

# Toward an Ethics of Decolonizing Allyship in Climate Organizing: Reflections on Extinction Rebellion Vancouver

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*Since launching in the UK in 2018, Extinction Rebellion (XR) has become a global social movement that uses mass civil disobedience to pressure governments to take immediate action on the climate crisis. While XR has shifted the conversation on climate change, it has also been critiqued for its lack of attention to privilege and oppression, and for its ‘apolitical’ approach to climate organizing. In this article, we argue that XR must develop an intersectional approach in order to address the climate crisis. In particular, we reflect on our experiences as participants in XR-Vancouver, located on unceded Indigenous territory in the settler colonial state of Canada. Settler colonialism in Canada is intertwined with the climate and ecological crises, as Canada’s status as a petrostate is built on the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples through a strategy of racialized extractivism. To attend to these dynamics, we build on Kyle Ponys Whyte’s concept of ‘decolonizing allyship’ and suggest three ethics — of relational accountability, care, and incommensurability — that settler-led movements like XR can cultivate. We conclude by inviting XR to (re)engage with a ‘politics of refusal’ that subverts the state and allows XR to collectively enact what different systems (rooted in intersectional, decolonizing allyship) could look like.\**

**Keywords:** climate emergency, climate justice, decolonization, environmentalism, Extinction Rebellion, intersectionality, social movements

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Global grassroots mobilization has intensified as the scientific community has increasingly advocated for immediate and drastic measures to curtail the climate and mass extinction crises.<sup>1</sup> In the last few years, social movements such as the Sunrise Movement, Fridays for Future, and Extinction Rebellion have emerged to pressure governments to take action. Other movements have a longer history of mobilizing for climate and ecological justice — among

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\* We thank Evan Bowness, Angela McIntyre, Hannah Wittman, and Karlene Harvey for reviewing prior versions of this manuscript, as well as two anonymous reviewers who provided generous and encouraging feedback. We are also grateful to Elder Jim Leyden, Chief Willie Sellars, and Stacy Gallagher for their teachings and leadership, and to Johnnie Manson and Emilee Gilpin, who have greatly informed our thinking. Trevor Mack is also grateful to the glaciers on T̓silhqox Biny that keep him humble. Lastly, we extend our thanks to the Indigenous land and water protectors and non-Indigenous allies/accomplices who continue to struggle against the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression.

<sup>1</sup> IPCC, ‘Global Warming of 1.5°C.’ (2018); William J Ripple and others, ‘World Scientists’ Warning of a Climate Emergency’ (2019) XX *BioScience* 1; Gerardo Ceballos and Paul R Ehrlich, ‘The Misunderstood Sixth Mass Extinction’ (2018) 360 *Science* 1080; Anthony D Barnosky and others, ‘Has the Earth’s Sixth Mass Extinction Already Arrived?’ (2011) 471 *Nature* 51; Gerardo Ceballos and others, ‘Accelerated Modern Human-Induced Species Losses: Entering the Sixth Mass Extinction’ (2015) 1 *Science Advances* 9; IPBES, *Summary for Policymakers of the Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services* (IPBES secretariat 2019).

them, the Idle No More movement in Canada, The Wretched of the Earth in the UK, and numerous grassroots collectives across the Global South.

Based on our prior experiences as member-organizers of Extinction Rebellion Vancouver (XR-Vancouver) — and *not* on behalf of XR-Vancouver<sup>2</sup> — this article reflects on one XR chapter's efforts to mobilize in a settler colonial context. Settler colonialism is defined as the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples due to 'the sustained migration and permanent settlement' of people non-Indigenous to a particular geography, and 'the development of elaborate institutions that [allow] settlers and their descendants to gain numerical and political dominance'.<sup>3</sup> Settler colonialism in the Canadian context is inextricably intertwined with the climate and ecological crises, as Canada's status as a 'petrostate'<sup>4</sup> is built on centuries of dispossession of Indigenous Peoples through a strategy of 'racialized extractivism'.<sup>5</sup>

It is important that, as authors, we position ourselves before continuing. Dana is a white, middle-class, non-disabled, straight, cisgender woman and settler of German, Polish, and Dutch descent who grew up on the traditional territory of the Susquehannock people (central Pennsylvania, USA).<sup>6</sup> Trevor is a documentary, narrative, and experimental filmmaker of T̓silhqot'in (Chilcotin), Dakelh (Carrier), and Polish descent who both grew up and currently lives on unceded T̓silhqot'in and Secwépemc (Shuswap) territories, located in the interior of what is now called British Columbia (BC), Canada.

In what follows, we first introduce XR and discuss its goals, framing, theory of change and tactics. We make note of critiques of XR, which call for XR to develop a climate politics more attuned to issues of social justice.<sup>7</sup> Drawing upon the work of intersectional feminists and of Potawatomi philosopher Kyle Powys Whyte, we highlight the need for XR and other settler-led movements in settler colonial contexts to take up an intersectional framework rooted in what we call ethics of decolonizing allyship.<sup>8</sup> We then discuss our experiences as member-organizers of XR-Vancouver and explain the unique sociopolitical context within which our chapter is situated, on unceded and stolen Indigenous lands. From our perspective, we suggest ways that XR-Vancouver can take steps to adopt an intersectional and decolonizing approach to its organizing, and close by sharing some generative tensions that XR — and

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<sup>2</sup> We want to emphasize that this paper does not represent the opinions or positions of XR or XR-Vancouver, although we did receive the permission of the coordination group to write this reflection. We are members of XR and participants in the diverse struggles against the climate crisis, but we do not speak on behalf of any movement. More information about XR-Vancouver can be found at <https://xrvancouver.ca/>.

<sup>3</sup> Margaret D Jacobs, 'Seeing Like a Settler Colonial State' (2018) 1 *Modern American History* 257.

<sup>4</sup> A Nikiforuk, *Tar Sands: Dirty Oil and the Future of a Continent* (Greystone 2010); Laurie E Adkin, *First World Petro-Politics: The Political Ecology and Governance of Alberta* (University of Toronto Press 2016).

<sup>5</sup> Jen Preston, 'Racial Extractivism and White Settler Colonialism: An Examination of the Canadian Tar Sands Mega-Projects' (2017) 31 *Cultural Studies* 353.

<sup>6</sup> "Vancouver" and "Canada" are colonial names given to parts of "North America", which many Indigenous Peoples refer to as "Turtle Island."

<sup>7</sup> Colin Kinniburgh, 'Can Extinction Rebellion Survive?' (2020) 67 *Dissent* 125; Nafeez Ahmed, 'The Flawed Social Science behind Extinction Rebellion's Change Strategy' (*Insurge Intelligence*, 2019)

<<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2019-10-31/the-flawed-social-science-behind-extinction-rebellions-change-strategy/>> accessed 29 March 2020; The Wretched of the Earth, 'An Open Letter to Extinction Rebellion' (2019) 6 *Journal of Global Faultlines* 109.

<sup>8</sup> There are various perspectives on the terms 'ally' and 'allyship'. We use 'allyship' throughout as that is the concept mobilized by Kyle Powys Whyte. Others have argued for shifting toward becoming 'accomplices' or 'comrades'. See: 'Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing the Ally Industrial Complex' (*Indigenous Action*, 2014) <<http://www.indigenousaction.org/accomplices-not-allies-abolishing-the-ally-industrial-complex/>> accessed 30 October 2019; Jodi Dean, *Comrade* (Verso 2019).

settler-led movements in general — will continuously need to address when building accountable alliances for climate justice.

## 2 EXTINCTION REBELLION: CRITIQUES OF A GLOBAL MOVEMENT

Extinction Rebellion (XR) is a social movement that started in the United Kingdom (UK) in October 2018. The decentralized network of activists made an international name for itself in November of that year, when XR-UK shut down parts of London through climate demonstrations. Members declared themselves ‘in rebellion’ against the UK government due to its insufficient action on climate change and mass extinction, declaring that the ‘social contract’ had been broken.<sup>9</sup> XR’s membership, online presence and media appearances have grown rapidly since. More than 1000 individuals were arrested in April 2019 during London’s ‘Week of Rebellion’ (as XR’s large-scale mobilizations to shut down business-as-usual have come to be known).<sup>10</sup> The movement continued to scale-out in the lead-up to the International Week of Rebellion in October 2019 (although its growth appears since to have plateaued, especially owing to the Covid-19 pandemic). There are now an estimated 650 Extinction Rebellion chapters in at least 45 countries across the world.<sup>11</sup>

When it launched in the UK, XR had three core demands:<sup>12</sup> That governments and other institutions (such as the media and educational institutions) ‘tell the truth’ about the climate and ecological crises; that governments ‘act now’ to stop biodiversity loss and to bring greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by the year 2025; and that governments create and heed the recommendations of ‘Citizens’ Assemblies’ on climate and ecological justice.<sup>13</sup>

At the heart of XR’s theory of change is the conviction that past grassroots tactics have not led to meaningful climate action. XR posits that large-scale, nonviolent civil disobedience — in particular, mass arrest — is the ‘only option left’ to force governments to respond to its demands.<sup>14</sup> The movement has drawn on the work of social movement theorists such as Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan,<sup>15</sup> whose empirical assessment of past movements found that when at least 3.5% of the population mobilized in nonviolent civil disobedience, a government would be very likely to address a campaign’s demands. Stephan and Chenoweth also found that nonviolent campaigns were about twice as likely to achieve their goals.<sup>16</sup> Their work, along with that of Gene Sharp,<sup>17</sup> established the efficacy of nonviolent methods for social and political change.

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<sup>9</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘About Us’; see also Extinction Rebellion, *This Is Not a Drill* (Penguin 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Kinniburgh (n 7).

<sup>11</sup> Neil Gunningham, ‘Averting Climate Catastrophe: Environmental Activism, Extinction Rebellion and Coalitions of Influence’ (2019) 30 *King’s Law Journal* 194.

<sup>12</sup> Note that XR chapters around the world and in Canada have also adopted a fourth demand, which calls for Indigenous self-determination, a just transition for all workers employed in the fossil fuel economy, and reparations to communities and countries that have been most affected by climate change. XR-Canada has proposed a fourth demand, and is currently soliciting feedback from chapters.

<sup>13</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘Our Demands’ <<https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/demands/>> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>14</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘FAQs’ <<https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/faqs/>> accessed 30 March 2020.

<sup>15</sup> Erica Chenoweth and Maria J Stephan, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict* (Columbia University Press 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Maria J Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, ‘Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict’ (2008, p. 8) 33 *International Security* 7.

<sup>17</sup> Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy, A Conceptual Framework for Liberation* (4th edn, Albert Einstein Institution 2010); Gene Sharp, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Porter Sargent Publishers 1973).

XR's theory of change has been criticized by scholars and activists for a number of reasons. Ahmed<sup>18</sup> argues that XR has decontextualized and misinterpreted the work of Chenoweth and Stephan. One key example is that XR has adopted the '3.5% rule,' focusing on mobilizing 3.5% of the population in resistance. Ahmed argues: '[the rule] is only meaningful in application to forms of political resistance against regimes involved in considerable, highly visible, domestic repression, by mobilising communities directly affected by that repression. And there is scant evidence of its effectiveness in the context of Western liberal democracy'.<sup>19</sup>

Ahmed and other scholars have also critiqued XR for its proclaimed 'apolitical' approach to climate mobilization. As Kinniburgh states,

There is no such thing as apolitical organizing, let alone an apolitical climate movement. As climate change slowly pushes the deniers into irrelevance and imposes itself as the twenty-first century's most pressing issue, the fundamental battle lines will be over how to confront the crisis... Extinction Rebellion's big-tent approach — which has required it to remain vague about the 'how' of confronting climate change — has been an effective mobilizing strategy in the short term but offers few answers to the burning questions of twenty-first-century politics.<sup>20</sup>

For XR to refer to itself as 'apolitical' — beyond being incompatible with the explicitly political work that XR actually does — comes from a position of privilege and is consistent with claims that XR has, from the outset, been a mostly white, middle-class environmental movement with a problematic lack of diversity (particularly in key organizational roles).<sup>21</sup> This critique of XR is particularly troubling considering its promotion of tactics such as voluntary arrest through collaboration with the police, which assumes that individuals are able to volunteer for arrest without fear — a privilege not equally shared, given the highly troubled relationship between the police and Indigenous people, Black people, and other racialized people.<sup>22</sup> In a poignant letter, the climate justice movement the Wretched of the Earth — a collective of racialized and diaspora organizers — penned:

Many of us live with the risk of arrest and criminalization ... The strategy of XR, with the primary tactic of being arrested, is a valid one — but it needs to be underlined by an ongoing analysis of privilege as well as the reality of police and state violence. XR participants should be able to use their privilege to risk arrest, whilst at the same time highlighting the racialised nature of policing. Though some of this analysis has started to happen, until it becomes central to XR's organising it is not sufficient. To address climate change and its roots in inequity and

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<sup>18</sup> Ahmed (n 7).

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* We would note here that we disagree with Ahmed's assumed position that Western liberal democratic states, including the US and Canada, do not engage in highly visible domestic repression; they repeatedly do so with respect to specific populations, notably towards Black and Indigenous people.

<sup>20</sup> Kinniburgh (n 7).

<sup>21</sup> Sam Knights, 'Extinction Rebellion: We Need To Talk About The Future' (2019) <<https://medium.com/@sam.j.knights/extinction-rebellion-we-need-to-talk-about-the-future-95459aa4d4e0>> accessed 29 March 2020; Kinniburgh (n 7). In saying that there is a problematic lack of diversity, we do not want to erase the activism of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized organizers, nor that of disabled, working class, queer, and nonbinary individuals within XR. We also do not want to diminish the fact that, around the world, these communities have long been on the frontlines of direct action (violent and nonviolent, arrestable and non-arrestable) in pursuit of social, economic, environmental, and climate justice. We simply aim to draw attention to the ways in which privilege, particularly white privilege, shape XR.

<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Comack, *Racialized Policing: Aboriginal People's Encounters with the Police* (Fernwood Publishing 2012); Robyn Maynard, *Policing Black Lives: State Violence in Canada from Slavery to the Present* (Fernwood Publishing 2017).

domination, a diversity and plurality of tactics and communities will be needed to co-create the transformative change necessary.<sup>23</sup>

While many of XR's members are committed to social justice, the Wretched of the Earth's critique of XR's lack of attention to privilege and oppression highlights the crucial need to center an intersectional view on the roots and impacts of the climate crisis. In the next section, we discuss the concept of intersectionality and how it relates to climate organizing in settler colonial contexts such as Canada.

### 3 AN INTERSECTIONAL VIEW OF THE CLIMATE CRISIS IN CANADA

From a social and critical environmental justice<sup>24</sup> perspective, the climate crisis exacerbates already-existing inequities that fall, and intersect, along lines of indigeneity, race, class, gender identity, sexuality, age, disability, and citizenship, among others. This is to say, the impacts of climate change are experienced differently based on a person's lived experience at the intersection of privilege(s) and oppression(s). Our use of the term intersectionality is based in the work of Black feminists who coined the term to describe the multi-dimensional (rather than one-dimensional) character of Black womxn's<sup>25</sup> subordination.<sup>26</sup> That is, Black womxn do not experience the oppression associated with being Black in isolation from the experience of being a womxn, and vice versa; rather, they experience the compounded effects of racism and sexism, and this translates into a unique (and intersectional) experience of oppression. There are, of course, many other oppressive social forces, or systems, that further exacerbate inequities; these further differentiate the experiences of Black womxn along lines of class, disability, sexuality, and so forth.

For the purpose of this article, we will focus on two specific intersecting systems of oppression at work in settler colonial contexts such as Canada. Drawing on the words of Kyle Powys Whyte, we refer to these intersecting systems as the 'capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression'.<sup>27</sup> The capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression has led to the *symptom* of climate change. In this view, colonialism (which dispossess and controls Indigenous Peoples) and capitalism (as a system of property relations that prioritizes private ownership and profit) are separate but related systems that interact to support one another. This matrix is designed to exploit, or to extract value from, both humans and nonhumans in pursuit of endless growth. This happens through dispossession, commodification, domination, and violence, which manifest as land theft, industrial resource extraction, pollution, and trauma. In this non-consensual process of de-naturalizing — or commodifying — the human and nonhuman, profits accrue to those who control land and capital at the expense of nature and people (but not all people equally — some people are harmed more than others<sup>28</sup>). Thus, it will be

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<sup>23</sup> The Wretched of the Earth (n 7).

<sup>24</sup> David Naguib Pellow, 'Critical Environmental Justice Studies', *What Is Critical Environmental Justice?* (Polity 2018).

<sup>25</sup> We use the term 'womxn' to be more explicitly inclusive of trans and nonbinary people.

<sup>26</sup> Combahee River Collective, 'The Combahee River Collective Statement'; bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (South End Press 1981); Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color' (1991) 43 *Stanford Law Review* 1241; Kimberle Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics' (1989) 1989 *The University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139.

<sup>27</sup> Kyle Powys Whyte, 'White Allies, Let's Be Honest About Decolonization' [2018] *Yes! Magazine*.

<sup>28</sup> Ingrid RG Waldron, *There's Something In The Water: Environmental Racism in Indigenous & Black Communities* (Fernwood Publishing 2018).

impossible to address the climate and ecological crises without dismantling the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression because it is these very same economic, social, and political systems that have dispossessed Indigenous Peoples, degraded the environment, *and* poisoned the atmosphere with greenhouse gases emitted from extraction on their territories.

As a result of these intersecting systems of oppression — capitalism and colonialism — climate movements increasingly consider ways of assessing the climate crisis through an intersectional lens to understand how it affects people differently based on their specific social locations (or positionalities). The intersectional framework not only draws attention to how different forms of oppression interact, but it also makes visible how they operate at multiple scales — from the individual to collective. In other words, oppressive forces not only affect the lived experiences of individuals, but also affect entire groups, institutions, and social movements.

What, then, is the role (if any) of settler-led environmental movements in dismantling the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression in pursuit of climate action? XR-Vancouver, as one such movement, is committed to showing up to support Indigenous-led struggles. Yet, as Whyte highlights, the framing used by settler-led movements often obscures the lived experiences of many Indigenous people:

Sometimes I see settler environmental movements as seeking to avoid some dystopian environmental future or planetary apocalypse. These visions are replete with species extinctions, irreversible loss of ecosystems, and severe rationing ... Yet for many Indigenous peoples in North America, we are already living in what our ancestors would have understood as dystopian or post-apocalyptic times.<sup>29</sup>

Further, Whyte makes the point that settlers ‘are living in the environmental fantasies of their settler ancestors. Settler ancestors wanted today’s world’.<sup>30</sup> That is to say, the dystopia of Indigenous Peoples (the dispossession of traditional territories, cultural bans, language endangerment, forced assimilation) is a direct result of what would be considered utopia for settlers’ ancestors (the widespread institutionalization of property and private ownership, Christianity, white supremacy, the powerful settler state). According to Whyte, today’s Indigenous-led environmental movements refuse to accept settlers’ (and their ancestors’) colonial fantasies by demanding self-determination; fighting against Indigenous erasure; ending violence against Indigenous people; empowering communities to heal from intergenerational trauma; supporting gender fluidity and seeking and gender justice; and ‘transforming lawmaking to be consensual’.<sup>31</sup> In this way, Whyte makes it clear how the capitalist-colonialist matrix intersects with other oppressive forces, such as heteropatriarchy — manifested as violence against Indigenous bodies, particularly those of womxn, girls, and two-spirit people — which other Indigenous scholars have linked to violence on the land.<sup>32</sup> In the words of

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<sup>29</sup> Whyte (n 27).

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Margaret Robinson, ‘Two-Spirit and Bisexual People: Different Umbrella, Same Rain’ (2017) 17 *Journal of Bisexuality* 7; Erynne M Gilpin, ‘Land as Body: Indigenous Womxn’s Leadership, Land-Based Wellness and Embodied Governance’ (University of Victoria 2020); Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, ‘Indigenous Resurgence and Co-Resistance’ (2016) 2 *Critical Ethnic Studies* 19; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, ‘Reclaiming Power and Place: Executive Summary of the Final Report’ (2019); 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’ (2016).

Lubicon Cree scholar-activist Melina Laboucan-Massimo, ‘violence against the land begets violence against women’.<sup>33</sup>

The insights from Whyte’s work highlight a tension in framing climate change in terms of a ‘crisis’ or ‘emergency,’ which is something many settler-led environmental movements, including XR, do.<sup>34</sup> This tension — that XR and other movements have only recently declared a ‘crisis,’ while Indigenous Peoples have been experiencing crisis for 500 years — is a direct result of the very different histories and material realities lived by settler movement participants and by Indigenous people. Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr.’s work on spatial and temporal thinking is also relevant here.<sup>35</sup> Deloria Jr. describes temporal thinking as based on Western conceptions of linearity and progress (an idea that nearly eliminated Indigenous existence and justified the doctrine of discovery). This thinking can lead to privileging an ‘emergency’ framing reliant upon time (having only so many years to act before climate catastrophe). In contrast, according to Wildcat,<sup>36</sup> ‘the experiential continuum of history upon which indigenous people rely has spatial boundaries with time understood as space mediated’. Indigenous Peoples’ relationship to space and place has been catastrophically under siege since the arrival of European colonizers. Deloria argues that a wider shift toward spatial thinking would allow society to build more ethical systems that are tied ‘directly to the physical world and real human situations’, grounded in communities’ context-specific material realities.<sup>37</sup>

So, while in some ways it is understandable that XR uses the language of crisis and emergency, there is a tension in this discursive act. To build relations of solidarity — imperfect as they may be<sup>38</sup> — settler-led movements must reflect on the need to balance a sense of urgency with the necessity for place-based awareness and intersectional reflexivity, while granting serious attention to the very different lived experiences of individuals and communities. In our view, there is an opportunity for settler-led environmental movements like XR to undertake deeper reflection on how to build toward what Whyte calls a ‘decolonizing approach to allyship’ — an approach that both recognizes and confronts ‘the resiliency of [white] settler privilege [and] involves directly facing the very different ecological realities we all dwell in’.<sup>39</sup> Here, it is important to note that ‘settlers’ are a highly diverse social group, with settlers experiencing different forms and levels of privilege and oppression, and benefiting from settler colonialism to different degrees. Nonetheless, all settlers — including Black, Indigenous-to-elsewhere, other racialized settlers, and migrants — do benefit from, and may be complicit in, the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island (North

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<sup>33</sup> Melina Laboucan-Massimo, ‘Climate Justice Must Include Gender Justice’ (2018)

<[https://davidsuzuki.org/story/climate-justice-must-include-gender-justice/?utm\\_campaign=stories-womensDay-en-08mar2018&utm\\_source=facebook&utm\\_medium=page-link](https://davidsuzuki.org/story/climate-justice-must-include-gender-justice/?utm_campaign=stories-womensDay-en-08mar2018&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=page-link)> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>34</sup> It is worth noting that some Indigenous communities and organizations have also chosen to use the language of emergency/crisis; see for example the climate emergency declared by numerous Yukon First Nations or statements from the BC Assembly of First Nations.

<sup>35</sup> Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Fulcrum Publishing 1994, p. 72-73).

<sup>36</sup> Daniel R Wildcat, ‘Indigenizing the Future: Why We Must Think Spatially in the Twenty-First Century’ (2005, p. 434) 46 *American Studies* 417.

<sup>37</sup> Deloria Jr. (n 34, p. 72).

<sup>38</sup> Joe Curnow and Anjali Helferty, ‘Contradictions of Solidarity: Whiteness, Settler Coloniality, and the Mainstream Environmental Movement’ (2018) 9 *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 145.

<sup>39</sup> Whyte (n 27).

America).<sup>40</sup> We now turn to elaborating some initial guiding principles, or ethics, of decolonizing allyship.

### 3.1 Ethics of decolonizing allyship

What does it mean to be an ally? General principles of allyship in social justice work include recognizing difference; taking up one's own responsibilities to critically educate oneself on privilege and oppression; listening more than speaking, and especially not 'speaking for'; and taking on support roles, not leadership roles (and especially not taking credit for others' leadership).<sup>41</sup> Our view of allyship is rooted in the understanding that it is an ongoing *process* borne of an active commitment to social justice and grounded in supportive, accountable relationships with the specific communities with which one aims to ally.<sup>42</sup> Allyship-as-action, or process, stands in contrast to allyship-as-identity, which can lead to the problematic development of a 'savior' complex<sup>43</sup> or a tendency to treat one's status as an 'ally' as static or permanent.

However, social justice is not the same as decolonization, nor does it encompass decolonization.<sup>44</sup> In particular, while colonization, racialization and (im)migration are closely related processes, they are also analytically and operationally distinct. For this reason, we specifically focus on Whyte's concept of *decolonizing allyship* to address the distinct oppression of colonization. Based on the scholarship of Whyte<sup>45</sup> and other Indigenous and critical race thinkers and community organizers — notably Tuck and Yang,<sup>46</sup> Walia,<sup>47</sup> Gehl,<sup>48</sup> Curnow and Helferty,<sup>49</sup> Wilson<sup>50</sup> and the Unsettling America collective<sup>51</sup> — as well as our own experiences working towards building relations of solidarity on the ground, we suggest three principles, or ethics, specific to decolonizing allyship:

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<sup>40</sup> Harsha Walia, 'Moving beyond a Politics of Solidarity toward a Practice of Decolonization' in Aziz Choudry, Jill Hanley and Eric Shragge (eds), *Organize! Building from the local for global justice* (PM Press 2012); Wesley Attewell and others, 'Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism' (2018) 6 *The AAG Review of Books* 192; Melissa May Ling Chung, 'The Relationships Between Racialized Immigrants and Indigenous Peoples In Canada: A Literature Review' (Ryerson University 2012); Candace Fujikane and Jonathan Y Okamura (eds), *Asian Settler Colonialism: From Local Governance to the Habits of Everyday Life in Hawai'i* (University of Hawai'i Press 2008).

<sup>41</sup> Kendrick T Brown and Joan M Ostrove, 'What Does It Mean to Be an Ally?: The Perception of Allies from the Perspective of People of Color' (2013) 43 *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 2211.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*; Lynne Davis (ed), *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-Non-Indigenous Relationships* (University of Toronto Press 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Kyle P Whyte, 'Indigenous Science (Fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral Dystopias and Fantasies of Climate Change Crises' (2018) 1 *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 224; Simpson (n 32).

<sup>44</sup> Eve Tuck and K Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor' (2012) 1 *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1.

<sup>45</sup> Whyte (n 43); Whyte (n 27).

<sup>46</sup> Tuck and Yang (n 44).

<sup>47</sup> Walia (n 40).

<sup>48</sup> Lynn Gehl, 'Ally Bill of Responsibilities'

<[http://www.lynngehl.com/uploads/5/0/0/4/5004954/ally\\_bill\\_of\\_responsibilities\\_poster.pdf](http://www.lynngehl.com/uploads/5/0/0/4/5004954/ally_bill_of_responsibilities_poster.pdf)> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>49</sup> Curnow and Helferty (n 38).

<sup>50</sup> Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Fernwood Publishing 2008).

<sup>51</sup> 'Allyship & Solidarity Guidelines' (*Unsettling America: Decolonization in Theory & Practice*)

<<https://unsettlingamerica.wordpress.com/allyship/>> accessed 29 March 2020.



- 1) *An ethic of relational accountability*:<sup>52</sup> Settlers actively learn about and challenge their privilege and are responsible and responsive to the communities with which they engage.
- 2) *An ethic of care*:<sup>53</sup> Caring, consensual, reciprocal, and respectful relationships are forged with human and nonhuman communities.
- 3) *An ethic of incommensurability*:<sup>54</sup> Settlers decenter/unsettle settler futurity (or possible futures) and do not expect easy, comfortable, certain, or reconciled pathways to decolonization. They work alongside Indigenous communities in ways that support their aspirations and material empowerment, both now and in the future.

We now turn to reflecting upon our participation in XR-Vancouver and how it can further integrate an intersectional approach and ethics of decolonizing allyship into its work. First, we outline some social, economic, political, and environmental considerations that are important for understanding the specific context within which XR-Vancouver operates.

#### 4 CASE STUDY: EXTINCTION REBELLION VANCOUVER

##### 4.1 Energy politics and racial extractivism in Western Canada

While many aspects of XR-UK have been taken up across XR chapters in Canada, the Canadian context is different from the UK in several respects. Among the most obvious and important to this discussion is the fact that Canada is a settler colonial state. As such, Canada relies on what Patrick Wolfe<sup>55</sup> has called the ‘logic of elimination,’ which attempts to erase Indigenous existence through ongoing invasion and dispossession — for example, through war, disease, starvation, surveillance, Residential Schools,<sup>56</sup> and other genocidal and/or assimilationist policies.<sup>57</sup>

The ongoing invasion and dispossession of Indigenous Peoples in Canada has been central to the settler colonial state’s development. As described by Preston, the nation-state of Canada is built upon ‘racial extractivism,’ or the logic by which Canada continues ‘to naturalize, order, enable and rationalize settler colonial violence and its extractive manifestations’.<sup>58</sup> As a

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<sup>52</sup> Cumow and Helferty (n 38); Wilson (n 50).

<sup>53</sup> Kyle Powys Whyte and Chris Cuomo, ‘Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies’ in Stephen M Gardiner and Allen Thompson (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics* (2017); Sophie Bond, ‘A Democratic Ethos’ in Antipode Editorial Collective (ed), *Keywords in Radical Geography: Antipode at 50* (Antipode 2019); Cheryl McEwan and Michael K Goodman, ‘Place Geography and the Ethics of Care: Introductory Remarks on the Geographies of Ethics, Responsibility and Care’ (2010) 13 *Ethics, Place & Environment* 103.

<sup>54</sup> Tuck and Yang (n 44).

<sup>55</sup> Patrick Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native’ (2006, p. 387) 8 *Journal of Genocide Research* 387.

<sup>56</sup> Residential schools were Canadian government- and church-sponsored boarding schools in operation for more than 100 years, with the most recent school closing in 1996 (TRC 2015). The schools were intended to ‘assimilate’ Indigenous youth into Canadian society; in reality, they separated Indigenous youth from their families and communities and disrupted and disparaged their cultures, and many Indigenous people experienced physical, emotional, and sexual abuse (TRC 2015).

<sup>57</sup> Johnnie Manson, ‘Relational Nations: Trading and Sharing Ethos for Indigenous Food Sovereignty on Vancouver Island’ (University of British Columbia 2015); Preston (n 5); Adam J Barker, Toby Rollo and Emma Battell Lowman, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Consolidation of Canada in the Twentieth Century’ [2016] *The Routledge Handbook of the History of Settler Colonialism* 153.

<sup>58</sup> Preston (n 4, p. 353).

key component of the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression, racial extractivism in Canada is tied to the westward expansion of settlers in pursuit of the fur trade, land, gold, and oil under the racist 'doctrine of discovery' and the 'legal fiction'<sup>59</sup> of *terra nullius*.<sup>60</sup> In particular, the 'discovery' of oil in the Athabasca region (in what is now known as Alberta) fuelled the Canadian government's desire to 'claim' the land through treaty<sup>61</sup> *in order to stabilize the area for development by industry*.<sup>62</sup> Put differently, the extractive industry pre-dates and directly informed the development trajectory of the settler colonial nation-state of Canada (the repercussions of which still resonate today). The assertion of these interests ultimately led to the creation of Treaty 8 of 1899. According to Madill,

The Privy Council Report of 1891 clearly indicated that the government's intention was to extinguish the Indian title prior to the development of mineral resources, the construction of railways and the preparation for settlement: On a report dated 7th of January, 1891, from the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, [it is stated that in the District of Athabasca] immense quantities of petroleum exist...[rendering] it advisable that a treaty or treaties should be made with the Indians who claim those regions as their hunting grounds, with a view to the extinguishment of the Indians title in such portions of the same, as it may be considered in the interest of the public to open up for settlement.<sup>63</sup>

Immense quantities of petroleum indeed: Recent estimates indicate that Athabasca oil sands<sup>64</sup> region is the third-largest crude oil reserve in the world, containing 166.3 billion barrels of crude oil and comprising 97% of Canada's share of proven oil reserves.<sup>65</sup> Canada is now one of the leading producers and exporters of oil in the world,<sup>66</sup> and the energy sector — largely bolstered by Athabasca oil sands — contributes 11% of Canada's GDP.<sup>67</sup>

The oil sands remain a site of political contention. One of the most recent sites of struggle connected to the oil sands is the Trans Mountain Expansion (TMX) project. The

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<sup>59</sup> Sheryl Lightfoot, 'Settler-State Apologies to Indigenous Peoples: A Normative Framework and Comparative Assessment' (2015) 2 *Native American and Indigenous Studies* 15.

<sup>60</sup> *Terra nullius* is Latin for 'nobody's land,' and refers to the legal concept used by the Canadian settler state to define inhabited Indigenous lands as 'uninhabited' or 'empty,' and thus open for European settlement. Preston (n 5); Manson (n 57); Jen Preston, 'Neoliberal Settler Colonialism, Canada and the Tar Sands' (2013) 55 *Race and Class* 42; Sean Parson and Emily Ray, 'Sustainable Colonization: Tar Sands as Resource Colonialism' (2018) 29 *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* 68.

<sup>61</sup> As many Indigenous scholars have noted (Borrows 2010; Lightfoot and MacDonald 2017; Ermine 2007), the Canadian government's understanding of treaty differs greatly from an Indigenous understanding of treaty, which is rooted in sacred engagement.

<sup>62</sup> Craig Candler and others, 'As Long As The Rivers Flow: Athabasca River Use, Knowledge and Change' (2010); Angele Alook, Nicole Hill and Ian Hussey, 'Ten Things to Know about Indigenous People and Resource Extraction in Alberta' (2017)

<[https://www.parklandinstitute.ca/ten\\_things\\_to\\_know\\_about\\_indigenous\\_people\\_and\\_resource\\_extraction\\_in\\_alberta](https://www.parklandinstitute.ca/ten_things_to_know_about_indigenous_people_and_resource_extraction_in_alberta)> accessed 29 March 2020; Preston (n 60).

<sup>63</sup> Dennis FK Madill, 'Treaty Research Report - Treaty Eight (1899)' (1986). See also Preston (2017).

<sup>64</sup> The term 'oil sands' describes deposits of bitumen (very viscous oil) and sand, which must be separated through energy- and chemical-intensive processing, resulting in enormous toxic waste lagoons called 'tailings ponds.' See Parson and Ray (n 60).

<sup>65</sup> Natural Resources Canada, 'What Are the Oil Sands?' (2020) <<https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/our-natural-resources/energy-sources-distribution/clean-fossil-fuels/crude-oil/what-are-oil-sands/18089>> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Natural Resources Canada, 'Energy and the Economy' (2020) <<https://www.nrcan.gc.ca/science-data/data-analysis/energy-data-analysis/energy-facts/energy-and-economy/20062#L4>> accessed 29 March 2020.

proposed project, originally owned by US-based energy corporation Kinder Morgan, would twin an existing 1,150-kilometre pipeline that connects the Athabasca region to Metro Vancouver to increase the export of bitumen to Asia, crossing dozens of First Nations' traditional territories along its route. If completed, the expansion would transport almost 900,000 barrels of petroleum liquids per day, tripling the capacity of the current pipeline.<sup>68</sup>

Because the Trans Mountain pipeline shuttles petroleum liquids directly into the third-most populated metropolitan area in Canada, the conditions were ripe for a unique anti-pipeline alliance to emerge. Pressure from First Nations, environmental groups, concerned residents, local governments, and (at the time) BC's provincial government, led Kinder Morgan to abandon its plans for TMX in 2018. But rather than act on his campaign commitments to work towards reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples and to prioritize clean energy, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau instead announced — one day after his administration declared a 'climate emergency' — that his government would use \$4.5 billion taxpayer dollars<sup>69</sup> to purchase the Trans Mountain pipeline from Kinder Morgan, thereby nationalizing the pipeline expansion project by bailing out a failing, multinational extractive project. By doing so, the Trudeau administration both prioritized the interests of capital over the interests of humans and nonhumans, and further entrenched Canada's ongoing history of colonialism by denying the self-determination of the 150 Indigenous Nations who oppose the tar sands expansion<sup>70</sup> (such as the Skwxwú7mesh and sə́l̓l̓wətaʔ, two of the Nations on whose territory Vancouver sits<sup>71</sup>).

Notably, the vast majority of lands that the pipeline crosses are unceded Indigenous lands, meaning that the land has never been negotiated through treaty or surrendered to the Crown.<sup>72</sup> British Columbia is fairly unique in this respect relative to other Canadian provinces, as almost all of the land within BC is unceded and about a third of First Nations (almost 200) have territory in so-called BC.<sup>73</sup> Here and across Canada, we see the ongoing subordination of Indigenous laws to colonial laws and the continual criminalization of land defenders.<sup>74</sup> It is within this context that XR Vancouver is situated.

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<sup>68</sup> Trans Mountain, 'Expansion Project' <<https://www.transmountain.com/project-overview>> accessed 29 March 2020; Deborah Curran, Eugene Kung and ǫǫǫvi Marilyn Slett, 'ǫvilás and Snəwayəł: Indigenous Laws, Economies, and Relationships with Place Speaking to State Extractions' (2020) 119 South Atlantic Quarterly 215.

<sup>69</sup> Original estimates were that TMX would cost taxpayers an additional CAD \$7.4 billion to construct; the most recent estimates now indicate that the project will cost taxpayers more than CAD \$12.5 billion (Global News 2020).

<sup>70</sup> Treaty Alliance, 'First Nations and Tribes Sign New Treaty Joining Forces To Stop All Tar Sands Pipelines'; Treaty Alliance, 'Treaty Alliance against Tar Sands Expansion: Signatory Nations'.

<sup>71</sup> Both Nations, among others, have launched legal challenges against TMX.

<sup>72</sup> While lands that were never negotiated in treaty agreements with the settler colonial state are often referred to as "unceded", this term is used to emphasize that these lands have been stolen and occupied, and that the Canadian government has no shared jurisdictional authority in these cases; it is not meant to imply that other lands that are covered in treaties have in any way been "ceded" or surrendered to the settler colonial state.

<sup>73</sup> First Peoples' Cultural Council, 'First Peoples' Map of BC' <<https://maps.fpcc.ca/>> accessed 29 March 2020; Statistics Canada, 'Aboriginal Peoples: Fact Sheet for British Columbia' (2016) <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-656-x/89-656-x2016011-eng.htm>> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>74</sup> Kelvin Gwley, 'Indigenous Men Ordered to Stay 500 Metres from Burnaby Trans Mountain Sites' *Burnaby Now* (Burnaby, 9 January 2020); Jaskiran Dhillon and Will Parrish, 'Canada Police Prepared to Shoot Indigenous Activists, Documents Show' *The Guardian* (20 December 2019); Jorge Barrera, 'Trans Mountain Monitoring Anti-Pipeline Activists, Labelling Some as "Persons of Interest"' *CBC* (25 November 2019); Irina Ceric, 'Beyond Contempt: Injunctions, Land Defense, and the Criminalization of Indigenous Resistance' (2020) 119 South Atlantic Quarterly 353.

## 4.2 Reflections on XR-Vancouver's Allyship Efforts

Considering the critiques that have been levelled against XR on the grounds of (non)intersectional organizing, and XR-Vancouver's location on unceded and stolen Indigenous lands, we — speaking as two former member-organizers of XR-Vancouver, and not on behalf of the chapter — now reflect in general terms<sup>75</sup> on the opportunities that we see for applying ethics of decolonizing allyship in XR.

XR-Vancouver began in early 2019; both of us joined in September of that year. The most recent estimate is that XR-Vancouver has around 100 active volunteers and more than 1000 interested volunteers in its larger action network; it reaches thousands more via its social media platforms. In late 2019, following XR-Canada's establishment of a national decolonization and solidarity working group, XR-Vancouver created a similar, chapter-based working group. The XR-Vancouver working group has begun building reciprocal and accountable relationships and supporting the efforts of Indigenous-led movements and communities in the Metro Vancouver area, in order to work towards addressing climate and ecological change in a way that does not perpetuate the inequities at its root.

### 4.2.1 *An ethic of relational accountability*

An ethic of relational accountability requires that settlers recognize their complicity in settler colonialism, as well as the ways in which they benefit. In our view, this entails that settler members of XR organizing on (stolen) Indigenous lands actively do the uncomfortable work of learning about and discussing privilege, oppression, and (de)colonization. The burden to educate settlers on these topics, or to manage emotions or reactions to this process and its implications, should not be placed on Indigenous or racialized organizers working within or outside of XR. Undertaking this process of self and collective education is a critical first step for engaging in solidarity work among social movements who (as collectives) may not experience certain forms of oppression within the broader structures they seek to dismantle.

To spur dialogue and facilitate settler members' (un)learning processes, XR-Canada's national decolonization and solidarity working group has created an allyship primer that consolidates resources, references and reflections on anti-oppression work, decolonization, civil disobedience, and (non)violence. As part of its mandate, XR-Vancouver's solidarity working group is committed to developing or hosting workshops that hold space for settlers to navigate topics that challenge their privilege and assumptions. Many other XR chapters across so-called Canada have similar aims.

However, a major tension that has surfaced in conversations on privilege and oppression concerns XR's relationship to the police and state. Many members of XR broadly, including in our chapter, support the XR-UK founders' theory of change — the creation of large-scale, nonviolent disruption (in particular through mass arrest) to overwhelm police capacity, while simultaneously 'winning over' those working within the police, such that the state's ability to use security forces against protestors is diminished.

At the same time, many members of XR (ourselves included) question the ethics and efficacy of this theory of change. XR's aim of 'winning over' an institution like the police has led to ill-conceived actions (for example, sending flowers and thank-you notes to the police after actions<sup>76</sup>) that have been widely condemned by anti-racist organizers and have alienated

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<sup>75</sup> We will reflect only in general terms in order to protect the emerging relationships between XR-Vancouver and Indigenous communities on-the-ground, and out of respect for the privacy of those involved.

<sup>76</sup> Aimee Lewis, 'Too White, Too Middle Class and Lacking in Empathy, Extinction Rebellion Has a Race Problem, Critics Say' *CNN* (24 November 2019).

allies. These kinds of actions demonstrate XR's ingrained privilege as a movement and highlight the need for larger, intentional, and intersectional conversations around systems of oppression and different understandings and experiences of violence.

In terms of ethics, the structural racism of police forces in Western liberal democracies such as Canada is well documented.<sup>77</sup> Canada's national police force, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP, formerly known as the North-West Mounted Police) was created to assert settler state sovereignty and thus to control Indigenous Peoples and lands.<sup>78</sup> Indigenous people have been murdered, jailed, and systematically oppressed by the state for defending their ways of life, largely because the traditional values held by many Indigenous communities are antithetical to the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression — a system which, in many cases, environmental movements aim only to 'improve' rather than to transform.<sup>79</sup>

In terms of efficacy, there are good reasons to consider the police to be a target of lower priority than other institutional actors — namely, the extractive industry and the finance sector.<sup>80</sup> In Canada, it is industry that has lobbied the state, received the police's protection, and fueled the climate, ecological, and socioeconomic crises.<sup>81</sup> As previously discussed, Canada historically undertook treaty 'negotiations' for '*the sake of creating stability for industry to move in*' during westward expansion.<sup>82</sup> That is, industry required *perceived stability and certainty* for development. This remains the case in Western Canada today: In a recent investigation, documents obtained through Freedom of Information requests illustrate that industry worked with government officials to push for the creation of modern-day treaties that seek 'surrender' of unceded lands in British Columbia in order to 'achieve "certainty" for commercial interests'.<sup>83</sup>

An ethic of accountability suggests that, for XR to be accountable to and build alliances with racialized communities, it needs to seriously interrogate its view of the state, which throughout history has colluded with industry and economic elites to advance corporate interests while dispossessing Indigenous Peoples and disproportionately harming those who are structurally oppressed.<sup>84</sup> By re-focusing its strategy on undermining the power of economic elites rather than on targeting or 'winning over' the police and state, XR has an opportunity to better align with (rather than alienate) communities marginalized by indigeneity, race, and class

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<sup>77</sup> Comack (n 22); Andrew Crosby and Jeffrey Monaghan, *Policing Indigenous Movements: Dissent and the Security State* (Fernwood Publishing 2018); Craig Proulx, 'Colonizing Surveillance: Canada Constructs an Indigenous Terror Threat' (2014) 56 *Anthropologica* 83.

<sup>78</sup> Amanda Nettelbeck and Russell Smandych, 'Policing Indigenous Peoples on Two Colonial Frontiers: Australia's Mounted Police and Canada's North-West Mounted Police' (2010) 43 *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 356.

<sup>79</sup> John S Dryzek and others, *Green States and Social Movements: Environmentalism in the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and Norway* (John S Dryzek and others eds, Oxford University Press 2003); Daniel Hausknost, 'The Environmental State and the Glass Ceiling of Transformation' (2019) 29 *Environmental Politics* 17.

<sup>80</sup> Resource extractivism on an industrial scale relies on massive loans and capital investments; therefore, the financial sector has become increasingly crucial to the energy sector in Canada (Hudson & Bowness forthcoming; Kylie Benton-Connell and DT Cochrane, "'Canada Has a Pipeline Problem": Valuation and Vulnerability of Extractive Infrastructure' (2020) 119 *South Atlantic Quarterly* 325).

<sup>81</sup> Barker, Rollo and Lowman (n 57).

<sup>82</sup> Alook, Hill and Hussey (n 49, emphasis added).

<sup>83</sup> Martin Lukacs and Shiri Pasternak, 'Industry, Government Pushed to Abolish Aboriginal Title at Issue in Wet'suwet'en Stand-off, Docs Reveal' (*The Narwhal*, 2020) <<https://thenarwhal.ca/industry-government-pushed-to-abolish-aboriginal-title-at-issue-in-wetsuweten-stand-off-docs-reveal/>> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Barker, Rollo and Lowman (n 57); Dayna Nadine Scott, 'Extraction Contracting: The Struggle for Control of Indigenous Lands' (2020) 119 *South Atlantic Quarterly* 269; Benton-Connell and Cochrane (n 80).

while becoming part of a larger coalition with the potential to undermine the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression.

#### 4.2.2 *An ethic of care*

Developing a practice of mindfulness and care is also important for sustaining and regenerating movements, as a form of ‘liberatory micropolitics’ that can fuel ‘transformative movement-building’ for systems change.<sup>85</sup> As a movement, a key component of XR since the beginning has been what it calls ‘regenerative culture,’ or a culture ‘which affirms our connected roots to deep and abiding nourishment’.<sup>86</sup> Cultivating a regenerative culture is a form of prefigurative politics; it is how XR posits that, as a movement, it advances ‘a practice and demonstration of the change [it wants] to deeply experience in this and all society’.<sup>87</sup> XR’s core strategy team in the UK has made strengthening regenerative culture a key strategy for 2020, in order for XR to ‘act as part of a wider movement for change, co-creating new stories and visioning new ways of being with the world’ and by ‘[embodying] our message through our actions and modeling our principles’.<sup>88</sup>

A regenerative culture entails internalizing an ethic of care, or what bell hooks<sup>89</sup> has called an ‘ethic of love’, for the humans, lands and waters that XR aims to protect. hooks argues that without a concerted focus on embodying an ethic of love — conceptualized not as romantic love but as ‘a combination of care, commitment, knowledge, responsibility, respect, and trust’<sup>90</sup> — we are certain to continue operating with an ‘ethic of domination’ that perpetuates systems of oppression.<sup>91</sup> In particular, those who benefit from systems of oppression have a responsibility to act collectively to address that injustice — as Bond states, ‘the burden is too great to bear alone’.<sup>92</sup> An intersectional ethic of care would be ‘aligned with recognition of the violence and harm of the structures of contemporary global capitalism and ongoing colonialisms. This framing of a politics of justice is spatial, relational, and situated, and is attuned to structural violence’.<sup>93</sup>

Cultivating an ethic of care is thus deeply political and rooted in morality and justice.<sup>94</sup> It requires taking the time to build lasting, meaningful, and reciprocal relationships with human and nonhuman communities. As such, embodying care can conflict both with colonial notions of time<sup>95</sup> and with the language of urgency in dealing with climate change. Acting with urgency can perpetuate an ethic of domination that upholds systems of oppression, harmfully overshadows the different lived experiences of people and communities, and obscures diverse

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<sup>85</sup> James K Rowe, ‘Georges Bataille, Chögyam Trungpa, and Radical Transformation: Theorizing the Political Value of Mindfulness’ (2017) 4 *The Arrow* 47; James K Rowe, ‘Micropolitics and Collective Liberation: Mind/Body Practice and Left Social Movements’ (2016) 38 *New Political Science* 206.

<sup>86</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘Wellbeing’ <<https://rebellion.earth/act-now/resources/wellbeing/>> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>88</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘Power Together’ (2020).

<sup>89</sup> bell hooks, ‘Love as the Practice of Freedom’, *Outlaw Culture* (Routledge 2006, p. 243).

<sup>90</sup> bell hooks, ‘Toward a Worldwide Culture of Love’ (*Lion’s Roar*, 2018) <<https://www.lionsroar.com/toward-a-worldwide-culture-of-love/>> accessed 24 March 2020.

<sup>91</sup> hooks, ‘Love as the Practice of Freedom’ (n 69, p. 243).

<sup>92</sup> Bond (n 44, p. 17).

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> McEwan and Goodman (n 53); Whyte and Cuomo (n 53).

<sup>95</sup> See earlier discussion of colonial notions of time in contrast with an Indigenous conception of time as described by Deloria Jr. and Wildcat.

ways of being and knowing. In contrast, acting according to an ethic of care requires patience, deep listening, and fair deliberation.

As participants in XR-Vancouver, we have partaken in processes of ‘slowing down’ in order to open up space for developing reciprocal and accountable relationships with Indigenous organizers and communities, based in an ethic of care. This has included learning about local, community-specific protocols; showing up to and taking on behind-the-scenes organizational roles to support Indigenous-led movements, acts of resurgence and programs; and — when invited — supporting, participating in, understanding, and learning through ceremony.<sup>96</sup>

Central to developing an ethic of care is a shift in ontology. According to hooks, ‘a collective failure to acknowledge the needs of the spirit’ has led to ‘an overdetermined emphasis on material concerns’.<sup>97</sup> Yet, decolonization is also material: It has real implications for lands and people. Tuck and Yang question whether settlers too often ‘allow conscientization to stand in for the more uncomfortable task of relinquishing stolen land ... Until stolen land is relinquished, critical consciousness does not translate into action that disrupts settler colonialism’.<sup>98</sup>

Clearly, cultivating critical consciousness and an ethic of care are important in taking the ‘first step’ toward decolonization.<sup>99</sup> Yet efforts at consciousness-raising and social repair should not be conflated with decolonization, which necessitates the return of Indigenous lands and lifeways.

#### 4.2.3 *An ethic of incommensurability*

Building upon the foundations of accountability and care, we believe settler-led movements can enter into dialogue with Indigenous communities about supporting their struggles for self-determination and find ‘opportunities for solidarity [that] lie in *what is incommensurable* rather than what is common across [radical movements]’ efforts.<sup>100</sup> Cultivating an ethic of incommensurability requires settlers to work alongside Indigenous communities without centering settler futurity or the desire for certainty.<sup>101</sup>

We see an opportunity for settler-led movements like XR to push back against the ongoing colonial violence that maintains Indigenous dystopias by supporting ‘daily acts of renewal’<sup>102</sup> as well as Indigenous acts of resurgence and exercises of sovereignty. As noted above, one such example can be found in how XR-Vancouver is supporting Indigenous-led

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<sup>96</sup> We recognize that there are a variety of perspectives on the inclusion of non-Indigenous people in ceremony (for example, see Waziyatawin 2011; Regan 2010; Davis et al. 2017). We want to be clear that settlers have no right to partake in Indigenous ceremony, and no right to appropriate Indigenous ways of being, doing, or knowing. We have only participated in Indigenous ceremonies when invited by Indigenous leaders, to honor what Regan describes as a ‘distinctly Indigenous approach to creating just and peaceful relationships’ Regan (2010, p. 148).

<sup>97</sup> hooks, ‘Love as the Practice of Freedom’ (n 69, p. 243).

<sup>98</sup> Tuck and Yang (n 30, p. 19).

<sup>99</sup> Fanon 1963, cited in *ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.* (p. 28).

<sup>101</sup> Katie Boudreau Morris, ‘Decolonizing Solidarity: Cultivating Relationships of Discomfort’ (2017) 7 *Settler Colonial Studies* 456.

<sup>102</sup> Jeff Corntassel, ‘Re-Envisioning Resurgence: Indigenous Pathways to Decolonization and Sustainable Self-Determination’ (2012, p. 89) 1 *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 86.

struggles against the Trans Mountain pipeline.<sup>103</sup> As another example, XR-Vancouver and other XR chapters across the world have followed Wet'suwet'en protocol and their hereditary leadership's calls to support Wet'suwet'en acts of resurgence as they re-occupy their territory and push back against the invasion of an energy corporation (TC Energy), the Canadian and BC governments, and the RCMP.<sup>104</sup>

These examples are natural opportunities for alliances between XR and Indigenous communities, as they relate to extractive energy projects that exacerbate climate change and violate Indigenous self-determination. In general, XR has and does mostly ally with Indigenous communities whose leadership denounces extractive projects that harm humans and nonhumans, given that this aligns with XR's goals as a movement. However, within and between Indigenous communities there exists an array of opinions on engagement with extractive industries, and XR will need to navigate situations where undertaking actions against climate and ecological breakdown might violate a community's protocols or its right to decide in favour of resource development. One such public situation occurred recently, where XR-Vancouver Island (not to be confused with XR-Vancouver) undertook an act of civil disobedience without following the protocols of Scia'new First Nation, which has signed an agreement with Trans Mountain.<sup>105</sup> Scia'new First Nation requested an apology for the action, which XR-Vancouver Island (unfortunately, in our view) did not deliver.

We suggest that relationship-building should be foregrounded in order to — to the extent possible — avoid any potential (eco-colonial<sup>106</sup>) indiscretions in the future. Settler movements must become attuned to the on-the-ground realities and ambitions of local Indigenous communities through respectful and reciprocal relationships; yet at the same time, they must be able to see and be highly critical of the structural conditions which too often place Indigenous communities in the position of having to choose between present needs and future goals.

For example, Indigenous Peoples in Canada do not have the ability to veto extractive projects; rather, 'Canadian courts require [only] that the Crown consult and accommodate the interests of Indigenous groups'.<sup>107</sup> The 'duty to consult' Indigenous Peoples over development projects that affect their lands and lifeways does not equate to Indigenous Peoples having the legal right — again, in terms of settler Canadian law — to say no. That is to say, consultation, not consent, is required by Canadian legal standards with respect to extractivism.<sup>108</sup> The spectacle of consultation results in most Indigenous Nations being placed in the undesirable position of either saying no and receiving no benefits whatsoever (while running the risk of draining time and community resources through lengthy court battles), or signing off on the

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<sup>103</sup> We cannot go into detail here for privacy and tactical reasons, but for examples of past actions see articles "Funeral' protest staged at Burnaby tank farm over social distancing" (April 15, 2020) or "Pipeline protesters block trucks headed for Burnaby tank farm" (Nov. 15, 2019), both in the Burnaby Now.

<sup>104</sup> Amanda Follett Hosgood, 'Emotions High as RCMP Arrest Seven at Last Wet'suwet'en Post' *The Tyee* (10 February 2020); Lee Wilson, 'RCMP Move in on Wet'suwet'en Territory in Early Morning Raid' *APTN News* (6 February 2020).

<sup>105</sup> Trans Mountain, "We Have Done Our Due Diligence" — Scia'new First Nation Supports Trans Mountain Expansion Project' (2018) <<https://www.transmountain.com/news/2018/we-have-done-our-due-diligence-scia-new-first-nation-supports-trans-mountain-expansion-project>> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>106</sup> We use the term 'eco-colonial' to refer to environmental movements justifying colonial means and methods in pursuit of environmental protection.

<sup>107</sup> Shin Imai, 'Consult, Consent, and Veto: International Norms and Canadian Treaties' in John Borrows and Michael Coyle (eds), *The Right Relationship: Reimagining the Implementation of Historical Treaties* (University of Toronto Press 2017, p. 371).

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*



development through a private contract (i.e. an Impact Benefit Agreement (IBA)) and receiving some form of monetary compensation.<sup>109</sup> Thus, while the material benefits associated with signing onto a resource development project might include jobs, or funding for housing, or health programs, or education — all desirable outcomes to which Indigenous communities in BC have disproportionately poor access<sup>110</sup> — as an anonymous reviewer of this paper aptly noted, ‘The precise dilemma that IBAs put communities in is that they [may] need to relinquish future ambitions in favor of present material needs’. In addition, legal scholars note that companies increasingly write ‘no-protest’ clauses into private contracts in the extractive sector in order to restrict community members’ right to protest.<sup>111</sup> First Nations can even be ‘forced to agree to terms that obligate the Chief and Council to take “positive steps to deter protestors or to make public statements denouncing their actions”<sup>112</sup> — a serious affront to Aboriginal and treaty rights, and essentially equivalent to a ‘gag order’.<sup>113</sup>

Can XR support communities in accessing material benefits — for example, through IBAs — even when incommensurable with XR’s own demands? What possibilities exist for XR to support communities in accessing these material benefits in alternative ways that meet both a community’s present goals and visions of futurity? We do not have the answers to these questions. Ultimately, given the diversity of views that exist within and among Indigenous communities, not all activism against extractive development will align with Indigenous people’s wishes.<sup>114</sup> However, we argue that settler-led environmental movements like XR have a responsibility to mobilize on the following fronts: Settler-led movements must push provincial and federal governments to respect Indigenous jurisdiction and implement the principle of free, prior and informed consent, as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of 2007 (which the province of BC affirmed in legislation enacted in late 2019<sup>115</sup>), while simultaneously demanding that reparations — as defined by each community’s context-specific requirements — be made to Indigenous Peoples by the key actors upholding the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression (including the state, extractive industry, and finance sector). At the same time, XR and settler-led movements must work to redistribute their own resources — and power to access said resources (i.e. through networks, grant-writing, etc.) — in accordance with local Indigenous communities’ visions.

By upholding an ethic of incommensurability, XR could enter into dialogue with community members to understand and honor their aspirations and needs without making assumptions or judgements about how those ambitions and needs should be met — but this is not possible without first establishing ethics of accountability and care. Ethics of relational accountability and care make it possible to work in solidarity with communities and to understand their present material realities and future ambitions, while an ethic of

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<sup>109</sup> See the thoughts and experiences of Chief Allan Adam of Athabaskan Chipewyan First Nation with respect to this dilemma in Scott (n 84).

<sup>110</sup> Statistics Canada (n 73).

<sup>111</sup> Scott (n 84).

<sup>112</sup> Scott (n 81, p. 284).

<sup>113</sup> Shiri Pasternak, ‘Wet’suwet’en: Why Are Indigenous Rights Being Defined By An Energy Corporation?’ (2020) <<https://yellowheadinstitute.org/2020/02/07/why-are-indigenous-rights-being-defined-by-an-energy-corporation/>> accessed 14 June 2020.

<sup>114</sup> A number of scholars argue that the state and industry strategically exploit these differences in opinion by using ‘divide-and-conquer’ strategies in an attempt to sow discord within and between Indigenous communities, and create public confusion.

<sup>115</sup> BC Government, ‘B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act’ (2019) <<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/indigenous-people/new-relationship/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>> accessed 14 June 2020.

incommensurability mitigates eco-colonialism by unsettling settler futurity and centering Indigenous futurity.<sup>116</sup>

## 5 TOWARDS A POLITICS OF REFUSAL

‘Refusal marks the point of a limit having been reached: *We refuse to continue on this way.*’  
Carole McGranahan<sup>117</sup>

‘Come be the change the government and corporations are refusing to make.’  
Extinction Rebellion<sup>118</sup>

In this article, we have described how an intersectional framework, oriented through ethics of decolonizing allyship, can guide the work of XR chapters in settler colonial contexts. We believe that XR can play an important role in the larger climate justice landscape by establishing relational accountability to local communities and by promoting a critical consciousness among settlers about the roots of the climate crisis (the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression); by upholding and enacting an ethic of care; and by supporting Indigenous communities’ acts of resurgence and struggles for material empowerment.

So where could XR go from here? This brings us to our final point. We believe that XR could better accomplish its overarching goal of ‘systems change’<sup>119</sup> by deeply engaging with a ‘politics of refusal’ alongside its ‘politics of demand’. As Day explains, a liberal politics of demand is ‘oriented to improving existing institutions and every-day experiences by appealing to the benevolence of hegemonic forces and/or by altering the relations between these forces’.<sup>120</sup> That is to say, a politics of demand works *within* existing structures, and thus is likely to get social movements like XR only so far in their quest for ‘systems change’:

... as recent history has shown, these alterations never quite produce the kinds of ‘emancipation effects’ their proponents expect. *The gains that are made (for some) only appear as such within the logic of the existing order, and often come at a high cost for others.*<sup>121</sup>

Should XR want to advocate for more radical and transformative change, we suggest that it will have to re-think its politics of demand by simultaneously deploying a politics of refusal. Instead of demanding that the settler state provide concessions that will help address the *symptom* of climate change, a decolonizing and intersectional lens suggests the need to take a critical look at — and possibly refuse — the ways that even a reconfigured state may perpetuate inequities. For example, XR’s three central demands — that (Western liberal) governments ‘tell the truth, act now, and create Citizens’ Assemblies’ — embody some tensions that are at odds with intersectional, decolonizing allyship. On one hand, these demands — oriented as they are toward the state — assert what the movement will accept as

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<sup>116</sup> Tuck and Yang (n 30).

<sup>117</sup> Carole McGranahan, ‘Theorizing Refusal: An Introduction’ (2016, p. 320) 31 *Cultural Anthropology* 319.

<sup>118</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘Power Together’ (n 88).

<sup>119</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘About Us’ (n 9).

<sup>120</sup> Day (2005, p. 80) as quoted in Adam Barker, ‘From Adversaries to Allies: Forging Respectful Alliances between Indigenous and Settler Peoples’ in Lynne Davis (ed), *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-Indigenous Relationships* (University of Toronto Press 2010).

<sup>121</sup> *ibid* (emphasis added).

an outcome of its organizing. And (at least in theory) the settler state is accountable to its citizens, thus providing an opportunity for settlers to use their voices in solidarity with Indigenous-led struggles. On the other hand, asking the state to recognize and respond to demands legitimizes the state itself, and thus its problematic relationship to Indigenous Peoples and the continued occupation of Indigenous lands. The self-determination of Indigenous Peoples necessarily entails that Indigenous Nations should have the ability ‘to control their territories and resources and [have] the ability to be self-governing — without interference from state governments’.<sup>122</sup> An intersectional, decolonizing allyship would refuse a climate negotiation where the state continues to make decisions that negate, undermine, or misrecognize Indigenous self-determination. This tension is not unique to XR, and will need to be addressed by other settler-led social movements as well, should they hope to take seriously the requisites of decolonization.

Another tension pertains to XR’s demand for Citizens’ Assemblies. Will Citizens’ Assemblies on climate and ecological justice necessarily lead to systems change? Our discussion here suggests otherwise. From our viewpoint, issue-specific Citizens’ Assemblies — while representing an opportunity for a more deliberative democratic venue — ultimately do not transform existing forms of governance, nor are they immune from the problems that already exist in Western liberal democracies (i.e. lobbying, manipulation, co-optation/elite capture, etc.).<sup>123</sup> Additionally, there are good reasons to believe that any new institution, if not explicitly intersectional, will run the risk of reproducing existing power dynamics that stem from privilege and oppression. For example, Citizens’ Assemblies use stratified random sampling to be demographically representative, where the ‘percentage of assembly seats reserved for a subgroup reflects the percentage of that subpopulation’.<sup>124</sup> In Canada, 78% of citizens are white,<sup>125</sup> so a Citizens’ Assembly in Canada is likely to perpetuate a form of climate and ecological ‘justice’ that continues to privilege whiteness/maintains white supremacy (the same could happen among other forms of privilege, such as ableism). Additionally, as the name suggests, Citizens’ Assemblies might simply uphold nation-state-centric notions of citizenship that are exclusionary (for example, of migrants) and potentially incongruent with the plurinational context of Turtle Island.

Thus, rather than emphasizing only a politics of demand, we propose that XR and other environmental movements should (re)engage with a ‘politics of refusal’<sup>126</sup> — described by McGranahan as a ‘generative and strategic, deliberate move toward one thing, belief, practice, or community and away from another’ that can ‘illuminate limits and possibilities, especially but not only of the state and other institutions’.<sup>127</sup> The ‘systems change’ that XR advocates requires dismantling the capitalist-colonialist matrix of oppression, and thus requires a *refusal* to

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<sup>122</sup> Dina Gilio-Whitaker, ‘Idle No More and Fourth World Social Movements in the New Millennium’ (2015, p. 869) 114 *South Atlantic Quarterly* 866.

<sup>123</sup> Matthew Flinders and Dion Curry, ‘Deliberative Democracy, Elite Politics and Electoral Reform’ (2008) 29 *Policy Studies* 371.

<sup>124</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘The Extinction Rebellion Guide To Citizens’ Assemblies’ 27.

<sup>125</sup> Statistics Canada, ‘Canada [Country] and Canada [Country] (Table). Census Profile’ (2017) <<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=PR&Code1=01&Geo2=&Code2=&SearchText=Canada&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&TABID=1&type=0#fnb95-ref>> accessed 29 March 2020.

<sup>126</sup> Audra Simpson, ‘On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, “Voice” and Colonial Citizenship’ (2007) 9 *Junctures* 67; McGranahan (n 117).

<sup>127</sup> McGranahan (n 91, p. 319).

focus only on ‘improving existing institutions and every-day experiences’ that fit within ‘the logic of the existing order’.<sup>128</sup>

We offer these reflections not to diminish the work of XR, but because we see opportunities for it to evolve so that it continues to play a role within the global network of organizations and movements advocating for climate action. Instead of relying on the state’s willingness to take action on climate and ecological justice, we invite XR to continue to *collectively envision and enact* what different systems rooted in intersectional, decolonizing allyship could look like. In looking beyond the state, XR chapters across the world could share in collective and equitable processes that allow for thinking more imaginatively about alternative futures, *whose* futures those are, and to back-cast from those potential futures to ascertain *what kinds of acts or actions must occur today* to arrive there; indeed, it seems to some extent that XR intends to move in this direction.<sup>129</sup> In settler colonial contexts, however, future possibilities are not necessarily settlers’ right to determine. We invite XR and other settler-led social movements on Turtle Island to sit with an ethic of incommensurability and to uncomfortably reckon with ‘the need to give up land or power or privilege’.<sup>130</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

In this paper, we have reflected on XR’s history, its critiques, and our participation as members of XR-Vancouver, and have offered some suggestions on how settler-led environmental movements can move towards an intersectional, decolonizing approach to climate activism. This entails taking responsibility for the past visions of settler ancestors who have (in a hegemonic sense) engineered the past and present Indigenous dystopias from which settlers continue to benefit<sup>131</sup>.

This approach relies on three ethics: of relational accountability, care, and incommensurability. We suggest that good places to start in cultivating these ethics include recognizing the intersecting drivers of the climate crisis; building relationships with and learning the unique protocols of the specific Indigenous Nations whose land settlers are occupying; respecting Indigenous laws and forms of governance; and confronting or refusing the unjust capitalist-colonialist institutions — including the extractive industry, economic elites, and the state — that have enabled it. Above all else, we believe that settler-led movements must actively support the calls to action led by Indigenous movements and communities right now, in ways that respond both to their current material realities as well as to Indigenous futurity. We owe this perspective to Indigenous leaders and scholars who can, and do, guide us in decolonizing our solidarity-building efforts.

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<sup>128</sup> Day (2005), quoted in Barker (n 120).

<sup>129</sup> Extinction Rebellion, ‘Power Together’ (n 88).

<sup>130</sup> Tuck and Yang (n 30, p. 21); see also Yellowhead Institute, ‘Land Back’ (2019) and the wider #LandBack movement.

<sup>131</sup> Whyte (n 27).