
23. Already existing dystopias: tribal sovereignty, extraction, and decolonizing the Anthropocene

Andrew Curley and Majerle Lister

23.1 INTRODUCTION

‘We made history’, the refrain from the Indigenous delegation of the 2014 Climate March through New York City. Curley joined the march as an Indigenous person concerned about climate change. It was hyped as the most important march in the climate justice movement to that point. He learned about the march through word of mouth, social media, and public chatter. Participants travelled from across the country to New York City to join. There were Indigenous environmental organizers mixed with celebrities. This was two years before the unfolding of the tragic events at Standing Rock that reminded the world of the real colonial violence Indigenous peoples face every day in protecting their lands, sovereignty, and environments.

The Indigenous contingent at the 2014 march was placed in the front of the procession to suggest that Indigenous peoples are at the frontline of global climate change. Organizers distributed stickers that read, ‘Co2lonialism’, that linked production of carbon emissions with colonization. Other marchers asked to take a picture of the banner against the backdrop of steam rising from a New York City sewer hole. Curley walked for a time with the banner that read ‘Air’, which symbolized one of the four vital elements of life in addition to fire, water, and earth. For most of the march, the sun was a muted grey overcast. In a movement looking for symbols and irony, pictures of the brightly coloured banners against a bleak sky highlighted for some the perceived starkness in potential environmental futures. In this chapter, we therefore interrogate the linkage of colonialism and carbon production in the context of the march. How are tribes ‘frontline’ communities and what is the relationship between tribes and carbon production?

Placing Indigenous peoples at the front of the march was meant to acknowledge that Indigenous communities were at the frontline of global climate change. Some of this recognition is progressive, but some of it is also cultural stereotyping. Organizers believe that Indigenous communities are the first peoples impacted by global climate change because they see Indigenous peoples as primarily subsistence-based communities living on a knife’s edge of survival. This rendering is not too different from past racist assumptions and it fails to conceptualize Indigenous peoples as modern peoples whose greatest threats are political marginalization at the hands of continued colonial processes. Although there is truth in the sense that Indigenous peoples are frontline communities, that frontline is more complicated than just the first communities to experience environmental change. It also includes, as this chapter will demonstrate, the fusing of Indigenous futures with extractive industries that is a by-product of decades of assimilation efforts.

The barometer of tribal economies are tribal institutions that encourage and manage development activities on tribal lands. For many nations, these have become resource regimes

dependent on extractive industries for survival. The messiness of tribal institutional ties to extractive industries are briefly described here, but admittedly require more depth. Instead, this chapter will focus on some of the implications in how we frame the Anthropocene among Indigenous peoples if we consider Indigenous peoples and nations as politically and economically marginalized peoples within global capitalism. In short, we need to account for the complicated factors that inform contemporary Indigenous life and not simply assume the impacts of climate change onto these people and places based on outmoded stereotypes.

Potawatomi scholar Kyle Whyte challenges dystopian narratives of climate change as erasing Indigenous perspectives and presence from the land. Indigenous peoples have experienced world-changing catastrophes before. Settler states such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States (US) are already existing Indigenous dystopias. One does not need to turn to science fiction, but to history texts to witness death, destruction, social, and environmental change (Whyte 2018). Heather Davis and Zoe Todd write that the dating of the ‘golden spike’ or start date of the Anthropocene should be moved from current consensus at the middle of the twentieth century to much earlier, to the advent of colonialism at the beginning of the seventeenth century (Davis and Todd 2017). The political implications of such dating would be to bind the problem of permanent human environmental impacts with colonialism and suggest that we cannot meaningfully address climate change without addressing generations of settler colonialism. In this chapter we bring into consideration tribal political institutions to the complicated questions of climate change’s impacts on Indigenous peoples. Tribal institutions in Indigenous communities usher in practices of extraction and resources development.

Rather than seeing Indigenous nations as only ‘frontline’ communities based on subsistence, we need to understand Indigenous peoples as groups that are politically marginalized in structures of colonial states and who might not stand to benefit – perhaps are even threatened by – climate change mitigation and adaptation measures. The popular understanding of Indigenous peoples and the environment represented in the 2014 march avoids real challenges facing Indigenous communities, challenges over questions of sovereignty, development, and sustainability. The conditions of many Indigenous communities, where we do our research, are areas of high unemployment, political inequality, and lack of resources – already existing dystopias. For many tribes, the major industries are oil, natural gas, and coal. Indigenous nations are not only subsistence communities on the frontline of environmental change but they are also communities embedded in minerals and extraction at the frontline of energy transition. This chapter considers the role of tribal institutions in navigating these existing circumstances that pertain to extraction, energy, and climate change.

23.2 TRIBAL SOVEREIGNTY IN THE ANTHROPOCENE

Among Indigenous scholars, there is a debate on the future forms, functions, and practices of tribal sovereignty. Mohawk scholar Taiake Alfred has forcefully argued that formal political institutions are foreign to philosophies of Indigenous governance and that tribes should abandon these forms where possible (Alfred 2006). Cultural anthropologist Paul Nadasdy has offered similar points about the nature of political sovereignty and citizenship among First Nations in Canada (Nadasdy 2017). Mohawk anthropologist Audra Simpson takes this insight a step further to describe the particular forms of ‘nested sovereignty’ and traditional

citizenship still in practice among Indigenous nations in colonial New York (Simpson 2014a). Yellowknife Dene Glen Coulthard writes that the modern state form in Indigenous communities not only strengthens colonialism but is necessary for modern capitalism (Coulthard 2014). On the other hand, Lenape professor Joanne Barker says that tribal sovereignty is imperfect and often serves colonial interests but is also a reflection of hard-fought struggles against colonialism (Barker 2005). Carroll (2015) and Corntassel's (2012) consideration of 'sustainable self-determination' is a useful entry point when thinking about decolonizing environmental governance and practices of Indigenous sovereignty. This chapter considers the legacy of tribal institutions and extractive industries, illustrating how deeply embedded resource extraction is in the landscape of Indigenous nations (Corntassel 2012).

Although tribes have the right to political sovereignty, Wallace Coffey and Rebecca Tsosie (2001) write about the necessity for evaluating Indigenous self-determination beyond political rights. They argue that we have to incorporate cultural sovereignty, especially as it relates to the environment, into consideration. They write that Indigenous people should govern their lands and resources as they see fit and as a way to resist, survive, and reverse the effects of climate change. Daniel Wildcat (2013) calls Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge and practices *Indigeneity*. Cherokee political scholar Jeff Corntassel (2012) argues for sustainable sovereignty and Cherokee geographer Clint Carroll echoes this sentiment and suggests tribes can incorporate environmental values into tribal political institutions (2015). Some have argued that the initial steps for the international community is to recognize Indigenous knowledge systems as crucial for solving this pressing environmental issue (Inoue and Moreira 2016). If the Anthropocene translates into an intensification of colonialism, then what does it mean for Indigenous nations that have become reliant on extractive practices as a means of economic and political power?

The colonial entanglements of extractive industries within Indigenous nations are hard to extricate. Tribal institutions are complex and cannot be reduced to the function of colonial interests. New ethnographies on Indigenous governance in and around official institutions speak to this difficulty (Pasternak 2017; Montoya 2018; Powell 2017; Lewis 2019). Our own foray into decolonizing Indigenous institutions have focused on the work of Diné activists and organizer Janene Yazzie, who suggests sovereignty is an on-the-ground relationship with place and land (Lister and Curley 2017) – which has direct implications for how we might understand tribal resource governance in the Anthropocene. Despite this, Indigenous nations retain their philosophies and approaches to conceptualizing the Anthropocene (Whyte 2018). In many Indigenous philosophies, the human is not the top species. Rather, humans exist in a cosmology determined by natural law of non-human persons which include many diverse species (Nadasdy 2016). The Anthropocene and our climate change politics do not account for Indigenous natural laws. Indigenous generation challenges are not between the young and the boomers, but between the living and ancestors.

Indigenous nations in the US are also among the most vulnerable communities impacted by changing energy landscapes. Our conventional thinking about the Anthropocene is one of impending doom and destruction (Gergan et al. 2018). Whyte and others push back against Eurocentric narratives about the end of Earth to ask what Indigenous perspectives and practices might teach us (2018). This chapter reminds us that Indigenous experiences are not limited to doom spelt by the collapse of the environment as the march in New York City suggested. For Davis and Todd, the 'golden spike' is tied more directly to colonialism and recent research demonstrates a link between colonialism and the Earth's changing climate (Koch

et al. 2019). As Wildcat and Whyte write, colonialism attempted to destroy the Indigenous world far beyond some of the worst predictions of climate change. Attempted genocide, forced removal, assimilation, and, at best, political marginalization have done tremendous damage to Indigenous life. To survive, many nations did the best with what they could on the little bit of land left to them. This often turned into long-term mining operations on tribal lands. Jobs, revenues, and resources keep Indigenous nations alive as much as grasslands and sheep. Tribal institutions, working with Indigenous lands, often express a desire for economic adaptation to changing energy regimes. However, the hardship of this transition is born by energy-producing communities with little regard from utility companies, power plants, or cities that benefit. We can expect political responses to climate change to follow in the same way unless something is done to change the political marginalization of tribes in settler states.

23.3 ALREADY EXISTING DYSTOPIAS: OIL, URANIUM, AND COAL IN THE NAVAJO NATION

Over the last ten years, Indigenous nations have experienced new energy-related pressures on their lands, economies, and overall social well-being as a result of changing patterns of carbon production and regulation in the US. Oil and natural gas development are proliferating across the Great Plains, putting pressures on Indigenous lands to develop mine sites or construct pipelines beneath reservations. For the Navajo Nation, the largest tribe in the US, a 50-year coal industry recently collapsed, impacting tribal coffers and jobs for Navajo and Hopi people. These booms and busts are part of a new resource curse plaguing reservation lands. The expansion of oil production in the Dakotas and the decline of coal in the Navajo Nation are interrelated issues along a changing carbon landscape that shapes global discourses on climate change, carbon production, and ideas of the Anthropocene.

Indigenous nations in the US are also among the most vulnerable communities impacted by changing energy landscapes. In 2016, much of the world witnessed the violence against water protectors at Standing Rock, where oil developers built new energy infrastructures beneath unseeded tribal lands and over the objection of community members and the tribal government. In this section we consider the history of two resources on tribal lands: coal and oil. As members of the Navajo Nation, understanding the histories of these resources helps us to understand our tribe's politics around climate change. Oil was first discovered in the Navajo Nation in 1922 and was an impetus for creating the tribal government. Other Indigenous nations might present a different configuration of topics, although the colonial dynamics are always the same. Coal was found in the 1950s and developed in the 1960s. Coal operations supported the Navajo Nation budget from the early 1970s until 2006 when the mines and powerplants started to close down. More than any other resource, coal and oil bear on climate change discourse and notions of the Anthropocene in important ways.

23.3.1 Oil

Oil is perhaps the energy resource with the longest and most troubled history among Indigenous peoples in the Americas (Fixico 2012). Oil is one of the world's most profitable industries and is the basis for world conflict today, including the 2003 US invasion of Iraq (Mitchell 2009). In the early twentieth century, oil production boomed in the US, especially in places

like Texas and Oklahoma. The most notorious instance of colonial guile involved the Osage, whose identities later became intertwined with the profits of oil companies (Dennison 2017). When oil exploration boomed in the 1910s and 1920s, profiteers murdered members of the tribe and took their lands, titles, and oil monies. The killing was so widespread that the federal government took notice and it is argued by some that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was created in response to these murders. It was at this time when oil leases between companies and tribes took on new importance. The Harding administration was favourable to oil contracts on public lands with little to no federal scrutiny. His secretary of interior, Albert Fall, had cosy relationships with companies. He was an immigrant to New Mexico from Kentucky but was elected to the Senate and eventually joined the Harding administration. As a lawmaker from New Mexico, Fall had some experience with tribes and understood federal–Indian legal arrangements.

During this time, the Standard Oil Company from Texas ‘explored’ for oil beneath Diné lands in the northern and eastern portion of our reservation. When the company’s geologists found bountiful reserves, the company needed to figure out a way to extract it. Standard Oil could not get at it without an agreement from the tribe and the tribe had no political mechanism with which to negotiate. Fall instructed the Bureau of Indian Affairs to create a tribal government haphazardly comprised of ‘representatives’ from the region who could review the terms of land leases between ‘the tribe’ and the company and approve them. This became the first tribal government of the Navajo people. Although the government was replaced after Harding died and Fall went to prison for accepting bribes from oil companies, many Diné people today believe that the organizing purpose of creating tribal governments was to facilitate contracts with oil and mining companies based on this history (Chamberlain 2000; Powell and Curley 2008).

Oil development fell on fractured Indigenous lands. Over the previous half century, the US unilaterally violated its treaties with tribes, especially those whose lands were in the Great Plains, and Congress passed the General Allotment Act of 1877. In effect, the act took commonly held lands and fractured them into individual allotments. Indian agents and the US Land Office (today the Bureau of Land Management) distributed the lands to Indian applicants, many of whom were swindled out of their titles by settlers. The intent of the law was to promote individual grazing and agriculture, but allotment titles were still held in trust by the federal government. When oil entered the picture nearly half a century later, royalties generated on these lands would create more controversy. The records of oil contracts for individual allotments as well as tribes were poorly stored. Millions of dollars of assets were lost due to poor record keeping, leading to the Cobell class action lawsuit against the US.

Today there is a boom in US and Canadian oil production. This has put renewed pressure on tribal lands. The controversial mining technique, hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, is making old oil sources accessible in new ways. The cheaper mining technique makes extraction of these hard-to-access oil fields profitable. Canada is investing hundreds of millions of dollars in pipeline technology to take crude oil from the interior of the country to port along its Pacific coast (Stanley 2016). Such actions work against the goals of environmental activists who warn against putting more carbon into the atmosphere. The notorious Tar Sands field in Alberta is one of the dirtiest and most inaccessible oil fields in North America. But the possibility of developing these fields is attracting finance from banks and corporations across the world to bring this oil out of the earth, into market, and into the permanent contribution of human-produced greenhouse gasses warming the planet and destabilizing the climate.

The Keystone XL pipeline was a proposed infrastructure to connect the Tar Sands with the Gulf Ports in Texas that would then ship this oil across the globe. Indigenous environmental groups protested this pipeline at the height of US president Barack Obama's 'all of the above' approach to energy development. In 2016, the Dakota Access Pipeline connected the Bakken oil field in North Dakota to refineries and ports along the gulf. This pipeline was constructed through the lands of the Great Sioux Nation, an Anglicized reference to the Nakota, Dakota, and Lakota peoples who share kinship and governing responsibilities with each other. The project was planned and built through ancestral lands and crossed the Missouri River. Climate activists and Indigenous peoples from across the world joined the Standing Rock tribe in opposing this pipeline construction in 2016. But the new administration of Donald Trump removed all federal regulatory holdups shortly after taking over the presidency in January 2017.

Oil booms bring another kind of threat to Indigenous communities, man camps (Deer 2015). These places are temporary settlements designed around the construction of pipelines or the development of oil fields. Men with no ties to the land on which they work participate in illicit buying and selling of Indigenous women, who are brought into sex work for a number of reasons, but often because of financial challenges or misinformation. Many of these women go missing, presumably abducted or murdered (Dhillon 2015; Anderson et al. 2018). The tragedy was so widespread in Indigenous communities both in the US and in Canada that a movement started to highlight the names, faces, and dates of disappearance of many women. Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women started in Winnipeg where women would wash up in the banks of the Red River that runs through the centre of the city. It has since spread to the US and also takes into account women who are the victims of domestic abuse or who are killed by the police. The targeting of Indigenous women by 'non-Indian men' (read White) is especially difficult to stop because racist US law prevents tribal law enforcement over non-Indians under the racist assumption that Indigenous jurisdiction will be unfair to white people. This created jurisdictional problems over domestic violence against Indigenous women on tribal lands, some of which was amended in 2013 in the amendments and reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act.¹

23.3.2 Uranium

As a consequence of racism and lack of political power, Indigenous lands and nations were subject to the worst effects of extraction. The history of nuclear and uranium is a good example of existing dystopic realities. In the Pacific, Indigenous island peoples suffered direct nuclear fallout from US and French nuclear testing. In the US, the Grants Mineral Belt in colonial New Mexico is one of the richest deposits of uranium ore in the world (a natural resources way of looking at the land) and was hazardously exploited for weapons during the Cold War (Brugge et al. 2006; Smith and Frehner 2010). Diné, Hispanic, Zuni, Acoma, and Laguna peoples worked in this industry without masks, air filtration, or adequate education about the radioactive risks of working with and around uranium. Uranium ore under the feet of Indigenous peoples and communities built up the US nuclear arsenal (Pasternak 2011). What is more, for Diné people, uranium mining occurred near people's homes and within communities – exposing the people to radioactive waste. In addition to the risk associated with the work, the mine sites were poorly monitored and maintained. The companies who exploited uranium were 'fly-by-night' operations that folded soon after they made their owners profits. Such lax regulation benefited the uranium industry but cost Diné people their relatives, communities, and lands.

To this day, many of these mine sites are in need of mitigation and monitoring – even decades after operations ceased. Uranium mining in the US southwest in the 1950s also introduced a fundamental paradox that still challenges tribes today – the paradox of the social embeddedness. Uranium mining ushered in revenues and provided scores of jobs. However, when uranium declined in the 1970s, uranium companies left much of the radioactive waste open and unmitigated (Jorgensen 1978; Jorgensen et al. 1978). What is more, a milling spill in 1979 dumped millions of gallons of radioactive water into creeks that Diné people have relied upon for generations, causing permanent contamination in some areas. The spill, known as the Churchrock spill, was the worst nuclear accident in US history and one of the most well-known examples of environmental justice against the continent’s Indigenous peoples today.

23.3.3 Coal

In the US populist imagination, coal exists in Appalachia (Scott 2010), but its heart is in the west. The Powder Basin, between the Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains, is the site for the most intensified mining activity today. The region is home to many large land-based tribes whose reservations overlap and intersect with places of known coal reserves.² The Crow Nation and Northern Cheyenne in Wyoming and Montana allowed companies to mine for coal in their reservations in order to increase tribal revenues and create jobs. The pro-extractive attitudes of tribal governments led to backlash in tribal communities (Allison 2015). Although some saw the benefit of the industry, many younger Indigenous activists recognized the colonial nature of coal in their communities. They organized within new and militant Native liberation and self-determination movements to oppose coal and other resource exploitation and extraction (Powell 2017).

In the Navajo Nation, Black Mesa became the site of some of the most controversial mining on Indigenous lands. From the 1970s, Peabody Coal transported coal from Black Mesa to a Nevada power plant via a water slurry that closed at the end of 2005 – a waste of potable drinking water for fossil fuel extraction. As the mine site was constructed in the early 1970s, Diné residents organized campaigns to ‘Save Black Mesa’. Some saw the use of industrial strip mining to convert the land into coal as destructive to the tribe’s homelands. The physical conversion of grasslands into an industrial mine site spoke to the stark contrast in what you can do with the land, from herding sheep for subsistence to mining it for coal. The Navajo Nation government supported coal mining as a source of jobs and revenues, but community members were split on its benefits. Some worked in the industry. Others saw familiar lands upended and objected to the use of aquifer water to slurry coal (Nies 2014).

Diné and Hopi residents recognized the absurdity of using water for coal in a dry and drought-prone region. Turning Diné lands into former coal fields, in need of mitigation, unusable in the future is an example of what Voyles calls ‘wastelanding’ (2015). After more than 30 years of mining, the lands of the Black Mesa Mine are an uninhabited wasteland. Mining laws require that Peabody Coal restore the land it mined. It leaves the land undisturbed for ten years before it can return it to the Navajo Nation. The ability of Diné people to take up sheepherding and farming on these former mine lands remains questionable as geologists working for the tribe have told me in confidence that the land might remain toxic. The scared landscape of Black Mesa is equal to any dystopic vision in discourse among environmental organizers and activists.

Discourse on the Anthropocene does not focus on the physically and emotionally scarred landscape of Black Mesa, long plundered for its wealth in coal. The Anthropocene is built on colonial relations, which forced tribes into political disempowered positions within a racist state and global capitalism. Climate change is a politics largely ignorant of Indigenous peoples' complicated relationship with extractive industries. Environmental activists and organizers are the most explicit at bringing Indigenous peoples into consideration, but often at superficial levels. The depth of colonial entanglements is not well understood or accounted for within political proposals. The connection with Indigenous peoples to subsistence lifeways are fodder for arguments supporting climate change mitigation or trying to stop carbon-intensive projects from getting off the ground. The tribal economies engineered around the extraction of oil, coal, and other minerals is underappreciated. This is true especially for the right wing which opportunistically exploits Indigenous suffering to justify its own pro-fossil fuel agenda.

23.4 DECOLONIZING THE ANTHROPOCENE

Indigenous peoples control lands across the US and Canada. Especially in western states and provinces, tribes maintain large areas of land on top of highly coveted natural resources. Through colonization and ideas of economic underdevelopment that were thrust onto tribal communities, tribal governments participate in energy development and mineral extraction, from coal, oil, and uranium to hydropower and natural gas extraction. Shifting US energy policies and practices roll across tribal lands dramatically and unevenly. Energy policies and practices are interrelated and can have mixed or even opposite effects on different tribal communities based on their geographies on top of or around sites of extraction. A focus on energy and extraction complicates our understanding of colonization today on Native lands and reveals underappreciated sources of structural inequality. The complication of Indigenous lands in a colonial context contributes to our larger understandings of the Anthropocene as an uneven process.

Indigenous scholars argue that the Anthropocene is a protraction of concepts that 'are steeped in colonial understandings of modernity and its colonial Other that were inherited from the European Enlightenment' (Simpson 2020, p. 55). The complication of Indigenous lands in a colonial context contributes to our larger understandings of the Anthropocene as an uneven process. Leftist critiques describe this unevenness as 'the capitalcene', attributing environmental change to the making of the modern world system. However, colonialism as a political and philosophical practice is destructive to environments. It helped shape the modern geological age and the modern world of unsustainable development and modernization efforts. Today, Indigenous lands are coveted more for their rich resources than for settlement. These new colonial desires engender new forms of colonization and underdevelopment. Land and energy become twin processes in the colonization of Indigenous homelands. Since the 1930s, colonization is both facilitated and contested through institutions of tribal governance. This chapter argues that decolonizing the Anthropocene in Indigenous North America requires attention to decolonizing tribal governance.

Oglala Lakota scholar Kali Simmons (2019) argues that Indigenous people, through settler legal systems, were only treated as 'human' after they disavowed their kinship to non-human relatives. She suggests that the 'human' that comprises the Anthropocene is a settler colonial tool for assimilation and creates a separation between nature and society where nature

becomes commodified and open to capitalist exploitation. Land, and other resources, is important to the fossil activity that defines the Anthropocene. Linking the Anthropocene with colonialism is key for understanding the social and political project that set the conditions of climate change (Davis and Todd 2017). The use of Indigenous lands and other resources for fossil fuels contributes to the challenges of the Anthropocene. Colonialism is the domination of one political entity over another and that relationship is demonstrated by the domestic state of Indigenous people within the US. As Indigenous scholars have noted, the Anthropocene is the intensification of colonial power relations and the practices that were produced by the power relations. In the US, those power relations are embedded in the political and economic arrangements between tribal institutions and colonial institutions. Due to the dominant colonial institutions, tribal institutions navigate the colonial practices that intensify the power relations and extractive practices that define the Anthropocene. These practices are defined as a heavy reliance on fossil fuels.

Modern tribal institutions emerged as a response to Indigenous activism (Wilkinson 2005). To combat colonial land grabs, displacement, and retain Indigenous lifeways, tribes negotiated a stronger sense of political sovereignty. They were able to do this through land occupations, mobilizations, marches, and after much hardship. The nature of these tribal institutions speaks to the challenges of decolonizing the Anthropocene and mitigating climate change. Survivability, for many tribes, are linked inherently with the ability of tribes to leverage their sovereignty in the form of mineral contracts. This particular brand of ‘sovereignty’ has been critiqued widely, but it is ultimately tied to how this ‘colonial entanglement’ has worked its way across Indigenous lands and across Indigenous communities (Fixico 2012; Dennison 2017).

Although tribes have the right to political sovereignty, Wallace Coffey and Rebecca Tsosie (2001) write about the necessity for evaluating Indigenous self-determination beyond limited political rights. They argue we have to incorporate cultural sovereignty, especially as it relates to the environment, into consideration. They write that Indigenous people should govern their lands and resources as they see fit and as a way to resist, survive, and reverse the effects of climate change. Daniel Wildcat (2013) calls Indigenous traditional ecological knowledge and practices *Indigeneity*. Cherokee political scholar Jeff Corntassel (2012) argues for sustainable sovereignty and Cherokee geographer Clint Carroll echoes this sentiment and suggests tribes can incorporate environmental values into tribal political institutions (2015). Some have argued that the initial step for the international community is to recognize Indigenous knowledge systems as crucial for solving this pressing environmental issue (Inoue and Moreira 2016). If the Anthropocene translates into an intensification of colonialism, then what does it mean for Indigenous nations that have become reliant on extractive practices as a means of economic and political power?

We began this chapter with Curley’s experience at the 2014 climate march in New York City. During this march, Indigenous activists and organizers were positioned at the front of the march as a symbolic understanding about the risk of climate change for Indigenous and other ‘frontline communities’. For mainstream environmentalism, Indigenous peoples are impacted communities, the frontline victims of climate change. The assumption is that traditional and cultural landed practices are threatened. Indigenous peoples are land-based nations whose identities, stories, philosophies, and governance are directly connected to the land. Critics of tribal governments as inappropriate expressions of Indigenous practices often gesture toward

the land, Indigenous relationships with the land, and resurgent cultural practices (Corntassel 2012; Simpson 2016, 2014b).

However, extractive industries have helped assuage some of the longstanding impacts of genocide, violent displacement, and forced assimilation. For generations, Indigenous peoples were able to survive on their lands through strategic engagement with extractive industries and capitalism. The legacies of these practices scar the landscape. They helped us survive on the land but also destroyed much of it in the process. With colonization, Indigenous peoples saw their lands taken and lives permanently altered. This constituted its own dystopia. Tribes later suffered through forced assimilation, continued land theft, and the creation of tribal institutions with legal and political rights strongly associated with the expansion of capitalism and extractive industries within and around Indigenous communities. Oil and gas fracking around Indigenous lands have witnessed the abduction and murder of Indigenous women who are ensnared into man camps. Coal created hundreds of jobs, a sense of economic dependency, and eventual collapse. These multiple, overlapping, and current dystopias are lost on most commentaries on climate change. To decolonize the Anthropocene requires attention to the more complicated landscape of colonialism as they pertain to Indigenous peoples and nations.

NOTES

1. This section of the chapter uses the term ‘Indian’ and ‘non-Indian’, which might offend some readers but is the language of US colonial law. It is found in the official legislation and on government documents and websites.
2. Consider the Coalition of Large Tribes, see: <http://largetribes.org/>.

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