

THREE



Indigenous Structural Critique

You ought to hear and listen to what we women shall speak, as well as the sachems; *for we are the owners of the land, AND IT IS OURS!*

—Unnamed Woman, Seneca, 1791

Property in the forms of leases, jurisdiction, fee simple, and numerous other ways of prescribing land have had a profound material significance on Indigenous people—at times it has been a matter of life and death.

—MISHUANA GOEMAN, Seneca, 2008

I do not believe that it is only by chance that we identify ourselves in relationship to the land we come from, the land we belong to. The land—the territory—defines who we are and how we relate to the rest of the world.

—SUSAN HILL, Mohawk, 2017

This chapter examines what it might mean to consider the history of Indigenous resistance to dispossession as an enacted and embodied mode of structural critique. It is organized into two main sections. Section I mobilizes resources from various contributions to critical theory (broadly

conceived) in order to examine the very idea of “structural critique.” I argue that such analysis is characterized, first and foremost, by synoptic evaluation: structural critique is concerned with the overall effect of a set of historical processes, which are not reducible to any one particular instance within. So conceived, structural accounts of this sort are, however, frequently challenged by their need to account for both continuity and change over time. With direct reference to the particulars of dispossession, I refer to this as the problem of *process*: how can dispossession be both different over various iterations in time and space and yet also plausibly the same, singular structure? My intuition is that responding to this challenge requires focusing attention on the subject-constituting function of historical processes. When we reorient the problem in this way, we decisively refine the question: continuity or change *for whom*? This permits us to grasp how a structure can be both mercurial (for some) and stable (for others). As a means of articulating this complex intersection of subject formation and structural critique, I turn to resources from the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, specifically the concepts of *alienation* and *diremption*. In my usage, the first refers to a form of impersonal domination whereby humans come to be controlled by institutions that are, ironically, of their own creation (in this case, the market and property relations that have transformed the earth into a universal ownership grid). The second refers to the splitting of humanity into constitutively antagonistic and hierarchically ordered categories (in this case, the relations of colonizer and colonized, settler and native). Taken together, these express concern for how we dominate *ourselves* and, through how we dominate ourselves, how we also dominate *each other*. The chapter thus evaluates the utility of this language for articulating the relation between structures and subjects in the context of dispossession.

Section II returns us to the words of Indigenous peoples themselves. It does so with the aim of excavating the relationship between normativity and subjectivity as it subtends Indigenous peoples’ structural critique of dispossession. The focus here is on the normative claims of Indigenous peoples—claims that express an experience of injustice—but also how the very activities of claims-making give new shape and content to the subjectivities of the claimants, in this case, the political identity of “Indigenous.” A historical survey of Indigenous political mobilization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is the means here for exploring the idea that internal disagreement over the precise normative locus of critique can coexist with the emergence and solidification of the subject of that critique. Through a historical reconstruction of various modes of Indigenous critique, I aim

to show how in this context normativity is thus related, but not reducible, to subjectivity (why a thing is wrong, and for whom). The chapter concludes (sections III and IV) with reflection on the *belatedness* of normative evaluation, by which I mean to highlight the fact that the critique always comes “after the fact” in the sense that it is motivated and informed by social group categories that are themselves produced by the very processes under consideration.

I

A structural critique of dispossession is characterized by synoptic evaluation: we are not concerned here with one particular event or action taken in relative isolation but rather with the overall effect of a macrohistorical process. In the case of dispossession, this is complicated, however, by the *processual* nature of the phenomenon under description. In framing the matter in this way, I am building off the “structural” critiques of settler colonialism and anti-Black racism found in work by Patrick Wolfe and critical race feminists such as Angela Davis and Ruth Gilmore, respectively. Consideration of the specificity of dispossession as a process will, however, also require some departure from this previous analysis.

One of the most influential and compelling accounts of settler colonialism comes to us from the work of historian Patrick Wolfe.¹ In Wolfe’s formulation, settler colonialism expresses an underlying “logic of elimination.” The logic unfolds as follows. Unlike other kinds of imperialists, who are often content to leave non-European peoples to live in conditions of dependency and subordination to an imperial center, settlers move with the intention to establish permanent European-style societies abroad. To accomplish this, settlers need access to land, which speaks to motivation. As Wolfe puts it: “Whatever settlers may say—and they generally have a lot to say—the primary motive for elimination is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element.” Gaining this access to land requires the wholesale elimination of native inhabitants. This elimination can, and often does, proceed through genocide. However, in other cases, it operates through forced removal, assimilation, and “statistical reduction” (i.e., the use of racialized taxonomies that convert Indigenous political orders into biopolitical “populations” highly susceptible to gradual dissolution over time). Thus, while not all settler colonial projects have been

genocidal per se, all have been eliminatory. Wolfe summarizes this in characteristically terse and clear terms: “Settler colonialism has both negative and positive dimensions. Negatively, it strives for the dissolution of native societies. Positively, it erects a new colonial society on the expropriated land base—as I put it, settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event.”²

Wolfe’s characterization of settler colonialism as “structure not event” brings to light a number of important features of the phenomena under description. First, it demands a synoptic view. To speak of “structures” is to highlight the systemic effects of a set of social processes, which are more than the mere aggregation of the individual actions taken within. In this way, Wolfe’s characterization of settler colonialism dovetails with parallel developments in critical race theory on the idea of “structural racism.” For instance, in her landmark study of the U.S. carceral system, *The Golden Gulag*, Ruth Gilmore defines racism as “the state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death.”³ What is important about this definition for our purposes here is the way that Gilmore dispenses with the methodological individualism of standard “normative theory” approaches to racism. For her, racism is not reducible to the actions or beliefs of individuals when taken in isolation. Instead, we are authorized to call a social formation “racist” whenever we observe long-standing patterns of group-differentiated vulnerability. This is the nature of “systemic” or “structural”—rather than merely individualist—racism. In an analogous fashion, Wolfe invites consideration of the settler colonialism in this sense.⁴

This matters for the normative evaluation of dispossession because it serves as a caution against conflating a macrohistorical process with any particular, individual instantiation of it. We saw that, over the course of the nineteenth century, Anglo settler societies managed to acquire a total of 9.89 million square miles of land, a gain of nearly 6 percent of the total land on the surface of Earth. Techniques of land acquisition were multifold. Anglo settlers obtained new territory from Indigenous peoples in these areas by annexation, purchase, temporary lease or rent, military occupation, squatting, and settlement. These diverse techniques were equally complex when viewed from a normative standpoint. Some clearly required violence, coercion, and fraud. Other methods were more peaceful, transparent, and based in norms of reciprocity, requiring mutual agreement and consent. Complicating matters even further, appropriation techniques often oscillated between the former and the latter. One of the principle architects of

dispossession in the late nineteenth century, U.S. president Theodore Roosevelt, gives clear expression to its dual-sided character.

Nor was there any alternative to these Indian wars. . . . Here and there, under exceptional circumstances or when a given tribe was feeble and unwarlike, the whites might gain the ground by a treaty entered into of their own free will by the Indians, without the least duress; but this was not possible with warlike and powerful tribes when once they realized that they were threatened with serious encroachment on their hunting-grounds. Moreover, looked at from the standpoint of the ultimate result, there was little real difference to the Indian whether the land was taken by treaty or by war. . . . No treaty could be satisfactory to the whites, no treaty served the needs of humanity and civilization, unless it gave the land to the Americans as unreservedly as any successful war.

As a matter of fact, the lands we have won from the Indians have been won as much by treaty as by war; but it was almost always war, or else the menace and possibility of war, that secured the treaty. . . . Whether the whites won the land by treaty, by armed conquest, or, as was actually the case, by a mixture of both, mattered comparatively little as long as the land was won.⁵

As Roosevelt points out, contract and conquest went hand in hand. Even when European and Indigenous peoples were able to arrive at mutually acceptable terms by which to govern the relations between them—often codified in ceremony and treaty—conflicts of interpretation over those terms often led to additional rounds of violence and the seizure of new lands. Conversely, many mechanisms for the acquisition of land by consent arose only after long periods of conflict. In these cases, once Indigenous peoples had had their economies destroyed, their populations decimated by war, disease, and famine, or persevered through decades of threatening violence, the surviving communities “freely” transferred their lands to settler colonizers in exchange for protection, subsistence, and the like.

If we were to analyze this as a sequence of discrete events, the normative evaluation of these diverse moments of land acquisition would be thus highly variable, heterodox, and contingent upon the specific circumstances of the exchange. Perhaps above all, it would depend on the *temporal window* through which we examined the phenomena: my “unforced” agreement today may look very different if we consider the preceding events that led me into such a condition that agreement eventually appears as my last best option. If, however, we step back and view dispossession not simply

as the aggregation of these individual acts but rather as a macrohistorical process, evaluated from within a larger temporal window—say, the entirety of the nineteenth century—we begin to see features of it that remain occluded from view in the microscale, individualist perspective. And these structural features have normative implications. For instance, when considering the course of the nineteenth century as a whole, one cannot help but be struck by the relatively *uniform effect* of all these different micro-practices. Despite important differences in the legal and political orders found across Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States, a remarkably similar system of dispossession emerged across these spaces. Hence, by the end of the nineteenth century, it was relatively routine to speak of the “true colonies” of the Anglosphere as constituting a single analytic frame.⁶ In the course of constituting this “mini world system,” Indigenous peoples were effectively divested of the territorial foundation of their societies, which, in turn, became the territorial foundation of the new settler societies. So despite the different techniques, methods, and justifications involved in the diverse exchanges, the results were relatively uniform. As Roosevelt himself noted, “looked at from the standpoint of the ultimate result, there was little real difference to the Indian whether the land was taken by treaty or by war.”

Structural analysis of the sort proffered by Wolfe and Gilmore is indispensable to understanding the overall impact of systems of domination such as settler colonialism and white supremacy. It represents an advance over the generally Kantian model of normative theory that has come to dominate much contemporary moral and political philosophy. In this latter framework, interactions are envisioned primarily as exchanges between isolated individuals encountering each other in a temporally and socially abstracted world of exchange. The normativity of the exchange is evaluated as a function of *intent*, not effect, and thus also in relative isolation from the historical processes that structure the context of the encounter in the first place, or link it to a chain of similar events and exchanges. This leads to a fallacy of division: the assumption that what is true for the whole must be true of all or some of the parts. Denuded of any social theory that can make sense of the tone and tenor of context, these moralistic evaluations lack the tools to evaluate colonialism, white supremacy, and the like as “systems” or “structures” rather than as a kind of exchange between individuals or the aggregation of such exchanges.⁷

To make this clearer, we might draw an analogy to the concern with gentrification. Gentrification names a certain socioeconomic process: it

attempts to describe what is happening in a very general sense, say, the socioeconomic transition of a neighborhood. This process involves a complex diversity of different actual manifestations. People retire and sell their stores to higher-end companies. Stores go out of business and are replaced by others. Empty warehouse space is converted into lofts or studios for artists and young professionals. Tenants are forcibly evicted from their long-term rental units so the building may be converted into condos. A fire destroys a local bar that was a center of social activity for lower-income patrons, only to be replaced by a yoga studio or high-end clothing store. The point is that these can all be taken as instances of gentrification when viewed from the macrosociological perspective since they all contribute to the overall effect—the displacement of lower-income (usually racialized) people, benefiting white capital. But the macrosociological descriptor is importantly ambivalent about the moral injury involved in each individual case. So, if we object to gentrification as a whole, it does not mean we think each specific event is a moral equivalent—that each micro interaction is necessarily morally objectionable when taken in isolation.

In attending to the specificity of dispossession, however, there is one additional feature I would like to highlight that is relatively occluded by the language of “structure,” namely, the processual nature of the phenomenon. By this, I mean to underscore the dynamic, amplificatory features of dispossession, which I have already theorized under the sign of *recursivity*. As explained in chapter 1, in characterizing dispossession as recursive, I seek to draw attention to an oddly self-referential logic inherent in the process. Generating its own conditions of possibility, dispossession entails producing property out of systemic theft. Recall, however, that recursion is not simple tautology. Rather than a completely closed circuit, in which one part of a procedure refers directly back to its starting point, recursive procedures loop back upon themselves in a “boot-strapping” manner such that each iteration is not simply a repetition of the last but builds upon or augments its original postulate. Recursion therefore combines self-reference with positive feedback effects. This feature is occluded by the language of “structures,” which cannot account for dynamism within endurance. After all, while dispossession may have some “structural endurance” over historical time, this is more than mere static persistence. The Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Simpson puts the point thus: “I understand settler colonialism’s present structure as one that is formed and maintained by a series of *processes* for the purposes of dispossessing, that create a scaffolding within which my relationship to the state is contained. . . . I experience

it as a gendered structure and a *series of complex and overlapping processes* that work together as a cohort to maintain the structure.”⁸ Relating this insight back to the historical analysis of previous chapters, we can note that the rounds of dispossession that took place in the United States during the first half of the nineteenth century were not just *replicated* in later locales as techniques of land acquisition spread to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand; they were *augmented* and *amplified* elsewhere. Viewed as a set of processes, we can better observe a “feedback loop” or “ratchet effect” at work: early cycles of territorial acquisition came to enhance the conditions for additional rounds in a self-reinforcing manner, particularly as advances in communication and transportation technology allowed Anglo settler populations to conceive of themselves, and eventually effectively operate as a relatively integrated transnational community. I contend then that, over the course of this period, individual moments of land acquisition were connected and transformed by one another in a way that generated a qualitatively new, integrated global phenomenon—namely, the world market in land—whose defining properties were not reducible to its composite parts when studied in isolation at any particular point in time. Dispossession can thus be used to name a historical process with supervenient properties, which has important implications for both descriptive and normative analysis. This characterization is preferable then to one that juxtaposes structure versus event, since it specifies the mediation between structure and event by accounting for how various individual “events” of dispossession related to one another in recursive fashion.⁹

Let us turn now to the following proposition: that dispossession might be usefully conceived as a historical process of diremption within systemic alienation. What does this mean and what comparative difference does it make to frame the matter in this manner? In using these terms, one immediately signals a Hegelian-Marxist provenance. The term *alienation* derives from the German *Entfremdung*, which is also occasionally translated as “estrangement.” Diremption is one possible translation of the Hegelian term *Entzweiung*, which has also been rendered into English as “sundering.” In its most literal translation, *Entzweiung* means to split in two, but in a more general sense it can denote forcible separation. In more quotidian German, it can also mean simply divisiveness or quarrelsomeness.¹⁰ Both terms are, in their philosophical uses, highly abstract and deeply contested. Let me say more about how they are employed here.

The notion of alienation in Hegelian-Marxism has historically been associated with a strong philosophical-anthropological claim about the underlying “essential nature” of humanity, from which we have supposedly become estranged. Marx originally spoke of alienation in terms of estrangement from our *Gattungswesen*, or species-being.¹¹ A century and a half of work across a variety of philosophical traditions has called into question this essentialist and romantic conception of alienation. Most recently, philosophers and political theorists have worked to reconstruct the concept in a nonessentialist manner. These “postmetaphysical” accounts of alienation posit not that we are estranged from our ahistorical essence but that we can still use the term to refer to the experience of being estranged from forms of social and economic organization that are, ironically, of our own construction. These processes are neither entirely foreign to us, nor can they be effectively integrated into our current self-understanding or brought under our effective control.¹² Rahel Jaeggi has provided a recent comprehensive exploration and reconstruction of the term along precisely these “postmetaphysical” lines. In her formulation, which I follow here in its general form, alienation must be reconstructed in *formal* terms. Previous accounts (such as is found in Rousseau, or in Marx’s early writings) tended to operate with a *substantive* definition, one that demanded a corresponding account of the positive condition from which one had become alienated. Accordingly, such formulations exhibit a propensity for essentialist and perfectionist orientations. By contrast, formal accounts examine the dynamic relations of appropriation that are productive of oneself in relation to the world. In this register, the distinction between alienated and unalienated modes of being is not one between a pregiven “authentic” self and a distorted or “inauthentic” one but between more and less operative relations of continuous self-interpretation and self-appropriation. Alienation is thus reworked and reformulated as “a relation of relationlessness.”¹³

Iterations of this concern with systemic or structural alienation have been widespread across a range of European thinkers for some time now. They had particular traction in the nineteenth century, often traveling under the broad heading of “impersonal domination.” There were many variations on this theme, but the underlying basic concern was that humans had created forms of social and economic organization that had effectively eclipsed our collective capacity to control and direct them. These “systems” or “structures” were thought to have come to dominate us through the way they shape, channel, and delimit the range of possible ways of thinking and acting available to us in an arbitrary and capricious manner. Importantly for

many of the diagnosticians of these structures, no one in particular necessarily had to design them, nor could any one individual or collective group effectively control them. They were thus thought of as both *autonomous* and *anonymous*, two features that could distinguish them from previous forms of personal domination. There is, therefore, a certain irony inherent in the concern with this impersonal domination since the agent of our oppression is a creature of our own making.

We can find in the work of Alexis de Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill clear examples of this concern under the heading of “social tyranny.” Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* famously warns of a “supreme power” that

extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them, and directs them; it rarely forces one to act, but it constantly opposes itself to one’s acting; it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd.

This bureaucratic form of impersonal rule, Tocqueville repeatedly reminds, is a form of “servitude.” It is perhaps even more powerful than overt, personal, and directly coercive forms of control because, under this “soft” and “gentle” rule, we conscript ourselves into its power under the mistaken belief that, because it is a system of our own making, it must be one over which we maintain effective control: “Each individual allows himself to be attached because he sees that it is not a man or a class but the people themselves that hold the end of the chain.”¹⁴

Directly influenced by Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill also warned of a “social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression.”¹⁵ In particular, Mill was concerned with how the highly mediated nature of mass, representative democracy facilitated the domination of minorities by majorities through the depersonalized apparatus of government and bureaucracy, as well as via the more informal mechanisms of the public sphere (such as broadsheet newspapers). The problem of social tyranny had, however, a second and more insidious face for Mill. The highly mediated, depersonalized, and decentralized forces of the new social systems required

of mass democracies also come to exercise a semiautonomous form of rule over the population as a whole. In other words, Millian social tyranny is not only about the domination of the majority over the minority; it is also about the domination of society over the individuals that constitute it. In discussing the latter face of impersonal domination, Mill tends to anthropomorphize “society” as an agent that acts independently of the individuals who, in effect, both constitute and are constituted by it, precisely to highlight the semiautonomous nature of social systems. Because “society can and does execute its own mandates . . . it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression.”¹⁶ This qualitatively new form of danger requires a qualitatively new defense of liberty, a defense against “the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them.”¹⁷

In sum, then, Tocqueville and Mill exhibit concern for a form of “impersonal domination” with two faces, which I will call *alienation* and *diremption*. The first refers to the sense of estrangement and loss of effective control by the society as a whole over its own forms of organization—the domination of *us by ourselves*. The second refers to the internal division of society as a function of the processes unleashed in the first—the domination of *some by others*.

The importance of Marx’s analysis of capitalism partially resides in his effort to combine these two elements. For Marx, capitalism is characterized as a system of social and economic organization that operates in a semi-autonomous manner, giving rise to new forms of impersonal domination. Modern bourgeois society is “like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.”¹⁸ At the same time, this form of social and economic organization also leads to an internal division, which expresses itself as *class domination* and *exploitation*. So capitalism has elements of both alienation and diremption. And yet the relationship between these is not always consistent or clear. The emphasis Marx accords to each varies depending on the specific objective at hand. This has given rise to interminable cycle of debates within Marxism over their relative normative weight, as well as the causal relation between them (i.e., whether impersonal domination generates class domination, or vice versa). For instance, in his well-known and highly influential contribution to Western Marxism, Moishe Postone argues that a cogent critique of capitalism can be constructed around the idea that, as a historically

specific form of social organization, capitalism is characterized by a unique form of social domination in which the whole of society is captured by its own socioeconomic processes. As he puts it: “Social domination in capitalism does not, on its more fundamental level, consist in the domination of people by other people, but in the domination of people by abstract social structures that people themselves constitute.”¹⁹ In my terminology here, this is an account of “formal alienation.” This stands in stark contrast to the “analytic Marxism” of G. A. Cohen (discussed at length in chapter 2), who dismisses all such talk of alienation and social domination and insists that the normative core of a critique of capitalism must reside in the concern for the exploitative relation between groups of people organized as classes.²⁰

In the latter half of the twentieth century, a variety of thinkers attempted to transpose this talk of alienation and impersonal domination into ecological language. This included many deep ecologists—often deriving philosophical resources from Heidegger—but it also increasingly implicated Western Marxism. In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno gave an account of a set of modernizing processes that emphasized the general estrangement of humanity from the natural world as a product of the rationalization process at the heart of Western modernity.²¹ Since their time, there has been a veritable explosion of concern for how capitalism fuels ecological destruction, species collapse, and climate change—central now to the current debates over the “Anthropocene.” In each of these cases, the concern is with how our social, economic, and (now) ecological systems of organization have effectively overrun our capacity to control and direct them. Operating now as a set of relatively autonomous and anonymous systems, we have become alienated from them, not in the high metaphysical sense (alienation from our species-being) but in the more prosaic sense: they comprise fundamentally estranged modes of self-construction and self-appropriation.²²

Across these diverse efforts to reformulate alienation and estrangement in nonmetaphysical terms, one common feature comes to the fore. As theories of impersonal domination move toward greater reliance on *alienation* as their core normative concern, they tend to drift away from *diremption*. That is to say, the more we frame the problem of capitalism or anthropogenic climate change, for example, as one of impersonal domination of humanity by its own constructions, the greater the temptation to obscure the simultaneous splitting of humanity into constitutively antagonistic and hierarchically ordered categories. In short, focus on how we dominate *ourselves* comes to elide concern for how we dominate *each other*.²³

We need not resolve such debates here. For our purposes, what matters is simply that, at least since Marx's own time, capitalism has been variously characterized as a system of *impersonal domination with internal division*. The normative critique of this therefore relies on concern for both alienation and diremption. This is relevant because our concern with dispossession is both conceptually and empirically indebted to this formation. The concepts we draw upon to articulate the features of dispossession are, in part, derived from these debates over capitalism more generally. This is not coincidental. Rather, it is because the processes themselves are also related. Conceptual derivation follows upon material entanglement. In other words, if dispossession exhibits many of the same features as capitalism more generally, it is not because it is analogous but because the two are already historically coupled.

I submit that a critique of dispossession can be coherently defined in these dualist terms, that is, as a problem of impersonal domination with internal division. By combining features of alienation *and* diremption, we are able to add analytic and historical specificity to our critique, which represents an advance over more generic concerns with commodification, privatization, primitive accumulation, or the "enclosures of the commons." While these other frameworks of analysis commonly raise concern with the alienating mechanisms of modern capitalist development, they routinely fail to enjoin this to a concern for the specific mode of diremption observable in recursive, colonial dispossession—namely, the formation of "Indians" as constitutively excluded subjects. We saw an instance of this previously in Polanyi's reference to the "commercialization of the soil" (see chapter 2). Although the terms *commercialization* and/or *commodification* share some overlapping features with dispossession, they remain both too general and too specific. They are too general in the sense that they are frequently used to describe a wide range of processes that cover such diverse phenomena so as to risk obscuring the specificity of dispossession in the colonial contexts that concern us here. They are, however, also too specific in their direct association with the Marxist tradition, which as we have already seen remains principally focused on the labor question, whatever additional resources it may offer for thinking through questions of land appropriation and colonization. Marxist theory displays a persistent tendency to reduce processes of colonial dispossession to that of capitalist commodification and enclosure, obviating the need for a robust examination of the specificity of settler expansion and Indigenous resistance on and through land.²⁴ Most obviously, generalized concerns with the commodification of land tend to

ignore the extent to which this process has been subtended by systematic transfer, loss, and group differentiation. It is not *only* that the earth has been commodified, privatized, and “enclosed” but that colonization generates a form of commodification so as to divest Indigenous peoples *in a distinct and particular way* of their ancestral homes. The duality of this process (propertization and systemic theft) is what the concept of dispossession is meant to capture.

By the same token, dispossession cannot be said to be controlled by any particular group of people at any particular point of time, at least not if by this we mean something like an extension of premodern relations of personal domination. Dispossession is a process by which huge swaths of the earth were transformed and apportioned into a private property grid system through systemic divestiture from Indigenous peoples. This process was partially constructed and guided by colonial elites, but it was not “controlled” by them. Rather, as we saw in previous chapters, dispossession was the effect of a set of distinct—even at times competing—state and market forces. Although government and corporate elites developed legal, political, and economic tools to steer and profit from the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands, even they could not fully contain or control these forces once they took hold. This is why, in his 1877 work *Ancient Society*, Lewis Henry Morgan can boast and lament the power of property in the same breath: “Since the advent of civilization, the outgrowth of property has been so immense, its forms so diversified, its uses so expanding and its management so intelligent in the interests of its owners, that it has become, on the part of the people, an unmanageable power. The human mind stands bewildered in the presence of its own creation.”²⁵ By the late nineteenth century, it is possible to speak of modern property relations as an “unmanageable power” that “bewilders” even its own creators. Borne on the backs of squatters, settlers, surveyors, homesteaders, and frontiersmen—many of whom were the very same impoverished, displaced protagonists of Marx’s tale of primitive accumulation in Western Europe (e.g., the Irish, the Ulster Scots)—global dispossession required no “managing committee.”

Apprehension of the duality of this complex set of processes requires therefore that we think dialectically: despite—or perhaps because of—the decentralized, heterodox, and fluid nature of the various processes and mechanics of its articulation, dispossession had a relatively stable, predictable, and uniform effect on Indigenous peoples. It is to their tradition of resistance that I now turn.

II

The final component to viewing dispossession as a historical process entails highlighting the way in which it serves to constitute categories of group identification and subjectivity. The relevance of this should already be somewhat clear from the previous discussion of alienation and diremption. One feature that differentiates these two normative concerns is the respective standpoints of their critiques. Whereas alienation generally imagines a unified collective subject alienated from itself in some relevant way, the critique of diremption is more commonly partisan, envisioning the freedom of one subject in direct opposition to the tyranny of another. Marx's way to square these two forms of critique was to figure the struggle of the proletariat against the diremptive splitting of humanity (expressed as class domination and exploitation) as containing the potential for a universal human emancipation against the alienating tendencies of capital. In this way, a particularistic and partisan struggle could also become a universal one (the movement from *an sich* to *für sich*). One of the great theorists of diremption, Frantz Fanon, hinted at a similar movement in his suggestion that anticolonial struggle of the twentieth century was preparing the ground for a "new humanism." Like Marx before him, Fanon was concerned with interrogating the conditions under which a sectarian battle—in this case, the struggle of the colonized for their very survival against the eliminatory violence of the colonizers—could nevertheless facilitate the more general emancipation of humanity from the alienating conditions of white supremacist, imperial capitalism.²⁶ In the remainder of this chapter, I explore how we might think of Indigenous struggles against dispossession as similarly positioned, as partisan or sectarian struggles against a historical process that has targeted them *in particular* but which nevertheless contains a dimension of concern to us *in general*.

In the first 150 years of European colonial expansion in the Americas, Indigenous peoples predominately related to newcomers, and to each other, through precolonial modes of political identity and organization. Although Europeans often spoke of the "Indians" as though they were a single, unified civilization, Indigenous peoples themselves typically eschewed such generalizations, continuing to identify with their specific tribes, clans, and nations. As Kevin Bruyneel puts it,

Only after centuries of European-based conquest, colonization, and settlement in North America did terms like *Indian* or *indigenous* gain any meaning at all by setting the collective identity of people such as the Cherokee, Pequot, Mohawk, Chippewa, and hundreds of other tribes and nations into contrast with the emerging Eurocentric settler societies. . . . The words *Indian* and *American Indian*, like *Native American*, *aboriginal*, and *indigenous*, emerged as a product of a co-constitutive relationship with terms such as *colonizers*, *settler*, and *American*.²⁷

The continuation of intra-Indigenous and intra-European rivalry from earlier eras meant that commercial, diplomatic, and military lines of affiliation were dynamic and frequently crossed the supposed civilizational divide. Rather than “Europeans” encountering “Indians,” for most of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, English, French, Spanish, German, and Dutch powers jockeyed with each other to build connections to the Mohican, Mi’kmaq, Pequot, Ojibwe, and Innu peoples (to name only a few). Indeed, many Indigenous societies took advantage of this shifting field to gain dominance over their historic rivals.²⁸

By the middle of the eighteenth century, this configuration began to shift dramatically. With the effective withdrawal of the Dutch from North American colonization in the 1660s, and the defeat of the French a century later, Indigenous peoples increasingly faced a unified English imperial front. Surging Anglo-settler populations followed this political consolidation in the late eighteenth century, augmenting the sense that an integrated Indigenous alliance might be needed to stem the tide of European expansion. Accordingly, over the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a qualitatively new form of pan-Indigenous political mobilization took place. The leaders of these movements are among the best known and most mythologized leaders of the era: Obwandiyag/Pontiac (Odawa) (c. 1720–69), Tecumseh (Shawnee) (1768–1813), Tenskwatwa (Shawnee) (1775–1836), Handsome Lake (Seneca) (1735–1815), and Neolin (Delaware) (b., d. unknown). As Mohawk historian Susan Hill notes, we know far less about the contributions of specific women, in no small measure due to distinctive sexism of the era and in the compilation of the historical record.²⁹ The epigraph that begins this chapter is a case in point. Documents give us a glimpse of a Seneca woman in the late eighteenth century—someone who expressly emphasizes the important role that women play in the leadership structure of her society, admonishing U.S. officials to “hear and listen to what we women shall speak”—but the record does not provide any infor-

mation about the woman, not even her name.³⁰ Nevertheless, we know from a variety of Indigenous and non-Indigenous sources that women served as important figures in the pan-Indigenous spiritual movements of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Historian Gregory Dowd has, for instance, reconstructed the prophecies of a young Delaware woman who challenged the traditional (male) leadership in her own community for their accommodation to British ways.³¹

What unified these new leaders was their commitment to a form of pan-Indigenous spiritual and political renewal through a paradoxically figured “new traditionalism” purged of European influence. Although historians commonly refer to these movements as “nativist,” they are perhaps better characterized as a form of *Indigenous syncretism*.³² Leaders selectively drew from a range of previously distinct religious, cultural, economic, and political practices and creatively wove them together in the hopes of producing a new revivalist movement that would have broad appeal across Indian country. They argued that, whatever political rivalries had divided them historically, Indigenous peoples were united by a broadly shared form of life, undergirded by a spiritual vision that could be juxtaposed against the similarly unified European civilization and Christian religion. Together, they produced a late eighteenth-century “Great Awakening.”³³

In so doing, these thinkers were faced with reconciling a number of tensions and contradictions within their movements. First, their radical appeal to Indigenous tradition was, at least in one sense, not very traditional. Pan-Indigenous syncretism flew in the face of longer-established institutions and forms of association that frequently emphasized differences and divisions between various tribes, clans, and nations. Accordingly, the new prophets often faced fierce opposition from an older generation of leaders. Second, Indigenous syncretism tracked along a paradoxical dialectic of division and unity. Leaders of the movement were tasked with explaining how it could be true that the European form of life was both inferior and yet continually gaining ground. They responded by arguing that the rising European threat was not due to the superiority of the newcomer’s civilization or religion—their guns and gods—but due to intra-Indigenous rivalry and division. As Dowd has argued, the new wave of pan-Indigenous spiritual revivalism that swept across the plains societies of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries partially “depended upon its Indian opponents,” since the new prophets “could attribute the failure of Native American arms not to British numbers, technology, or organization, but to the improper behavior of the accommodating Indians. As long as nativists

faced serious opposition within their own communities, they could explain Indian defeat as the consequence of other Indians' misdeeds." In this paradoxical way, "infighting extended the life of the movement."³⁴

The prophets of pan-Indigeneity were also highly critical of Indians who adopted European ways, whom we might call "accommodationists." Accommodationists included people such as Alexander McGillivray of the Creeks and Joseph Brant of the Mohawks, two prominent leaders who deliberately opted to study in Euro-American schools, use Anglo names, own Black slaves, and generally adopt standard European customs of the time. Perhaps most infamously from the standpoint of the new prophets, accommodationists frequently converted to Christianity and encouraged it among their brethren. The spread of Christianity was particularly controversial because it cut against the new prophets' emergent theory of *polygenesis*: the belief that Indigenous peoples were created separately by their own distinct god, and thus were spiritually corrupted by conversion. The theory of polygenesis was one means by which the new prophets could emphasize the unity of all Indigenous peoples (contra older tribal leaders) and separation from Europeans (contra accommodationists).³⁵

Indigenous syncretism produced a number of successes. One of the first examples of Native peoples consciously and expressly mobilizing resistance to dispossession on the basis of a shared Indigeneity can be found in Pontiac's War. From 1763 to 1766, a confederacy of Native nations rose up against British rule, destroying eight forts and killing or capturing hundreds of colonists. Partially in recognition of this pan-Indigenous resistance, the British Crown began to modify its claims and policies, including more substantial recognition of existing Indigenous legal and political orders.³⁶ Securing peace with neighboring Indigenous nations further enabled contraction and retrenchment. Between 1761 and 1776, the British Crown abandoned seven of the nine forts it held at the close of the Seven Years' War. On the occasion of abandoning "two such expensive and troublesome Forts," General Thomas Gage wrote of his "great pleasure." In this, Gage was reflecting "an increasingly skeptical mood towards landed empire within Britain."³⁷ Another well-known instance of pan-Indigenous unity occurred in 1768, the year that Cherokee and Shawnee leaders set aside generations of enmity, signed a peace treaty, and agreed to unite against Anglo-American expansion (only a half century earlier, the two nations had been embroiled in bitter conflict against one another).

By the mid-nineteenth century, pan-Indigenous politics began to wane. By that point, the new prophets struggled to generate the desired level of

native unity required for widespread, organized resistance to Anglo settler colonization. Waves of displaced peoples from the eastern territories were being driven onto the plains, creating heightened tensions and increased competition with local communities. For instance, the Crow and Cheyenne nations were steadily pushed west by competition with Dakota and Lakota peoples. Their divergent responses to this pressure neatly illustrate the dilemmas of pan-Indigenous politics during this period. Northern Cheyenne tribes eventually sided with their historic rivals, the Oceti Sakowin (aka, the “Great Sioux Nation”), to forge a unified front against Euro-Americans (later even fighting together in the famous 1876 Battle of the Greasy Grass). The Crow, by contrast, spurned unification and remained a nation apart.³⁸ In the nineteenth century, pan-Indigeneity remained a fragile and complex political process of continuous negotiation.

All of this is to say that Indigenous counterdispossession has always been a tradition of *argumentation*, not only externally (vis-à-vis Europeans) but internally as well. As such, it has never entailed substantive agreement on all issues but is rather composed of a shared space of concern, or form of problematization, which arises from a common experience of dispossession. This internal differentiation, it should be emphasized, in no way diminishes the force or import of the critique. It means only that Indigeneity is a *politics*: a contested terrain of discursive and material struggle that simultaneously unites and divides people as individuals and collectivities. In particular, what I wish to highlight here is that internal disagreement over the precise normative concern of critique can coexist with the emergence and solidification of the subject of that critique. Normativity is related to, but not determined by, subjectivity, which is why an emergent conception of “Indigenous” can serve as the vessel for a range of normative concerns. In the next section, I propose to examine more closely some exemplary figures in this internally complex tradition of argumentation as a means of unpacking its multiple logics.

Almost immediately after the U.S. Congress began to institutionalize the dispossessive process outlined in chapter 1, Indigenous peoples began to articulate a response. One early voice of opposition came from the Pequot author, minister, and political organizer William Apess (1798–1839), whose most prolific writing occurred during the late 1820s and 1830s. In 1828/29 he published his autobiography, *A Son of the Forest*, perhaps the first single-authored autobiographical work ever written by an Indigenous person.³⁹

In 1831 he was appointed by the New York Annual Conference of the Protestant Methodists to preach to the Pequots and published *The Increase of the Kingdom of Christ*. Not long after that, *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians; or, An Indian's Looking-Glass for the White Man* appeared in print as well. In 1833 Apess went to Massachusetts, where he participated in a minor revolt of Mashpee peoples there, who rose up in defiance of settler attempts to usurp local decision-making processes within the community. For his role in the Mashpee uprising, Apess was arrested for disturbing the peace, sentenced to jail for thirty days, and ordered to pay a fine. His writings on the revolt include *Indian Nullification of the Unconstitutional Laws of Massachusetts* (1835), a work that cleverly appropriates the legal language of “nullification” away from its Euro-American context for his own purposes.⁴⁰ After publishing two more major works—*Eulogy on King Philip* (1836) and a second, much revised version of *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians* (1837)—Apess appears to have stopped writing. No record of other works can be found after 1838.⁴¹

William Apess is best characterized as an accommodationist. He went by an English name, converted to Christianity (even becoming an important Methodist minister), and generally adopted a European form of life. Still, he was a vociferous critic of Euro-American predations on Native lands. Apess’s critique was thus predominantly an *immanent* one. Across his various works, Apess never tired of pointing out the profound hypocrisy of the Anglo settlers, particularly their fickle and opportunistic commitments to Christianity and the rule of law. This provided the normative basis of his critique, helping him point out what he called the “black inconsistency” at the heart of the Euro-American claim to racial and civilizational superiority. As Apess put it,

If black or red skins or any other skin of color is disgraceful to God, it appears that he has disgraced himself a great deal—for he has made fifteen colored people to one white and placed them here upon the earth. . . . Now suppose these skins were put together, and each skin had its national crimes written upon it—which skin do you think would have the greatest? I will ask one question more. Can you charge the Indians with robbing a nation almost of their whole continent, and murdering their women and children, and then depriving the remainder of their lawful rights, that nature and God require them to have?⁴²

In characterizing their societies as distinctly Christian and law-governed, Apess noted, Anglo-Americans committed themselves to a set of normative

principles that could then be leveraged in a critique of those same societies. As we can see here, his concerns were diverse and complex, including Anglo-America's deep entanglement in genocide, racism, and war. As we can also observe, he consistently opposed himself to dispossession: the wholesale *theft* of a continent is part of the "black inconsistency" of settler colonialism.

For an example of an external critique, we can turn to a figure from later years. Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt, or Chief Joseph (c. 1840–1904), was the leader of the Wal-lam-wat-kain (Wallowa) band of the Nez Perce nation during a period of intense conflict with the U.S. government in the late nineteenth century, including the 1877 Nez Perce War. Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt was a smart and adaptive leader, who drew both on specifically Wal-lam-wat-kain traditions as well as broader pan-Indigenous forms of identification and organization (for instance, allying himself with the Lakota chief Sitting Bull). In 1879 an autobiographical reflection on his life and political views was published under the heading "An Indian's View of Indian Affairs." There, Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt gives expression to his peoples' (multiple) concerns with the dispossession process. He first narrates the dilemma that faced his father, Tuekakas (Old Chief Joseph or Joseph the Elder, c. 1785–1871), when the elder chief was forced to sell off large sections of his peoples' ancestral lands:

My father, who had represented his band, refused to have anything to do with the council [of U.S. governor Stevens], because he wished to be a free man. He claimed that no man owned any part of the earth, and a man could not sell what he did not own. . . .

Eight years later (1863) was the next treaty council. A chief called Lawyer, because he was a great talker, took the lead in this council, and sold nearly all the Nez Percés country. . . .

In this treaty Lawyer acted without authority from our band. He had no right to sell the Wallowa (*winding water*) country.

He elaborates,

The earth was created by the assistance of the sun, and it should be left as it was. . . . The country was made without lines of demarcation, and it is no man's business to divide it. . . . I see the whites all over the country gaining wealth, and see their desire to give us lands which are worthless. . . . The earth and myself are of one mind. . . . I never said the land was mine to do with as I chose. The one who has the right to dispose of it is the one who has created it.⁴³

This is one of the clearest and most articulate statements on the dilemma of dispossession. Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt recognized that he and his people were being pushed into either adopting a fully proprietary relation to the earth or losing it entirely to the Americans. He deftly objects here to both sides of the dispossessive process: the transformation of the land into property, and its divestment from his people.

Apess and Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt obviously related to Euro-American society in very different ways. While Apess was appreciative of several features of the settler world and sought to accommodate himself to it in many ways, Chief Joseph was, by comparison, a “traditionalist.” They were nevertheless united in their strong opposition to dispossession. Accordingly, I read their different ways of relating to settler society expressed as two different modes of critique. Since Apess largely adopted the prevailing normative structures of Anglo-America (Christianity and the rule of law in particular), he sought to leverage those for an immanent critique. By contrast, Chief Joseph operationalized a form-of-life critique, one that sought to discredit the Anglo-American way by juxtaposing it to another, external, superior standard: an ethic of care for the living earth.⁴⁴ Chief Joseph was unconcerned with whether dispossession was internally consistent with the established rules and norms of settler society; for him and the people for whom he spoke, it was inherently objectionable. As I interpret it, that both immanent and externalist modes of critique could coexist within the same tradition of Indigenous political critique is a function not of internal inconsistency but of the particular subject position of the critic relative to the processes under consideration (inside/outside).⁴⁵

One of the more insightful—yet continually overlooked—thinkers along these lines is Laura Cornelius Kellogg (1880–1947). Kellogg was an Oneida leader, author, and political activist. A prolific author, she wrote across a range of genres, including poetry, short stories, and essays. Perhaps her most famous work of political analysis is *Our Democracy and the American Indian* (1920), an impassioned defense of Haudenosaunee (or Six Nations of the Iroquois) sovereignty and self-government. In this work, Kellogg decries the “million ‘golden calves’ of hypocrisy” to which the Anglo-Americans pray.⁴⁶ Paramount among these was their highly inconsistent and selective defense of private property. On the one hand, settlers venerated fee simple land ownership and continuously strove to convert native title into this form. On the other hand, however, they also deployed numerous legal and political devices to prevent Indigenous peoples from ever effectively actualizing a concomitant private property claim to the

land (for instance, by preventing Indians from mortgaging their proprietary interest in land for the purposes of raising capital). Kellogg referred to the process of generating this truncated form of fee simple ownership as “dissipation,” and she decried the “lack of security of possession” it produced for Native peoples.⁴⁷ She moreover called upon her fellow Indigenous peoples to theorize this dilemma of possession and dispossession: “It is plain the Indian himself does not know what theory to advance to save himself and his possessions, but he realizes that the concrete thing he wants is to save them.”⁴⁸

Kellogg offered concrete, practical solutions to this impasse. Among her various accomplishments, she was a founding member of the Society of American Indians (1911–23), the first American Indian rights organization run by and for Indigenous peoples. The society provided an organizational structure for pan-Indigenous syncretism and spawned a revival of such movements. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Kellogg was most actively involved in promoting her “Lolomi plan.” The plan involved Indigenous peoples apprehending the reservation and reserve system for themselves, turning it into a network of new, self-governing collectivities by placing land into corporate trust (to render it less alienable).

One of the important contributions that Kellogg makes to the Indigenous tradition of counterdispossession is the manner with which she explicitly grasped the need to forge pan-indigeneity by giving it an institutional structure, undergirded by a new political economy—a system she occasionally termed “Indian communism.”⁴⁹ In this way, Kellogg highlights for us the *reconstructive* dimension of Indigenous political critique, that is, the extent to which pan-Indigenous identity is both made and found. This reconstruction is simultaneously forward and backward looking; it draws resources from the past to forge a new future. For instance, explicitly invoking the example of Tecumseh, who wanted to “nationalize the race,” Kellogg insists on the need for the Indigenous “race” to “restore itself to some of its traditional philosophy” as a means by which to counter the traditional colonial policy of “divide and conquer.”⁵⁰ She warns Natives against assisting Euro-Americans in their efforts to “create factions among the tribes”: “Our solidarity will be threatened by them just so long as you do not wake up and refuse to allow them to represent you.”⁵¹ She expands upon this theme as follows:

There have been times when I thought all one Indian had in common with another were ignorance and oppression. There have been times

when I thought there were Indians and Indians ad infinitum. I had not then broken through the fastness of the wilderness, I had not then found the fraternity. The fraternity whose spirit cannot be broken by a million years of persecution, the fraternity who, regardless of ethnic culture of Bureau propaganda cannot be coerced into demoralization. The fraternity whom exile and “a reign of terror” have only strengthened. The fraternity to whom death is sweet if that is the price. My heart has not ached through the mountains in vain. The heroes of my childhood are not all gone from the earth. But, they are not begging and bean of politics with which to drag out a miserable existence. They are not around fawning upon the Paleface.⁵²

Rarely has there been a more poetic and compelling articulation of the need to draw upon the past to forge a new form of pan-indigeneity in the face of this systemic threat. What we might draw from Kellogg’s work then is the insight that dispossession is partially constitutive of the modes of subjectivity and forms of group identification (e.g., “settler,” “native”) it engenders, but it is not determinative. (As she puts it, Indigenous peoples have more in common than their shared oppression, but they do have that.) Accordingly, the tradition of Indigenous counterdispossession works both within and against this mode of subjectivation. This tradition of critique both refers to, and calls forth, an Indigenous subject who might bear it forward into the present. In this way, it is performative.

The three thinkers surveyed above, of course, do not exhaust the range of Indigenous political critique. They are chosen instead as exemplars of three different aspects of the tradition of counterdispossession.⁵³ William Apess was an accommodationist who nevertheless launched a trenchant immanent critique of the profound hypocrisies and “black inconsistencies” of Anglo-America. Hin-mah-too-yah-lat-kekt (Chief Joseph) was a traditionalist who articulated an external critique from the standpoint of an alternative form of life. Finally, Laura Kellogg developed a unique form of Indigenous syncretism, one that sought to forge a new pan-Native movement on the basis of a shared institutional structure of collective land ownership and development. Each opposed dispossession, albeit on different grounds. Each saw this critical opposition as part of their indigeneity.

The twentieth century has seen a remarkable rebirth and revival of Indigenous syncretism. As Miranda Johnson has extensively documented,

rounds of dispossession associated with the expansion of natural resource extraction industries in the 1950s, through 1980s generated new waves of pan-Indigenous legal and political mobilization. While rooted in local traditions and particular customary legal orders, these movements also saw a remarkable convergence of Indigenous political identity, now in a much-expanded “Anglo settler world.” Over this period, Dene, Dakota, Haida, and Ojibwe peoples from North America were increasingly in direct, continuous communication with their counterparts around the world, in particular, the Anglophone South Pacific. This generated “a new definition of indigeneity,” which “emphasized that indigenous peoples’ identities were inextricably bound to the land.” The politics that followed from this “yoked together place, history, and identity,” and drew together otherwise far flung and disparately located communities who nevertheless had a basis on which to build a common struggle: they were “groups that had been dispossessed of much of their territory and wanted to re-establish connections to places of significance to them in order to restore a sense of who they were in the wake of dispossession.”⁵⁴ Thus, although these struggles often emerged in relation to concerns with their specific national contexts, as Ojibwe scholar Sheryl Lightfoot has argued, this also generated a new form of Indigenous internationalism that amounts to a “subtle revolution” in the global order.⁵⁵ It is to this globalized Indigenous struggle against dispossession that author and activist George Manuel (Shuswap) referred when he coined the term “Fourth World.”⁵⁶

Today, Fourth World critiques of dispossession are enjoying a renaissance. The contributions of contemporary scholars such as Joanne Barker, Jodi Byrd, Nick Estes, Mishuana Goeman, J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, and Leanne Simpson are best understood against this long, historical backdrop. Two of the most important and influential contributions to these debates today include Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin, White Masks* and Audra Simpson’s *Mohawk Interruptus*. These two works continue the Indigenous tradition of grappling with the dilemmas of dispossession and possession in their own ways. Coulthard’s analysis draws on a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous thinkers alike to highlight the endurance of a “form of structured dispossession,”⁵⁷ which continues to threaten the life and livelihood of his people in the context of a supposedly postcolonial era of multicultural recognition politics. Simpson moves between thick ethnographic dialogues with Haudenosaunee interlocutors and an analytically sharp genealogy of anthropology as a mode of ethnographic capture that supports “an ongoing structure of dispossession that targets Indigenous peoples for

elimination.”⁵⁸ What stands out most about these two works as exemplars of the tradition of counterdispossession with which I am most concerned here is the extent to which both are self-consciously situated in the long-standing historical struggles of their respective communities. Coulthard’s intervention builds upon and extends the Dene Nation’s multigenerational resistance against exploitative and extractive natural resource “development” projects in the Canadian north, ultimately going back to the nineteenth century but intensified and accelerated since the 1970s. In Simpson’s case, the analysis given in *Mohawk Interruptus* rests upon the still visceral, living memory of the 1990 bloody and highly sensationalized armed conflict between (in particular, but not limited to) the Mohawks of Kanehsatà: ke and Kahnawà: ke, on the one hand, and the military and police powers of the Canadian government, on the other. Colloquially known as the “Oka crisis,” this standoff occurred when Mohawks resisted the desecration, commodification, and confiscation of their ancestral lands through the expansion of a nine-hole golf course into a funeral site. As these two works make dramatically clear, contemporary Indigenous social and political critique is standing on the shoulders of countless generations and is grounded in a project of fierce material and ideological resistance beyond the narrow confines of staid academic debates.

III

Indigenous peoples have always resisted dispossession. They have not, however, always done so *as* Indigenous peoples. Instead, the very idea of indigeneity was, in part, forged in and through this mode of resistance. One might even say that “indigeneity” is the name for that intervention, that interruption, which has historically prevented processes of dispossession from ever fully realizing themselves. This has been consistently obscured by the reduction of “indigeneity” to fixed, temporally frozen cultural substance.⁵⁹ In *The White Possessive*, the Indigenous (Goenpul) scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson plots an alternative course of analysis, away from the ethnographic capture of “cultural difference” as an index of normative standing and toward an analysis of “the conditions of our existence and the disciplinary knowledges that shape and produce Indigeneity.”⁶⁰ Paramount among these conditions is what she terms the “possessive logic of white patriarchal sovereignty,” especially manifest in the juridical construction and regulation of property. As we have already seen, partially as a

function of this focus, the concept of dispossession operates as a key term of analysis in Moreton-Robinson's work.

The first key insight of this move has been to observe that "Indigenous peoples" are not found existing in a historical and sociological vacuum, defined by a specific cultural essence that remains fixed for all time. Rather, like all human groups, they are made in time and through historical processes. This point has been made time and again by Indigenous scholars themselves, who have repeatedly cautioned against the foreclosure of Indigenous agency through conscription into categories of identity that are, paradoxically, both too vacuous and too determinate. Some of the most important work on the problem of vacuity comes to us from the Chickasaw scholar Jodi Byrd. In *Transit of Empire*, Byrd analyzes how the category of "Indian" functions as an empty cipher, a vessel into which pour the hopes, fears, and aspirations for diverse political agents and agendas. As she plots its movement across a range of texts and debates, Byrd observes consistency in the very fact that this transit continues to foreclose direct grappling with the practices of *self*-determination within Indigenous modes of collective political action.⁶¹ On the side of overly determined content, Delaware scholar Joanne Barker observes:

"The Native," then, is put to work in many ways to represent specific political concerns and agendas. As a consequence, who is and is not included as native is contingent on the social contexts of its use. . . . The challenge, then, is not how to capture the truth or the essence of the Native in the category of the Native; it is not about which discourse "gets it right." Rather it is to think through the kinds of historical circumstances that have been created to produce coherence in what "the Native" means and how it functions in any given historical moment or articulatory act.⁶²

In sum, as Byrd, Barker, and a host of other interlocutors have long documented, what it means to be "native," "Indian," or "Indigenous" is constituted in a set of deeply fraught political acts that entail navigating between the shoals of vacuity and determination.

Such debates over the politics of Indigenous identity are too large, complex, and rapidly shifted to be grasped in their entirety here.⁶³ Instead, I consider them only insofar as they are refracted through a much narrower issue: the critique of dispossession. If it can be properly said that indigeneity has been partially formed not only in the shared experience of being targeted by processes of dispossession but also in common resistance to it,

then indigeneity is already defined in part as critical praxis. Viewing it in this light permits us to reconceive the category of “Indigenous” as a political construct that emerged through a long process of learning, adaptation, and experimentation.⁶⁴ Approaching the matter in this way does not entail viewing indigeneity as a perfectly coherent, unified whole. That is precisely the point. Rather than a unitary subject, we have a “family resemblance” of different modes of resistance and forms of normative critique that, despite their internal diversity, nevertheless compose a recognizably distinct grammar of struggle. The point is not that all individual Indigenous people share precisely the same view on the matter. It only means that there is a recognizable Indigenous tradition of counterdispossession to which they can appeal—even in their disagreements with one another. In this way, “indigeneity” is no different from any other historically constituted grammar of politics, such as liberalism, feminism, or Marxism.

An additional qualification is in order. To say that indigeneity is made in and through historical processes such as colonization and dispossession is importantly not to claim that it is wholly *determined* by those processes. As an empirical collection of people, Indigenous peoples are not fully scripted into the roles and categories that interpolate them into prevailing systems of power; nor do they simply invert those systems in a clean dialectical reversal. Rather, Indigenous peoples have developed both immanent forms of dialectical critique, which exploit and overturn contradictions from within prevailing systems of power, and external, ontological, or “form-of-life” critiques that draw resources from their own intellectual, spiritual, and political traditions. As has been explored above, the most effective strategies often oscillate between these two poles, operating both internal and external to dominant systems of power.

These different modes of critique are manifest in the very terminology we draw upon. At one end of the spectrum, we can speak of “Indians”—a legal-racial category imposed upon whole categories of people without their consent (often even without their knowledge). At the other end, we have specific terms of collective self-expression, such as Kanien’kehaka, Nêhirawisiw, Māori, Diné, or Inuit (Δ∅Δ^c). Critique can be mobilized from either position. Immanent criticism of ascriptive categories such as “Indians” has the advantage of being able to mobilize large numbers of people into one struggle, since it builds upon the shared experience of colonial interpolation. For this same reason, however, it has the distinct disadvantage of being predominately *negatively* defined. On the other hand, drawing from the specific intellectual and political traditions of the Nuu-chah-

nulth or Pitjantjatjara has the advantage of being very *positively* defined (that is, associated with a thick set of determinate cultural, spiritual, linguistic practices). For that same reason, however, it makes coordination between groups more difficult, and thus collective self-determination all the more elusive. This is a dilemma that Fanon, among others, rightly pointed out as central to most anticolonial movements.⁶⁵

In and through many centuries of struggle, the partial solution to this has been to foster categories that can mediate between these poles. *Indigenous* is just such a category. It speaks to a shared experience of colonization but also to a family resemblance of spiritual, cultural, and political commitments. This has been one mechanism by which specific nations, tribes, societies, and confederacies across a huge swath of time and space have self-consciously forged a common political project that consists both in opposing colonization in all of its forms and fostering alternatives to it grounded in plural visions of other worlds and other forms of life.

I have drawn upon this forging process as a site of critical theory, with specific reference to how it constitutes a tradition of counterdispossession, one not only distinct from but also in crucial ways superior to the prevailing European frames of reference. It is my contention then that anyone interested in understanding the historical development of the late modern and contemporary global order would do well to pay attention to this tradition because it contains indispensable resources for understanding dispossession at both historical-descriptive and critical-normative levels.

We are perhaps better positioned now to understand one final component of this analysis I should like to highlight: the *belatedness* of normative critique. In framing things this way, I am drawing upon language commonly found in Freudian theory and the Freudo-Marxist works of early Frankfurt School thinkers. In works such as *Project for a Scientific Psychology*, Sigmund Freud argued that trauma was characterized (at least in part) by the feature of *Nachträglichkeit*.⁶⁶ Lacking a direct English translation, this term has been variously rendered as “afterwardness,” “belatedness,” and/or “deferred action.”⁶⁷ The core element here is that working through trauma involves wrestling with and reincorporating memory or after effects (not “the event” as such) and, as such, is necessarily structured by a certain retroactive, belated understanding. The traumatic event is partially constitutive of the subject at hand, who can only begin the work of repair from that now posttraumatic location. The effect of working through trauma is not to

“restore” the subject to some original purity—the picture of a pretraumatic self is likely a construct or projection of current circumstances—but to (re) constitute oneself in a manner that better enables the interminable tasks of self-interpretation and self-appropriation. In this sense then, wrestling with trauma is always belated.

In this work, I have argued that dispossession entails the large-scale transfer of land that simultaneously recodes the object of exchange in question such that it appears retrospectively to be a form of theft in the ordinary sense. Because of the strange recursive logic of this operation—in which theft precedes and produces property—those targeted by the process appear, contradictorily, to be demanding the return of a stolen object that is not property at all. In this, Indigenous peoples appear as the “original owners” of the land but only retrospectively, that is, refracted backward through the process itself. By now, it is hopefully clear that this is not contradictory but rather *belated*. By this I do not mean that Indigenous peoples and their allies come to object to any particular instance of dispossession once it is “already too late.” People can and do anticipate new rounds of dispossession all the time. Nor am I suggesting that the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their lands is a form of trauma, Freudian or other. Rather, I am arguing that apprehension of the particular meaning of dispossession in colonial contexts can benefit from deploying a concept of *belatedness*, one that parallels the analogous function of that term in other contexts. The utility of the term consists in the fact that it highlights how the condition for the articulation of the normative concern is structurally (rather than merely chronologically) “after the fact”—that is, refracted backward through the process itself—because the evaluative standpoint or subject position itself is partially constituted by the processes in question. The very terms of a critique of dispossession are located in situ to the processes under description, rendering “Indians” as claimants over an object (property in land) they seek to recover in such a way as to undo it. As I have attempted to illustrate, the historical processes in question (dispossession) are partially constitutive of the modes of subjectification and group identification at stake (Indigenous, Native, settler, etc.), which in turn bear upon and shape the standpoint or mode of normative evaluation and critique. The recursive structure of this feedback loop is entirely missed in ideal, analytic modes of “normative theory,” which operate by reconstructing an idealized, hypostasized “original subject” who stands prior to the processes in question.

IV

Indigenous peoples have consistently and steadfastly denounced and resisted both the transformation of the earth into a proprietary grid and the systematic transfer of this land out of their hands and into the hands of white settlers. They have been effectively arguing that the earth belongs to no one in particular, and it was stolen from them. As I have been arguing throughout, while this appears contradictory, it is in fact an appropriate, conceptually complex response to the particular process under description. This critique contains simultaneous concern with alienation and diremption. It is a concern both with separation of humanity from the earth and the internal sundering of humanity into categories of “colonizer” and “colonized,” “settler” and “Native.” Rather than a weakness, the brilliance of the formulation lies precisely in its capacity to keep these two elements sharply in view at once. If there has been a relatively high level of consistency in this opposition, I suggest, it is not because Indigenous peoples are possessed by some ineffable connection to “the land.” It is not, as some critics contend, because Native peoples are defined “metaphysically as being of the land.” Rather, it is because these peoples—however otherwise different they are from one another—have two things in common: they have been made the targets of a single global process and they have fought it. When we actually undertake the work of reconstructing the historical conditions under which it has emerged, what follows is a story of the operation of Indigenous political critique as the dialectical inversion of—or, in the words of the Kanaka Maoli scholar J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, the “counterpart analytic” to—the dispossession process itself.⁶⁸ Read in this light, Indigenous critique may be thought of less as a substantive identity category than as an oppositional praxis that emerged in dialectical fashion relative to a specific set of historical processes. If dispossession is already a negation, then Indigenous critique is the negation of that negation.