

Book Review: *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* by Leanne Simpson

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Spring 2019

Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance: Theorizing, Writing, Organizing, Schooling

Leanne Simpson's *As We Have Always Done* is at once a description of Nishnaabeg Intelligence and a method that allows for a deeper understanding of relationality of human and nonhuman forms of life and more broadly what it means to ethically approach research sites. From very early, and using the example of Dr. Driben, Simpson simultaneously indicts anthropology (and other western/colonial epistemic systems) as a field that has been instrumental in the dispossession of indigenous and other marginalized populations and shows what it would mean to move toward decolonial frameworks even while occupying fraught positions. She writes: *He asked the Elders if they thought the project was a good idea, they said it was. He asked them how best to proceed. They told him. He asked them if they would be the decision-makers. They agreed, and then they were, and he got out of their way (13)*. Not only does this ethical engagement trouble/disrupt the imposed boundary between what constitutes 'properly' academic theorizing and what remains in the realm of the autobiographical, of stories, visions, and dreams- but it visibilizes aspects of native culture foreclosed or elided by the traditional archive- an archive which has historically and in the present moment been structured by relations of power. Furthermore, it models how we might resist engaging in research that is

extractive and disempowering and instead practices speaking with and not for the populations whose stories we want to tell.

To unmask settler colonialism, racial capitalism, cis-heteropatriarchy and white supremacy, Simpson goes against the traditional archive choosing instead to ground her theory in social practices in place- what indigenous scholar Glen Coulthard calls *grounded normativity*. Thus, rather than maintain colonial ideas of how we ‘come to know’, Simpson constructs theory from the literal ground up. The epistemic shifts that Simpson makes are also productive for other interventions she is making primarily around showing how western epistemologies not only shape sociality and materiality but also how it shapes the subjectivities of native people who identify or disidentify with, for example, Two-Spirit or Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) codifications. Furthermore, in enacting the decolonial research praxis that is necessary for disrupting what Vimalessary, Pegues, and Goldstein (2016) call “Colonial Unknowing” (settler moves towards innocence) -- and although Simpson is careful to point out that she is speaking for herself--so much space is created for other voices- living and already departed, children and Elders, echoes from other radical traditions, queer, trans and other gender and sexual minorities. Regardless of how these perspectives come to Simpson (although always through motion, fugitivity, through practice), they allow for the rupturing of coloniality and the suturing of solidarity at the site of knowledge production. Her use of what Jacobs, Thomas and Lang in *Two-Spirit People* call ‘dissident vernaculars’ enacts resistance to positivistic methodologies that (falsely) separate researcher from the object of study; prioritizes embodied knowledge and is the crux of what she frames as indigenous resurgence.

While Simpson's text is clearly anti-status quo (that is, anti-colonial epistemologies, anti-cis- heteropatriarchy, anti-capitalism, etc), she seems more invested in advancing a pro-indigenous worldview of what it means to live in freedom (p.7). This I read as another deliberate move to decenter whiteness by focusing instead on indigenous nation-building. She writes: *This is a manifesto to create networks of reciprocal resurgent movements with other humans and nonhumans radically imagining their ways out of domination, who are not afraid to let those imaginings destroy the pillars of settler colonialism (10)*. Thus, settler colonialism is not her focus but she recognizes that when Indigenous nation-building occurs settler colonialism is necessarily interrupted.

Central to Simpson's argument is the notion of *refusal* - a refusal of the rights and 'privileges' offered by whiteness; the refusal of state recognition, refusal of capital accumulation, a refusal of western-based education, since claims for status do not disrupt the system but actually maintains it, leading to further dispossession. To be clear, Simpson is not suggesting that there is no value in achieving what would be tantamount to full citizenship but that the indigenous impetus is not toward possession, rather it is consensual attachments that fully attend to reciprocal relationships between humans, non-humans and the land. The arguments Simpson lays out toward this end are structurally similar to adrienne maree brown's *Emergent Strategy*. Both thinkers center quotidian practices as the ground from which decolonization swells- where there is accountability to each other, strategic movement and shared decision-making practices (p. 218). And where justice is practiced every day, is felt at the level of the body, comes from and extends outwards to all forms of human and nonhuman life. *Practices are politics.*

Beyond offering an expansive vocabulary for Nishnaabeg Intelligence specifically and decolonial praxis more broadly, Simpson does significant work to make visible how indigenous people continue to experience multilayered oppression at a time when indigenous dispossession is narrated as a thing of the past. She distinguishes clearly between indigenous resurgence as practiced by the state and resurgence grounded in place - the former reabsorbing the coloniality into the very frameworks that are seemingly wrestling against it. One of the most poignant examples of how these practices are distinct came from her discussion of how the internet (specifically social media) is used for activism via Idle No More. Simpson writes:

I wonder how the internet as another structure of control whose primary purpose is to make corporations money, is at all helpful in building movements. I wonder if the simulated worlds of the internet are simulations that serve to only amplify capitalism, misogyny and transphobia, anti-queerness and white supremacy and create further dependencies on settler colonialism in the physical world. I wonder if this creates further alienation from oneself, from indigenous thoughts and practices and from the indigenous material world. I wonder if this is a digital dispossession from ourselves because it further removes us from grounded normativity (221)

For Simpson, radical resurgence necessitates connections to actual physical bodies, bodies in motion; bodies connected to the land. This site of analysis does significant work in laying bare how the machinery of racial capitalism is always already remaking itself. Radical resurgence is a recognition of this and collective decision to remain fugitives of this system - fugitives existing in constellations.

Simpson's text is brilliant. It re-members and weaves visions and dreams of indigenous and black ancestors, conversations with mentors and elders, observations of ceremonies and relations, indigenous scholarship, black radical thought, activist platforms, and embodied knowledge to pave the way for decolonial futurities that are always already present.