Maia Manshadi

December 4, 2025

Violence to the Body is Violence to the Land:

Resistance From the Body is Resistance From the Land

Indigenous women are on the frontlines of resistance as colonial violence simultaneously targets their bodies and the land. Colonial and patriarchal attitudes towards the land reflects itself in attitudes towards bodies. This is the result of a spiritual and physical separation from nature and it has harmful effects on us all. Having laws with opposing views, Indigenous communities bear the brunt of these atrocities and their existence is a testament to the weakness of colonial structures. This essay engages with the text *Indigenous Resistance in Action Against the Violence of Resource Extraction* by Danielle Sherwood. In this essay, there is an emphasis on the link between resource extraction and the negative impacts it has on Indigenous well-being and sovereignty. In response, I provide knowledges of both scientific and lived experience to illustrate interconnected violence to the body and the land. I center the voices of Indigenous women as active agents in their liberation and shed light on the responsibilities of those witnessing such violence to act. Indigenous scholar Rachel Fowers of the Leey'qsun nation argues that the term settler is a verb and not a noun, "thinking through [the term] as a set of responsibility and action" (Flowers). I write from the positionality of a settler and a survivor.

The psychology of colonial violence is both a threat to the body and the land. There is a cultural amnesia towards the fact that Europeans were also colonized. Commons were privatized and those, primarily women, with intimate knowledge of the land were killed (Federici). European thinkers like Francis Bacon and Renee Descartes encouraged a misogynistic scientific

revolution that promoted a utilitarian view of nature. According to Bacon, “the empire of man” should “penetrate the womb of nature… nature had to be hounded and made a slave to the new mechanicized devices; science had to torture nature's secrets out of her” (Fideler). This misogynistic worldview is embedded into our institutions of thought and knowledge and consequently socially reproduced as rape culture. The colonizer’s attitude towards nature and humans is that of utilitarianism. The illusion of choice that capitalism presents is a form of coercion. For example, it shows up as the threat of jail or homelessness if one doesn’t comply with being a productive member of a white supremacist society (Manshadi, 2). Systems of coercion reinforce the notion that non-consensual action is acceptable behaviour. Flowers points out that, “for Indigenous peoples’ struggles, the unified “no” is also a resounding “yes” to something different, yes to a reality to come”(39). This requires the respect towards free, prior and informed consent on all scales, without the coercion of the state, the state imposed band councils or between each other.

Machismo (male supremacy), is often found in dispossessed, lower class men who experience a sense of powerlessness as a result of such coercion. “Given the ongoing disruption & geographical isolation, there is a limited opportunity for employment beyond extraction industries… This often results in horizontal violence (Sherwood, 2). The latter is an explanation, not an excuse. Flowers points out that “when Indigenous men engage in gender violence, or are silent in the face of it, they are in collusion with white male colonial violence... rather than building alternative mechanisms"(43). Supremacist violence is a result of the lack of the recognition of our interconnectedness and the first separation is from within. “Colonization… has aimed to fundamentally change the social and economic fabric” of Indigenous peoples whose laws center life and kinship (Sherwood, 1). When the land is treated as something to control and

exploit, the people are too. In effect, to see oneself as above nature is to deny one's own humanity, as illustrated by the unreasonable expectations of white supremacy. The antidote therefore, is in the recognition of interconnectedness and kinship and anti-colonial calls to action that reaffirm this.

The environmental consequences to such mentalites are evident. “As an Indigenous activist from Oaxaca explains, women in her home community can get uterine cancer because of contamination in their water sources resulting from the Canadian mining company [Fortuna Silver Mines]” (Altamirano-Jimenez, 1). In resistance to threats to life imposed by the company, the Coalition of the United Peoples of Ocotlán was created where women were at the frontlines of a blockade while their sons and husbands worked. Indigenous women globally have been on the frontlines of resistance against this mentality and its manifestations. “Often, Indigenous women’s bodies are explained in symbolic terms, as a microcosm of Indigenous lands; her body is where our sovereignty begins… Indigenous women in Latin America use the term territorio cuerpo-tierra (body-earth territory) as a political statement that connects the landscape of their bodies to the defense of land territory (Altamirano-Jimenez, 1, Flowers, 41). Water is traditionally women' s responsibility, as they are the waterkeepers both literally and figuratively, carrying children in the womb (Sherwood). Pipelines and its production/distribution process have harmful effects on the land and body, water and air. My research on the TMX pipeline near my hometown in BC shows that it emits neurotoxins causing developmental and cardiovascular problems, threatens aquatic species with elevated biotoxin levels and impedes their growth, contaminates waterways with polyclinic aromatic hydrocarbon toxins and more (Manshadi, 1). Sleydo’ Molly Wickham is one of the matriarchs on the frontlines of land defense in her community, resisting the government-approved Coastal Gaslink pipeline on the

Wet'suwet'en territory of so-called Northern BC. The resistance of the Wet'suwet'en people has inspired direct-action across the colonial state, such as the Shut Down Canada movement. Despite them fighting for the continuation of life itself, “colonial law works to criminalize land and water defenders, while the acceleration of unsustainable natural resource commodification is facilitated by law, superseding human and Indigenous rights, and the rights of Indigenous women in particular (Puentes, 1). The priority of policing has always been that of repression and dispossession.

These industries threaten food sovereignty and as a result, the self determination of Indigenous peoples. There is an “assault on their abilities to hunt and gather safely… ancestral sites for food gathering have also been impacted. Industry sites have disrupted migration patterns of wildlife [and] shift work leads to less time and flexibility for hunting on the land” (Sherwood 4). Historically, food has been a tool of settler colonialism and assimilation from sled dog and buffalo massacres (Manshadi, 4) to modern day harmful environmental practices, ongoing occupation, agricultural policy and more. The displacement of Indigenous peoples is also an attempt to displace the knowledge of how to care for the land. Emily Flemd is an Innu land defender who mobilized and organized protests across so-called Quebec against the proposed bill 97. Bill 97 sought to allocate up to 2/3s of so-called Quebec’s forests and Indigenous land to the logging industry for short-term economic gain. In resistance, she and members of the Atikamekw Nation as well as the broader Indigenous community and its allies (including me) support a blockade in Manawan. The blockade itself has become a site of return to the land, where longer term structures are set up to survive the winter and elders and children share space and speak in their own language. Despite clear cutting that threatens forest ecosystems and waterways, they assert food sovereignty through hunting, fishing and foraging. As a result of these protests, the

bill has since been put on pause, yet the struggle against it as well as the camp continue simultaneously. Resistance to life-threatening conditions is so natural that the Earth does so herself in response to anthropogenic climate change. Like the womb, it is self-regulating. This can be exemplified by what humans experience as “natural disasters.” Entropy and the natural order of chaos is an example of natural rematriation. It is the process where energy (colonialism) is dispersed and unable to do useful work (Fatih Gozuacik, F., Pattison, D. & Tabor, C.). Knowing the Earth shall prevail, we must then continue to mitigate this chaos and disperse this energy for the continuity of humankind.

As resource colonialism continues to threaten Indigenous sovereignty, women bear the brunt of it. Around the world, sexual assault is used as a tool for colonization, harming human dignity and enforcing powerlessness (Fanon, 188). It demoralizes not only women but entire communities. In the Fort St John community, “98% of Indigenous women surveyed reported having experienced violence” (Sherwood, 1) as a result of man camps for resource extraction. Man camps situated in rural areas for resource extraction portray the same violence as they do the land on to many cases of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Relatives (MMIWR) (Sherwood, 2).. I’ve worked in Fort St John, tree planting for the extractive logging industry. I have advocated for the removal of an abuser who assaulted multiple women that was set to be hired as a foreman. It was a long and triggering process for everyone involved. Whether in judicial court or company policies, these processes are extremely difficult for the survivor and often center the comfort of the perpetrator and the companies’ image with a lack of belief until proof. This discourages survivors from speaking up in the first place. This inaction is comparable to that of “the Royal Mounted Canadian Police (RCMP) [who] have been shown to enable and perpetuate the exploitation of women and fail to respond to local complaints seriously”

(Sherwood, 1). Not only are aware of the MMIWR crisis as it has been made clear for well over 20 years (Sherwood 2) but they themselves perpetuate sexual violence and murder to this day with weekly death tolls (Yellowhead Institute, 1). It is evident that genocide is ongoing because when women are targeted, entire communities are at stake.

"The government has proven itself incapable and unwilling to prevent the genocide it perpetuates, having "endorsed the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada's Call to Action along with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), yet neither are legally binding… this consultation process appears to be but a performative act on behalf of the government." (Sherwood 5).

Therefore, there is a push to "recenter Indigenous law (Flowers, 34). Police and prisons not only fail to prevent this violence but reproduce systems of hierarchy, patriarchy and capitalism (Manshadi 1). Survivors rarely get justice through the court system because it was designed to protect the interests of the state, not the people.

In response, women are taking back their agency and seeking justice on their own terms. "While Indigenous women's bodies are described as targets of gendered colonial violence, it is critical not to lose sight that we are also legal and political actors" (Flowers 41). Women are becoming healers in the way the times ask of them: Resisting colonialism, protecting land and waters and birthing safe and just worlds outside of the dictation of the settler-state. Response-Based Practice (Richardson & White) calls to center the agency in the resistance of the oppressed as a reclamation of their agency. Women are creating their own ways to fight back against patriarchal violence, such as the Gulabi Gang in India. In this gang, women organize to beat rapists and corrupt leaders with sticks. Sampat Devi first discovered the power of the stick when her intervention in an abusive marriage forced the violent husband to mend his ways. Now

boasting 40,000 women, they vow to ‘protect the powerless from abuse and fight corruption’ (Desai, 1). Similarly, survivor Chelsea Perkins is unjustly facing jail time for killing her rapist after the court system failed to intervene. This is a common outcome for women who take back their agency with retribution. Evidently, such violence was imposed on the dispossessed. Such acts may seem abhorrent to those with privilege. Yet, if they truly want to prevent violence, it is not by calling for the silencing of the oppressed in the name of peace. It is by acting against the colonial and patriarchal mentalities that result in body and land exploitation and the settler state that socially reproduces it. We must affirm that it is dangerous to perpetuate colonial and patriarchal violence when the colonial system not only fails to do so but inherently upholds it. We must commit to its abolition.

The prevention of violence is in asserting Indigenous sovereignty. Sherwood concurs, “Indigenous self-determination is paramount for reducing the violence ensuing from resource extraction projects” (Sherwood 7). Marginalized communities around the world call for the return of land in their hands (Manshadi, 8). This labour cannot be done by Indigenous people alone. Settlers must take up the labour required of them while being careful not to reproduce colonial dynamics and perpetuate the violation of Indigenous agency. Therefore, to be a good ally is to listen, to “bear witness to Indigenous women’s existence and stories (Puentes, 1) and support self-directed Indigenous responses (Sherwood, 6). Flowers elucidates the terms in which settlers can develop right relations; by supporting Indigenous sovereignty and finding the willingness to relinquish white privilege as well as the state that grants it.

“We can no longer sit idly in the womb of the beast while it feeds off the blood of our kin through its umbilical cord, granting us complicity. We must refuse not just ideologically but

politically. We must cease to engage in that which turns us into blood-consuming cannibals" (Manshadi, 2).

We must cut the cord.

In the face of their oppression, this essay posits Indigenous women as active agents in the liberation of life, to which we are all connected. "We all come from the same source (the land); our healing is connected to the healing and the protection of our land" (Morin, 1). As anthropogenic climate change, psychological and corporal violence persist, we all have a duty to dismantle the state and its systems of exploitation and domination. It is up to all of us to confront the desire for domination in all its forms. A desire for domination lies in a desire for power. We must sit with our fear of powerlessness and alchemize such desires into collective power. True power lies not within one over the other but mutuality and reciprocity. The past is created in the present. If the past dictates the future, we have work to do. Now.

Works Cited

Altamirano-Jimenez, Isabel. *Indigenous women refusing the violence of resource extraction in Oaxaca* Vol. 17(2) 2021 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/11771801211015316

Desai, Shweta. *Gulabi Gang: India's Women Warriors*. Al Jazeera, 2014 https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2014/3/4/gulabi-gang-indias-women-warriors

Federici, Sylvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation.* Autonomedia, 2004

Flowers, Rachel. *The Refusal to Forgive: Indigenous Women's Love and Rage.* Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education and Society Vol. 4(2) (p.32-49), 2015

Fideler, David. *Restoring the Soul of the World: Our Living Bond With Nature's Intelligence*. Inner Traditions, 2014.

Gozuacik, F., Pattison, D. Tabor, C. Urone, P. & Hinrichs, R. (2020). *Physics: The 2nd Law of Thermodynamics*. OpenStax. https://openstax.org/details/books/physics

Manshadi, Maia. *Systems Thinking*. Thompson Rivers University, 2022

Manshadi, Maia. *The Effects of Globalization on Food Systems*. Concordia University, 2023.

Manshadi, Maia. *Kitchen Table Talks*. Concordia University, 2024.

McGuire, Michaela & Gudgihljiwah, Jaad. *Two Weeks Six Dead: Police violence, Indigenous Dehumanization, Canadian Indifference.* Yellowhead Institute, 2024 https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2024/two-weeks-six-dead-police-violence-indigenous-dehumanization-canadian-indifference/

Morin, Brandi. *Pipelines, man camps and murdered Indigenous women in Canada.* Indigenous Rights, Al Jazeera, 2020 https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2020/5/5/pipelines-man-camps-and-murdered-indigenous-women-in-canada

Palmater, Pam. *True Test of Reconciliation: Respect the Indigenous right to say no.* Canadian Dimension, 2018. https://canadiandimension.com/articles/view/true-test-of-reconciliation-respect-the-indigenous-right-to-say-no

Puentes, Chase. *Dr. Sherry Pictou on Indigeneity, Feminism and Resource Extraction.* School of Marine and Environmental Affairs, 2021 https://smea.uw.edu/currents/dr-sherry-pictou-on-indigeneity-feminism-and-resource-extraction/

Sherwood, Danielle. *Indigenous Resistance in Action Against the Violence of Resource Extraction.* Dalhousie University, 2021

Simmons, Matt. *RCMP arrest five land defenders on Wetsuweten Territory as Coastal GasLink construction continues*. The Narwhal, 2023. https://thenarwhal.ca/rcmp-arrests-wetsuweten-gidimten-camp/#:~:text=Sleydo'%20Molly%20Wickham%2C%20spokesperson%20for,she%20said%20in%20a%20statement.

Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network. *Violence on the land, violence on our bodies: Building an Indigenous response to environmental violence*. Landbody Defense, 2016. http://landbodydefense.org/