



Book Review

More Powerful Together: Conversations with Climate Activists and Indigenous Land Defenders

Gobby, Jen. (2020). Fernwood Press. ISBN 9781773632261 (paper) CDN\$26.00; ISBN 9781773632513 (e-book) CDN\$25.99; ISBN 9781773633596 (pdf) CDN\$25.99. 250 pages.

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In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) final report issued 94 calls to action to institutions of the Canadian state and to the broader civil society. For so many sectors (health, education, justice and journalism among others) the TRC has been crucial for advancing the project of "reconciliation" and "decolonization" in so-called "Canada." Yet the TRC report and its 94 calls to action are eerily silent on the topic of the environment and climate change. Enter Jen Gobby's *More Powerful Together*, an essential starting place for considering how the climate and environmental movements can advance the work of decolonization and forge the right relationships for a better world.

In this book, Gobby argues that colonialism and capitalism are the underlying causes of both climate change and social injustice, and as such, our movements and organizing around climate change must also dismantle the colonial structures that continue to dispossess Indigenous Peoples of their lands and "modes of life" (as Glen Coulthard, 2014, has called it). This, of course, is no small task. Gobby outlines how the Indigenous land defense movement, the mainstream environmental movement, and the climate justice movement have converged around pipeline protests. But she also shows that this convergence is not (yet) a true alliance capable of mounting a united challenge to the causes of climate change and social injustice. In fact, Gobby's conversations and surveys with movement activists suggest that climate movements have been unwelcoming and hostile places for Indigenous people and that NGOization has deprioritized land defense and decolonization and depoliticized climate action.

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Like many settlers, when the TRC published its final report in 2015 I eagerly looked over the 94 calls to action hoping to find suggestions for my work. But the calls to action don't address the environment or climate change head on. At first I was perplexed by this, because the purpose of residential schools was to break Indigenous children's links to their cultures and identities. This is clearly articulated in the summary report and there are many calls to action related to language and culture and others that suggest incorporating Indigenous Knowledge into teaching methods, classrooms and other institutional practices. But the report doesn't explicitly call attention to the fact that residential schools were also designed to remove children from their lands. As a settler, I am learning how a sense of responsibility to vast kin networks that include humans and non-humans is integral to many Indigenous cultures and cosmologies. Residential schools were an attempt to break these relationships with and responsibilities to the land and to networks of kinship that included not only Indigenous children's human families, but also the more-than-human world. Thus, I believe the TRC's recommendations ought to have called us to renew these reciprocal relationships to our non-human others.

If I could turn the results of Gobby's research into a few key TRC calls to action around climate change I would suggest the following as the main take-aways:

1. We call upon environmental organizations and movements, NGOs, and environmental departments at all levels of government to expand their approaches to the problem of climate change. Climate change should be seen not only as a problem of rising Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions, but also as a problem of broken relationships to the non-human world. These broken relationships are the result of capitalist-colonial systems that rip apart reciprocal relationships between humans and between humans and non-humans. The same systems that produce unchecked global warming dispossess Indigenous Peoples from their lands and modes of life. Thus, any strategy to reduce GHGs must also re-build reciprocal relationships by engaging Indigenous Knowledges and Indigenous approaches to governance and diplomacy.
2. We call upon those working in environmental movements and sectors to support Indigenous struggles for self-determination. As Gobby suggests, "when Indigenous Peoples enact their own governance systems, lifeways and culture, colonial structures begin to lose power" (p. 109). As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change made clear in their 2019 *Special Report on Climate Change and Land* secure land tenure for Indigenous and traditional landholders is key to slowing the climate crisis. Climate movements and environmental sectors must work the world over to return land to Indigenous Nations and to recognize Indigenous sovereignty and jurisdiction over the full extent of their traditional territories.

In conducting her research, Gobby also provides an example of how to centre Indigenous voices and how to ensure that research with Indigenous people is not “extractive” (p. 10). I found Gobby’s approach to “raise up and disproportionately report on the views and theories of the Indigenous people” (p. 12) that she interviewed a useful way forward. In this way, Indigenous perspectives and experiences can be centred even if Indigenous participants do not make up a majority of participants in a given study. Not only did Gobby disproportionately report on the views of Indigenous participants in her study, she also made central the words of Indigenous authors and scholars and the public statements and writing of Indigenous movements and organizations. While I believe scholars should be striving to include as many Indigenous people as possible in their samples, it is also vitally important to make good use of the existing public statements and writing of Indigenous people and organizations. And where a sample suffers from over-representation of settlers, Gobby offers a practical way forward for a researcher: to prioritize and disproportionately report on the contributions from Indigenous people.

More Powerful Together is a starting place for groups that want to build effective movements to combat climate change and inequality. The book does not provide a roadmap for accomplishing this, but it does insist that effective movements against climate change must not be myopic. We can continue to have oppositional politics converge around issues like pipelines, where local (often settler) communities are attempting to protect their local environments, climate change groups are motivated out of concern for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and Indigenous land defenders are asserting their jurisdiction and self-determination as a means of carrying out their responsibilities to the land and each other. But these will only remain flashpoints until environmental and settler-dominated movements can understand decolonization as central to a more ecologically and socially just world. As Gobby suggests, we are more powerful when we can propose solutions that are intersectional, when we can propose “alternatives that help address as many forms of injustice as possible” (p. 193). This will also help us to “scale up” our solutions and “render them more powerfully transformative” (p. 193). After all, now is not the time for half-measures, for movements that only improve the lives of some of us, for reforms that are not at the scale and the scope of the crises in front of us. Now is the time to radically remake the structures and right our relationships with each other and with the non-human world.

References

Coulthard, G. S. (2014). *Red skin white masks: Rejecting the colonial politics of recognition*. University of Minnesota Press.