suwet'en resisting pipeline construction in British Columbia and Six Nations resistance to dispossession in Southern Ontario.

been able to constitute the meaning of the "Indigenous struggle" subject position in such a way that it signifies merely the struggle for rights. The discourse therefore supports rather than dismantles colonialism (Starblanket 2019); as Alfred (2011) states, "reconciliation is surrender" (43:00). Leanne Simpson (2018) argues that settler colonialism is always updating its processes to make it seem like things are changing. Currently, the settler colonial state (1) enunciates a reconciliation discourse and (2) establishes commissions and inquiries to inquire into Indigenous issues, reconciliation processes and standing meetings with national Indigenous representative organizations. These new processes make settler colonialism appear kinder and gentler so as help neutralize resistance (L. Simpson, 2018). The discourse and related practices are examples of the "politics of distraction": They encourage Indigenous peoples to engage in negotiating rights with the Crown, where small gains are made, while the same process distracts Indigenous agendas from the real decolonial struggle for land and political authority (Corntassel 2012).

The reconciliation discourse makes the colonial state and society appear more just; in this sense, it prevents Indigenous peoples from viewing them as their adversary—their constitutive outside, their Other. These had been seen as the adversary by the militant Indigenous movements resisting colonialism in the late 1980s and early 1990s[25] (Alfred and Lowe 2006; Alfred 2009b; Alfred 2016, 35:00-42:00). Many Indigenous identities shifted because of a change in the articulation of the Other. Indigenous peoples saw colonial institutions as less of a threat and thus accepted reconciling with them, thereby not defining themselves in opposition to them.

"Reconciliation" and Floating Signifiers

Mouffe (2018b) outlines how articulation allows people to make sense of the world, providing their world with meaning, which then leads to real-world practices and politics. The articulation of the reconciliation discourse does precisely this in the way it gives meaning to important floating signifiers that provide understandings of the world. We have seen how it brings Indigenous peoples to understand "reconciliation" (through the recognition of rights) as "decolonization." Decolonization therefore comes to be understood as not requiring that issues be addressed related to the settler-colonial structure and the theft of Indigenous lands (Coulthard 2014).[26] The reconciliation practices that flow from the rec-

25 See footnote 15.

26 Further examples can help to demonstrate how the state's reconciliation discourse articulates "decolonization" to mean much less than land restitution. For instance, in 2016, Prime Minister Trudeau announced that his government was initiating a review of federal laws and policies so as to "decolonize" them (De Souza 2016). The examples he gave of this process included closing economic gaps and improving health care (De Souza 2016). Trudeau attempted to discursively frame decolonization as something requiring very limited state actions, as a process that can flow from small government programs and services (Alfred and Tomkins 2010). Moreover, closing socioeconomic gaps through government programs merely aims to enable Indigenous peoples to succeed or even assimilate into the wider settler society (Walter and Andersen 2013). This begs the question: Can or would colonial institutions ever end colonialism?

onciliation discourse will therefore serve to absolve those who committed land theft. As alluded to above, because historic and ongoing colonialism is in fact premised on the theft of land, true decolonization cannot happen without land restitution (Tuck and Yang 2012; Coulthard 2014; Alfred 2016, 8:00; Coulthard 2018). The ability of this discourse to absolve those guilty of land theft is a further example of it being a pacifying discourse.

In this same discourse, the right to "self-determination" that colonized Indigenous peoples have long sought in order to obtain control over their own destiny as self-determining or even sovereign nations free from colonial authority (Alfred and Tomkins 2010; Miner 2015) is articulated in relation to "self-government." This latter signifier works to temporarily suture the meaning of the floating signifier "self-determination." As Trudeau articulated in his 2017 speech to the United Nations General Assembly, his government sees the "implementation of self-government as an expression of self-determination" (Trudeau 2017). However, the self-government that Trudeau's government is offering Indigenous peoples through the modern treaty process and recent self-government agreements amounts to merely municipal-style powers that give Indigenous peoples little meaningful control over their own lives.

Indigenous peoples in Canada have long sought nation-to-nation relationships with the Crown because the numbered treaties that were signed by the Crown with First Nations were international agreements between sovereigns (Alfred 2009b; Gaudry 2013; Asch 2014; Barker 2014). At no point did First Nations see themselves as submitting to Canadian sovereignty through the treaties. However, the treaties have been interpreted to mean the latter by the Crown (Asch 2014; Barker 2014; Gaudry 2016). For First Nations, the treaties were about creating an alliance between sovereign nations where they would be interdependent and share the land, with each nation not subjugating the other (Gaudry 2013; Asch 2014; Barker 2014; Gaudry and Lorenz 2018). This understanding of the nation-to-nation relationship is clearly opposed to the conception of Indigenous nations existing within a single sovereign state, with the (Canadian) sovereign having relations with those subservient nations and the latter in turn governed by the jurisdiction of Canada. This model characterizes the "nation-to-nation" relationship as articulated in the reconciliation discourse, and is exemplified by the current relationship between the federal Crown and the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), and the Métis National Council (MNC; Asch 2014; Pasternak 2014). This is despite the fact that, when Trudeau entered office in 2015, his mandate letter to his Minister of Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs called for a renewal of the nation-to-nation relationship with Indigenous peoples (Trudeau 2015). Thus, the reconciliation discourse is rearticulating the "nation-to-nation" floating signifier so as to narrow its meaning. A more progressive meaning would include the notion that Indigenous nations have sovereignty and a land-base.

I mentioned above how many Indigenous peoples have come to embrace this discourse on reconciliation and view it as constituting decolonization. The success of a discourse can be evidenced when a great number of subjects reproduce it. Below, I provide some concrete examples of its reproduction by Indigenous peoples. Former AFN National Chief Bellegarde (2016) accepted the idea of the nation-to-nation relationship as articulated

by Trudeau's government. The same can be said for former MNC Vice-President David Chartrand (see Baxter 2021), who articulated it the same way. In fact, very few national Indigenous leaders articulate the nation-to-nation relationship as being an international relationship between sovereigns (Alfred 2011, 34:00). Chartrand has called for the Métis Nation to reconcile with Canada's sovereignty through the recognition of rights (Sauders and Dubois 2019) and has referred to Trudeau as the "reconciliation champion" (see Bernard 2019). Moreover, in September 2021, then MNC President Clément Chartier noted that "decolonization [is] well under way in Canada" (Chartier 2021). He had earlier articulated that Trudeau's government represents "reconciliation in action" (see APTN National News 2019).[27] These leaders were clearly identifying with subject positions in the reconciliation discourse. Trudeau has been so impressed with Métis leadership support of his reconciliation model that, in 2019, he referred to his relationship with the Métis "as the model of what reconciliation can be, tangibly and concretely" (APTN National News 2019).

The AFN has embraced the recognition/reconciliation discourse more or less consistently since the 1970s (Coulthard 2014). During the federal election of 2019, the AFN released its elections priorities document, which called for a need to "maintain the momentum" achieved by the Trudeau government in addressing First Nations issues, including recognition of rights (AFN 2019). The document did not address the need for large-scale land reform, exemplifying the politics of distraction perfectly. When in office, Bellegarde commonly used his public addresses to express support for the Liberal Party of Canada (e.g., Bellegarde 2019, 20:00-25:00). Similarly, in 2021, the newly elected AFN National Chief RoseAnne Archibald discussed "the legacy of colonialism and paternalism historically exercised by the government of Canada" (see Stranger 2021), relegating colonialism to the past.

Counter-hegemonic Discourses

Gaudry and Hancock (2012) have spoken of the importance of critiquing the representations created by dominant discourses that flow from the ongoing colonial project. In this section, I will explore how there are other discourses that attempt to subvert or deconstruct the dominant discourse. They do so by articulating reconciliation in relation to other signifiers, such as "land," "justice," "jurisdiction," and protection from "gendered violence." In this way, this section sheds light on the silences of the reconciliation discourse.

Kim Tallbear (in Harp 2021, 33:00) has discussed how reconciliation can hold different meanings to different people in Indigenous politics, arguing that it is polysemic and never closed. Simpson (2014) articulates reconciliation as requiring the ending of settler colonialism. Moreover, various thinkers, including Coulthard (2014), Alfred (2009b, 2015, 2016, 9:00), Corntassel (2021, 2012), Palmater (2018b), and McIvor (2021), argue

27 It is also worth noting that, in 2018, Chartier argued that he could not support Bill C-262, a bill to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Canadian law because its backer, Member of Parliament Romeo Saganash (who is First Nations), had used an expletive when questioning the Prime Minister's commitment to Indigenous rights (Barrera 2018). The Hon. Saganash had stood up in Parliament and asked, "Why doesn't the prime minister just say the truth and tell indigenous peoples that he doesn't give a fuck about their rights?" (Zimonjic 2018).

that reconciliation requires land restitution and self-determination, which some of these thinkers view as constituting the meaning of "justice."[28] Other components of reconciliation can include financial transfers and compensation for injustices (Alfred 2009b; Palmater 2018b; Green 2019). For some, reconciliation would involve Indigenous constitutional jurisdiction in Canada[29] or even Indigenous sovereignty (e.g., Palmater 2018b).

A return to the original international treaty relationship in which Indigenous peoples envisioned retaining their sovereignty and sharing the land with the Crown is another articulation of reconciliation (Mackey 2016; Perley and Peach 2018).[30] Going further, Alicia Elliott (2017) points out that reconciliation should perhaps be replaced with "restoration" of Indigenous nations, cultures, languages, and lands.[31]

Palmater (2018b) and Maracle (in Winsa 2017) have articulated reconciliation in relation to protection from both settler violence and sexualized violence, control over one's body, and the elimination of the theft of Indigenous children by child welfare agencies. They also see it including being able to protect Indigenous lands from environmental destruction. For Pasternak (2018, 2:00), Palmater (2018b), and McIvor (2021), reconciliation is also about Indigenous peoples being able to consent to economic development projects taking place in their territories.[32]

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28 Similarly, Joyce Green (2019) writes that land theft is the most significant wrong the Canadian state must take responsibility for and that it is the absence of this that demonstrates the limits of reconciliation in Canadian public policy. Snelgrove (2021) can be referenced for further discussion of Indigenous models and critiques of reconciliation.

29 Manuel (2017) discusses how the best model for reconciliation would be to make First Nations governments a distinct order of government in Canada, with jurisdictional powers akin to those of the provinces enshrined in the Canadian Constitution (Manuel 2017). The Crown would properly fund those governments, and they would be provided with a large resource base with full control over resource development on those lands (Manuel 2017). Green (2019) agrees that Indigenous constitutional jurisdiction would promote reconciliation.

30 More recently, Snelgrove (2021) has discussed the incompatibility of reconciliation with settler colonialism and supports Indigenous interpretations of treaty as a possible path away from settler colonialism towards coexistence with non-Indigenous people, decolonization, freedom, and an end to capitalism. He seems to envision this model of decolonization as moving away from state sovereignty, implying that he rejects reconciliation with state sovereignty. His model would involve the negotiation of new treaties between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people involved in anti-capitalist, anti-racist, and environmental struggle.

31 In a similar vein, Lewis (2017) articulates that reconciliation should instead be about settlers reconciling themselves with Indigenous-determined projects of resurgence that create Indigenous governance outside of the settler-controlled state. This relates to Alfred's (2016, 31:00) emphasis that what reconciliation must include is non-Indigenous Canadians becoming reconciled to how they are in an unjust position in relation to Indigenous peoples and the land.

32 When elected in 2015, Trudeau argued that Indigenous peoples did not have such a veto over resource development projects. This is despite the promise he made while campaigning that they would have such a veto (APTN National News 2016). Indeed, his government later developed a series of *Principles Respecting the Government of Canada's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples*, which state that the Government of Canada "aims to secure…free, prior, and informed consent" from Indigenous peoples (Government of Canada 2018, 12). Every reader should understand that aiming to secure consent is not the same thing as consent.

With these counter-hegemonic discourses, the floating signifier "reconciliation" is articulated with other signifiers such as "land," "justice," "consent," "equality," "compensation," "freedom from violence," "political authority," and "environmental protection." This provides the "reconciliation" signifier with a new and more progressive signified than it had in the dominant discourse of reconciliation, which sees reconciliation as largely rights recognition. This helps to destabilize the dominant discourse, which creates a false narrative that we are swiftly transitioning away from colonialism.

Next, I will explore "Idle No More" as a specific example of a counter-hegemonic discourse on reconciliation.

The Discourse of Idle No More: From Reconciliation to Resurgence

The dominant discourse on reconciliation varies in effectiveness in terms of co-opting Indigenous struggle and manufacturing consent to colonialism. In 2012, the Idle No More (INM) social movement emerged following the articulation of the INM discourse and the #IdleNoMore hashtag on social media by a small group of Indigenous women and allies in Saskatchewan.[33] It provides an example of how articulation is constitutive of reality, of a people, and of identity, as discussed in more detail below. It soon became the largest mobilization of Indigenous peoples in modern Canadian history (L. Simpson 2018), involving demonstrations across the country and countless blockades of roads and transport infrastructure.

The INM discourse was initially enunciated in reaction to some of the harmful legislative initiatives of then Prime Minister Stephen Harper (Pasternak and Dafnos 2017, 296). However, in the larger picture, it indicated that Indigenous peoples had grown disillusioned with a discourse that posited that the politics of recognition (i.e. reconciliation through the mere recognition of rights) would improve their condition and lead to decolonization. INM can be understood as a struggle for land and sovereignty, thereby demonstrating the failures of the pacifying function of the dominant reconciliation discourse (Barker 2014; Coulthard 2014; Lewis 2017). Speaking in the wake of INM, Leanne Simpson (2014) noted that reconciliation made it appear like things were improving for Indigenous peoples, when in reality they were getting worse, with their lands never having been under so much colonial pressure.

Taiaiake Alfred was the first Indigenous scholar to discuss resurgence, arguing that it should replace reconciliation (Alfred 2015; Alfred 2016, 42:00; Coburn 2016; Alfred 2018). He finds reconciliation problematic because it entails reconciling with both colonialism and the colonial state (Alfred 2009; Alfred 2015; Alfred 2016, 16:00). In contrast to reconciliation, resurgence consists of Indigenous peoples decolonizing (through land restitution) and living Indigenous lifeways on their lands, where they have autonomous or sovereign control using principles of Indigenous governance and their autonomy is defended from settler

33 For a full discussion, see Raynauld, Richez, and Morris (2018), Harp (2020a), and Harp (2020b).

efforts of disruption. INM was a grassroots movement for such a resurgence.[34] Through resurgence, settler colonialism is dismantled, and politically independent, land-based, and non-capitalist Indigenous economies are rebuilt (M. Elliott 2017; Lewis 2017; Simpson 2018; Mills 2018). It involves a return to non-coercive, non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, and autonomous Indigenous spaces and ways of organizing society (L. Simpson, 2011).[35]

INM was not a protest movement for greater inclusion or the participation of Indigenous peoples within the institutions of the Canadian state (Barker 2015; Melançon 2018). Instead, it was a movement of dissent and resurgence that sought self-determination and sovereignty and strove to return Canada to the original nation-to-nation relationship of the treaties (Barker 2015; Melançon 2018).

Through its articulation and construction of Indigenous peoples' reality, the discourse of INM positioned the Indigenous subject in opposition to settler colonialism, the colonial state, and colonial society (Coburn 2016; Balaton-Chrimes and Stead 2017). The INM discourse constructed an antagonism, with these colonial institutions becoming a constitutive outside, impeding Indigenous peoples from realizing their full identities, while simultaneously constituting their identities. Indigenous peoples need homelands to continue their land-based cultures and identities. Fully realizing this would require lands to be returned, something that cannot be accomplished within settler colonialism because, as we have seen, the ultimate goal of the latter is removing Indigenous peoples from the land to as to facilitate economic development (L. Simpson 2014; Alfred 2016, 5:00).

The INM discourse served to disarticulate moments of the reconciliation discourse and rearticulate them to signify something much more substantive than they had signified in the reconciliation discourse. The floating signifiers it rearticulated include "decolonization," "self-determination," and "nation-to-nation." "Decolonization" came to mean not mere rights recognition but the return of lands and political power. "Self-determination" came to mean something more akin to sovereignty as opposed to mere municipal-style self-government. "Nation-to-nation" came to signify a relationship between sovereigns, and "reconciliation" came to mean something more like "resurgence."

This analysis demonstrates that an Indigenous antagonism ("Indigenous struggle" in this case), as with every antagonism, is a floating signifier that can be articulated in different ways, thereby acquiring different meanings (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). The articulation of "Indigenous struggle" in one discourse can be subverted and articulated in new ways in other discourses (Laclau and Mouffe 2001). In the INM discourse, "Indigenous struggle" became rearticulated to mean something much more progressive or radical than it did in the reconciliation discourse, where we have seen that it was merely a struggle for rights. In INM, it came to mean the return of land (decolonization), the (international) treaty relationship, and sovereignty, among others things.

34 For a full discussion, see Alfred (2018, 38:00), Alfred (2015), Alfred and Corntassel (2005, 613), L. Simpson (2018), and Barker (2015).

35 Unfortunately, new discourses are emerging that are rearticulating resurgence to mean very narrow goals, such as mere Indigenous inclusion or the facilitation of the learning of Indigenous language and culture (see L. Simpson, 2018).

It is also important to explore the broad settler involvement and support for INM (Barker 2015). At approximately 5% of the total Canadian population, the Indigenous population is too small to be an effective force for decolonial change on its own, and settler allies may be crucial for success (Coulthard 2013a; Lukacs 2021). As has been illustrated, it is through discourse that different actors develop a common identity by reference to something external that is articulated and constituted in the discourse (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Mouffe 2018b). The articulation of the INM discourse led a broad segment of the Canadian public to support Indigenous resurgence (Lukacs 2019).[36] INM was a social movement with a broad range of social actors in which the different social agents were floating signifiers that perceived one external threat (colonialism) as menacing the identity of each. Without this external threat articulated in a discourse, these kinds of groups will not come together, but, when they do come together, their identity is constituted and they become a collective political subject. Their identities are not pre-given (Marchant 2013; Laclau and Mouffe 2001). Through the discourse of INM, Indigenous and settler actors developed a common identity, being moulded into a collective political subject by reference to colonialism. The discourse of INM was therefore counter-hegemonic.

In this sense, INM is a prime example of how an Indigenous social movement is not an empirical referent constituted outside of discourse. Indigenous social movements are constituted through discourse in the sense that *the discourse moulds and constructs the relations between subjects* (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Laclau 2018). When a discourse is initially constructed, the actors and the adversary (named as a signifier) of those actors to which it is referring do not have presence in the world as pre-given groups. Instead, the actors are discursively placed into categories within a narrative that simultaneously articulates and thus constructs the classification of an adversary or an opponent (not necessarily an enemy) of their identities. A story unites the actors as a group. In this sense, the political practice of articulation constitutes the interests that it is attempting to represent, and then represents them (Laclau and Mouffe 2001; Mouffe 2013; Bernard-Wills 2012). This speaks to how all antagonisms concerning Indigenous peoples are discursively constructed. Given these insights, it can be said that the discourse of INM constituted the identities and interests of certain settlers, who later became represented in the movement.

It is also worthwhile exploring INM in relation to identification. We have seen that there are no essential identities but only identification (Laclau and Zac 1994, 23, 37; Mouffe 2018b, Ch. 4). We as subjects are always trying to find a signifier to represent us and express our identity (through identification) in the symbolic order. In a Lacanian sense, this speaks to the lack in each subject, whereby the subject is continually striving to establish a fully achieved identity through identification. In this process of subjectification, the subject identifies with different subject positions (i.e. signifiers) in a discourse in an attempt to fill its lack and represent it in the symbolic order. Through subjectification one

36 Settler involvement in resurgence can be viewed as an argument against those theorists who view resurgence as "separatist" and pessimistic and therefore questionable because it privileges "isolationism" and "separatism" over interdependence and solidarity with settlers (for a full discussion, see Snelgrove [2021]).

becomes somebody.[37] Thus, the enunciation of discourse leads to identification, which leads to subjectivity; identification creates a subject (Mouffe 2018b). Articulation therefore constitutes and changes subject positions and subjectivity (Howarth 2000; Mouffe 2018b). For example, in Marxist discourse, the proletariat is a signifier with which one can identify, and it is given its meaning in that discourse. The proletarian secures his/her identity in opposition to the capitalist class (the constitutive outside), with the struggle between the capitalist class and the proletariat being constituted though the discourse. Similarly, in the INM discourse, Indigenous peoples increasingly identified with a form of indigeneity that resisted mere recognition and incorporation into Canadian sovereignty, while settlers came to identify with being decolonial. These identities required the constitutive outside of colonialism, the colonial state, and colonial society to form. The counter-hegemonic discourse of INM achieved de-identification with the dominant discourse's subject positions. Moreover, that settlers joined the INM struggle speaks to the non-essential character of working-class identity discussed above, with workers being able to participate in a plurality of subject positions within the country's cultural and institutional apparatus (Laclau and Mouffe 2001).

However, INM's challenge to the dominant reconciliation discourse was disrupted, with INM protests and settler interest in Indigenous issues plummeting by mid-2013 (Barker 2015). The movement became reconcilable with the politics of recognition. The dominant discourse of reconciliation re-emerged in 2013 with increased strength in the enunciations of the Liberal Party of Canada under the leadership of Justin Trudeau. It was almost immediately after the release of the "94 Calls to Action" of the TRC in June 2015 that Trudeau promised to fully implement all 94 in his first term in office (Jewell and Mosby 2019).[38] Moreover, in Trudeau's 2015 electoral campaign and as Prime Minister, he repeatedly articulated that his most important relationship was that with Indigenous peoples (e.g. Trudeau 2015). The reconciliatory discourse of Trudeau brought many settler and Indigenous identities to become reconstituted. Many Indigenous peoples who had identified with subject positions in the INM discourse came to reidentify with reconciliatory subject positions in the discourse of Trudeau and became less resistant in that process. Trudeau's discourse would reconstruct their interests and pacify them, rendering them more amenable to supporting and participating in the institutions of the settler colonial Canadian state. For many Indigenous peoples, his discourse meant that colonial institutions no longer played the role of the Other.

Between 2012 and 2018, the number of Indigenous members of the Liberal Party of Canada multiplied by a factor of fourteen. Because of Trudeau's reconciliation discourse, being a member of the Liberal Parry of Canada was clearly one subject position that some Indigenous people had come to identify with (Lukacs 2019; see also Lukacs 2021).

37 For a full discussion of this process, see Laclau and Zac (1994), Laclau and Mouffe (2001), Torfing (1999), Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000), and Smith (1998).

38 Snelgrove (2021, 53) also discusses how a government discourse of reconciliation was used in the wake of the legitimation crisis caused by Idle No More.

Indigenous voter turnout in the 2015 federal election also increased dramatically over that in previous elections (Martens 2019), while on-reserve voter support for the Liberals increased from 12.9% in 2011 to 40.5% in 2015 (Grenier 2020).

Analytical Conclusion

Laclau and Mouffe used the term "hegemony" to describe a situation where a dominant discourse is established whose interpretation of the world is perceived as "common sense" and truthful, limiting what is thinkable and say-able (Herschinger 2019). This article has provided a unique application of the theoretical tools of these two highly original thinkers to explore how the Canadian state has attempted to create hegemony by articulating a dominant discourse on reconciliation. We have seen that, through the reconciliation discourse, colonialism uses the articulation of the recognition of rights to represent itself as its opposite, as decolonization.

Counter-hegemonic discourses are enunciated by various actors in the Canadian body politic that attempt to disrupt or even deconstruct this dominant discourse. Laclau defined power as identity because the latter can affirm itself only by challenging what threatens it (the Other; Laclau 1990). Power is by definition what creates a constitutive outside, the Other, and is therefore what constructs identity (Torfing 1999). Laclau argued that we cannot have a society without power because we cannot have a society without identity. He conceptualized social transformation as being about building new power/identity (Laclau 1990). I have examined how such social transformation has occurred in Canadian Indigenous politics through the articulation of competing discourses that make the world intelligible and meaningful, constitute identity, construct antagonisms, and lead to real-world practice and politics. Idle No More is a prime example of a counter-hegemonic discourse that reconstituted Indigenous identity.

I will close with a consideration of future avenues for research. It appears that, as Trudeau's time in power has continued, Indigenous people have identified less and less with subject positions in the reconciliation discourse based on the recognition of rights. This could be in part because of his slow progress on implementing the TRC Calls to Action, his high level of litigation against Indigenous rights, and the lack of land reform under his government. In the place of reconciliation, a new discourse of "Land Back" has emerged, which seems to signify what I have referred to as "resurgence" and a rejection of the politics of recognition in this paper. Future research can explore this discourse and its strategy of articulation in relation to floating signifiers. Such research can also explore its ability to challenge the dominant discourse of reconciliation.

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