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# Once were Maoists

## Third World currents in Fourth World anti-colonialism, Vancouver, 1967–1975

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Last year witnessed a publication surge in critical reflections on the lasting significance of the global social and political upheavals of 1968. Among these interventions was the reissue (with a new foreword by #BlackLivesMatter co-founder Alicia Garza) of activist-historian Max Elbaum's *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals Turn to Lenin, Mao and Che* (2018). The book begins by laying out the explosive interplay between the local and global that informed domestic politics on the left in the United States in the decade to follow:

> During the first four months of 1968, the Vietnam Tet Offensive ended Washington's hopes of victory in Southeast Asia, incumbent President Lyndon Johnson was forced to abandon his re-election bid, Martin Luther King was assassinated, and Black rebellions erupted in more than 100 cities. Flames reached within six blocks of the Whitehouse; 70, 000 troops had to be called up across the country to restore order. These jolts punctuated a decade of civil rights organising, anti-war protests, cultural ferment, and youth rebellion that shook the entire country. Looming defeat in Vietnam inspired more challenges to Western imperial power throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America – then commonly termed the 'Third World'. Marxism and anti-imperialist nationalism gained seemingly unstoppable initiative. At home, more US constituencies added their weight to the energized Black community and the early anti-war battalions: youth-led protests surged in Puerto Rican and Chicano communities, an Asian American movement was born, Native Americans revitalized their fight for land and freedom. Women took up the banner of liberation, a new movement for gay and lesbian rights entered the fray. Labor stirred, with more and harder-fought strikes in 1969 and 1970 than in any year since 1946. (1–2)

Ideologically, the post-1968 decade witnessed the rise of a Third World-oriented Marxism on the US left, which according to Elbaum (2018), emerged as an alternative to a state-battered and increasingly out-of-touch 'Old Left' to a new demographic of aspiring young revolutionaries. In contrast to the perceived orthodoxy and whiteness of Old Left institutions, this wave of New Left radicals took inspiration less directly from the Soviet model and trade union activism, and more from the revolutions of Fidel Castro's and Che Guevara's Cuba; from Ho-Chi Minh's North Vietnam and Mao Zedong's China; and from the national liberation struggles of Africa.

This new 'Third World Marxism' was particularly appealing to revolutionaries of colour insofar as it paid heightened attention to the "intersection of economic exploitation and racial oppression" and put opposition to racism at "… the heart of its theory and practice" (3). Although Third World influences on the New Left were diverse during this period, the political force that commanded the most attention was arguably the revolutionary socialism thought to be embodied by the Communist Party of China under the chairmanship of Mao Zedong. Maoism, it was believed at the time, advanced a reinvigorated, grassroots model of socialist internationalism that refused to capitulate to racial capitalism and its mechanisms of violent dissemination: internal colonialism at home and imperialism abroad (Lovell 2019; Frazier 2015; Cook 2014; Wolin 2010; Kelley and Esch 1999). To what ends this understanding was mobilised and to what extent it matched reality will be taken up further below.

Out of all the people of colour political struggles and organisations covered in Elbaum's book – the Revolutionary Action Movement, Black Panthers, Young Lords, Black Liberation Army, the Red Guards, etc. – the struggles of Indigenous peoples receive the least attention. On the one hand, this is interesting to note given that the historical period under scrutiny aligns almost exactly (1968 through to the early 1980s) with many historical accounts of American Indian radicalisation in the United States. What is commonly referred to as 'Red Power', this period of Native American activism is often represented as beginning with either the formation of the American Indian Movement (or AIM) in Minneapolis in 1968 or with the occupation of Alcatraz Island from 1969 to 1971. While this periodisation of Red Power has recently come under scrutiny, in many accounts it stands as almost self-evident (Cobb 2008; Cobb and Fowler 2014; Shreve 2014; Nickel 2019; Lewondowski 2016). On the other hand, the relative absence of Indigenous struggles in *Revolution in the Air* makes sense. Elbaum's book offers a story about the substantive uptake of Marxism by New Left radicals in the US read through and adapted from the decolonisation struggles and anti-imperial politics of the Third World, with an emphasis on the interpretation and application of Maoism to this period and these groups in particular. While the self-determination efforts of the Third World drew many admirers from the ranks of US Red Power, Third World Marxism was less of an influence. Subsequently, although "… a number of individual American Indian activists embraced Marxism", Elbaum notes, "… it seems a consensus that no Marxist cadre groups or organizing collectives formed on an explicitly Marxist basis" (2018: 80).

There are a couple of reasons for this. First, in settler-colonial contexts dispossession serves as a foundational structure underwriting state formation and capital accumulation. Marxists working in contexts like the United States have tended to insufficiently recognise this. Instead, dispossession has been overwhelmingly represented as either a matter of 'the past' or it has been subordinated to the problem of exploited labour. Both serve to ideologically mask the specificity and ongoing nature of colonisation and its constitutive violences in countries like the United States and Canada. Second, many Marxist approaches adhere to a modernist view of historical progress that ranks variation in cultural, social and economic formations in accordance with each form's approximation to an imagined ideal of human development. This, in turn, has historically tended to frame Indigenous cultural, social and economic expressions as either superfluous or material and ideational impediments to progress that need to be abandoned for the sake of Indigenous peoples' own emancipation. These first two tendencies have fueled a significant amount of distrust among Indigenous activists towards Marxism, particularly those organising during the heyday of US Red Power. This skepticism came to a political head after the Sandinista National Liberation Front (SNLF) successfully overthrew the dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza Debayle in Nicaragua in 1979. The success of the Sandinistas threw the Indigenous communities of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast – the Suma, Rama, and Miskito peoples

– into conflict with the communist nation-building project of the SNLF and thus into alliance with the US government's anti-communist foreign policy. Subsequently, many US Red Power activists – particularly high-ups in AIM like Russel Means – felt compelled to choose between "… an anti-Communist pro-indigenous stance, and a pro-Marxist position that subordinated Native rights to the revolutionary project" (Toth 2019: 197; for an in depth discussion of this period, see Dunbar-Ortiz 2016a). In the context of Indigenous peoples' struggles in the United States, these issues have compromised the building of left-Indigenous coalitions and relations of solidarity that might produce a more fruitful exchange between Indigenous and Marxist political traditions. For these conversations we need to look elsewhere.

With this in mind, the following will provide an alternate history of Red Power radicalisation and Indigenous-Marxist cross-fertilisation, one that reorients our gaze away from the dominance of US narratives and towards the struggles of Indigenous nations on the West Coast of Canada during the late 1960s and 1970s. More specifically, I focus on the political work undertaken by a small but dedicated cadre of Native militants going by the name Native Alliance for Red Power (or NARP), the Native Study Group (NSG), and the Native Women's Liberation Front (NWLF) in Vancouver, British Columbia (BC), between 1967 and 1975. Through their examples, I show that Red Power advocates drew profound inspiration from the decolonisation struggles of the Third World and, like many radicalised communities of colour during this this period, molded and adapted the insights they gleaned from these struggles abroad into their own critiques of capitalism, patriarchy, and internal colonialism at home. I argue that these critiques borrowed substantively and productively from a Third World-adapted Marxism that provided an appealing international language of solidarity and political contestation that they not only inherited but sought to radically transform through a critical engagement with their own cultural traditions and land-based struggles.

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NARP was established in Vancouver in the late fall of 1967 after a meeting was called by Indigenous women in response to a controversial trial involving the rape and murder of a Native teenager, Rose Marie Roper, by three white men near Williams Lake, BC (Bobb 2012; see also Backhouse 2008). According to NARP founding members, Henry Jack and Geraldine Larkin (hereafter Gerry Ambers), the rank and file of NARP was originally drawn from a cross-section of the growing urban Indigenous population, including men and women, ex-convicts, high school drop-outs, a few academics and university students, as well as Native working class folks who either lived in or had recently migrated to the city from more rural communities (Jack 1974; Ambers 2019: personal communication). While active, NARP would grow to include chapters in most major Native urban centres across BC: Vancouver, Port Alberni, Ashcroft, Kamloops, Victoria, and Duncan (Bell 1969). In its early days, members would meet weekly in the form of small discussion-groups anywhere that space could be found – at member's apartments, in bars, diners, Indian Friendship Centres, and the offices of leftist and communist organisations: "[w]e were a green bunch with only one idea in mind", recalls Henry Jack (1974) of NARP's founding, "to do something about our appalling conditions instead of just sitting on our asses doing nothing" (119). NARP was thus formed explicitly as a 'direct action' or 'protest group' that sought to represent grassroots issues in ways that its members thought that the emerging state-subsidised First Nation organisations of the day had failed or were failing to do in an urgent enough manner (Bobb 2012).

The political line developed by NARP during its existence was as eclectic and anti-establishment as its youthful membership. Predating both the formation of the American Indian Movement in 1968 and the infamous Alcatraz occupation of 1969–1971, NARP drew critical

inspiration and influence from a combination of Indigenous tradition, the national liberation struggles of the Third World, the women's liberation movement, and the politics of Black Power in the United States (Bobb 2012; 2019: personal communication; Ambers 2019: personal communication).

In terms of Black Power, the most evident political influence on NARP organisers came from the platform and politics of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP), with which NARP members had established an early relationship via its Seattle chapter in 1968 (Ambers 2019: personal communication; Bobb 2019: personal communication). As shared with me by one of NARP's original founders, Kwakwaka'wakw Elder and artist Gerry Ambers, herself and another NARP member, Tony Antoine, felt it important to reach out in solidarity to the newly formed Seattle chapter by contacting the organisation to inform them of their own group and to tell them that they would be willing to sell the Panther newsletter, *The Black Panther*, to help raise money and support the Black liberation struggle in the United States. In response, their Seattle contact suggested that representatives of the two organisations get together to discuss a basis of unity. Subsequently, it was decided that Ambers and Antoine would drive down to Seattle for the sit down, and, upon arrival, were blindfolded by their host and driven around the city until they reached a secure location for the meeting: "I had no idea where we were being taken!", recalled Gerry in our conversation (personal communication). There they met Seattle chapter founder, Arron Lloyd Dixon, who was appointed captain of the chapter in April of 1968 by national BPP co-founder Bobby Seale. According to Ambers, they discussed the importance of their respective organisations' work, their mutual struggles for national liberation, the danger of informants within their movements, and the necessity of organising with an eye to the future and the constantly shifting terrain of their struggles: "[t]he leaders of our movements have to be prophets", Ambers recollected Dixon stressing, "because they need to see what's coming down the road and we have to prepare our people for it" (2019: personal communication). Following the meeting, Ambers and Antoine returned to Vancouver and, along with other core NARP members (Ray Bobb, Willie Dunn, David Hanuse, Henry Jack and Joan Carter) established their own political platform – expressed in its 'eight-point program' – which was borrowed and adapted from the Panther's 'ten-point program' with Party consent (Bobb 2012; 2019 personal communication; Ambers 2019: personal communication). Commenting on the diverse uptake of their platform, Bobby Seale (1969) once stated: ours is a "universal program" and several "ethnic revolutionary groups such as the such as the Mexican American Brown Berets, the Chinese American Red Guards, the Indian NARP, and others have programs similar to ours" (online). Although our "program was written specifically with the basic needs and desires of the Black people in mind," Seale (1969) concludes, "[e]verybody who wants it can have it. It isn't the program of the BPP because we dreamt it up. It is so because it came from the people" (online).

The ten-point program was itself inspired by the global dissemination of Mao's *Little Red Book*, particularly its insistence on the universality any given political line being informed by and tested against the lived reality of the masses in struggle. On the surface, at least, built into Maoism was a theoretical and political versatility particularly suited to its diverse uptake. As Robin DG Kelley and Betsy Esch (1999) explain, central to Maoism:

> is the idea that Marxism can be (must be) reshaped to the requirements of time and place and that practical work, ideas, and leadership stem from the masses in movement not from a theory created in the abstract or produced out of other struggles. (9)

This was incredibly important to burgeoning Black and Brown radicals in the US for it broke with certain tendencies within Western Marxism that tethered the revolutionary potential of

'under-developed' (read: non-Western and/or people of colour) communities to appropriately developed material conditions in the progressive unfolding of history, with presumably white city-dwellers in the lead. Mao's insistence on the revolutionary capacity of the peasantry not being dependent on the proletariat in urbanised centres broke significantly with this developmentalist framework, both in theory and practice (as demonstrated by the success of the Chinese Revolution itself). This was paramount for radicals of colour in the United States because it meant that they need not wait for the development of supposedly "objective material conditions to launch their [own] revolution[s]" (Kelley and Esch 1999: 9).

These political influences distinguish early Red Power travelers of Maoism from its predominantly white followers on the communist left in Canada. As with the United States, the influence of Maoism on the Canadian left was not exported directly from China (Kelley and Esch 1999: 11). Rather, for those previously associated with Old Left institutions like the Communist Party of Canada, the source of Mao's influence can be traced back to the revelations made regarding Stalin's atrocities by Khrushchev in his infamous 1956 speech at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which spawned an 'anti-revisionist' movement among the pro-Stalin left worldwide. The 'first wave' of anti-revisionist organisations in Canada emerged from the debates that animated this global split, many of which turned to Mao as the rightful heir of Stalin's (and Lenin's) true revolutionary legacy. Canada's earliest anti-revisionist groups (formed between 1964 and 1970) included the Progressive Workers Movement, the Canadian Party of Labour, the Canadian Liberation Movement, and the largest of them all, the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist). All of these groups believed that the Chinese model offered Canadian progressives a 'revolutionary alternative' to existing left organisations like the pro-Soviet Communist Party of Canada, the New Democratic Party, as well as Trotskyist and other New Left groups (Canadian Anti-revisionism, no date). NARP's interest in Maoism was informed less by these anti-revisionism debates and more by China's perceived global leadership under Mao (especially between 1955 and 1975) as a material and ideological supporter of the world's 'wretched of the earth' represented by the Non-Aligned and Third World national liberation movements, and by the theoretical innovations that Mao was thought to make to Western Marxist representations of non-Western struggles. Again, here the influences on NARP closely overlap with Kelley and Esch's (1999) findings regarding Mao's impact on radical Black nationalism in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. They write: "China offered black radicals a colored or Third World, Marxist model that enabled them to challenge a White and Western vision of class struggle – a model they shaped and reshaped to suit their own cultural and political realities" (8). In Canada, a similar impact affected Red Power organising.

As a political formation committed to direct action, NARP carried out many activities. If Mao's displacement of the white urban proletariat provided particular inspiration to Black nationalists like the Panthers, this insight, I suggest, was taken even more literally by NARP. Maoism was attractive to its Red Power advocates because it displaced not only the white urban subject but also the *geographical location* of classic accounts of revolutionary struggle from the cities to the countryside, or in this case, *the land*. For NARP co-founder Ray Bobb, in particular, this re-orientation was 'the core' of Mao's attraction: the 'countryside-encirclement-of-the-city' strategy situated Indigenous commitments to land defence as not only a revolutionary act, but also necessary for any effective resistance to the nature of capital accumulation in political economies like Canada's, based significantly, as they are, on extraction. In such contexts, extractivist development projects are foundational to accumulation given three dominant features of our neoliberal condition: the ongoing decline in Canada's domestic manufacturing base, in part due to outsourcing to the Global South for cheap labour and manufacturing sites; geopolitical instabilities resulting in a tempered political aversion (at least stated in words, if

not in deeds) from acquiring desired resources from unstable regions in the world ('dirty oil', 'blood diamonds' etc.); and the aggressive 'turn inward' to devour domestic land and resources through increased extractivism as a result of the first two features. This analysis was made explicit by members of NARP in their evaluation of the oil crisis of the early 1970s and the subsequent demand it created to increase colonial exploration and capitalist development in Denendeh, the homelands of my own people, the Dene (NSG 1976: 5). Dialectically linking the struggles of the Third World to the "colonial character of the capitalist mode of production" in the north, they write:

> The ripening of contradictions and the growth of the struggle in the Middle-East, the main source of oil for imperialism, brought about an energy crisis in the imperialist nations. […] From that time, we could detect an alteration in their profit-making strategy. They re-directed their investments in oil exploration from the Middle-East […] to the imperialist nations. The rationale for this is that the growth of national liberation and social revolution in the Third World was creating an 'unsafe political climate for investment'. Thus, to maintain sources of raw materials it is necessary to find 'safe' areas of investment. The focus for this re-direction is the 'Canadian' north and, by and large, it has already been explored and decisions have been made on the division of the north amongst the various imperialist interests. The only impediment holding up a wholesale corporate invasion is the fact that the north is, and has been for tens of thousands of years, the legitimate domain of native people. It represents the only (or one of the only) vestiges of genuine national territory for native people, wherein they can realize the aspiration to which all peoples are rightfully entitled – nationhood. (5)

And, of course, similar dynamics remain at play today, which is clearly demonstrated in the resistance of the Wet'suwet'en and Secwepemc land defenders against the marked increase in proposed pipeline construction and liquefied natural gas development on their traditional territories. Under such conditions, Indigenous land-based resistance is increasingly being recognised as foundational to large scale social transformation and has subsequently forced state and capital to respond in kind through the production of "new terrorist identities, risk economies, and security networks that will configure colonization and capitalism […] in the years to come" (Pasternak 2016: 117). In short, Maoism's geographical shift in the terrain of anti-capitalist struggle synced well with the century-plus long commitment by Indigenous nations in BC to land defence, which NARP carried forward into the late 1960s and early 1970s via its support for and participation in blockades and land reclamations exemplified by the West Coast Nisqually fishing rights struggles south of the Canadian/US border in the late 60s (which also had a Seattle Panther presence), the Fort Lawton military base occupation in 1970, and the Cache Creek armed blockade in the BC interior in 1974 (Bobb 2012; 2019: personal communication; Ambers 2019: personal communication). To my mind, the significance of these type of Indigenous-led actions are only now getting the theoretical attention they deserve on the non-Native left.

Other forms of self-defence NARP supported included strikes led by students attending residential or boarding schools. They formed a Vancouver inner-city patrol squad called the 'Beothuk Patrol' that intervened into the rampant anti-Native settler and police violence that is still well documented in the neighborhood; and, like the Panthers, they self-published a 'newsletter' (5,000-plus readership) that covered a range of topics, including recruitment for land-based direct actions, general articles pertaining to the Indigenous freedom struggle (including analyses by Red Power theorists like Metis scholar Howard Adams), Native projects with anti-capitalist

forms of economic development, news regarding the successes and failures of national liberation efforts in the Third World, as well as suggested reading lists for its young readership.

As with many radicals during the period, NARP members familiarised themselves with the works of Mao and other Third World theorists (Fanon, Nkrumah, Memmi, etc.) through the formation of a socialist study group in 1971, which they called the Native Study Group. The NSG also had a sister organisation in San Francisco, formed by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz and Robert Mendoza, to apply "Marxian analysis and national liberation theory to the history of colonization of Native Americans in North America". (Dunbar-Ortiz 2016a: 32–3). On Dunbar-Ortiz's account, the Marxism of its study group was also Maoist in orientation (2016b: 80). According to Bobb (2012), the NSG's mandate was to create "theory to the level whereby an organization could be formed to do conscious revolutionary work" (online). The goal of the NSG was thus to combine theory with revolutionary practice, including the establishment of material relations of support and solidarity within and between the 'internal colonies' of the US and Canadian settler-states and the nations of the Third World. Such efforts culminated in a 1975 trip of 18 to the People's Republic of China (PRC), which they titled the Native People's Friendship Delegation (Bobb 2012). The delegation members consisted of men and women, made up of both status and non-status First Nations and Metis delegates. The visit was organised by Lee Bobb (hereafter Lee Maracle), along with three other women. The trip was sponsored and paid for by the Chinese Communist Party, with airfare covered by the delegation through fundraising and personal contributions. On 16 January 1975, China's embassy sent approval for the tour to happen in June, and after a three-week visit, the delegation returned home on 22 June 1975. Although the intentions of the trip varied among its delegates, many, if not most, were intent on learning more about Maoism, the Cultural Revolution, and China's treatment of national minorities.

Upon returning to Canada, the NSG organised fundraising events to continue supporting their political activities, including setting up gatherings to share what they learned during their travels. Typical at these events would be a show of solidarity from local organisations also engaged in the struggle against First World imperialism abroad and internal colonialism at home. Typical organisations would include the Liberation Support Movement (a then Vancouver-based Third World Marxist-Leninist solidarity group), the Black Action Group (a Vancouver-based Black Power organisation), the East Indian Defence Committee, a militant South Asian anti-revisionist organisation formed in Vancouver in 1975), and the Progressive Workers' Movement (an anti-revisionist group which included a NARP member, Gordie Larkin, husband to Gerry Ambers at the time). The San Francisco branch study group also set up similar engagements in California, specifically for Lee Maracle, to lecture on the spirit and intent of the delegation and the possibilities of applying what they learned to an analysis of colonisation and decolonisation in Native North America. The most relevant conceptual takeaway from the PRC trip for Maracle was China's commitment to 'socialism and self-reliance', although in her case articulated through a 'cultural' frame of reference (which she also claimed was inspired by her trip to China). In reflecting on her experience, and what she learned of the relationship between economic self-reliance and cultural empowerment, Maracle wrote:

> [w]e learned that we cannot be alienated from our own culture. We have to develop an understanding of it so we can feel closer to our own roots. In China the minority groups are encouraged to promote their Indigenous culture – to learn and speak their own languages. It is very important if [our] people are going to develop in an equal way, [we must] develop [our] culture as [we] develop [our] economy.
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> *(Maracle cited in Chartier 1975: 6)*

There is admittedly a lot to unpack here. With over 50 years' hindsight, and especially in light of the detail regarding what we know about the liberation struggles of Tibet against Chinese occupation, the argument that the Cultural Revolution or Chinese communism was a diversity-affirming movement for Indigenous and national minorities is largely unsustainable. But what about at the time? There are two issues to consider that would have made Maracle's observation slightly less controversial than they appear today. First, as the work of Kelly and Esch (1999), Robeson Frazier (2015), and (in a less sympathetic tone) Julia Lovell (2019) have all shown, significant resources were dumped into what was essentially a post-Sino-Soviet split global public relations campaign by the Chinese Communist Party to represent itself as *the* revolutionary alternative to the Soviet Union for people of colour the world over:

> [i]n an age when the Cold War helped usher in the nonaligned movement, with leaders of the 'colored' world converging in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955 to try and chart an independent path toward development, the Chinese hoped to lead the former colonies on the road to socialism.
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> *(Kelley and Esch 1999: 9)*

Kelley and Esch (1999) go on: "[t]he Chinese […] not only endowed nationalist struggle with revolutionary value, but they reached out specifically to Africa and people of African descent" (9). This outreach included Chinese statements of solidarity with the US Black liberation struggle, of which NARP, as we have seen, was a keen follower.

Second, between 1949 and 1976, Mao's foreign policy promoted China as a quasi-tourist destination for worldly revolutionaries. What Julia Lovell has called a "hospitality machine" designed to "distract from or conceal discordant realities, and to cater to the whims of carefully chosen foreign guests," this machinery aimed "to proselytize the virtues of the Communists and their government" to would-be sympathisers abroad (2019: 78). In terms of the downplayed 'discordant realities' that Lovel speaks of, perhaps the most glaring was China's representation of the rebellion in Tibet. As Robeson Frazier (2015) explains, this armed uprising was portrayed as a minor conflict started by the upper-class and landholding elites; a view that deliberately disregarded "the revolt's multiclass composition and the reality that it represented a popular Tibetan rejection of the PRC's claims to Tibet" (59). Based on conversations I've had with Ray Bobb (one of the delegates on the trip), I suspect that similarly scripted representations where provided to folks on the Native Peoples' Friendship Delegation in 1975. Such representations suggested that what was happening in Tibet was a 'reactionary' movement against Chinese communism propped up by Western imperialist nations (Bobb 2019: personal communication). As such, to truly understand the PRC's position on the cultural self-determination of national minorities, one had to look at examples such as Mongolia, not Tibet. As Lee Maracle was paraphrased as saying in an interview upon her return from China: "[t]he Mongolians have independence. … In the past they were underdeveloped and through Chinese policy the Mongolians have been put in a privileged position. … They are stressing cultural development since in the past their culture was suppressed" (Chartier 1975: 5).

Gender also figured into NARP's analysis of colonial violence and decolonial resistance, as evidenced by the circumstances under which the organisation was formed: as a response to the rape and murder of 17-year-old Rose Marie Roper of the Esketemc First Nation at Alkali Lake. From its inception, women not only held foundational leadership positions in the organisation, but they also shaped how issues addressed by the group were theoretically understood and how to go about politically organising to confront them. For Gerry Ambers, Roper's death was inseparable from the colonial violence that they sought to mitigate as organisers. She understood

the violent transgression of Roper's bodily sovereignty as inextricably linked with the violation of Indigenous people's lands and sovereign authority. For her, there was no hierarchy of importance between the two, and the men, generally speaking, respected her lead: "I felt that they accepted our leadership very, very well. We were always recognized as equals," recalled Ambers of her time with NARP (2019: personal communication). Self-organised, NARP women were understood as core to the movement. As stated in an editorial statement for *The Native Movement* newsletter (the publication that the *NARP Newsletter* eventually morphed into later in 1970),

> this newsletter is being published by young Indian people who are, as yet, unorganized, as a whole. The sisters in our group, however, are organized. They call themselves the Native Women's Liberation Front and have policies worked out which are, practically, nationalist, and, essentially, revolutionary.
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> *(NWLF 1970: online)*

Disillusioned with the 'white woman's liberation movement', Vancouver Red Power women established the NWLF in 1970 to centre Indigenous women's voices in its push for the "total liberation of the colonized people of this world and for the total liberation of the Indian people of this continent" (online). And when Red Power men neglected to take their lead, the NWLF shut this down:

> Those who identify with the values of the system question the potential of Indian women in the movement. This is nonsense. Without women only half the movement's resources are being tapped. The Native Women's Liberation Front's purpose is to correct this mistaken idea and put an end to the tremendous waste of people in the movement.
>
> *(NWLF 1970: online)*

Red Power women's commitment to liberate all 'colonized people of theworld' was put into practice through their own gendered solidarity efforts. One such display of support involved Red Power women helping organise and host a thousand-participant gathering of the Indo-Chinese Woman's Conference held in Vancouver in 1971, an anti-war event that hosted delegates from North and South Vietnam to share their stories about the gendered atrocities of the imperialist war in Southeast Asia (Wu 2013: 238–239).

The emphasis NARP/NSG/NWLF placed on its international solidarity campaigns was an outgrowth of three theoretical/political influences. The first was rooted in the political traditions of the Indigenous nations that comprised their membership. While decolonisation has always been informed by the normative import of Indigenous relations to land and place, we must also recognise, following Nishnaabeg theorist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, that our struggles are and have also been intrinsically linked to and informed by global developments, and vice versa (2017): "Internationalism has always been part of our political practices", she writes, because our existence as nations has always been an international one "regardless of how rooted in place we are" (56). For Indigenous nations in BC, this internationalism was something they had always done.

The second influence relates more squarely to NARP and NSG's interpretation of Maoism, specifically the extrapolation of Mao's 'countryside-encirclement-of-the-city' framework to the world stage. As Bobb (2012) explains, when Maoism is applied at a global scale, the Third World – Asia, Africa, and Latin America – can be analogised as the 'countryside' and North America and Europe the 'city'. Such a view tethered, for Bobb, the success of national liberation struggles in the Third World to those of the 'internal colonies', paradigmatically represented by Indigenous nations. Defeating imperialism *and* internal colonialism thus requires a two-front

attack: solidarity and support for the 'people's wars' of the Third World abroad and the convergence of decolonisation with class struggle to weaken the stranglehold of colonialism at home. Most of NARP's organising, as well as the political associations they formed with other communities and groups, took these demands to heart (Bobb 2012).

The third influence, I suggest, was the concept of 'internal colonialism' itself. Arguably the most dominant critical theory of race in the late 1960s and 1970s, the application of the 'internal colony' thesis to domestic race relations was, again, a product of the profound influence of the struggles against colonialism and imperialism in Asia, Africa, and Latin America (see, for example, Allen 1992; Barrera and Ornelas 1972; for critiques see Omi and Winant 2014; for application to Indigenous British Columbia see Tennant 1982). Originally stemming back to early-20th-century Marxist debates on the 'national question' sparked by Lenin's 1916 declaration that Southern Blacks in the United States should be considered an 'oppressed nation', the thesis underwent a revival on the US left in the 1960s as theorists began to assert that "people of color living in the United States are colonized people, and that forms of colonial and neocolonial power in the Third World are also deployed colonized populations domestically" (Adamson 2019: 344). Similar to 'settler-colonial' studies after it, the internal colonialism perspective insisted that "racial marginalization and subordination must be understood through the lens of colonialism and imperialism as *persistent and ongoing processes*" (Adamson 2019: 344). Unlike too much literature in the field of 'white settler-colonial studies' (King 2019), however, the normative stakes for non-Indigenous communities are much clearer when looked at through the internal colonialism frame: they, like Indigenous peoples, ought to also be considered beneficiaries of decolonisation afforded through their own access to the right to self-determination. NARP found no inconsistency with this claim coexisting with their own land and sovereignty struggles. Under such a framework, the specificity of our respective experiences of anti-Black, racialised, and colonial violences did not translate into the political incommensurabilities that seem, at times, to haunt our solidarity efforts today.

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As with the influence of Third World-inspired Marxism generally, the pull of Maoism among Red Power organisers in Vancouver begins to wain as we close out the 1970s. There are a number of reasons for this. First, for many people of colour on the left in the United States and Canada, directions in Chinese foreign policy increasing began to hamper its ability to claim moral authority in leading the world revolution against colonialism and imperialism. The instrumentality of China's interventions in Africa punctuate this decline in leadership, especially in the wake of its 1975 decision to support the US-backed white supremacist regime of South Africa in its colonial contest with national liberation forces in Angola (Kelley and Esch 1999). China's betrayal was felt particularly strong amongst the Black left, which, as we have seen, was one of NARP's longest interlocutors. Second, in a manner similar to the United States and its Counter Intelligence Program, over time the instruments and techniques of Canadian state repression created irreparable cracks in the movement through the believed use of informants, misinformation campaigns, and state violence. To a certain extent, this resulted in a culture of paranoia, increased sectarianism (resulting in an aversion toward internal group descent), organisational power struggles, and ultimately a decline in membership. Third, and perhaps most importantly, some former members also became more deeply entrenched in their own communities' cultural and political traditions and began to organise more squarely within the normative frameworks offered by these practices. Even with this being the case, some members of NARP refused to see these disparate revolutionary traditions – those offered by Third World Marxist orientations and Indigenous political thought – as incommensurable. They were different, yes, but united

in their commitment to justice and the collective project of freedom (Ambers 2019: personal communication).

So this begs the question: Why tell this story? Especially in light of the fact that the liberation sought by this generation of organisers has yet to break the stranglehold of colonial violence still experienced by so many in our communities today. With this being the case, I want to conclude with three brief take-aways. They are in no way the only ones, but important nonetheless.

First, in exploring the political cross-fertilisations at the heart of this story, we challenge the idea that Indigenous peoples' openness to engaging outside theoretical traditions somehow equates to assimilation and therefore represents and/or serves in the discursive erasure of Indigenous thought and intellectual traditions. What I hope the story offered here shows is that the decolonisation of Indigenous nations and nationalisms has historically been an intellectually polymorphous project undertaken by critically intelligent and culturally grounded individuals committed to radical social transformation. Before the hegemony of liberal recognition politics started to increasingly limit what Indigenous peoples could claim as their rights via Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982* (rights that the courts have wedded to a mythical ideal of cultural purity within the uncontested sovereignty of the Canadian state and its capitalist mode of production) Indigenous organisers used to critically engage other traditions in their struggles for freedom without this cross-fertilisation representing cultural *inauthenticity*. 'By any means necessary' – as the saying used to go.

Second (and in a related way) this story points to a critically important history of solidarity, both in thought and practice. That is, the activities of organisations like NARP show what Indigenous land struggles have to materially offer in terms of forging a genuine politics of solidarity across social struggles that, for many reasons, do not always see eye to eye. I hope that their story might continue to mitigate these tensions by highlighting a critically important example of intellectual and political collaboration, one in which Indigenous land and sovereignty struggles are thought to intersect – necessarily and productively – with other liberation theories and efforts. As an example of "radical Indigenous internationalism" (Estes 2019: 204) – to borrow Lakota historian Nick Estes' terminology – NARP dared to imagine "a world altogether free of colonial hierarchies of race, class and nation" (and importantly, gender) and sought to align itself with colonised communities, at home and abroad, committed to achieving similar ends (2019: 204).

In the Canadian context, some recent scholarship has opted to downplay if not dismiss the historical lessons one might take from a productive engagement by Indigenous peoples and their supporters with the revolutionary traditions of the Third World, promoting instead a more appeasing politics that James Tully and John Borrows call, 'reconciliation-resurgence' (Burrows and Tully 2018); they argue against "the lack of nuance" indicative of some Indigenous scholar's "adoption of a dialectic" drawn from different colonial contexts (6). Specifically, they challenge the "polarizing" and "divisive" ways that the "binary of Third World decolonisation and master-slave dialectics of the 1950s and 1960s was pulled into some Indigenous studies circles in ways that reject reconciliation in broad terms" (6); "Third World politics", they write, "we generally regard as a historical failure" (24). The separatist politics of "Black Power" is assigned a similar fate (24). They suggest that the simplistic binaries underwriting these traditions "can fatally conceal and obscure a complex intersectional field" that "reconciliation-resurgence" is better equipped to avoid. The stakes are high, they suggest given that the inability to "illuminate broader and more complex intersectional fields of power" was not only "one reason why the colonization/decolonization binary did not lead the way to Third World liberation" but that it "might even be said that such dichotomies led to deeper forms of neocolonialism, dependency, inequality, and patriarchy in Third World settings" (7). And if this were not bad enough, such

dichotomous thinking, they claim, "does not coincide with many traditional ways of knowing and being" (7).

While I do not have the time or space to unravel every argument at play here, I feel it is important to respond to a couple of core issues that are being raised. First, 'binaries' did not undermine the Third World project, racial capital did. To quote Vijay Prashad, the Third World "was not a failure [...] it was *assassinated*" (Prashad 2007: np). Instead of liberation, the forces of globalisation spearheaded by the advanced capitalist states (with the United States leading the fray), fought to subdue any independence the 'darker nations' had mustered. Orchestrated through the International Monetary Fund, 'structural adjustment' campaigns used the precarity of newly independent but heavily indebted states to open up themselves up to the demands of Western capital accumulation and thus indirect rule; initiating what Frantz Fanon called the transition from the 'apotheosis of independence' to the 'curse of independence' (Fanon 1991) – a *post*-colonial *colonisation*. Also, even if the import of such theories carries with them Manichean tendencies, ought this not be interrogated against the specific material and discursive contexts in which they are deployed, and with a concern to what effect? NARP's anti-revisionist was concerned less about the Soviet Union trading communist internationalism for 'peaceful co-existence' with the capitalist west; in other words, their non-reformist position was not a naïve reproduction of Stalinist orthodoxy within their theory-building and organising. Rather, it was adapted and applied to a shift in the reproduction of colonial relations of power that began to consolidate in Canada in the late 1960s, from an openly repressive structure to one that operates through the carefully scripted recognition of 'Aboriginal rights'. It was this 'co-existence' – the peaceful co-existence offered through a politics of recognition and eventually reconciliation – that they refused. NARP, it could be said, theorised and anticipated the 'death of reconciliation' being declared in the bush and on the streets today.

The third take away is related to the first two, but more personal. Thinking and writing systematically about Red Power activism in BC offered me an indirect chance to contextualise the work that I originally undertook in *Red Skin, White Masks,* particularly my theoretical application of the Third World contribution of Frantz Fanon's thought to colonial contexts like Canada. When I finished writing my book, we were in the midst of what many thought to be the most significant political mobilisation of Indigenous peoples against the state in almost a half century (we are clearly in an equally significant phase as I write). When my book hit the shelves, however, that movement had all but dissipated and another one was on the horizon: the liberation politics of Black Lives Matter. Under such conditions, I worried that my use of Fanon could be read as problematic, as an appropriation that required at minimum some theoretical and historical contextualisation. The intellectual and activist labour of earlier generations provides an important glimpse into this context. It demonstrates that the Black and Indigenous radical traditions, the struggles of the Third and Fourth Worlds – 'the wretched of the earth' – have a long history of political engagement and intellectual exchange that transformed lives and built alternative worlds that we still inhabit. This is a critical history to retell given the demands of solidarity that unravelling our colonial present requires.

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