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**Ke-ne-pee-um! Welcome to Session A.03 Claiming the Past to Open Our Future: Language and Rhetoric of Idle No More**

**Before we begin, I would like to thank and honor the Miami, Potowami, and other tribes of Indiana whose lands we gather on today.**

Started by four Canadian women, Jessica Gordon, Sheelah McLean, Sylvia McAdams, and Nina Wilsonfeld, Idle No More was a platform to discuss the issues surrounding C-45. The women used Facebook, Twitter and a website to disseminate information. Throughout late 2012 and 2013, Idle No More “has quickly bec[a]me one of the largest Indigenous mass movements in Canadian history” (INM website). My colleagues and I will introduce ourselves as we each come up to speak, and we will have time for conversation.

**Joining the Round Dance: Rhetorical Indigenous Bodies of Protest**

Wunee montompan. Na ta su weese Joyce Rain Anderson. New-tu-waass ma-sih-pee-at Wampanog. Noo-wek-on-tam nu-ta-ee (I am glad to be herewith you).

(Good morning, my name is Joyce Rain Anderson. I am from the lands of the Wampanoag. I am glad to be here today. I start by thanking my ancestors and elders who guide me, but any mistakes I make will be my own.

“when we dance, every time a foot hits the ground, it is prayer.” Tsani Grosvenor

**Bodies carry stories; bodies tell stories. This is a story among the many stories we hold close.**

In November 2012, it may have been the whispers of Indigenous stories or a discussion of Indigenous peoples and environmental issues. By December, drumbeats called us in malls and at plazas and on street corners. Indigenous bodies gathered to protest Canada’s passage of Bill C-45 which threatens Canadian environmental protection and violates treaties. And, as Thomas King writes in *The Inconvenient Indian,* “Now I don’t want to give anyone the impression that I think treaties are a bad idea. Treaties aren’t the problem. Keeping the promises made in the treaties is a different matter (King 225). Like our ancestors before us, Indigenous people turned to story, to dance, to the body as a vehicle for protest to let governments know we would be idle no more.

Among other issues, this bill imperils streams and lakes, and amends the 1867 Indian Act without having consulted First Nations peoples and further attempts to erode sovereignty. Moreover, it violates articles 18, 19, and 20 of the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples which was passed in September 2007. The four countries initially opposed Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) are (not surprisingly) Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. While these countries have since announced their support, the US being the last in 2010,their policies and actions continue to threaten lands of Indigenous peoples. In the U.S. and Canada currently are enacting policies and plans which directly violate these rights. The Keystone XL Pipeline, fracking, and changing regulations which protect waterways are a few examples. In Canada, Bill C-45, which has been renamed as the Jobs and Growth Act 2012, is linked other pieces of legislation which include S-6, the first nation education act. Any of these pieces of legislation could have a massive impact on Indigenous sovereignty.

This is by no means the first time indigenous peoples have risen up and or protested against colonization. Indeed we have been resisting since 1492 and probably before. We can honor names like Metacom, Po ‘pe. Little Turtle, Tecumsah, Red Cloud, Geronimo, and more who laid their lives on the line to fight the onslaught of colonial terrorism. In the late 1800’s the Ghost Dance became a non-violent protest which resulted in a massacre by the US Army at Wounded Knee in 1890. Jeremy Wood (Metis) states, Settlers like to believe that colonialism, sad as it was, has ended, and that Indians are, at best, part of the great tapestry of America. We’ve resisted from the start. [Idle No More] is the continuation of a long history.” (\*find source). A resurgence of Native resistance took place during the 60s and 70s. This “campaign of resistance” (Paul Chaat Smith and Robert Warrior) include the taking over of Alcatraz Island in 1969, the Trail of Broken Treaties march, the occupation of the BIA in Washington DC, the second siege of Wounded Knee, covering Plymouth Rock in sand and boarding the Mayflower and throwing a replica pilgrim overboard, and many others as enacted through AIM.

Word spread of Idle No More spread quickly to the United States, Central and South America and globally where people joined in having teach-ins, rallies, round dances and protests to support the rights of Indigenous peoples. It should be noted here that some events like rounddances are directly associated with INM, and others happen alongside this movement. I am interested in how Indigenous bodies enact and are acted upon within these protests.

In the Americas and elsewhere, indigenous bodies have endured much. Knowing ourselves to be inextricably connected to the earth, we, as Native peoples, have resisted an ideology that would sever that connection. In my work, I am aligning with Julie Nagan’s research in (re) mapping the colonial body. Further, I consider the Indigenous body as rooted to place. As an example, the Wampanoag word for land was akeem, with an m which indicated the inseparable connection of the land to the body. Following contact and particularly in the religious tracts in the Wampanoag language, the –m was dropped from the word. Disconnecting the body from the land is also connected to the way maps of the ‘new world” were constructed showing vacant spaces. Julie Nagam points out, “Colonial maps describe the [“new world”] space as void or *terra nullis* by the lack of bodies and their focus on the vast ‘empty’ space. In these land surveys, the purported lack of bodies denies the embodied or living knowledge situated in the land and the indigenous bodies” (149). I argue this change in language is equal to a change in mindset. A conversion narrative. Equally, the idea of land as vacant still persists in colonial discourse and threatens Native territories today. Settler colonialism mentality has always been incongruous with an indigenous worldview. Settler colonials in order to justify their lust for land and its resources claimed indigenous bodies to be inferior to their own; colonial texts often liken Indigenous bodies to beasts and heathens in a savage state. Thus, Native bodies have endured forced conversion, imprisonment, theft, relocation, abuse, violence, and restrictions. From praying towns to residential boarding schools, Native peoples were taken from their homes and imprisoned in institutions. Historically, strikes against the native body continued as the settlers deliberately removed bodies from their homelands through government policies. This was done through setting up reservations, breaking up their lands into allotments, placing them in boarding schools, relocating them to cities, and denying native peoples religious and spiritual practices. Further, governments of the United States and Canada still determine who can be recognized as Indian, and how Indigenous nations exist within these nations. My presentation is born from the recent resistance strategies to the current state of Indigenous peoples. It is a story of embodied rhetorics, rhetorics located within and in Indigenous bodies and generated for Indigenous bodies. Indigenous bodies have been continually responding to limitations put on their sovereignty through, as de Certeau might argue, “disquieting [the ] familiarity” of colonial discourse. Through “tactics” of dance protests, hunger strikes, and human blockades, a resurgence of Indian protests “navigate the strategies of institutions and power structures” bringing renewed attention to environmental concerns, treaty rights, and sovereignty. Protest is a way of disseminating embodied rhetoric.

Coinciding with the protests of Idle No More, Teresa Spence, chief of the At-ta-wa-pis-kat Reserve in northern Ontario, began a hunger strike. She did so in direct response to C-45 when she and other First Nation Chiefs were barred from entering the House of Commons on December 4, 2012. Other elders also engaged in hunger strikes including Grand Elder Raymond Robinson. However, Chief Spence was also responding to “concerns she had raised in 2011” regarding substandard housing and health conditions on her reserve. Despite an officially declared state of emergency, the Canadian government issued no response (see Ornelas). Setting up a tipi on Victoria Island in Ottawa, Chief Spence began her hunger strike on December 11, 2012; she made it clear that she would end her strike when Prime Minister Harper and Gov. Gen. David Johnston would convene a meeting with first nation chief and recommit to Canada and the Crown’s treaty obligations. She declared “we need to reignite a nation to nation relationship based on our inherent and constitutionality protected rights as a sovereign nation. We are demanding our rightful place back here in our homeland that we call Canada” (McCarthy, Bradshaw). In her protest, Chief Spence was using her own body by denying her own body and exercising sovereignty over her body.

Historically, many have used the hunger strike as a protest tactic. Scholars agree that the hunger strike is used as a method of non-violent action where the powerless struggle to create political opportunities out of nothing to correct a perceived injustice (Scanlan 276). We have heard of hunger strikes in prisons like Guantanamo, yet Indigenous groups have seen this tactic as Gomez-Barris notes as “bodily performances of self-starvation [which] enact what it means to live in a barely livable state of colonial difference” (Gomez-Barris 121). For example, Jessica Shirmer discusses the protests of women in Guatemala and Chile in the 70s and 80s who persisted in seeking answers about their missing family members. They take over public spaces and call out the government to investigate disappearances and murders. In 1978, 100 of these women engaged in the Long Hunger Strike which had the support of Chilean Society. Likewise in her study, Marcena Gomez-Barris notes the Mapuche in Chile have used hunger strikes since 2004 to demonstrate “the starving body of the hunger striker has become the site of resistance against the modern nation state’s continued practice of colonial subjugation” (120).

As a protest tactic, hunger strikes mean that the striker undertakes great risks and thus must be willing to die for a cause. This tactic involves potential self-destruction of the body. Hunger strikes become dangerous to the body in only a few days when the body begins to breakdown fat in order to produce energy and ends up consuming itself from within to survive. (277). And while the idea is to call attention to a cause, a striker must also endure the emotions of the public.

There was both support and outrage regarding Spence’s decision to go on a hunger strike. These came from both sides.. In mainstream media, the 50-year-old Spence was often ridiculed and attempts were made to undermine her leadership. In fact, Patrick Brazeau, who is Algonquin and a polarizing figure in Harper’s Conservative Party, claimed that Spence’s action is “a bad example for First Nation’s youth.”(\*sources). One of the most telling aspects of the media attack came when it was revealed that Spence was drinking lemon water, medicinal teas, and fish broth. Fish broth was characterized as “the cheat.” And in media accounts, the word hunger strike became liquid diet, thus tempering the phrase. Anishinabe writer Leeanne Simpson replied “it’s as if a liquid diet doesn’t take substantial physical, mental, and emotional toll or substantial physical, mental, and emotional strength to accomplish.”

Fish broth can be what Norma Alacón calls tropography or the interanimating relationships between metaphor and places. (Brady 138;97) Spence was embodying cultural tradition. Her fast incorporated her peoples’ cultural traditions of eating fish broth which could traditionally sustain communities when there was no food. According to Simpson, “Spence is eating fish broth because metaphorically colonialism has Indian people on a fish broth diet for generation upon generation” (Simpson “Liquid Diet).

As Simpson reasons, Chief Spence was in ceremony and fasting as a ceremony is difficult. Roxanne Ornela, who visited Chief Spence during her strike, she writes, “I can relay with certainty that I know what bravery looks like while standing on the edge of life. I saw unwavering determination and courage in Chief Spence’s face while she held to her conviction in calling for changes to the government’s apparent arrogance and mistreatment of First Nations” (6). Chief Spence and Grand Elder Robinson ended their strike after 44 days when the government and the Assembly of First Nations developed a plan agreeing on intergovernmental cooperation over the next five years (“First Nations: Working for Fundamental Change”).

During this time, Indigenous bodies were moving. New Year’s Eve 2012 sparked many flash mob round dances. From the Mall of America in Minnesota to Boston’s Faneuil Hall to places all over Canada and the United States, Indigenous peoples gathered in a circle and invited supporters to join them. As one media pundit stated, “what can be more unsettling than a crowd of people dancing in the face of authority?” (source). Yet for Indigenous peoples, dance has always been a tactic for protest and embodies who we are as Native peoples. In *The People Have Never Stopped Dancing,* Jaqueline Shea Murphy explains, “indigenous dance practices embodied ideologies counter to those the governments were corporeally enforcing. Dance practices and gatherings . . . affirmed the importance of history told not in writing or even words but bodily” (Shea Murphy 31). And globally dancing as protest has indeed been a symbol of resistance to oppression. Take for example in Brazil where capoeira (ca bo wear a), a form of martial arts, was disguised as dance so that slaves could practice their skills without punishment. Or in Africa where the toyi-toyi was used for centuries beginning with the MauMau in Kenya resisting English colonists to South Africa to fight against apartheid. A marching foot movement, with hands held skyward motioning back and forth, and leaders call “awadla” (power) and be answered “awethu” (to us; to the people). Crowds pour into the streets joining each other rising up to impossible circumstances, and confronting those who held the real guns. Even among native peoples protesting through dance is peaceful protest. In the late 1880s, Paiute Wo-vo-ka began to promote the ghost dance to reinforce help and cultural survival for Indian peoples who were facing starvation and dislocation and death from settlers and even agents of the United States government. He encouraged people to bring back traditional knowledge that they needed to sustain themselves and to dance in prayer. It was the United States government who turned violent and massacred the dancing people at Wounded Knee in 1890.

Round dancing originates with the Cree people, and it is considered a healing dance. Although it is now commonly a pan tribal social dance, it is still used in ceremony. As a social dance it encourages more people to join the dance while it fosters a sense of identity within native communities. To dance one clasps hands and engages in a counter-clockwise step moving around the circle, a symbol of equality, kinship, and harmony, and the circle reconnects us with the earth. The dance creates relationships and helps us remember how we are all connected. It carries memories of our ancestors who have passed and those who are yet to come.

Idle No More encouraged people to gather in public spaces and hold flash-mob round dances. The flash mob became a way to enact free assembly ( Salmond 95). Harold Reingold refers to these Smart mobs as they have a definite cause as social protests while using contemporary media to organize (95). Messages are sent out via social media and potential participants provide contact information; they go to an agreed-upon place at an agreed-upon time and wait for a text message. Drums start beating and dancers emerge joining hands. Some may carry signs to indicate the cause, and others in the watching crowd are invited to join in the round dance.

Bodies enact these dances at malls, city plazas, and other places which signify meaning. Bodies gather and enact with places that have significant meaning; the drums and dancing bodies reinvent and reconstruct the meaning of the space, reclaiming it as Native space. (Danielle Endres and Samantha Sendra-Cook 258-59). We can understand the significance of this through thinking about how the Alcatraz takeover literally marked the island as Indian Land, a marking which still exists, or Chief Spence marking her space in Ottawa challenging the position of Parliament Hill. Likewise, the round dances took place is public space like city plazas in Toronto, Sacramento, Boston and many, many other major cities, or in shopping plazas like the Mall of America. Over 1,000 people participated in the 2012 New Year’s Eve Mall of America round dance, a space that marks untethered consumerism. Interestingly, Patricia Shepard and Reyna Crow were arrested on New Year’s Eve 2013 upon entering the Mall of America and were told drums were not allowed in the mall. On New Year’s Eve 2012 in Boston, we gathered at Faneuil Hall built in 1742 and known as the Cradle of Liberty. Even briefly reconstructing the meaning of these places makes them Native space, and bodies dance to bring about justice.

Indigenous bodies continue to place themselves at the forefront of protecting mother earth from the onslaught of greedy developers who try to extract every resource from her body. These developers don’t consider the consequences of their greed. For example, Oklahoma is experiencing daily earthquakes (122 in the past month) attributed by experts to the disposal of waste water from fracking. Oil spills from fracking are happening everywhere contaminating water supplies and land. The Keystone XL Pipeline still looms as a threat to Indigenous nations in North and South Dakota and Canada. Despite the environmental concerns, hundreds of millions of dollars are being poured into getting crude out of Alberta into pipelines. Tribes engage in protests like the Miq’ maq of Els-i-potg who held a roadblock on October 13, 2013. The RCMP responded with teargas and rubber bullets. Other tribes have joined to develop Moccasins on the Ground training by Owe Aku's Sacred Water Protection Project. They focus on skills, tactics, and techniques of nonviolent direct action in three day training camps. They demonstrate how to blockade heavy equipment, and hold workshops on strategic media, street medic training, knowing legal rights with respect to civil disobedience. (Moccasins on the Ground). Indigenous bodies continue to protect the future for generations to come.

It is our responsibility as Native peoples to care for our lands and our peoples. We understand our interconnectedness to all our relations and hold them in reverence. While Idle No More has brought attention to the issues, it is important to understand that our peoples have never been idle, that we have indeed laid our bodies on the line over and over again. We will continue to do so.

Kutapuatash.

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