

The Act of Theory: Indigenous Resurgence/Resistance and the
Enactment of the Community Self in the Colonial West?

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I have been having a continuous dialogue with myself throughout my graduate studies in order to reconcile and come to some understanding about the concepts of theory and the ideas of action within my own personal notion of resistance in the cage which is the *colonial west*. ***When attempting to define the colonial west, the concept leads me to the question:*** how can theory be anything but personal? ***The colonial west*** — *the cage of colonialism* that is wrapped and adorned in the flags that are honoured by many in Canada and the United States — takes the lives, histories, and stories of Indigenous peoples and peoples of colour everyday — the hyper awareness of self within the context of the streets of a major city, a small town — ***we are multicultural they say as they tell me I am an angry Indian and to get back to my reserve*** — the geographical location that cages my history, my life my soul ... ***The act of theory*** — **is the enactment of taking back the empowerment of the community self, which I define as an individual's commitment and enactment of culture and identity in Indigenous communities in North America, with this concept I attempt to engage with moving beyond the cultural, emotional and spiritual survival of the individual but the survival of the communally shared identity that** instead to embraces the emotional, cultural and spiritual survival and healing of Indigenous communities that exist outside of the colonial west's seeming ***and most imposing obsession with the self***. In opinion, theory is personal, political and resembles an attempt at defining my place and personal invention to the communities and goals of my current PhD project at the University of Toronto. Theory, in opinion, is an intimate moment that connects and extends on Elizabeth Povinelli's theoretical work and it redefines who I am and who I am going to become.

Although it is important to understand where I as a “highly educated” Person of Colour, who is overcoming the unenthusiastic impression that the public school system in Toronto that

told me I wouldn't be successful in university, significantly changed the way I viewed the education system and what it means for me to be moving forward in a mainstream educational institution. As the discipline I've chosen to do my PhD in is also served with a heaping side dish of colonialism, **it is important to understand what Elizabeth Povinelli means by “. . .what is the difference between the ‘intimate event’ of a love that refuses the dictates of the social skin and constitutes humanity retroactively and other kinds of intimacy? That is the proper relationship of these other forms of sexual intimacy?”¹. *Intimacy* is very much connected to what could be classified to the *act of theory* because my own personal development and my own research aiming to transform and influence myself and those I care about in community — capital C community is what Indigenous people would refer to the overall cultural space that a group participates in or specific Nation that an individual is in— those affected by the “gender”, racial and cultural group, but it can also give more access for particular groups than another and I have purposely framed it that way. What would research look like if the “academic”, the “researcher” moved beyond the “interesting”? What if the research and the theory moved into the intimate? What if theory moved into this *act of theory* as an emotional reaction to redefining an individual's “selfhood” and self image? The emotional, spiritual uproar of an ‘academics’ heart — you know when your heart gets that warm icky feeling not because of the need to make a name for yourself within academia but the need to love and protect our friends not our participants, to give back to our communities not to become an expert on the other.**

I am still coming to terms with the complexities of my own identity in relationship to my own research, where as others seem to pick up my identity as a part of their research of “the

¹ Elizabeth Povinelli. “The Intimate Event and Genealogical Society.” From *The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality*, 2006:176.

other” in the west. As **these researchers become interested in the pain process I have facilitated in order to begin healing in my research and my identity — is it possible for academia to move away from what is interesting to what individuals are personal about without it being a comparison of pain, violence or the intergenerational trauma that is continuing throughout particular communities? Especially within the context of Indigenous communities, who are shifting between the 4th world and the 1st world — but ultimately remain lost.** This is a call for a shift in power and of control of Indigenous cultural groups to specify what is being conducted within their own communities. Alas, I live in the colonial state of Canada which has and continues to be built on the backs of Indigenous and Black peoples and continues to live in a state of chosen ignorance due to the necessity, need, and desire to be ‘better than the states’ or ‘not as bad as them’ or ‘thank goodness we (Canadian Citizens) have Trudeau (current Prime Minister) and the **fear of Trump is real — the ability to travel, To move in our global space has become restricted — the want to further divide Indigenous territories by imposing an the concept of Mexican/US Wall, no matter how impossible it may be the building of this wall, it is representing more physical division of Indigenous territories and Ignoring the fact that Black and Indigenous people are dying at the hands of those who are supposed to be ‘protecting us’ and is almost becoming justified by the election of racism and white supremacy itself. In turn, research has become a space of reclamation with the Indigenous self in relation to community and contemporary realities.**

Confronting these types of realities, bringing healing practices and programs to our communities — healing and wanting to bring up those around me as a way of resisting the colonial state that has developed around Indigenous peoples — this in itself is an act of sovereignty and Indigenous cultural resurgence. The goal of this paper is to highlight the role of

Indigenous young people in the resurgence process and understand acts of theory and sovereignty which redefines Indigenous identities within the context of an imagined West with an imagined sense of belonging. **The ever evolving sense of community, belonging, and being of those who identify as citizens of the colonial states of Canada and the United States — is ultimately false — what is Canadian?** To me their identity is built up around concepts of a social structure that is no longer willing to face the genocide and racial divisions in which their country was built on. **Reclaiming Indigenous visual sovereignty as an Act of Resurgence is necessary for the communal strength of young Indigenous peoples to heal from and portray their realities within their own narratives. The main focus of my PhD project, under the supervision of Dr. Bonnie McElhinny, will be to understand and encourage Indigenous communities and cultural resurgences through film and arts-based activism and education as presented by International film festivals.** What does it mean for notions of resurgence to occur on an international basis and how does this notion of Indigenous connectivity change the way in which Indigenous peoples are reimagining and defining their *Indigenous selves*? **Although there are many different ways in which Indigeneity is practiced and resistance is organized within different Indigenous communities there is also a necessary need to strengthen the Indigenous self for young Indigenous peoples to strengthen and support their Indigenous communities — the ability to reimagining what the state has deemed upon Indigenous young people by the colonial state — is addressing and redefining the Indigenous future is about readdressing the potential of Indigenous creativity that has been stomped on — and has been resisted by so many Indigenous artists, like Rebecca Belmore, Christie Belcourt and Norval Morisseou — who have been recognized on a national and international basis of what “Canadian” art looks like.**

This drastically affects the way in which Indigenous peoples can better support their Indigenous selves and gain a level of self-esteem that would allow for Indigenous cultural resurgences to be sustained and continued for the next generation of Indigenous peoples. **The development of a curriculum that supports and creates an anti-colonial/anti-oppressive space can be very difficult because some of the violence of settler colonialism has often found its way into certain aspects of spiritually/culturally and physically violence that is forcibly seen as "tradition" on many different levels. When a community can imagine and engage with positive alternatives to suicide, self-harm, and other negative outlets of colonial tensions and stresses on Indigenous young people there can be both cultural strengthening, as well as self-guided alternatives to the lateral violence and intergenerational trauma that does exist within Indigenous communities and the settler society. Cultural resurgence and participation within positive outlets of frustration allows for Indigenous cultural resurgences to evolve and connect to Indigenous peoples in different spaces or regions.**

There is a need to include and engage with the large contributions to anti-colonial frameworks by Indigenous activists and academics — and in the context of this attempt at theory development — there is always a need to intersect how Indigenous academics and community members are engaging and enacting theory as a community cultural action. **As Glen Coulthard states, in his 2014 text Red Skins, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition that: ...within the emergent theory and practice of *Indigenous resurgence*, have added to our understanding of the entanglement of contemporary recognition politics with the operation of settler-colonial power. I feel that it is important to conclude my study in this way because Indigenous contributions to anti colonial thought and practice have been**

generally under appreciated for their transformation and value and insides (153). The better understanding of the amazing activism and resistance are sometimes underrated but the outlets for Indigenous young people is very much an active resistance and contributing to the building of the Indigenous community self. When attempting to create a discussion for and with Indigenous peoples, specifically other Indigenous young people — this will hopefully assist with the establishment of a space for resistance to the colonial West and the way of seeing how Indigenous representation is perceived and understood. It is also significant to support Indigenous young people in their ability to create and sustain meaningful ways. *This making the Act of Theory: personal, intimate and absolutely necessary for community.*