
Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017. 320 pp. ISBN 978-1-5179-0386-2.

<https://www.upress.umn.edu/book-division/books/as-we-have-always-done>.

Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer, and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's latest book continues the work of *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* in articulating and recentering Indigenous radical resurgence. *As We Have Always Done* holds Indigenous freedom as a guiding vision and manifesto, initially posing the brilliantly human question "what does it mean for me, as an Nishnaabekwe, to live freedom?" (7). Simpson goes on to detail the powerfully complex and multifaceted relational, ethical, reciprocal, procedural, and embodied answers that come from a deep engagement with Nishnaabewin, the "lived expression of Nishnaabeg intelligence" (25) or Nishnaabeg ways of being, and Biiskabiyang, the decolonial, resurgent, and embodied processes of return, reengagement, reemergence, and unfolding from the inside out. In her own words, "This is a manifesto to create networks of reciprocal resurgent movements with other humans and nonhumans radically imagining their ways out of domination, who are not afraid to let those imaginings destroy the pillars of settler colonialism" (10). Simpson recenters Indigenous political resistance, not as a response to the settler colonial state, but instead as an act and process of Indigenous nation-building.

Simpson enacts Nishnaabewin in her writing by reinscribing kwe (woman within a spectrum of gender variance) as method, refusing to separate body and life from research or "be tamed by whiteness or the academy" (33). The knowledge she shares is generated from different practices than those centered in the academy. She instead centers Nishnaabewin knowledge generated through the kinetics of place-based practices that produce both heart and mind intelligence. She seamlessly weaves together Nishnaabeg stories, teachings from her Elders Doug Williams and Edna Manitowabi, lived experiences and realities, relationality to other Indigenous theorists, and examples of resurgence. In this way, the experience of reading is cyclical and generative as ideas appear, reappear, and overlap in various contexts and modes in relationship to each other, navigating the reader through interconnected networks of Nishnaabewin knowledge.

Through this journey, two main principles of Indigenous radical resurgence emerged for me: the practice of reciprocal recognition and the practice of generative refusal. Reciprocal recognition starts with knowing and expressing "who we are" (67) as Nishnaabeg and Indigenous peoples, through Nishnaabewin and grounded normativity. Simpson recurrently draws upon Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard's concept of grounded normativity as a procedural, lived, and engaged nation and place-based ethical framework. From this place of internal and grounded intelligence and ethics, Simpson presents a simple but radical act of love when she advocates for collective reciprocal self-recognition: "the act of making it a practice to see another's light and to reflect that light back to them" (184). This act of reflection and recognition becomes a radical tool of resistance in the context of settler colonialism, because colonialism strategically employs shame as a mode of dispossession.

One of the most powerful images of recognition that Simpson puts forth in the book comes from her “favourite part” of Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson’s work *Mohawk Interuptus*, where Audra interviews a fellow Mohawk about his definition of community membership. His response is simply, “When you look in the mirror, what do you see?” “Genius,” Simpson remarks (179). The image of the mirror reminded me of work done on settler colonial cognitive imperialism and the insidious effects of shame on Indigenous self-identification within colonial structures and institutions, particularly in education. James Sákéj Youngblood Henderson describes the effect of Eurocentric education on Indigenous students as “the realization of their invisibility [...] similar to looking into a lake and not seeing their images” (59). This also echoes what Adrienne Rich has famously described as *physic disequilibrium*, “as if you looked in a mirror and saw nothing” (199). In a complete refusal of the position of victim, Simpson, instead of merely looking for a reflection, embodies the whole mirror: “So at the same time I am looking into the mirror, I also am the mirror” (181). I will assume that Simpson would also advocate for reclaiming the whole lake as part of an intact Indigenous land base, where grounded normativity and Nishnaabewin emerge from and are practiced on. She asks, “What if the driving force in Indigenous politics is self-recognition rather than a continual race around the hamster wheel of settler colonial recognition?” (180).

Refusing settler colonial recognition becomes integral to radical resurgence because, as Simpson explains, colonialism begins from a want for land, but materializes in a series of complex and overlapping processes that maintain expansive dispossession of Indigenous bodies and lands (45). In Nishnaabeg thought the opposite of dispossession is not possession, but consensual attachment – reestablishing reciprocal recognition, reconnecting to networks of relationships to the land, and reenacting Indigenous relationality and thought. Refusing dispossession through attachment generates the alternative to capitalist, white supremacist and heteropatriarchal state control beyond the structures of that control.

This brings us to the second main principle, the embodied act of generative refusal: refusal to participate in colonial structures and processes, and stepping outside or simply leaving as resistance. Through various interwoven threads, Simpson shares the Nishnaabeg story of the Hoof Nation leaving Nishnaabeg territory in reaction to being disrespected and overhunted. They retreat in order to recover, and rebuild before renegotiating terms of treaty with the Nishnaabeg. Actualizing teachings from this story, Simpson asks, “What if no one sided with colonialism?” (177).

The day I was writing this review, I was able to see this type of generative refusal in action. On Feb. 28th, 2018 the Indigenous Students’ Council at the University of Saskatchewan released an official statement calling for Indigenous student non-participation in all of the university’s administrative indigenization and reconciliation efforts. The students are asking for support for Indigenous student autonomy through the creation of an Indigenous Student Union and the renaming of the current Indigenous student centre to the Gordon Oakes Red Bear Indigenous Student Union Building. These students are enacting precisely what Simpson is calling for – generative refusal and reciprocal recognition by building an alternative system outside of the settler colonial structure of the university (and reclaiming space to do so). In part this action is in response to the inaction of the university following the unjust not-guilty court rulings in the deaths of Coulten Boushie (Red Pheasant Cree First Nation) and Tina Fontaine (Sagkeeng First

Nation). While the Boushie and Fontaine families necessarily, strongly, and resiliently fight to seek justice within a system not meant to serve Indigenous peoples, but to uphold the settler colonial state, these students recognize and are putting into action their capacity to envision what it means to refuse recognition from the university and strive for self-recognition outside of the system. As they state, “the greatest resource we have on campus is each other” in this “step toward building a decolonial future.” The work they are doing is inspirational and I stand in full support and solidarity with them.

To pull only these two principles out of the interwoven complexity they are situated within in *As We Have Always Done* does them a great disservice for the purposes of summary. Simpson carefully enmeshes critical interventions and critiques of colonial capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy into the unfolding of these two concepts. She also stresses the necessity of recentering and recovering woman, two-spirit queer, and child identities, because heteronormative policing of sexuality and gender, and the implementation of heteropatriarchy is at the heart of colonial dispossession. Heteronormativity is a tool of colonization used to control bodies and sexualities as sites of sovereignty and political governance that threaten settler claims to land. Simpson also recognizes accountability to the Black communities within Kina Gchi Nishnaabeg ogamig and beyond in a shared struggle against domination.

Ultimately, Simpson beautifully imagines constellations of coresistance – clusters and relational networks of local artistic and political resurgence that “create mechanisms for communication, strategic movement, accountability to each other, and shared decision-making practices” (218). And she encourages what she terms flight paths out of colonial shame and violence that include everyday practices at home, being on the land regardless of colonial divisions of reserve, rural, and urban spaces, claiming collective and private physical space to think, and simply acting with Indigenous presence. In other words, radical resurgence is also normal: “just Indigenous life [...] as we have always done” (247).

Though a necessarily fully immersive read, Simpson’s cerebral and multifaceted theories continually emerge, clarify, and, then slip from grasp, reinforcing process over fixity. The book requires a read, and a reread, and then maybe a reread with friends, but in my opinion is essential for anyone studying any aspect of Indigenous decolonization, politics, law, and settler colonialism, and signals a vital shift away from current neoliberal discussions and policies of indigenization and reconciliation in order to rebuild and recover Indigenous nationhoods.

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A Note to White Readers: I purposefully put this note outside of the main review, because it is a position we need to get used to being in. We do not need to see ourselves in this book. Simpson works to decenter whiteness as a necessary part of working outside of settler colonialism. She offers the humbling and somewhat underhanded advice that real white allies will “show up in solidarity anyway” (231). So, show up anyway - read this book and educate yourself!

Henderson, James Sákéj Youngblood. "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism." *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, edited by Marie Battiste, UBC Press, 2000, pp. 57-76.

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Rich, Adrienne. "Invisibility in Academe." *Blood, Bread, and Poetry: Selected Prose 1979-1985*. Norton, 1986, pp. 198-201.