Indigenous Food Sovereignty: 
Growing and Surviving as Indians

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Abstract

This thesis explores the emerging political concept of Indigenous Food Sovereignty. In brief, the concept of Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) makes the claim that Indigenous communities have the right to preserve and practice their cultural traditions surrounding the production of food. Communities should have access to enough land in order to practice their traditions to the point of self-sufficiency. This goal involves limiting the actions of Indigenous individuals through promoting traditional values within Indigenous communities. IFS also seeks to limit the actions of non-Indigenous persons and nations in order to protect space reserved for Indigenous traditions. I ask the following questions throughout my research into this subject. What kind of limitations on the freedoms of Indigenous individuals does the enforcement of tradition within communities entail? In what ways does “guaranteeing enough Indigenous land” require limitations on the actions of non-Indigenous people? Finally, are the values and demands that IFS promotes justifiable within an Indigenous worldview? A liberal worldview?

From the traditional Indigenous worldview, I find that IFS is justifiable. This does not occur without tension though, for the concept additionally desires to employ certain modern practices in order to help communities survive. I find that liberalism can also agree with IFS in regard to the restrictions that are demanded on Indigenous individuals; this occurs through the adoption of a “cultural compromise” surrounding the issue of land inalienability. In this compromise, Indigenous communities are given the power of alienation over their lands so they may choose to alienate or not at their will. This is intended to please both sides because Indigenous people have the freedom to alienate if they want to, but they are not forced to do so.

IFS’s demands against external nations, however, create the most tension between the Indigenous and liberal worldviews. Liberals largely do not support the protection of Indigenous territory when it poses unfair limitations on liberal peoples. I thus question whether the above compromise will stand here. Yet, if agreement is not found between cultures, then this leaves us with an increased chance for real-world cultural conflict in the future. In this respect, I suggest that perhaps it is better for both sides to be flexible and accept the compromise being proposed. This would go a long way to avoiding conflict and would allow for the representation of a variety of individual views which exist across both Indigenous and liberal communities.
Résumé

Cette thèse explore le concept émergent de «Indigenous Food Sovereignty» (IFS); Ce concept peut être traduit: «Souveraineté Alimentaire Autochtone». En bref, l’IFS affirme que les communautés autochtones ont le droit de préserver et pratiquer leurs traditions culturelles concernant la production d’aliments. Ces communautés doivent avoir accès à suffisamment de terrain dans le but de pratiquer leurs traditions jusqu’à l’autosuffisance. Cet objectif implique de limiter les libertés des membres des communautés afin de promouvoir les valeurs traditionnelles. De plus, ce concept cherche à encadrer les actions des nations non autochtones pour garantir l’espace nécessaire à la réalisation de ces pratiques traditionnelles. Je pose les questions ci-dessous pendant ma recherche: 1. Quelles sortes de limitations sur les libertés des autochtones faut-il pour appliquer le concept dans les communautés?, 2. Qu’elles sont les conséquences pour les non autochtones de l’attribution de terrain aux fins de l’IFS?, 3. Finalement, est-ce que les exigences que met en avant ce concept sont justifiables du point de vue autochtone? Du point de vue libéral?

D’après la perspective autochtone, je trouve le concept justifiable. Mais, ceci n’arrive pas sans tension puisque le concept désire employer quelques pratiques modernes pour aider les communautés à survivre. Je crois aussi que la pensée libérale peut être en accord avec l’IFS à propos des restrictions pour les individus autochtones; ceci se produit grâce au «compromis culturel» concernant le point principal de l’inaliénabilité des territoires autochtones. Dans ce compromis, les communautés autochtones reçoivent le pouvoir de vendre ou non leurs territoires. Cela a pour but de plaire aux deux côtés puisque les autochtones ont le droit de vendre leurs territoires mais ne sont pas forcés de le faire.

Toutefois, les exigences de l’IFS envers les nations étrangères créent le plus de tension entre la pensée libérale et la pensée indigène. Les penseurs libéraux, en général, ne supportent pas la protection des territoires autochtones quand cela implique des restrictions pour des peuples libéraux. Ainsi, je demande si le compromis ci-dessus peut supporter la pression dans ces conditions-ci. Cependant, l’importance d’une entente sur ce point est primordiale à de bonnes relations futures. À cet égard, je recommande que les libéraux et les autochtones acceptent ce compromis. Cette entente augmenterait les chances d’harmonie culturelle et permettrait la représentation à la fois des différentes positions qui existent à travers les communautés libérales et autochtones.
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I would like to express my gratitude first to my supervisor, Christa Scholtz. Since I mentioned to her my intention to do research in this area, Christa has kept her eye open for relevant books and sources, many of which formed the literature included in this thesis. She has been a source of encouragement for me to stay on the scholarly path through all hurdles. She has been an excellent reviewer and critic of my writing, returning drafts to me with unprecedented speed while providing thoughtful insight. I also wish to thank the other members of my proposal committee, Jacob Levy and Antonia Maioni, who gave helpful criticism for my proposals. I also give thanks to my external reviewer, Professor Muñiz-Fraticelli, for his helpful comments on my initial submission.

I extend my arms out in embrace to my family and friends who have supported me throughout the intense final months of transcribing, reflecting, writing, and editing. They have seen the importance of dedicating myself to this project. Even at times during family dinner, my mind was on writing about food instead of eating it. In particular within my close circle of kinship, I am forever indebted to my mother for bringing me into creation. She has given me strength and pride as an Ojibwa person and teaches me the values of my ancestors.

Finally, I wish to recognize my friends and advisors within the Indigenous community. I am thankful to my own community, Fort William First Nation, for supporting my pursuit of a Master’s degree and my desire to do research on Indigenous thought. I must also express the invaluable support I received from my interviewees, Doug West, Fiona Devereaux, Dawn Morrison, and Michael Smith. They have shared their time, their thoughts, and their stories with me. More importantly, they each inspired me as Indigenous thinkers, encouraging me to continue in this project. I share your words here with pride, and I hope my writing carries your thoughts with truth and force.

Chi-Miigwetch,

William Waboose Perry
Chapter I: Introduction

Indigenous Food Sovereignty (IFS) is one of the newest political concepts that Indigenous activists are developing to forward the goals of their survival and sovereignty. The IFS movement exists in many Indigenous communities throughout Canada but is most prominent in British Columbia where Indigenous sovereignty over land has largely not been ceded through treaties with colonial governments. And this is what IFS is primarily concerned with as a political concept: sovereignty over land and how it is used. Culturally, IFS simply seeks to ensure the survival of traditional food production methods. Yet, when this goal is transcribed politically, it necessitates several serious demands within Indigenous communities and vis-à-vis external nations. I propose in this paper that the demands of IFS are able to be categorized into two major claims of political sovereignty: 1. the sovereignty to enforce traditional values within Indigenous communities, and 2. the sovereignty to protect these values externally through imposing limitations on the actions of other nations.

Because IFS focuses primarily on cultural food practices, a large part of the concept’s rhetoric revolves around food traditions and how to successfully implement them within a modern political context. The importance of traditional food practices and related norms of land use within Indigenous culture is explained in the first section of chapter two. In brief, traditional food is valued as a mode of healthy and appropriate nourishment for Indigenous physiology, as a potential means of maintaining a positive social environment within communities (which is often attributed to the communal values that the food practices entail), and because it transmits traditional cultural values. Food production is seen as one of the most important ways that Indigenous people interact with the land and survive as culturally distinct peoples.
Activists do not equate IFS with an overarching Indigenous political sovereignty, but it is seen as a critical and necessary feature of political sovereignty that is Indigenous in nature. IFS is also not a small category of political demands within a larger and more complete sovereignty; it is instead a manifestation of some of the most critical Indigenous values that should be reflected and preserved by Indigenous sovereignty. Thus, to say that IFS on its own is a complete form of political sovereignty is not accurate. However, through the way that it shapes Indigenous sovereignty and defends many of the necessary conditions of this sovereignty, I conclude that it is an indispensable partner to any Indigenous sovereignty movement. As it is demonstrated in the following chapter, food practices represent some of the most significant aspects of Indigenous cultures. One of IFS’s purposes as a theory, therefore, is to highlight the salience of food within Indigenous sovereignty.

Following this, IFS seeks to defend what are seen as the necessary conditions for establishing and maintaining food sovereignty (the protection of food traditions) within communities. First, activists want to enforce traditional values within Indigenous communities, and they seek to ban other practices which deny traditional values. Secondly, IFS wants to ensure that traditional food practices are able to survive against external pressures. This involves making demands against other nations. The goal of this paper is to identify the specific demands of IFS and ascertain if they are philosophically acceptable by Indigenous and liberal worldviews. The driving questions of this paper are consequently: “What values (and limitations on actions) does IFS wish to enforce both within and outside of Indigenous communities?”, and “Are these values / limitations justifiable by Indigenous and liberal worldviews?”

In my research, it became evident almost immediately that the demands of IFS are not purely “traditional” in the sense of promoting pre-colonial ways of life. The concept instead
takes two fundamental values of the Indigenous worldview and enforces these as essential and indisputable. These fundamental values are the non-ownership / inalienability of land and the non-destructive use of natural resources. After these are asserted, IFS then allows the implementation of certain modern (untraditional) strategies of food production which are deemed “acceptable” within the fundamental values. The combination of these fundamental and acceptable tenets make up the demands that IFS wishes to enforce internally and externally. Therefore, the implementation of IFS within Indigenous territories predicates three propositions: 1. the non-existence of property ownership that allows alienation of land by individuals, 2. the proscription of various western modes of land usage that are deemed environmentally destructive, and 3. the ability of Indigenous communities (as groups) to make decisions regarding the adoption of modern technologies and values, within the limits set by the previous two propositions.

After exploring the primary demands of IFS, I begin to challenge them from two distinct values systems: Indigenous and liberal. From the Indigenous perspective, I propose that the combination of values put forth by IFS creates tension between it and a traditional Indigenous worldview. How is the adoption of modern practices justifiable by tradition? Furthermore, how would communities control modernization so as to not let it completely destroy their traditions? I argue that IFS resolves this tension through a dual rationalization of Indigenous survivance in a modern context. This rationalization is that: 1. Indigenous communities must be able to defend their traditional values against modernity in order to preserve their distinct cultural identities, and 2. Communities should be able to implement acceptable aspects of modernism in order to help them adapt to modern pressures and survive as resilient communities. That is, IFS argues that

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1 In essence, this third proposition affirms that the communal power of decision over adaptive land usage trumps individuals’ powers or rights in this regard.
both Indigenous culture and communities must survive. For the current contexts in which Indigenous nations find themselves, this joint goal requires aspects of both tradition and modernism.

I also consider one more Indigenous argument against IFS. I explore whether the traditional ideal of individual autonomy could contradict the limitations on individual actions that are enforced by the concept. In examining this traditional conception of autonomy, I discover that it is a very different idea than liberal individual freedom. In Indigenous autonomy, the individual is located within a circle of responsibility to all other individual beings within natural creation. I conclude that the values of IFS can be supported by Indigenous conceptions of individual autonomy.

The strongest arguments against IFS come from liberal theories. In particular, liberals argue that the freedom to own and sell land is a fundamental right of every individual. Jacob Levy argues that these rights are essential to the geographical and social mobilities that liberalism is founded upon. Yet, I believe through a cultural compromise put forth in part by Levy that IFS’s claim to internal restrictions is largely reconcilable with a liberal perspective. This compromise proposes that Indigenous communities should have the ultimate sovereignty to decide over the alienability of their land as communities. Although this compromise leads to the potential of either side’s fundamental values being denied, depending on whether communities alienate or not, I argue that both IFS and liberal thinkers must logically accept this conclusion as a result of their own argumentations.

The conflict does not stop here however. Liberalism’s strongest arguments against IFS concern the restrictions that it poses to non-Indigenous people. Once again, the issue of land
inalienability factors strongly here. Liberals oppose inalienability because it leads to resource hogging and because it impedes land exchange and development for non-Indigenous people. We will see here that the differences between Indigenous and liberal perspectives on land usage reflect an incommensurability between the two worldviews. But does this incommensurability mean that the two sides are irreconcilable through the compromise proposed above? For the compromise to work, liberals must accept the sovereign power of Indigenous communities to alienate or not. This includes the possible situation where few or no communities will ever desire to alienate their land; I am not certain that liberals can agree to this. In the end, however, my focus is on avoiding conflict, and I suggest that both sides should bend to accept this solution.

Since the Indigenous worldview must accept alienability when communities choose to pursue it under this compromise, I furthermore argue that liberalism should be able to accept liberal communities who support inalienability. I think a significant amount of Canadians do believe that not all land should be up for sale or development. Thus, support of inalienability extends between both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, just as support for alienability may as well. For either worldview to enforce an absolute position on this matter would be unrepresentative of the entirety of the citizens that they respectively represent. In the end, I therefore advocate for the ability of both Indigenous and liberal persons to decide on these fundamental questions for themselves as communities of people.

This thesis is divided into four main chapters. Chapter one introduces the subject at hand and touches upon some methodological considerations. Chapter two sets out the concept of Indigenous Food Sovereignty through the words of Indigenous food activists. I also explain and reconcile here the tension between tradition and the instrumental modernization occasionally supported by IFS. Chapter three then examines arguments against the first major claim of IFS
(internal sovereignty). Contentions from both Indigenous and liberal perspectives are put forth; this is followed by proposals on how to reconcile the differences discovered. Chapter four does the same as three, but for IFS’s second claim (external sovereignty). I only pose contentions from a liberal perspective here, followed by a discussion on the possibility of reconciling the Indigenous and liberal positions on this matter.

1. Why Indigenous Food Sovereignty?

Canadians have never had to look far to witness Indigenous legal and social battles. The past few years, however, have particularly seen Indigenous arguments in news headlines. Through opposition to gas pipelines, mining projects, fighting changes to the Indian Act, settling large land claims, and signing self-governance treaties, it is clear that Indigenous voices desire to be heard. Many of these battles focus on Indigenous claims to land: how much land they deserve, how they wish to use land, and how they expect others to use it. Indigenous Food Sovereignty touches upon all of these issues and puts forth new arguments on them.

I believe that an exposition of IFS is important to political theory. The claims that it makes represent contentious issues that have been argued by both Indigenous and western thinkers for centuries. Indigenous theorists have recently argued, however, that the main historical discourse on land and territory largely excludes their worldview. As Dale Turner states,

If American Indians want to have their rights and sovereignty recognized by American legal and political institutions, they must do so using the already existing legal and political discourses of the dominant culture – the language of rights, the theory of
political liberalism, the languages of nationalism and political sovereignty, to name a few. To make matters worse, the normative concepts that drive these discourses have evolved with little or no influence from American Indian intellectuals.\(^2\)

Mary Ellen Turpel has argued that this assimilation of Indigenous perspectives into western language and theories often results in domination and a colonial monopoly of argumentation over Indigenous people.\(^3\) In this regard, I think it is clear how examining IFS through a scholarly medium is valuable.

Although the dominant discourse may exclude Indigenous arguments, western theorists do recognize the significance of Indigenous territorial claims. These issues have been written about historically by Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Rousseau, Hegel, Kant, and others. Within this paper, my focus is on modern liberal thinkers. I primarily cover the thoughts of Will Kymlicka, Jacob Levy, and Hillel Steiner. Additionally, some non-liberal western thinkers, such as Avery Kolers, are referenced. I think it is important for IFS, which strongly defends Indigenous traditions, to engage with these theories and be challenged by them. I believe that this will produce a stronger understanding of the arguments from both sides.

The claims of IFS are also relevant to current environmental movements in Canada. One major example of this is the opposition to petroleum pipelines such as the Keystone and Northern Gateway lines. In British Columbia, these projects are often jointly opposed by Indigenous and Canadian individuals; both groups have a ‘shared concern’ over the safety of

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coastal waters. Within the Indigenous perspective, however, there exist strong arguments of Indigenous sovereignty over traditional territories that such projects may threaten.

Finally, IFS’s values reflect the social consciousness which has emerged around the subject of food in the last decade. This “food awareness” is observable in debates on locavorism, genetic modification, environmental degradation from industrial agriculture, and the general food security of Canadians. Recent works on the topic of food include The Omnivore’s Dilemma, In Defense of Food, and Fast Food Nation. Within the world of film, the feature length Food Inc. has received much attention as well. In response to these anti-industry positions, Pierre Desrochers has recently argued in The Locavore’s Dilemma that bigger and more global food production is in fact better for food security and the environment. This recent consciousness of what we eat in North America asks the questions of where our food comes from and how it is produced. And these questions of *where* and *how* are central to the concept of IFS.

**2. Methodological Considerations**

Much of the research for this paper is based on Indigenous thought. This comes from a variety of sources, such as journal articles, published print books, online NGO publications, and interviews with Indigenous activists. I have personally conducted four interviews for this paper, three which took place in British Columbia and one which took place in Ontario. My interviewees are Michael Smith, Doug West, Dawn Morrison, and Fiona Devereaux. Each of these individuals represents a different ‘demographic’ within the IFS movement. It is from these sources that I construct the concept of IFS in this paper.
My interview with Michael Smith took place in Nelson, British Columbia, where he currently resides. Smith grew up in an isolated community in northern British Columbia with his parents where he learned how to live off the land in a traditional manner. He later moved to Vancouver and pursued post-secondary education, first as an engineer and later as a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine. Smith represents a traditional minded yet progressive sort of activist. He has been involved in several Indigenous food sovereignty projects in B.C. and was excited to speak with me about them.

Professor Doug West has a PhD in Political Science and currently teaches this subject at Lakehead University in Ontario. West is non-Indigenous, but he has gained a respect for traditional ways of life and instructs courses on Indigenous politics as well as the politics of food. West has been actively involved in supporting local gardening and farming projects in Northern Ontario with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. He was happy to discuss his thoughts with me from both the perspective of a political scientist and a food activist.

Dawn Morrison is arguably the most prominent writer in Canada on the subject of Indigenous Food Sovereignty. Morrison is a member of the Shuswap Nation in British Columbia. Her work on IFS includes a chapter in the recent book Food Sovereignty in Canada, several publications from the working group which she chairs, as well as presentations throughout British Columbia. Morrison is the current chair of the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) which consults on this subject with Indigenous communities across British Columbia. Morrison’s writings therefore speak to a large population of Indigenous people. This interview was a great opportunity for me to clarify her group’s publications as well as to discuss her personal thoughts on IFS.
Finally, Fiona Devereaux is a non-Indigenous food activist based on Vancouver Island. She has worked with Indigenous communities for many years and is responsible for the creation of the “Feasting for Change” program. In this program, Indigenous people from all over British Columbia congregate in one community and spend a day harvesting, preparing, and eating traditional foods as well as sharing stories and knowledge of these foods. Devereaux is a Registered Nurse by profession and provides thoughts on IFS from the perspective of a non-Indigenous professional who is deeply embedded within several communities.

Through these interviews and through my additional research into Indigenous writings, I have become aware of some methodological concerns that theorists have when writing about Indigenous perspectives. One of the main concerns is the danger of saying too much about what “Indigenous” is for too many people. In papers of this type, it is easy to over generalize beliefs and use one cultural conception to blanket over all Indigenous people. The truth is that beliefs, traditions, and food practices vary across hundreds of distinct nations in North America. To say that there is one traditional Indigenous view of something is often misleading. In some cases the specificity of a belief is evident. It is clear, for instance, if I speak about the traditional value of salmon, lobster or other ocean foods that this is not something which applies to interior Ojibwa nations. Other beliefs are not so obvious to discern.

This methodological concern is in part answered by one of the more prominent conceptions of IFS, put forth by Dawn Morrison. In her writing, Morrison rejects “a formal universal definition of sovereignty in favour of one that respects the sovereign rights and power of each distinct nation to identify the characteristics of our cultures and what it means to be
Indigenous.” That is, IFS focuses on promoting the sovereignty of each Indigenous community to define their own traditions and protect them as such. Although empowering individual communities in this way largely resolves the problem of generalizing Indigenous beliefs, it creates other theoretical tensions which I explore throughout this paper.

Despite the individuality of culture that IFS allows, I firmly believe that it does promote some values as being universal to an “Indigenous worldview.” And for the purpose of being able to speak about Indigenous people and make conclusions with at least a basic level of generality, I adopt this approach. In brief, this “Indigenous worldview” promotes a reverence for many or all aspects of the natural world (flora, fauna, rocks, and so on); generally, there is a conviction that these entities are living / spiritual beings that deserve respect as such. Furthermore, all beings are viewed as existing in relation with each other. This relationship is often viewed as a familial kinship but may also be expressed as the sharing of a similar life essence or power. I describe these traditional beliefs further in chapter two when discussing IFS and again in chapter three while examining the idea of Indigenous individual autonomy.

I wish to note that incorporating this assumption into my writing is not something that I have done whimsically. I have deliberated this as a scholar, as a researcher embedded in Indigenous communities, and as an individual who is aware of traditional Ojibwa values. I believe that the above values are representative of a general Indigenous worldview and that incorporating this within a scholarly work is an important contribution of this study.

Throughout this paper, I also recognize that IFS is a ‘living’ and malleable concept which is developed by individuals and groups in an activist context. I therefore avoid directly equating

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IFS with “Indigenousness.” To accomplish this, I include potential Indigenous critiques of IFS in chapter three; I also outline tensions which exist between IFS and traditional values throughout chapter two. I end up locating the concept of IFS somewhere between the two polar perspectives being discussed in this essay: Indigenous and non-Indigenous (“western,” “modern,” or “liberal”). I believe that IFS engages present-day Indigenous communities based on this vantage point. I maintain, however, that the concept demonstrates a strong tendency of Indigenous cultural conservatism.

This thesis examines the reasons of conflict between Indigenous and liberal nations in new ways. While the discussion begins primarily with how Indigenous people value food, the demands which are made as a result are not simply about eating. The ability of Indigenous people to practice and protect their food traditions is inextricably linked to their physical survival as culturally distinct peoples. Consequently, although the central focus of IFS is control over food production, this necessarily expands to touch upon the broader issues of environmental protection, cultural survivance, individual versus communal rights, territorial claims, and political sovereignty. A clearer understanding of how both worldviews argue and think about these topics is presented through my research.

Finally, the suggestions for compromise that I examine go a long way to finding agreement on the issues that fuel this cultural conflict in North America. There is a tendency amongst many scholars to conclude that the differences between Indigenous and western worldviews are “simply incommensurable.” Both Turpel and Turner conclude this.5 Jacob Levy also reaches this conclusion in his writings.6 Yet, Levy realizes that to stop at this point does not

5 Turpel, "Aboriginal Peoples and the Canadian Charter: Interpretive Monopolies, Cultural Differences; Turner, "Oral Traditions and the Politics of (Mis)Recognition."
produce much of value on how to move forward for both parties; this is the spirit I adopt in my paper. Although I as well find that the two value systems are very much divergent, I devote significant thought towards creating space for agreement on the issues which divide them. My hope is that conflict will be resolved and that some form of inter-cultural harmony will be found. In the end, although I am not absolutely certain that the compromises between liberals and IFS will work, I think that the solutions presented in this paper are some of the most viable pathways to future understanding and cooperation.
II. Indigenous Food Sovereignty

In this chapter I set out to fully explore the philosophical and activist terrain that Indigenous Food Sovereignty spans. As a concept that is being actively developed by individuals and groups, various demands are expressed under the label of IFS. Below, I outline two major claims under which I believe the demands of Indigenous food activists fall. Sections one through three below examine the claim of IFS to enforce traditional cultural values and practices within Indigenous communities (Claim 1). This first claim involves imposing restrictions on the actions of community members in order to ensure a “continuity of values.” Sections four through six below examine the restrictions on external nations that IFS demands (Claim 2). This discussion primarily involves clarifying the concept of “external sovereignty” that IFS puts forth. I analyze how this claim to sovereignty affects non-Indigenous people, in particular within a Canadian context.

Claim 1: Promoting Tradition in Communities

I begin below by examining Claim 1 as a right to the promotion of pure tradition within Indigenous communities. I outline some of the traditional values which guide this goal; this is the focus of section one. This claim quickly expands in section two, however, where I demonstrate that IFS supports certain modern practices and technologies in Indigenous communities. I propose that this additional demand creates tension within the concept. That is, why does IFS allow some aspects of modernism while clearly banning others? In section three, I argue that this demand reflects an inherent value of “progressive conservatism” within IFS. This approach
allows the adoption of modern practices which are acceptable within an Indigenous worldview while prohibiting other practices that deny fundamental Indigenous values. I believe that this forms additional pressure against IFS to justify its first claim. Why are activists allowed to use the argument of defending tradition against modernity while adopting certain modern practices? To conclude, I suggest that this tension is resolved by IFS’s dual rationalization of defending tradition while ensuring the survival of communities through adapting to modern realities. This argument involves giving each Indigenous community the power to decide on how their particular traditions should be redefined in response to modern pressures.

1. A Long Tradition of Food

Traditional food is highly valued within Indigenous culture for various reasons which relate to the health of individuals and the environment, promoting spiritual values, and maintaining social harmony within communities. Traditionally, there is a strong connection between food and medicine; they are often seen as being one and the same:

The recovery of the people is tied to the recovery of food, since food itself is medicine: not only for the body, but for the soul, for the spiritual connection to history, ancestors, and the land.7

The cultural concept of “food as medicine” promotes a holistic approach to maintaining and restoring the health of our bodies and the ecosystems that provide us with our food.8

Michael Smith has adopted this valuation of food into his identity as a traditional healer.

I’m a chef and a doctor, so that’s an interesting combination for people . . . ideally they should be the same job you’d think, if Hippocrates was right about “let your food be your medicine.” But that is where I’m really passionate about food sovereignty. ⁹

There is a strong belief in Indigenous circles that the causes of many ailments are related to sorts of food that we eat. The claim is further made that Indigenous people (as well as other ethnicities) each have their own nutritional needs which are supported by traditional cultural diets.

As Indigenous peoples, our bodies are best adapted to using energy most efficiently by practicing a semi-nomadic lifestyle and eating traditional diets that consist of foods high in protein, and complex carbohydrates high in fibre and rich in vitamins and minerals.

The traditional diet of the interior [British Columbia] tribes consists of fat and protein from animal sources, as well as complex carbohydrates found in plants. ¹⁰

Michael Smith relates this point in a more humorous manner, warning Indigenous people to avoid nutritional advice from “hippies.” According to Smith, in the last fifty years many popularized nutritional norms in North America have arisen from poorly or incorrectly interpreted aspects of other cultures’ food practices (such as vegetarianism, whole grain consumption, and consuming raw nuts, seeds, beans, and grains). Smith half-jokingly pins the blame on “hippies” and confers the following advice to Indigenous people:

Let’s not make the mistake of listening to the hippies around food, because they may like to hang out and give you a ride if you’re hitchhiking from one reserve to another ‘cause you’re native and hippies are all about being nice to native people – but they don’t know shit about food. Especially food for First Nation’s people who have not had, in one context, the benefit of a thousand years of an agriculturally based diet. So, when I think about food sovereignty, it has to be food sovereignty around what is actually digestible by the people eating it.\(^{11}\)

Traditional food is thus strongly linked to health within Indigenous culture. But this focus is not only on physical health – mental well-being, cultural identity, as well as the health of whole communities are referenced as well:

The harvesting of traditional/country food is one of the primary aspects of the special relationship aboriginal people have to the land, and a primary means of transmitting cultural values, skills and spirituality. Food obtained from traditional food systems links the environment and human health, and forms the basis of social activity, social cohesion, and social integration. For many aboriginal people, country/traditional food retains significant symbolic and spiritual value, and is central to personal identity and the maintenance of culture. Thus, for some aboriginal people, the ability to access sufficient and safe traditional/country food . . . is integral to cultural health and survival.\(^{12}\)

Traditional food practices reflect the values of a general Indigenous worldview. In this view, the relationship that humans hold with the land and its resources is seen just as that: a relationship. It is something that must be nurtured and respected to ensure the continued

existence of both humans and nature. In Inuit society, for example, while joy and pride are shown in a successful hunt, it is the joy in an animal’s willingness to give itself to the hunter as well as the hunter’s ability to harvest the animal.\textsuperscript{13} IFS writer Dawn Morrison states that Indigenous traditions of harvesting, hunting, and preparing food “represent the most intimate way in which we interact with our environment.”\textsuperscript{14} This deep relationship can even extend to plants and other ‘non-sentient’ food sources. As Enrique Salmón explains, the Rarámuri peoples of Central America believe through their creation story that humans were originally born from corn and that they are, in this way, “the children of corn.”\textsuperscript{15} Indigenous peoples generally recognize that existing “in any environment is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin.”\textsuperscript{16}

A final traditional value is that food practices are highly communal in nature and tend to be extramoney: they focus on providing the community with food and making sure everyone is taken care of. Fiona Devereaux explains this from her perspective, remarking that Indigenous people tend to view food as something to be shared and not to be profited from.

I think that is one thing that I have really seen in the [Indigenous] community: it is never about money. And it isn’t about business. And I think that shift is just not integral to their being. They would rather just harvest it and give it to you or share it; they don’t want to sell it. Whereas I think the colonial view is “how can we make money off of this?”\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} Nicole Gombay, \textit{Making a Living: Place, Food, and Economy in an Inuit Community} (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Ltd, 2010), 40-43.
\textsuperscript{17} Fiona Devereaux and William Perry, \textit{Interview with Fiona Devereaux by William Perry} (Victoria: December 7, 2012).
This hesitation to sell food comes in part from the spiritual view that food and resources provided by the Earth are, as Winona LaDuke describes, “gifts from the creator.”\(^ {18} \) The 2006 report from the Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty (WGIFS) reflects this view, stating that “food is framed less as a resource to be exploited and more as a component of both an ecological and cosmological relationship with nature.”\(^ {19} \)

Other arguments against selling traditional foods are more pragmatic and are based around the fear of what profit motives can lead to. The 2008 report from WGIFS explains this perspective:

Many of the most dedicated traditional harvesters whose priority is long term ecological and cultural sustainability of Indigenous food systems are concerned that [commodification of traditional foods] will: 1) further erode the tribal and ecosystem values inherent in Indigenous food economies, 2) lead to over exploitation, contamination and degradation of traditional foods, 3) devalue the highly localized nature of Indigenous food systems through international marketing schemes, and 4) limit Aboriginal jurisdiction to harvest and take care of our relationships with traditional land and food systems.\(^ {20} \)

The concern then is that mass harvesting and marketing will permanently damage local environments and may slowly weaken Indigenous traditional values. This is not to say that the

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trading and selling of food was never done historically by Indigenous nations;²¹ it is, however, a clear point of contention within the IFS movement.

Many of the real-world activities of IFS activists focus on promoting traditional foods and cultural values in communities. Below is a small selection of suggested activities (from WGIFS) for Indigenous communities to engage in.

• Go out and hunt, fish and gather Indigenous foods with family and friends . . .

• Feed babies and children meat and berries from the land at an early age to acquire a taste and get them conditioned to eating it.

• Establish a “baby food” distribution network of Indigenous and organic foods for welfare Moms and Elders so it is convenient for them. Always make sure that children, babies, and expectant mothers always have enough Indigenous foods.

• Incorporate Indigenous food gathering activities into daycare and school programs.²²

In most of these food projects, there is a clear preoccupation with promoting traditional practices between generations, so as to ensure food values, knowledge, and preferences are continued into the future.²³ The production of food also occurs through the coordination of small-scale

²¹ Margery Fee documents how there was often large trading of traditional foods with the original colonialists and fur traders. See Margery Fee, "Stories of Traditional Aboriginal Food, Territory, and Health," in What's to Eat?: Entrées in Canadian Food History, ed. Nathalie Cooke (Montréal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009).
²³ This concern is supported by a recent food culture study based out of McGill University. The study demonstrated that across three generations of Indigenous women (grandmother, mother, and daughter) there was a marked decrease in the taste appreciation and consumption levels of traditional foods, specifically “when a particular food was not consumed frequently.” See Nancy J. Turner et al., "The Nuxalk Food and Nutrition Program, Coastal British Columbia, Canada: 1981–2006," in Indigenous Peoples' Food Systems, ed. Harriet V. Kuhnlein, Bill Erasmus, and Dina Spigelski (Rome: Food and Agricultural Association of the United Nations / Centre for Indigenous Peoples’ Nutrition and Environment, 2009), 31.
community gardens and agriculture, both within communities and in off-reserve locations.\textsuperscript{24} Yet, this is where the activities of IFS begin to extend into not strictly traditional practices.

2. Changing Tradition

A significant amount of IFS’s activities and goals extend beyond “pure” tradition. This happens through the incorporation of modern practices and techniques into community food production. Michael Smith’s working plan for IFS which he has tried putting into action with some nations in British Columbia is “the possibility for various reserves, given their land base, to potentially produce more food using old skills and a lot of the modern ones.”\textsuperscript{25}

Eventually the hope is that these four various constellations of reserves put together, and with some tactical planning, could set up various permaculture or orient based farms, or even kind of traditional demonstration farms for what was done a thousand years ago. They could produce enough food. With enough mobility, communication, and practice, we could have enough abundance to feed everyone on each of these reserves as well as share with more satellite reserves and get them involved. We could even possibly involve local non-Indigenous grocery stores, co-ops, and stuff like that to participate in purchasing a certain amount of these foods.\textsuperscript{26}


\textsuperscript{25} Smith and Perry, \textit{Interview with Michael Smith by William Perry}.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
Smith is suggesting the possibility for various Indigenous nations within a reasonable proximity of each other to be interdependent in food production. His idea is that different communities would produce different crops and foods depending on their land base and geography.\textsuperscript{27} This idea in particular aims at dealing with the issues of low population levels and land quantity for some communities. Food and sovereignty will be shared between nations.

Smith’s vision is a clear example of an activist developed conception of IFS which is willing to stretch beyond purely traditional practices.

If we could do a food sovereignty thing, like the model I am talking about, which is pretty traditional, but also more sophisticated now with the kind of technology we have, within four to five years, you would have a completely running series of co-producing farms sharing everything, and eventually the abundance could be for profit and to upgrade infrastructure, to ensure better education for people who want to come back to the reserve and run this or that part of the farm: you need the accountant, you need obviously the hydroponic dude, you need the person who figures out how to really do good soil biochemistry. All of a sudden everyone’s motivated and can include themselves in what we call the sophistication of modern education.\textsuperscript{28}

Smith never promotes environmentally destructive practices or land alienation, yet his vision of food sovereignty clearly possesses characteristics which are not strictly traditional. Another example of modernization that Smith proposes is the transportation of produce in refrigerated trucks between communities.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
Smith also foresees food production as having potential for capital generation through marketing foods to non-Indigenous people.

I think a branded First Nations’ company that would be producing and delivering consistently healthy and organic produce or other products from our reserves back into mainstream Canada would be a really beneficial political decision as well as an obvious for-profit business decision.\textsuperscript{30}

Dawn Morrison agrees as well with the idea of selling traditional foods in order to support some economic activity. She justifies this largely on an instrumental basis, and she maintains her opposition to large scale operations:

I think that with some trade, there is value in that. But it is about making a small scale market work, as opposed to a large scale. Like, what has happened in the Non-timber Forest Products Industry, which is what they call it now, is really a lot of our foods and medicines. And they are commodifying the foods on a large scale and they get shipped to Japan or Europe, somewhere thousands of miles away . . . That is really unsustainable, and that is the kind of commodification I don’t agree with.

But I think if there is small scale trade and sharing, a co-op or cooperative model of community based economic development that can come from it, that it is not my place to say that Indigenous people should not sell for money, because a lot of communities are

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
living in poverty and they need to at least have enough money to pay for the gas to go out and pick the berries, right?\textsuperscript{31}

So there is an idea stressed in IFS that Indigenous people need to embrace a certain amount of modernity to survive within current contexts. This is in part because communities are dependent on various aspects of modernity, but it is also to ensure a larger and more varied production of foods than purely traditional methods would provide. To accomplish a new sort of food sovereignty in Indigenous communities, certain activists have no issue with taking advantage of modern knowledge, technologies, and modes of economic exchange. It can be said then that tradition is not always a rigid concept, that it is flexible to some degree in order to promote a stronger and more viable food economy.

In reality, tradition is never going to be a “pure” concept anymore for Indigenous people in North America. Tribes, nations, and families once inhabited much larger tracts of land and were less inhibited by the demands of other peoples. The natural environment was largely intact and undisturbed by urbanization. Also, many nations were nomadic and crossed land that is now divided by an international border between the United States and Canada.

Colonization has also brought developments that Indigenous people appreciate and want. Many new technologies were adopted early on and are now considered integral parts of tradition (for example, glass beads, oil paints, cotton and metal ornaments for regalia, firearms for hunting). On the other hand, some more modern technologies and the industries that they require fit vaguely or not at all into Indigenous traditions (such as flying to powwows in other provinces, using mass-produced forest products for community housing, buying monocrop tobacco, and so

forth). Finally, Indigenous people appreciate many foods from the different cultures with whom they now co-exist; these include foods that would traditionally be considered unhealthy or otherwise inappropriate.

Avery Kolers describes this reality when discussing the resiliency of Indigenous ways of life in the face of drastic modernization. He suggests that such “shocks” or crises can be detrimental to Indigenous resiliency:

Shocks that overwhelm resilience can cause not just ecosystems but arguably also societies to cross thresholds from one kind of system into another, such that it is difficult if not impossible to return. This is surely what happened to Indigenous societies in North America in the centuries after European contact.32

The severe shock on traditional Indigenous modes of resilience (hunting, gathering, and local communal governance) may have caused such profound cultural changes that the old ways are rendered inaccessible to current generations – to the point that they are probably impossible to return to. Are Indigenous communities inherently non-resilient then? The answer to this question, if posed in the context above, is very likely “yes.” Indigenous communities qua purely traditional communities are not resilient. In fact, it is likely impossible that they could exist today almost anywhere in North America. It is also unlikely that many Indigenous individuals want this. No one I have interviewed and no sources I have read on this subject have stated goals of returning to a ‘pure’ Indigenous way of life.

In a sense it is unfair to criticize only Indigenous peoples for this; most societies have been greatly influenced by other cultures and modernization. But this defense does not resolve

the problem that Indigenous people make claims *against* modern developments (or “threats”) while still adopting various elements of modernity. It is this somewhat paradoxical position that Will Kymlicka considers the distinguishing characteristic of Indigenous peoples from other cultural minorities: they demand the “ability to maintain certain traditional ways of life and beliefs while nevertheless participating on their own terms in the modern world.”  

This raises questions as to what the *cultural borders* of Indigenous nations are. Such borders certainly exist, for not all modern practices are equally accepted. For example, I asked Doug West whether IFS would support practices like monocrops or the clear cutting of forests to create agricultural fields. He responded,

No, I don’t think it would . . . I think when we talk about [Indigenous] sovereignty, the idea behind it was to create an imagined kind of community of people who believe in the same kind of values. And that imagination starts to become real after a while, through practice. So traditional Indigenous sovereignty, to me, is related to practical uses of and relationships to the land that are supported by continuity of values.  

West is suggesting then that there is an inherent value of cultural conservatism within IFS. This Indigenous cultural conservatism produces a focus on the “practical uses of land” (that is, the production of food and other immediately life sustaining products) as well as the proper relationships with the land which support these uses in perpetuity. Morrison’s earlier comment that food harvesting in Indigenous culture represents the most intimate interactions with the land also reflects this. In a modern context, this struggle for a “continuity of values” encounters a situation where Indigenous peoples take part in modernism both willingly and unwillingly.

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(through the free adoption of modern aspects as well as through forced colonizing) while still making claims to rights of tradition. All of this selective participation by Indigenous peoples seems to happen, as Kymlicka argues, on “their own terms.” Where does this leave the concept of tradition to stand in communities, and how do IFS thinkers approach this paradox?

3. Progressive Conservatives

Indigenous Food Sovereignty is a concept that finds itself caught between the present and the past, between conservation and progress. Traditional Indigenous practices are viewed as being under attack from new values and technologies, and this view is supported by centuries of attempted (and often successful) assimilation. Yet activists who promote IFS are aware of the realities that Indigenous communities face. As has been suggested, it is likely impossible for any group to return to a purely traditional way of life, and it is highly probable that no community would want this either. For both of these reasons, the IFS movement does not promote returning to pre or even early colonial modes of living.

Yet, what IFS endorses is still culturally conservative. One of its primary beliefs is that refocusing on more traditional livelihoods will be beneficial for the physical, cultural, and social health of communities; this is complemented by allowing room for modern growth. Smith states,

You know, I make the joke sometimes that it is the next casino, in the sense of First Nations being able to get some funding to start a business that may not have the kind of Las Vegas superficial kind of excitement and alcohol driven behavior of gambling to
something a little more grandmother-like, in the sense of “let’s take care of the food needs of our people, and then our neighbours and see what they’re doing.”35

But what does accomplishing this goal impose on Indigenous communities and individuals? What kinds of limitations are to be enforced?

The traditional eco-spiritual value of protecting nature explains IFS’s opposition to industrial developments like mining and heavy forestry. Yet, as we have seen, some Indigenous activists also oppose certain forms of modern agriculture. The Indigenous working group within the Food Secure Canada organization has expressed their “deep concerns for industrialized forms of agriculture that food security embraces. It undermines small farmers, is fraught with health concerns, is heavily reliant on agrochemicals and capital intensive food production systems, and strikes at the core of food sovereignty.”36 Morrison’s working group on food sovereignty also touches on this issue in relation to the cattle industry:

There are serious concerns about the environmental impacts of unsustainable cattle rangeland practices on Indigenous land and food systems. While most agree that the cattle industry has made beef more readily available in the mainstream agriculture based economy, many of the most persistent traditional harvesters are concerned about the loss of culturally important plant and animal species in the forests, grasslands, and waterways.37

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35 Smith and Perry, *Interview with Michael Smith by William Perry*.
As a theoretical aside, this passage more than any other highlights the tension that exists between the concepts of *food security* and *food sovereignty*. According to these food activists, food security focuses primarily on the sufficient provision of food to people, regardless of how the food is produced. Food sovereignty, on the other hand, promotes the right of Indigenous peoples to produce food on their own through traditional (or traditionally acceptable) means.
IFS therefore sets limits on how food is to be produced within Indigenous communities. Destructive practices like mass cattle ranging, monocrops, genetic modification, and other ‘industrial’ farming practices are not permitted.

Another prominent traditional value which IFS supports is maintaining no concept of personal property within Indigenous territory. When I spoke with Michael Smith about liberal arguments surrounding an Indigenous right to sell land, his first comment was: “there’s a glitch to that conversation from my thinking: ‘nobody owns anything’ . . . now all of sudden individuals own land? I mean, you can’t even say that in most Indigenous languages.”

He continues by stating,

I can’t sell you something that’s inherited to the people. I mean, my only thing is to do my best with it so that the people who inherit it from me get some benefit from me being there.

Thomas Berger also affirms this value in his book, *A Long and Terrible Shadow*.

To the Indians, land is inalienable. Indians believe that land is held in common by all members of the tribe, a political community that is perpetual. Every member of the community in succeeding generations acquires an interest in the land as a birthright. In this way the tribal patrimony passes from one generation to the next.

In addition to being untraditional, IFS activists believe that the alienation of their land is a significant threat to their sovereignty. Michael Smith makes this point by comparing the situations of Indigenous land in Canada versus the United States. Indians in the U.S. are

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38 Smith and Perry, *Interview with Michael Smith by William Perry*.
39 Ibid.
permitted to sell, lease, or otherwise dispose of their reservation land to non-Indigenous people at their will.\textsuperscript{41} As Smith describes, however, this freedom has led to a radical reduction of the land available for current Indigenous individuals because much of it was previously disposed of.

It started back in the 1930s; [the U.S. government] said “how are we going to get rid of these people?” There is a computer generated map of North America that goes from 1700, 1800, 1900, to 1930, 1970, and each time, the amount of Indian land that is reserved for them as reservations for their use based on their choice went from about 40% of this continent to these tiny little dots.\textsuperscript{42}

This concern over land loss is again affirmed by Berger. In the United States, Berger notes that “within fifty years, total Indian land holdings . . . had been reduced from 55 million hectares to 19 million hectares.”\textsuperscript{43} He adds that “these statistics are, however, misleading, because the lands lost to the Indians were usually the most valuable lands they held.”\textsuperscript{44}

As Canadian governments and theorists consider ideas of privatizing Indigenous territories here, this fear has become prominent within the IFS movement. Morrison and Smith both suggest that revising current modes of Indigenous governance would help secure Indigenous land against this perceived threat to traditional food practices. Currently, the formation of governments within Canadian Indigenous communities is strictly regulated by the Indian Act, which enforces “non-traditional” modes of decision making. Regarding these imposed governance structures, Smith states:

\textsuperscript{41} For an overview of some land alienation policies in different colonial nations, see \textit{A Long and Terrible Shadow: White Values, Native Rights in the Americas, 1492-1992} (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1991), 100-10. Also see Levy, \textit{The Multiculturalism of Fear}, 172-73.

\textsuperscript{42} Smith and Perry, \textit{Interview with Michael Smith by William Perry}.


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
If the only way a band council is allowed to work is based on Robert’s Rules of Order, you don’t have a band council. You have a group of people forced to make agreements and be heard or voted for or against in a specific enough way that isn’t traditional at all.\(^{45}\)

Marie Smallface Marule affirms this, stating that the imposition by “the Canadian government of an elected form of government on Indians is in direct conflict with the traditional forms of government.”\(^{46}\)

Many Indigenous activists believe that the imposed hierarchical ‘chief and council’ system causes division within communities and leads to easier and quicker support of alienation or industrial developments. Renowned Indigenous theorist Taiaiake Alfred details cases in British Columbia where Indian bands have supported industrial developments on unceded traditional territories in exchange for marketing opportunities. Alfred states that such deals “testify to a rejection of the responsibility to defend the peoples’ ancestral rights in favour of embracing a capitalistic ethic.”\(^{47}\)

While sometimes it may be the case that “capitalistic Indians” are trying to create pathways forward for economic development in their communities, Alfred and other writers question whether these sorts of decisions are reflective of the desires of Indigenous communities as a whole. Marule has said that the reality in certain communities is that they are controlled by a small “elite class” of Indians who oppose the communal representation that traditional

\(^{45}\) Smith and Perry, *Interview with Michael Smith by William Perry.*
governance structures would provide. The general position put forth by these writers thus contains an assumption that most Indigenous people, excluding a few “bad apples,” desire for Indigenous land to be protected against alienation and destructive development. Comments from Dawn Morrison affirm this assumption.

Corporations and the governments do that: they selectively choose people who have bought into their values and don’t maintain the traditional food or cultural values. The majority of us do. But because of the way the elected band council system is set up, they get away with it really.

Many Indigenous thinkers consequently demand the right for communities to define and construct their own systems of governance, based on direct representation of members, consensus building, and a range of other traditions which vary from nation to nation. This would ideally lead to the opposition of deviant individuals but would not stop the power of whole communities to support some of the acceptable progressive elements that IFS proposes.

The power of communal self-definition is thus essential to IFS. Michael Smith discussed with me the need for Indigenous peoples to adapt to realities such as the inability to be semi-nomadic and having limited access to land and resources. Smith suggested that, in these contexts, communities should take the pragmatic approach of reimagining their traditions in order to help ‘get things done’:

Make up a new one! If true autonomy and freedom are what this is about – and it’s what it has always been about – we should be allowed as reserves, as nations, as families, to

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48 Marule, "Traditional Indian Government: Of the People, by the People, for the People," 41.
49 Morrison and Perry, Interview with Dawn Morrison by William Perry.
50 And, as I noted in the methodology section, this characteristic is included within Morrison’s conception of IFS.
find out what works. There’s some things that worked in the past when people were more migratory. If you’re going to set up a resource base on your land as food producers, then find working models for that.\textsuperscript{51}

Taiaiake Alfed is also an advocate for self-defining communal traditions, describing it as “swaying but not breaking, adapting and accommodating without compromising what is core to one’s being.”\textsuperscript{52} Menno Boldt has also made this demand for the development of Indigenous self-governance. He specifically describes this as something that

should evolve from the aspirations of Indian people for survival and well-being as Indians; it should be a design that grows out of the ground of Indian cultural philosophies and principles; and it should be purposed to deal with the urgent social and economic needs that exist in Indian communities today.\textsuperscript{53}

Boldt highlights the need for Indigenous nations to confront modern problems in ways that they define as acceptable, in order for them to survive as Indians.

This self-regulation of adopting modern practices within prescribed limits has recently found support in the Delgamuukw Supreme Court case. In this case, the Supreme Court found that Indigenous people have the right to use traditional lands in a variety of ways, including some modern methods of food harvesting. This is permitted so long as the uses are not “irreconcilable with the nature of the attachment to the land which forms the basis of the particular group's aboriginal title.”\textsuperscript{54}

\textsuperscript{51} Smith and Perry, \textit{Interview with Michael Smith by William Perry.}
\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Delgamuukw V. British Columbia}, 3 S.C.R. 1010(1997).
Claim 1: Conclusions

In the first half of this chapter, we have observed why Indigenous food activists want to promote traditional foods within their communities and how this necessitates several limitations on the actions of Indigenous individuals toward communal land. We have also seen that IFS allows communities to pursue certain aspects of modernism at their will. From this point, the concept tries to find a balance between preserving tradition and allowing new adaptations. The resulting dilemma is how to not let one side of the balance become dominant – either extreme modernism which is seen as environmentally and culturally destructive or pure tradition which would likely destroy the modern resiliency of Indigenous communities.

Both tradition and modernism are seen as valuable to Indigenous survival. Maintaining tradition ensures that each community survives as a distinct cultural entity, formed from their own conceptions of who they are as Indigenous peoples (“Indians surviving as Indians”). Tradition also ensures that communities survive in environmentally sustainable ways – that they do not destroy their ability or the ability of future generations to use the land in traditional manners. On the other hand, adopting aspects of modernism allows communities to tackle modern social and economic issues and manage the unavoidable realities they face. Communities are able to engage with the modern world in ways that are non-traditional but still “acceptable.”

The above argumentation represents what I call a dual rationalization for modern Indigenous survivance; there is both a cultural preservation and a physical survival justification being made in the claim to internal self-governance. Culturally, Indigenous people demand the right to govern their communities in ways which respect the values of their traditional worldview. The fundamental values that IFS primarily wishes to defend are the non-destructive
use of land and the inalienability of Indigenous territory. We have seen that the aim of defending these values under IFS is the preservation of traditional food practices such as hunting and harvesting. But Indigenous peoples demand a further right to conduct themselves in ways that they see fit to ensure their survival as people – even if this involves reducing their “cultural distinctiveness” to some degree. In IFS, this involves the adoption of modern strategies and technologies around food production, so long as these methods do not lead to the denial of fundamental traditional values.

If we recall the three propositions of IFS which I stated in the introduction, Claim 1 affirms all three of these propositions within Indigenous communities. Claim 1 denies that western norms of individual property can exist in Indigenous communities. It further places restrictions on the kind of uses that can be made out of communal land; I have explored some of these restrictions above. Finally, Claim 1 states that Indigenous communities should have the right as communities to adapt their beliefs, so to be open to new technologies and practices that aid in survival and production, so long as these do not deny the core values of inalienability and non-destruction. These three propositions affirmed within Indigenous communities make up the claim to internal sovereignty of IFS. The above claims are similar to those of broader political sovereignty movements of Indigenous peoples; this demonstrates IFS’s characteristic of being a partner to a general Indigenous sovereignty. Yet, IFS primarily views these demands as being necessary to the defense of traditional foods and food values, and this remains its goal as a concept.
To close, IFS writer Enrique Salmón has stated that “cultural changes are inevitable in any society. In fact, change should be included as part of the definition of culture.”\textsuperscript{55} In this light, perhaps the Indigenous worldview is not about stopping cultural change but is instead about discovering how to best adapt to changes while still being Indigenous. To what extent self-empowered Indigenous communities will succeed at preserving their traditional values and balancing them with progressive strategies is a matter to be observed in the future.\textsuperscript{56} I believe the thought amongst Indigenous activists is that there is a general spirit within communities which leads them in traditional directions.

The dilemma of post-colonial Indigenous survivance does not end here however. Although success in survival rests largely on the actions of Indigenous communities, it also depends on the actions of external nations. In the remainder of this chapter, we will see that IFS consequently makes demands to limit the actions of external nations and that it also claims rights over certain territories which rest within Canadian jurisdiction. These are the claims that activists make under the label of external sovereignty.


\textsuperscript{56} Also, whether acceptably Indigenous approaches to these modern problems prove to be efficient or feasible solutions is a good question for future policy research.
Claim 2: External Political Sovereignty

“Sovereignty” is a contentious word within the IFS movement. It is an idea that is employed quite deliberately (with both deliberation and purpose) by theorists and activists. In the following sections I look at how IFS approaches the idea of sovereignty and makes claims based on this terminology. This claim can once again be analyzed through the three propositions of IFS which I identified earlier. Through external sovereignty, IFS affirms its core demands to liberal nations, which are: 1. to defend the inalienability of Indigenous land from external pressures to buy, lease, or otherwise acquire it for non-Indigenous people or entities, 2. to prevent heavy industrialization or destructive development on these lands, and 3. to defend the Indigenous right to use land not only in purely traditional ways, but through other means that do not deny their fundamental values.

The use of “sovereignty” by IFS does not escape the tension between tradition and modernization which I explored above. My examination of Claim 2 thus follows a similar path of analysis as that of Claim 1. I begin in section four by discussing what a purely traditional conception of “sovereignty-as-cooperation” looks like. In section five, I look at the deliberation by activists over using what is considered a western form of sovereignty, one which asserts stricter and more exclusive territorial norms. I also briefly discuss here some theories of sovereignty from western thinkers, including a recent conception which may resemble the Indigenous idea of sovereignty-as-cooperation. By the closing of this chapter, in section six, I show how IFS deliberately uses a stronger conception of sovereignty in an instrumental way: as a tool which responds to the pressures of colonial power. This neo-Indigenous sovereignty seeks to protect Indigenous food and resources from outsiders, and it accordingly makes several
demands on external nations. At the same time, it also desires to promote limited sharing between nations as a reflection of traditional territorial norms.

4. Cooperation

Cooperation and sharing is the essence of many First Nations’ value systems and food systems . . . So I look at sovereignty as being co-sovereignty in some ways: in a way where we start by eating together and then from there, we build a new sense of community. That’s what I would like.57

Each of the activists I spoke with had their own way of distancing the word “sovereignty” from a traditional Indigenous perspective of territory. Smith in particular rejects the word entirely, calling it a “distraction” from what Indigenous ideals actually are:

William Perry: On the topic of language, some activists speak about the questionable use of the English language to describe Indigenous concepts – such as “sovereignty” in Indigenous Food Sovereignty.

Michael Smith: Well, I think the word Indigenous takes care of that.

Perry: I guess the word Indigenous is there as an adjective, but it doesn’t really change that we use a western concept, “sovereignty,” to describe an Indigenous perspective.

Smith: Well yeah, “Indigenous” implies co-reliance. So “sovereignty” is sort of an add-on, a distraction.58

57 West and Perry, Interview with Douglas West by William Perry.
58 Smith and Perry, Interview with Michael Smith by William Perry.
Is co-reliance between nations the ideal goal of Indigenous Food Sovereignty then? How does IFS expect ‘territory’ to be ideally treated by others?

Nicole Gombay explains her understanding of traditional land norms as particular nations or families “having an affiliation or connection with a given area” which is respected by others but is not purely exclusive.\(^59\)

So, although in Nunavik, as in other parts of the Canadian Arctic, there are areas that particular groups of families have tended to use, this does not necessarily mean that others were, or are, prevented from using those areas.\(^60\)

Gombay states that the consequence of such a system of common property is that it “operates only when those who use the resources have some influence over others who use them, which ensures that they are harvested wisely and respectfully.”\(^61\) For communal inclusivity of resources to work, users must share and respect the values of everyone else within the community, so as everyone has a common understanding of land use. And, as Gombay explains, “where no such respect is shown, problems can arise . . . common property is a mode of communication, whereas private land tenure is a mode of appropriation.”\(^62\)

With this in mind, we can easily see how many Indigenous peoples initially approached interactions with the early colonialists: with a cooperative sharing of land and food.

The concept of cooperation gets closest to a shared sense of sovereignty over access to good food, as opposed to access to bad food . . . But access to good food requires a sense of judgment and a sense of knowledge . . . And to think that Indigenous people have that


\(^{60}\) Ibid.

\(^{61}\) Ibid. *Making a Living: Place, Food, and Economy in an Inuit Community*, 38.

\(^{62}\) Ibid.
more than non-Indigenous people is a mistake. But at the same time they come at it from different perspectives that could come to the same conclusion, which is that we share the lands together. This I think was the original intention of the treaties from the Aboriginal side. That’s certainly what the understanding was, but the non-native people haven’t lived up to their side of the bargain. And for me, that is sharing food.  

Perhaps to say that non-native people have not lived up to their end of a “bargain” (which is a shared understanding) is not wholly accurate. There was likely never that true intention on the side of colonialists who came from western traditions of exclusive land ownership. These differences in the understandings of land usage are at the heart of the conflict between Indigenous and western peoples. Doug West states that a European concept of territorial sovereignty is based primarily on “force and power” (such as the power to exclude others from land). On the other hand, we have seen that an Indigenous conception of sovereignty is based on the open sharing of land.

I believe this conclusion, that an Indigenous conception of communal land usage depends on communication and common understanding of values, begins to explain Jacob Levy’s contention about the often non-communality of Indigenous territorial norms. Levy states that these norms are not

the happy Rousseauian vision of pulling up the stakes of the first man to fence off property, with all of humanity continuing to enjoy travel across all of the earth.

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63 West and Perry, *Interview with Douglas West by William Perry.*
64 Although activists argue that the idea of sharing is contained within original agreements and treaties with colonialists.
65 West and Perry, *Interview with Douglas West by William Perry.*
Indigenous statements about land in particular sometimes suggest this image; but on this conception of land there are undoubtedly fences separating their territory from ours.\textsuperscript{66}

Indigenous sharing necessarily involves the sharing of both land and values: if values are not shared, it is likely that land will not be either. The fact that colonial nations often do not share or respect Indigenous values is what drives the debate over employing a new conception of Indigenous sovereignty.

5. Deliberating Sovereignty

\textit{I think we need to be a little gentle with the idea of “sovereignty” – not trying to define it completely. We understand it has this tremendous currency in the western tradition, and we want to use it against the colonial power that forces us to eat the food that makes us sick. But at the same time, we want to protect our tradition. And we use the word just for now. There must be better words in our language that can go with that . . . But I think there is a better word in English; it’s called cooperation.}\textsuperscript{67}

Moving forward with an understanding that cooperative territorial values do not resonate strongly within western political sovereignty, IFS is willing to use the same language of “sovereignty” in order to protect Indigenous food practices from colonial pressures to develop traditional lands. Doug West asserts this instrumental use:

\textbf{In a way, [sovereignty is] a European inspired idea in reaction to a European inspired colonialism. We use your own term against you. I will use it as a weapon to make you}

\textsuperscript{66} Levy, The Multiculturalism of Fear, 206.
\textsuperscript{67} West and Perry, Interview with Douglas West by William Perry.
realize what you’re doing to me. You’re forcing me eat your food; I will use my own concept of sovereignty to be able to combat against that.\footnote{Ibid.}

Dawn Morrison also suggests a hesitant but purposeful use of sovereignty within the IFS movement. She explained to me that “for Indigenous peoples, the term sovereignty is kind of contradictory to our own worldview even, that term. But we use it because it gets a lot of attention.”\footnote{Morrison and Perry, \textit{Interview with Dawn Morrison by William Perry}.} Menno Boldt affirms this as well, echoing West’s thoughts about Indigenous sovereignty being reactionary to western values.

From an \textit{Indian} perspective “sovereignty” is an inappropriate concept. It did not emerge as a ‘thesis’ from \textit{Indian} culture; rather, it emerged as an ‘antithesis’ to Canadian claims of sovereignty over Indians. In order to deny Canadian sovereignty, Indian leaders countered with an assertion of Indian sovereignty.\footnote{Boldt, \textit{Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government}, 134.}

Thus, Indigenous norms of sovereignty arrive in a modern context as a response to the ‘threat’ of western claims to the same concept.

It is of interest to what extent the tension over an Indigenous concept of political sovereignty is pertinent to the range of western theories on the same subject. In western thought, the concept of sovereignty began early on with the traditional idea of \textit{strict sovereignty}, a quite classical iron-hand, free-to-do-anything, conception of internal and external power.\footnote{See Chapter 7 of Christopher W. Morris, \textit{An Essay on the Modern State} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Also see Daniel Philpott, "Sovereignty: An Introduction and Brief History," \textit{Journal of International Affairs} 48, no. 2 (1995). Ruth Lapidoth, "Sovereignty in Transition," ibid.45(1992).} As theorizing progressed into the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, however, the more familiar sounding concepts of the
laws of nations and non-intervention emerged. Finally, there have been fairly recent discussions concerning the varying strengths of self-determination for Indigenous peoples and cultural minorities who are typically considered sub-national groups. Looking at the range of western theories which surround sovereignty, it is no wonder that L. Oppenheim once stated on the subject:

There exists perhaps no conception the meaning of which is more controversial than that of sovereignty. It is an indisputable fact that this conception, from the moment when it was introduced into political science until the present day, has never had a meaning which was universally agreed upon.

Sovereignty is therefore not a wholly stable concept within the western tradition either; there is much disagreement over its signification. Perhaps, then, a clean dichotomy between western and Indigenous theories of territory is not wholly fair to assert. The exclusive western sovereignty that Indigenous theorists tend to refer to is what is considered within political science as a strict ‘traditional’ form of the concept. Daniel Philpott defines this sovereignty as being the “supreme legitimate authority within a territory.” This is where “supreme authority” means “both undisputed supremacy over the land’s inhabitants and independence from unwanted intervention by an outside authority – a church, an empire, another state or a United Nations.”

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72 Ibid. In particular, see Lapidoth 329-31.
75 Philpott, "Sovereignty: An Introduction and Brief History," 357.
76 Ibid.
Christopher Morris’s definition of classical sovereignty as being “the ultimate source of political authority within a realm” is essentially the same.\textsuperscript{77}

Morris also adds that sovereignty typically consists of both a claim to \textit{internal} and \textit{external} sovereignty, where internal signifies controlling citizens within the state and external refers to being independent of external powers.\textsuperscript{78} This corresponds to the two major claims of sovereignty that IFS makes. And, according to Philpott, it is specifically the external sovereignty of states which remains a strongly contested issue amongst modern political theorists.\textsuperscript{79} Hurst Hannum highlights this point by saying “few, if any, would support such a view [of absolute sovereignty] today, and the very concept of the equality of states at least implies that the sovereign rights of each state are limited by the equally sovereign rights of others.”\textsuperscript{80}

It is beginning from this sort of critique that Iris Marion Young has recently proposed her concept of “self-determination as non-domination.” Young employs a feminist critique of individuality to refute the idea of sovereignty as absolute independence. She argues that no single entity is independent of need from others and that their actions, if pursued arbitrarily and without consideration of other agents, limit the freedom of other nations or groups (she calls this “domination”).\textsuperscript{81} Young thus rejects a traditional idea of sovereignty and promotes one in which each group of peoples has the right to follow their own systems of governance and ways of life, free from dominating interference.

\textsuperscript{77} Morris, \textit{An Essay on the Modern State}, 175.  
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{79} Philpott, "Sovereignty: An Introduction and Brief History," 357.  
\textsuperscript{80} Hannum, \textit{Autonomy, Sovereignty, and Self-Determination: The Accommodation of Conflicting Rights}, 15.  
Other people ought not to constrain, dominate, or interfere with those decisions and interpretations for the sake of their own ends, or according to their judgment of what way of life is best, or in order to subordinate a people to a larger “national” unit. Peoples, that is, ought to be free from domination. Because a people stands in interdependent relations with others, however, a people cannot ignore the claims and interests of those others when their actions potentially affect them. Insofar as outsiders are affected by the activities of a self-determining people, those others have a legitimate claim to have their interests and needs taken into account even though they are outside the government jurisdiction.82

Young characterizes this concept as being similar to traditional Indigenous norms of territory.83

Yet both Morris and Young realize that the classical ideas of sovereignty and the independent state are still prominent within a modern political discourse; Morris specifically states that “neither of these is likely to pass away soon.”84 From the perspective of Indigenous nations, strong assertions of sovereignty by colonial nations are seen as a threat to their cultural survivance. Indigenous theorists and activists believe that if they do not assert their own sovereignty in response, then they will potentially face losing territory and the ability to maintain their traditional ways of harvesting food and other resources. Indigenous communities are thus left in a place where they must assert a non-Indian form of sovereignty in order to ensure their survival as Indians.

6. Purposefully Sovereign

*I’m not over-romanticizing what it must have been like for Indigenous peoples. Sure there must have been a lot of trial and error, mistakes made, and so on. But there were thousands of years of learning how to live in this place, and then for other people to just come and totally disregard that and take over, it’s not right. It’s not fair. It doesn’t matter what race you come from. You can’t really argue with that, right?*85

What do Indigenous nations with traditions of sharing land openly do in the face of other nations that do not share these values? What are the claims of a post-colonial ‘neo-Indigenous sovereignty’?

Before exploring this subject outright, I think it is important clarify two levels of claims that IFS makes to external sovereignty. One is a claim for communities to use land within their *treaty reserves* in the ways that they wish and to resist external pressures or demands against this. The second level of external claims that IFS makes is over lands which are currently within Canadian jurisdiction but that Indigenous communities view as being *traditional territory*. These claims are closely related in the Indigenous mindset; activists argue that the sharing of traditional territories is included in the original agreements between Indigenous and colonial nations. From a colonial perspective, however, I think that linking these two claims is inappropriate, as Canadian governments do not guarantee much or any Indigenous right to jurisdiction over traditional territories.

To fight against this colonial position, a large part of the IFS movement focuses on actively utilizing traditional rights of food harvesting in Canadian public lands. This impetus for

85 Morrison and Perry, *Interview with Dawn Morrison by William Perry*. 
action is an instrumental way of invigorating the food movement within Indigenous communities. Morrison’s working group encourages people to “Hunt, fish and gather Indigenous food more often”, adding that “sovereignty is a responsibility and action. ‘Just do it’. The actual ‘doing’ is what strengthens the movement. Don’t just wait for it to happen.”

IFS is thus seen as a way of inspiring more people to be activistic or to at least act and take advantage of their rights within traditional lands.

One purpose of this mobilization is to show the non-Indigenous world that people are still practicing food traditions and want to continue doing so (that is, a sort of “Indians were here” tag on the land). Fiona Devereaux explains that a lot of Indigenous food practices can be hidden due to their non-intensive nature, and they are thus are not seen or recognized by non-Indigenous people. The neo-Indigenous goal is to make them be seen.

So now [traditional harvesters are] making sure that the cedar is stripped on a site where you could see maybe walking down into a national park and say “hey!” – the purpose of that being education . . . And you might hear people saying “oh, you don’t see people harvesting.” Well, if people are berry picking in one of the bigger parks in Victoria, they are saying “this is my right.”

In addition to using and demonstrating these rights, Indigenous activists feel they must actively fight to guarantee their continual existence. They do this through seeking to limit environmentally destructive developments within treaty and traditional lands. For what use is land for hunting, gathering and growing food if it is polluted or otherwise damaged? In the case of treaty reserves, limitations on development are in part legislated through various means within

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87 Devereaux and Perry, Interview with Fiona Devereaux by William Perry.
the Indian Act. But many communities, of their own accord, also actively limit what kind of activities non-Indigenous people may do within their reserve lands.

What should be of more concern to colonial governments is how Indigenous nations claim the right to oppose destructive developments on lands situated within Canadian jurisdiction. Morrison speaks passionately about a current mining project that she says will threaten the waterways and fishing for a traditional region in British Columbia.

Right now, there’s a mine being proposed in the upper Adams River and is right adjacent to the glacier that feeds the whole watershed that defines our territory. And it’s the world’s largest sockeye salmon run, in the Adams River. . . . So it’s really significant. But it’s the same thing – the government is giving the mining companies the go-ahead and they are going to do this without consulting us. That’s our food, our main source of protein, and it has been for thousands of years. But they are going to be messing with the water in that watershed and when the salmon are already coming back in really, really low numbers.88

Devereaux expresses this concern as well for Indigenous people who are trying to preserve traditional foods like the ooolgan in coastal waterways.89 She explains how mainstream food industries like fish farms affect traditionally used waterways and limit Indigenous sovereignty over their food sources:

They are desperate to get the fish farms away from their land and the general area because they’re killing the live fish stocks and impacting the ooligans. The government

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89 The ooolgan (also “eulachon”) is a sea fish and traditional food of many west coast First Nations. They are perhaps most known for their oil or “grease” which has various uses. The ooolgan is listed as a threatened species under the U.S. Endangered Species Act.
owns the fish farms or the Finnish do, and they impact Indigenous food sovereignty because they threaten the wild stocks. So there is that conflict; they don’t have true access to their food and it’s being impacted by decisions of the government.

In order to mitigate the above problems, one of the major claims that IFS makes is to expand the amount of land currently protected for Indigenous use. In other words, activists want to expand Indigenous jurisdiction (the ability to impose traditional limitations of land use) into territories currently under Canadian jurisdiction. It may be contended that Indigenous peoples do currently have rights to access public lands in Canada for traditional harvesting. This is true to an extent, but activists I have spoken with do not see any genuine *guarantee of continual rights* in the current arrangement. They view it as being a sort of whimsical promise of sharing which is often broken by colonial governments.

And it is true that rights to traditional practices on Crown land do not necessarily guarantee continual access to the land. Large tracts of Crown land are often purchased or leased for exclusive development, something which was likely not understood in original treaty agreements. For instance, the Indigenous nations who signed treaties in southern Ontario surely did not foresee the majority of land stretching from the U.S. border to north of Toronto being developed, privately owned, and inaccessible to them. Activists thus desire to protect their interests against what they call “land grabbing”: the perpetual theft of land that was originally viewed as communal and shared between nations.

A lot of the land is being grabbed; they call it “land grabbing.” We call it colonization because it has been happening since Columbus set foot in North America. So yes, there is
a huge concern with land grabbing now, and foreign investors coming in, and leasing or buying large tracts of land.  

Perpetually decreasing access to land makes the promotion of self-sufficiency through traditional harvesting increasingly difficult for Indigenous communities.

As a result, some activists desire the creation of new land reserves for traditional food harvesting. These reservations of land would be protected against industrial development, urban sprawl, and other destructive growth – the land would be subject to Indigenous restrictions. Dawn Morrison states that this idea is in part inspired by the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR) that exists within British Columbia and which protects fertile agricultural areas from these same threats.

British Columbia I understand is the only province in Canada that has that kind of land classification system. So I know that right now there are a lot of farmers and people doing a lot of work to protect the land that is in the ALR. But now what Indigenous people are saying is “why do non-natives have land set aside for their food, but we still do not?” – especially when we are still struggling to have access to hunting. It’s become more encroached upon, some of our traditional harvesting sites, whether fishing, hunting or berry picking.  

A report on this subject from the Food Secure Canada organization also recommends that new land reserves be created for Indigenous practices.

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90 Morrison and Perry, *Interview with Dawn Morrison by William Perry*.  
91 Morrison, "1st Annual Interior of B.C. Indigenous Food Sovereignty Conference Final Report."  
The creation of these new reserves is seen as a way of making Indigenous rights to traditional areas within Canadian territory meaningful and continuous. I do not think that Indigenous people wish for these new reserves to be considered as exclusive to their use, but primarily that they be permanently protected from industrial / urban development and ‘destructive’ forms of food production. Non-Indigenous people practicing Indigenous modes of food harvesting might very well be welcomed on these lands as a form of cross-culture sharing – as a way of opening the door to a more traditional idea of sovereignty-as-cooperation. In this light, although neo-Indigenous sovereignty is seeking to limit Canadian governmental jurisdiction, I believe it can also welcome Canadians into Indigenous territories to share food and land.

Claim 2 Conclusions

IFS’s claim to external sovereignty demands Indigenous protection of land within treaty reserves as well as external traditional territories. This claim to jurisdiction arrives through the adoption of a western concept of sovereignty. Indigenous activists adopt this stance in order to guarantee the ability of communities to maintain or regain self-sufficiency through traditional means of food production.

This neo-Indigenous sovereignty enforces the exclusivity of reserve land to Indigenous persons. It also seeks to impose restrictions on external traditional territories through the creation of new land reserves. In both the treaty and new reserves, IFS desires to enforce the values of land inalienability and non-destructive resource use which guarantee a continual Indigenous right to practice cultural food harvesting. The rationalization for the creation of new reserves is that
the current and historical actions of colonial governments reflect no intention to permanently guarantee Indigenous access to Crown land, which was originally intended to be shared between nations. My supposition within this paper is that Indigenous people would not necessarily seek for these new reserves to be exclusive for their use; this would support the original intention of sharing and cooperation within public lands. Together, these demands are an affirmation of IFS’s three propositions (inalienability, non-destruction, and adaption of culture) against external nations. The form of sovereignty that is demanded for treaty reservations is strong and restrictive, resembling a more classical western notion of sovereignty. On the other hand, the form of sovereignty that is suggested for the new land reserves is more inclusive and reflects the ideals of a traditional “sovereignty-as-cooperation,” where resources and foods can be shared between nations.

Thus, while Indigenous people are seeking to defend against pressures which threaten their traditions, the desire for cross-cultural cooperation and sharing still exists. This cooperation over land and values is similar to the theory of “self-determination as non-domination” that we saw advocated by Iris Marion Young. Young argues that no nation is absolutely sovereign and that each nation must yield to the lifestyles and values of others, so to accommodate others’ existence. I find that the Indigenous perspective is slightly different than this and aims more toward sharing and respecting similar values between nations. This sharing is not possible

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93 Although, I suspect that if the reserves were to be open to use by non-Indigenous people that this might cause Indigenous activists to demand more land in order to compensate for the additional use. The final goal is always to ensure the possibility of Indigenous communities to be self-sufficient through traditionally acceptable food production methods.

94 Kymlicka poses an interesting argument against the idea that accommodating all cultures (which he calls “cultural relativism”) will lead to non-intervention. Essentially, he argues that if all cultural perspectives must be accommodated, then cultures that have inherently dominant tendencies would still be allowed to exploit others. I suppose the response that Young would give is that such cultures do not merit protection under her argument. See Will Kymlicka, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 144-45.
currently and may be unlikely in the future. Yet, it remains a hope on the Indigenous side. As Dawn Morrison concluded her interview with me, she passionately expressed her desire for the ideal of cooperation.

I think the ultimate goal is to coexist peacefully, right? . . . It’s obvious that we’re all in this together. Nobody is really going anywhere, and we actually have more and more new immigrants coming. And for reasons that are beyond their control even, things happening in their own country where people are being displaced from their own land.

I have mixed heritage: my dad is Irish and Scottish, and my mom is full blood Shuswap. And so I know that my Irish and Scottish family, they were hungry and they were displaced from their traditional land and colonized by the British. So that part of my family experienced a lot of the same social issues that my Indigenous side did: substance abuse, social isolation, poverty, food insecurity. And that was why they came here, to North America.

. . . But sometimes even my non-native family has a hard time understanding why I’m so strong on the Indigenous issues. It’s not because I’m racist or because I think that “white people shouldn’t be here.” I don’t believe that at all; I think that we are all meant to be here together, and that we are all supposed to learn something from it. And when we learn how to do that, that’s when things will be more cooperative. But it’s not true peace to think that Indigenous peoples have to compromise so much. And I think that Indigenous peoples have done a really good job of being resilient and being able to have a voice.95

95 Morrison and Perry, Interview with Dawn Morrison by William Perry.
III. The Freedom of Individuals

We have now discussed the concept of Indigenous Food Sovereignty at length and are aware of its major claims. In this chapter I will put forth arguments against the propositions that IFS wishes to enforce upon Indigenous individuals within communities. These propositions are, once again: 1. the inability of community members to own or alienate land, 2. the inability of community members to use and develop land in ‘destructive’ ways, such as for industrial development or intensive agriculture, and 3. requiring individuals to make decisions regarding adaptive land uses within a traditional and communal model of governance (not as individuals, but as a community).

Section one below examines a traditional Indigenous theory of individual autonomy. We will see that individual decision making is highly valued within certain Indigenous cultures. This could potentially contradict the restrictions that IFS imposes on individuals. Section two presents arguments from a liberal perspective of individual rights. The final section of this chapter will pose suggestions on how these differences can be bridged. I believe that traditional autonomy and IFS can agree with each other on the basis of the Indigenous worldview that they share. The differences between liberalism and IFS are more difficult to reconcile, but I think this is still possible through a cultural compromise which stresses the sovereignty of individual communities over internal decision making.
1. Individual Autonomy in the Indigenous Worldview

Aboriginal people have individual freedoms through our own forms of government. Who is to say that freedom of conscience and religion, freedom of thought and belief, and freedom of association do not exist in our societies? Of course they exist. We believe in maximizing individual autonomy without sacrificing a sense of community responsibility.⁹⁶

Throughout various Indigenous traditions there exist strong valuations of individual power and autonomy. I think that examining these valuations in the current context will add depth to the classic image of Indigenous society as being primarily based on collective rights and group control. My goal in this section is to explain the nature of Indigenous individual autonomy and pose it as a potential argument against the demands of IFS. In this discussion, it is of course important to note that how power was organized in different Indigenous nations sometimes varied greatly. The accounts described in this section reflect some of the strongest conceptions of individual autonomy within Indigenous thought.

In Inuit culture, Nicole Gombay stresses four essential values to their way of life, one of which is called inuk nammineq. This value is described as “personal independence and individual strength, which leads to a distrust of distant rulers, and encourages the development of the ability to judge for oneself and to act accordingly.”⁹⁷ Kiera Ladner describes a similarly strong valuation of the individual in Blackfoot society. The Blackfoot people recognize the power of individual creation within the world and respect the right of each individual to follow its own

pathway to fulfilling its being.\textsuperscript{98} This results in a strong “ethic of ‘non-interference’ or the understanding that one cannot interfere with another’s realization of their powers.”\textsuperscript{99}

This traditional value strongly influenced Blackfoot perspectives regarding the legitimacy of communal governance and “collective will.” Ladner explains that “the only time an individual had an obligation or responsibility to comply with the ‘collective will’ is in situations where they had consented to and were part of that ‘collective will.’”\textsuperscript{100} All power of communal governance is seen as coming directly from each individual’s participation in and consent to said governance.

But this does not give individuals the right to do whatever they want to others, because others’ powers must be respected as well, including beings who exist within nature. Ladner stresses that being a Blackfoot person requires acceptance of this large circle of ‘kinship’ between all beings and the responsibilities to others that the circle entails.

All life is related, and all beings (particularly humans) have a responsibility for honouring those relations and the essence of all beings by developing an understanding of the natural order and their relationship to it . . . Kinship is not a matter of blood relationships. It simply acknowledges the fact that a relationship exists between beings and that those beings have accepted the responsibilities that flow from said relationship.\textsuperscript{101}

[Kinship] was a realization that what one does within that circle of life affects the total sum of that circle . . . It was a statement of relationships and responsibilities, and guidelines as to how one lives those relationships and responsibilities. Once an individual

\textsuperscript{98} Kiera L. Ladner, "When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance" (Carleton University, 2001), 69.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} "When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance," 70.
\textsuperscript{101} "When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance," 73.
accepted their place as a Blackfoot in the circle of life, s/he assumed the obligations of a Blackfoot towards that circle of life and accepted that all others had obligations for her/him as well.\footnote{102}

Gombay confirms that this view of responsible autonomy also exists in Inuit society. She states that in Inuit and other communal societies, “a great deal of emphasis is placed on personal autonomy,”

but such autonomy relies on people recognizing that people are ultimately responsible to the collective and promote the well-being of the collective. In this context, people are judged on their state of being . . . a person’s state of being depends very much on his or her conduct within a set of relations with others in human society and with animals.\footnote{103}

Thus, a respect for one individual’s power within the world immediately entails an equal respect for all individuals because all creation (power) is equal. This is not unlike the mutual respect for individual rights that liberalism proposes for its members – one key difference being that in Indigenous philosophy all beings merit recognition.\footnote{104} The importance of responsibility to others is never overlooked by Ladner when discussing the individual’s place within society and the world. The idea of the \textit{responsible individual} appears multiple times in her writing:

Indigenous world views . . . conceptualized the individual as an autonomous being whose autonomy could not be interfered with; as long as they acted responsibly.\footnote{105}
There was no ‘authority’ greater than the responsible individual other than the total sum of individuals exercising their powers through consensual decision making.\textsuperscript{106}

Individuals were free to discover their path in life and then to follow their pathway in the manner they saw fit. That is to say, an individual was free to discover, ‘understand and realize their unknown potentials’ and to live the responsibilities emanating from these gifts.\textsuperscript{107}

The idea of individuals being free to develop themselves in the way they choose but then having to share their gifts and abilities is much like Michael Smith’s conception of autonomy. Smith says that Indigenous individual autonomy is productive for society as a whole and that it still provides genuine freedom to each person. He states that “collectivism isn’t a loss of autonomy. It’s a place for you to use yourself and your autonomy in service of something that actually gives your autonomy meaning, which is what all First Nations / Indigenous cultures all over the world practice.”\textsuperscript{108} Smith is careful here to differentiate autonomy from individuality, the latter which he perceives as being ultimately destructive to social cohesion.

Liberty of the individual is the destruction of the society. Because it’s you on your farm, on your parcel, with your cow and your shotgun: “Damnit!” *BANG!* Autonomy is a very different experience than individuality. Because individuality is a castle; autonomy is a participant.\textsuperscript{109}

Individual autonomy of course does not restrict humans from taking the lives of animals and plants or from using resources; these activities are necessary for survival. Instead, the

\textsuperscript{106}“When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance,” 228.
\textsuperscript{107}“When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance,” 278.
\textsuperscript{108}Smith and Perry, \textit{Interview with Michael Smith by William Perry}.
\textsuperscript{109}Ibid.
restrictions against individual action reflect the more general Indigenous eco-spiritual value of living in balance with nature. Ladner emphasizes throughout her work that Indigenous understandings of living and governance come from nature. And she states that the most fundamental teaching which nature gave the Blackfoot people was that “power was legitimate when it was expressed in the same manner as in the natural world (i.e. collectively).” From this conclusion, it is the responsibility of every individual to collectively support society and the larger circle of life: “Power (essence) was to be used in a way that creates and maintains peace, harmony and balance within a human community and between humans and the wider circle of life.” Traditional individual autonomy therefore restricts the freedom of people to disrupt or damage other sections of the circle of life (and create disharmony). I will explore how this conception of autonomy relates to the arguments of IFS in section three.

2. Internal Illiberalism

Liberals cannot endorse cultural membership uncritically. Indeed, if the liberal commitment to respecting national identity flows from its role in enabling [individual] autonomy, should we not encourage or compel the members of illiberal cultures to assimilate to more liberal cultures? But again this ignores the way people are bound to their own cultures. The aim of liberals should not be to dissolve non-liberal nations, but rather to seek to liberalize them. This may not always be possible.

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110 Ladner, "When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance," 288.
111 "When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance," 289.
I believe that one of the primary ways to discern how different societies limit individual freedoms is to determine who is considered an “individual” within the society (or, who is a holder of rights). In Indigenous society, all beings who have power stemming from creation are individuals meriting some level of non-interference. This perspective is largely at odds with liberal theories on individual rights. The primary reason for this is because liberals only view humans as individuals. From the perspective of Indigenous autonomy, restrictions on human actions toward nature are simply a matter of individuals being limited by other individuals. From the perspective of liberalism, however, this is a matter of Indigenous groups limiting the rights of their members in order to protect cultural values – something which should not occur.

Will Kymlicka is one of the most prominent writers on liberal theories of multiculturalism. In *Multicultural Citizenship*, he concludes that having a culture is valuable to individuals because it gives them autonomy. It does this by providing them a contextual lens through which they can view the world and make meaningful decisions.113 But if the only intrinsic value of having a culture is the promotion of individual autonomy and rights (which coincidentally is the most important value of liberal culture), then there is a potential for problems with cultures that unfairly limit the freedoms of their members.

Kymlicka proposes two sorts of rights that cultural communities may claim: 1. rights against their own members (the promotion of cultural values through internal restrictions), and 2. rights to protection from external cultures.114 The first sort of right is generally not permitted by liberal values.

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Given the commitment to individual autonomy, liberal pluralists oppose internal restrictions. Liberal pluralism rejects the idea that groups can legitimately restrict the basic civil or political rights of their own members in the name of preserving the purity or authenticity of the group's culture, traditions, or bloodlines.\textsuperscript{115}

The concern of liberals is therefore that Indigenous communities may pose unreasonable restrictions on their citizens’ behavior in order to promote traditional values. Now of course, all societies restrict the actions of their citizens to protect civil order and individual rights (for example, to safety from threat, violence, or theft). Additionally, what is deemed to be a reasonable restriction varies and is often highly contested between liberal nations.\textsuperscript{116} Yet, the restrictions that IFS promotes are, for various reasons, opposed outright by liberal theorists.

A primary concern for liberals is the limitations on land use that IFS defends. We have already summarized that such limitations include not allowing individual ownership of land as well as banning various types of industrial and agricultural developments. In discussing this subject, Jacob Levy explains two fundamental principles of liberal societies which relate to land ownership: geographical and social mobility. Geographical mobility describes the ability of liberal citizens to move freely from one place to another if desired – in this case, not being tied down to any particular parcel of land (being able to sell the land and move).\textsuperscript{117} Social mobility is a little more complex in how it relates to land ownership. Levy explains this relationship:

\begin{quote}
[Since social mobility] means not only changes in income but also changes in the way income is earned from one generation to the next, the fungibility of land with other goods
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{115}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116}Some easy examples which portray this are bans on public smoking to protect public health, taxation to support various public programs, the right to own and bear certain types of firearms, and governmental control or prohibition of different narcotic substances.
\textsuperscript{117}Levy, \textit{The Multiculturalism of Fear}, 208.
\end{flushright}
has made a tremendous difference here as well. A society in which land could not be exchanged for other goods would tend to keep people in place (since the alternative to staying might be to abandon a valuable piece of land and gain nothing for it); and it would tend to at least rigidify the tendency of the urban to remain urban and the rural to remain rural. That in turn tends to keep the children of farmers as farmers, and so on. Private property in land is one of the institutions that support the liberal mobilities.¹¹⁸

And there is truth to this argument. The mobility of First Nations people in Canada, defined under these terms, is limited. Status Indians generally cannot own reserve land in a way that allows them to sell it, lease it, or use it as collateral for loans. Indigenous persons who are unable to receive bank loans or mortgages are typically left to apply for assistance from their community government, or they can build whatever they can from the money they have in pocket. Selling a house or parcel of land is also difficult on reserve, as it can only be sold to other community members. All of this is a result of non-Indigenous people being unable to make valid claims to Indigenous land (because it is inalienable). From a liberal perspective, this is viewed as a form of social segregation that tends to keep Indians on reservations and non-Indians out of them. As Levy argues, “this looks exactly like a restriction on the liberty of members in order to preserve the character of the culture.”¹¹⁹

As we have further seen, Indigenous individuals who do stay on reserves would be limited in how they can use and develop their land under IFS. Heavy industries like mineral and oil exploration are not allowed. And even people who want to use community land for agriculture would face limitations on what kind of food production methods they can use. These

¹¹⁸ Ibid.
¹¹⁹ The Multiculturalism of Fear, 198.
restrictions would limit the potential for individual capital generation, thus reducing the capacity of Indigenous producers to compete within the Canadian agricultural market. As a result, it is likely that IFS’s limitations would coerce Indigenous agriculturalists to integrate themselves into the communal food economy, it being the most viable (or at least most attractive) option. Finally, although it is not the case currently in Indigenous communities, given a view that communal land is intended for communal benefit, it is not unfair to ask if traditional values would eventually limit or forbid private capital generation on Indigenous land. That is, must all economic activity benefit the community? Or would a more progressive option like communal taxation on personal profits be implemented (that is, an income tax)?

A final problem that liberals may have surrounds communal governance. Under such governing structures, Indigenous individuals who want to perform untraditional activities could be viewed as not respecting ‘Indigenous values’ – the values that are affirmed by their community as a whole. As I have noted, the Indigenous communal land system requires a shared understanding of values for people to access it in common trust with others. If such understanding and respect do not exist, then “problems can arise” (to use Gombay’s words cited earlier). It is possible then that such problems with untraditional individuals could eventually result in lost access to communal lands or at least a loss of influence into how land is used.

Losing rights for disagreeing with or disobeying societal values is not an Indigenous invention; imprisonment, for example, has existed in cultures around the world for millennia. The use of this analogy is not to suggest that Indigenous persons who do not ascribe to traditional values are ever viewed as criminals or deviants; a much more empathetic view of
“cultural healing” is in fact held by certain activists. And I think only in the case where deviant individuals consistently contradict the will of their community would there ever be loss of access to land or influence in how it should be used.

Regarding the issue of communal systems of governance, I think there is much room for agreement between Indigenous and liberal perspectives. Indigenous societies are not ‘illiberal regimes’ in any typical sense of the word. As various thinkers have stated, traditional Indigenous governance generally involves communal debates and the inclusion of individual perspectives. This mode of decision making is quite inclusive and even resembles a form of direct democracy. Thus, if a particular mode of government is agreed upon by most of the membership of a community and it is based largely on direct representation in decision making, it would be difficult to argue that this is illiberal. So long as community members are not arbitrarily “losing input” in communal decision making, liberals should be satisfied here.

Having said that, this of course does not entail that all community members’ views must be followed. A system of governance is not “illiberal” simply because it does not satisfy the desires of all the people in a community. For instance, certainly not all Canadians agree with the decisions of their governments or the structure of their political system. Allowing members input in decision making is what matters. Indigenous governance requires this, and I think liberalism can recognize that. The primary problem for liberalism regarding Indigenous communities is the

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120 Morrison argues that Indigenous people who deny traditional values or do not participate in communal goals are often hurting from past trauma, such as residential schooling, substance abuse, and other social problems:

“[Food harvesting] is hard work, but it’s actually good for your soul. It makes you feel good. It’s amazing what comes of it. But you have to be at a certain level of your healing. And a lot of people who have experienced trauma . . . are not always at a place where [they] can see the value of getting out and working on the land, or being with other people in a real community where you really need to work cooperatively to be food sovereign.”

Morrison and Perry, *Interview with Dawn Morrison by William Perry*. 
illiberal prohibition of land ownership which surrounds all of these questions. I address this and other remaining issues in the following section.

3. Pathways to Cooperation

I find that traditional individual autonomy can agree with what IFS proposes. Both concepts incorporate the Indigenous eco-spiritual respect for nature. This means that harmful practices like heavy industry which could massively damage aspects of the natural environment would be not allowed by either autonomy or IFS. Intense agricultural practices may be subject to closer scrutiny in this regard, for not all are equally damaging. We have seen that mass cattle ranging, monocrops, heavy chemical use and several other modern practices are considered by activists as being unacceptable to traditional values.

Land inalienability is slightly more complicated to justify. How does this value fit into a traditional view of autonomy? We know that inalienability is considered a traditional aspect of Indigenous culture because land is not capable of being owned by individuals. It is instead considered to be in “perpetual inheritance” to all the people of a community. Within a genuine Indigenous worldview then, alienating land is simply something that does not exist within the range of possibility or understanding. This is something that autonomy should recognize.

But I think that IFS goes even further with its justification of land inalienability. This involves recalling the dual rationalization that it rests on. Once again, this is the argument that both Indigenous culture and people must survive for “Indigenous survivance” to signify anything real. Indians have to survive, and they must do so as Indians. I believe that this argument is
crucial to the defense of IFS and that it can be accepted by traditional individual autonomy. This strengthens IFS’s position against destructive land use and alienation.

Recognizing the modern situation where individual nations have limited access to land and resources, it is quite possible that the development of one major industry on communal land could damage the ability of a community live off of the land. If a lake becomes polluted or many of the trees are cut down in a short period of time, this would greatly limit the capacity of that community to fish, hunt, gather berries, harvest wood, and so on. Although modern industry produces capital for communities to buy food and resources from different regions, this is not what the Indigenous worldview is fundamentally about nor is it what IFS makes claim to.

I think it can be further argued here that, since Indigenous land bases are so limited currently, the alienation of land can also hurt the chances of survival for Indigenous nations. Alienation removes even more territory from their reach and damages their ability to maintain self-sufficiency through traditional food practices. Surely this is an argument that individual autonomy, which desires to promote traditional values, can respect. If too much communal land is lost, there would be no more space left in which individuals could be autonomous as traditional Indigenous people.

The claim of IFS to enforce communal governance is also complex in how it relates to a defense of individual autonomy. Ladner’s above exposition of autonomy specifically describes one group’s traditions; it is not necessarily fully applicable to other nations. Also, we know that purely traditional governance structures (Blackfoot or otherwise) have not been actively used for generations in communities nor may they represent the most viable ways for these communities
to conduct themselves today. Menno Boldt recognizes these concerns and stresses the need to re-grow Indigenous governance:

Indians need to experiment, evaluate, and gain experience with ‘home-grown’ culturally authentic (i.e., Indian) self-government. While it is true that Indians were self-governing before they were colonized, it is equally true that for more than 100 years, they have not governed themselves.\(^\text{121}\)

In regard to the topic at hand, these re-grown structures may lead to increases or reductions of individual autonomy, based on its functionality in supporting modern Indigenous survivance. Increasing autonomy initially may allow for more varied experimenting with new structures and traditions. Decreasing autonomy, on the other hand, would better enforce structures which are found to be good in addition to reducing the influence of non-Indigenous modes of governance. These are modern realities that traditional conceptions of autonomy do not necessarily take into account. That is, traditional autonomy assumes that the traditional communal structures and values which support it exist in full; this is not true.

I do not think traditional theories can deny that communities have to redevelop their governance structures and adapt them to new situations that they face. Ladner notes herself how Cree traditions varied between different natural environments, being inspired by different elements in each ecosystem.\(^\text{122}\) It should not be unreasonable then that the natural environments of modern Indigenous nations should influence the formation of their governments; this includes how the ‘political environment’ affects Indigenous access to the natural world.

\(^{121}\) Boldt, *Surviving as Indians: The Challenge of Self-Government*, 139.
\(^{122}\) Ladner, "When Buffalo Speaks: Creating an Alternative Understanding of Traditional Blackfoot Governance," 253.
In contrast with the arguments above, liberal arguments against IFS cannot be resolved by appeals to Indigenous values; reconciliation must occur on terms that western theorists can appreciate. To recap, some of the liberal concerns of IFS which I proposed were: 1. the potential for enforced communal distribution of profits from activities done within Indigenous territory, 2. the difficulty of individuals to generate capital or find varied employment under IFS’s restrictions, and 3. the prohibition of private land ownership (inalienability of land).

I think that the question of distributing profits is resolvable in the same way that it is within liberal nations. In the communal governance structure, there would need to be a resolution made on what percentage of profits derived from communal land must be shared with the community as a whole. To make feasible any privately run operations which do not benefit the community directly, an income or resource use tax may be the only reasonable solution. With other operations, such as community farms, this may not be needed if food products were distributed directly to community members. Yet, if food production were to turn towards external marketing, the distribution of profits (as money) may need to be regulated. In the case of community members who are employed within other countries (for example, Canada or the United States), they would not be using communal resources for profit and would likely be paying foreign taxes. These persons would consequently pay less tax or potentially be exempt altogether.\(^\text{123}\)

I propose therefore that taxation is an idea which can be borrowed from western states and implemented within Indigenous communities quite fluidly. It would facilitate how communal resources being used should benefit each community as a whole. There are, however,

\(^{123}\) To facilitate this in the future, “tax treaties” like the sort that exist between colonial nations may eventually be formed with Indigenous nations as well.
some nuances which would need to be decided upon communally. I have a sense that traditional values would oppose any form of “property tax” – a tax just for inhabiting a piece of land. This sort of taxation gives valuation to land as well as suggesting individual rights and responsibilities towards certain ‘properties.’ This may also be viewed as taxing individuals simply for living within their traditional territory. But, a tax that focuses on resource use and profit making, while still not customary, does not wholly refute Indigenous land values.

On the subject of finding varied employment, I do not think that IFS demands for every individual on reserve to be a harvester or farmer as their occupation. This would certainly be illiberal and also borders on social slavery. As I noted, given the limits that IFS imposes on food production, individual scale pursuit in this areas may not be the most attractive options for capital generation. I think this reflects, however, the general spirit behind IFS: that cooperative production is often the best and most ‘profitable’ way to pursue projects.

Yet, if individuals want to travel outside of reserves to pursue modes of capital generation or employment that are prohibited by IFS, I think this must be allowed. Although Indigenous activists aim at promoting traditional values both within and outside of their communities, this aim should be pursued through education and passive promotion. It should not attempt to restrict the actions of colonial nations on their sovereign territories. Nor should it stop Indigenous individuals from seeking employment outside of their communities. A better goal would be to actively encourage members to return to their communities through the creation of new work opportunities which utilize education and build the communities’ strength. This is what Michael Smith has suggested in his vision of IFS.

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124 This consideration would exclude traditional territories where Indigenous nations make demands of sharing.
The final question that we must deal with is regarding land inalienability; we have seen that this Indigenous tenet contradicts the fundamental values of a liberal worldview. I think the best way for IFS to argue its position here is through the fact that communities who enforce inalienability would be doing so of their own accord. If representative modes of governance exist and community members express through them that they wish to enforce inalienability on themselves, is this still illiberal? Do people have the right to limit their own fundamental liberal freedoms?

Jacob Levy references how the Nisga’a self-government in British Columbia essentially holds this power of decision over their land: to either register it as inalienable or return it to fee simple ownership at their will.125 This in fact makes up Levy’s proposed compromise between Indigenous and liberal norms: that Indigenous people accept the idea of alienability while maintaining communal control over whether land is in fact alienated or not. I think this represents the best compromise regarding internal limitations for both Indigenousness and liberalism.

Indigenous people are allowed to keep their land inalienable, if they choose so as communities. There is a chance that communities may decide to alienate some of their land, but they are not forced or pressured to. This communal power to change the status of land does not directly provide relief to individuals who want to own or alienate when their community is opposed, but it leaves the door open to an alternative. Dissenting members would still have access to communal land for habitation or use within prescribed limits, or they would have the opportunity to live and work elsewhere.

125 Levy, The Multiculturalism of Fear, 179.
The main stress that this compromise puts on IFS is that communities are given the definite power to deny the fundamental value of inalienability. I believe, however, that this is an inevitable risk in what IFS is proposing itself. Giving communities the powers of self-definition and self-governance, as far as I can see, does allow them the chance to alienate – even if they “should not do it.” Although alienating land is allegedly counterproductive to Indigenous survival, there are few or no viable ways of controlling what self-empowered communities do with their land. And if such means of control were ever conceived, I imagine the appropriateness of them would be highly contested. The best IFS can do is hope that communities will freely act in the best interest for their survival as Indians.

Activists do believe that the value of territorial conservation remains strong within Indigenous communities. I agree that this is likely true, though it may not always remain so for all groups. The value of inalienability can be given a better chance of survival through communal modes of decision making and the revival of traditional food practices. But if a community ever ends up in a situation where the large majority of its members support alienation, how is inalienability realistically going to be enforced? In the end, I think IFS must realize that if Indigenous traditions are to survive, they must survive with the will of Indigenous people. Who else is going to promote the survival of Indians as Indians if not Indians themselves? Certainly not liberals in any case.

Although the intercultural bridge that I have described here is clearly stressed, I think that it is ultimately acceptable by both Indigenous and liberal worldviews. Jacob Levy’s compromise proposes a situation where both sides can be satisfied with the level of freedom that Indigenous individuals retain. If communities of individuals choose to limit themselves and make land inalienable through representative modes of governance, this is something that liberals do not
seem to oppose. On the other hand, IFS must accept that giving Indigenous communities the power of self-governance may result in some communities acting non-Indigenously.

As Dale Turner has suggested in his writings, “we should leave Indigenous ways of understanding the world where they belong—in the communities.” In the same spirit, I propose that we should leave Indigenous survival up to communities as well. This approach admittedly may not fully compensate for the weakening of traditional values in communities stemming from a long history of colonization. Yet, many activists believe that these values are still strong enough to survive if it is left up to communities themselves to preserve them. This belief will likely prove itself to be true in many cases, and it will be strengthened through the promotion of cultural values and food traditions within communities.

However, as IFS further demands, all of this must occur without interference or pressure from external nations. Activists desire Indigenous jurisdiction over the territories which are necessary to preserve traditions. This entails imposing restrictions both on reserves as well as in areas external to them. Whether liberals can accept this increased level of non-interference is my next and final topic of discussion.

IV. Rights vis-à-vis External Nations

This final chapter critiques the claims that Indigenous Food Sovereignty makes against external nations; I have called this a claim to external sovereignty. As I stated in chapter two, this claim affirms the three propositions of IFS against external pressures (the three propositions being: inalienability, non-destruction of land, and the Indigenous freedom to adopt new technologies in limited ways). These demands are affirmed within treaty reserves as well as for the hypothetical new land reserves which activists desire to create. In this final chapter I explore arguments against these demands from only a liberal theory perspective. In the second section of this chapter, I consider how to resolve these issues and propose ways on how best to move forward for both liberal and Indigenous nations.

1. External Illiberalism

Even if the tension discussed in the previous chapter surrounding ‘internal illiberalism’ can be resolved, liberal theorists pose other significant problems with Indigenous land holdings. In part, these issues arrive from the classic propositions of John Locke which state that every person has an equal right to a share in the Earth’s resources. Hillel Steiner describes the fundamental right of equal access to resources, and he directly references Locke’s theory in his argument. Steiner states that all persons have the “right to an equal share of natural resource values . . . in order to prohibit claim-stakers from engrossing too much and thereby leaving

127 The primary traditional Indigenous argument against these demands would surround the tension that exists between the concept of sovereignty-as-cooperation and a stronger western sovereignty; I have already looked at this in-depth in chapter two.
others with little or no freedom at all. Locke himself says that claim-stakers, in appropriating a piece of land, must leave ‘enough and as good’ land for others.”

Invoking Locke to justify the acquisition of Indigenous land today could be slightly controversial. Historically, Locke’s theories of land and territory were employed widely in justifications for colonizing the Americas; the popularized argument was that Indian lands were in fact terra nullius (empty land, belonging to no one). The language of the current debate over land, however, has shifted away from questions of terra nullius and historical injustices to an argument which focuses on the equal distribution of global resources. The goal of these arguments is stated as one of global justice.

Sometimes these arguments take a soft form and focus on basic human rights. Kymlicka argues for this in *Politics in the Vernacular* when he highlights the vast amount of unutilized land possessed by Indigenous groups in contrast with impoverished and landless urban populations. In this case, redistribution applies to Indigenous peoples when it is found that their land share is so disproportionately large that it causes other individuals hardship. When this is not the case, it is acceptable for Indigenous peoples (who have historically been disadvantaged themselves) to hold onto land. Kymlicka describes this as an attempt to find a fair pathway between the protection of Indigenous minority cultures and the fairness of distribution to all.

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people. Kymlicka concludes that Indigenous peoples could be allowed a certain amount of disproportionate land ownership in order to help them thrive, but he says that this can only go so far before the situation becomes unjust.

This equality argument for special rights and resources is not unlimited. At some point, additional resources assigned to Indigenous peoples would not be necessary to protect against vulnerabilities, but rather would simply provide unequal opportunities to them. In these circumstances – which may not exist anywhere on the globe – Indigenous peoples would have an obligation to redistribute some of their wealth to other peoples.

As it is the same for every global citizen or group, Indigenous peoples have a liberal duty to share their land and resources when there is not ‘enough and as good’ for others. But it is difficult to argue when this specific point has been reached. Above, Kymlicka doubts that many Indigenous peoples have turned into illiberal land hoarders. Yet he seems to change his position quite rapidly, within the same chapter, stating the following as well:

People should only be able to insist on exclusive use of parts of the natural world if they leave ‘enough and as good’ for others. While that condition may have applied when Indigenous peoples originally occupied their homelands, it is no longer true today. Since there is no unclaimed land left for the heartland poor to appropriate for themselves, any claims to property must be judged against a standard of equality.

What is considered “enough and as good” is likely a difficult judgment to arrive at in many cases. Perhaps this is one reason why various theorists argue as well for a more equal (and

131 Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship, 147.
132 Ibid.
133 Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship, 148.
stricter) land and resource sharing based on *precise monetary valuations*, as opposed to the more vague concerns of human rights fulfillment. Steiner exemplifies both the global and capitalistic side of this argument when states that “everyone, everywhere, has a right to an equal share of the value of all land.” He continues by considering how differing land types, geo-social locations, and resource content can affect the valuation of territories.

Evidently the ownership of an acre in the Sahara Desert is of a different value, and consequently attracts a different payment liability, than the ownership of an acre in downtown Manhattan or the heart of Tokyo. Similar things can be said about real estate in the Saudi oilfields, the Amazon rain forests, the Arctic tundra, the Iowa corn belt, the Bangladeshi coast and the City of London. No doubt the values of these sites tend to vary with such factors as technological change, population shifts and changing consumption patterns, as well as depletions of extractable resources and discoveries of new ones.

The solutions proposed by such theorists are therefore largely monetary in nature. Steiner’s ideal solution is the creation of what he calls a “world fund.” Nations would pay a share of their land and resource value into this fund, to which other nations would have a per capita claim of compensation for unequal resource and land distribution. Indigenous nations who occupy more territory would pay for their extra land and resources, while nations with less land value would be compensated from the global fund. Kymlicka’s solution is similar to this. His proposition to rectify resource inequalities states that Indigenous peoples “should probably [pay a] form of a resource tax.”

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134 Steiner, "Territorial Justice," 68.
135 Ibid.
It would be up to the Indigenous peoples themselves to decide how to manage their resources to pay for this tax. Some communities may decide to sell some of their land, or lease it, or develop some of their mineral wealth, or invite outside people to develop the wealth for them.\footnote{138}

Liberal egalitarian justice thus applies to Indigenous peoples in two ways depending on their situation: they may keep or receive resources as a way to bolster their strength and resiliency, or they may have to pay money to compensate for extra resources in order to aid those who are significantly disadvantaged in comparison. In this sense, land may be considered as being inalienable since nations are not being forced to physically surrender parts of their territory. But, Indigenous peoples must be able to pay for the capital value of the resources they are withholding from others. The same applies to all peoples and nations, including wealthy First World countries.

Jacob Levy also argues against Indigenous land holdings but states that his concerns are different than those in the arguments above. While Kymlicka and Steiner argue based on an equal distribution of global resources, Levy’s argumentation focuses on an equal fungibility (or mobility) of land itself. Levy’s driving question is: “What does it do to a liberal and mobile society if an ever-growing portion of its land is held under a kind of Indigenous \textit{inalienable} entail?”\footnote{139} The use of “entail” here is historically purposeful. Levy is comparing Indigenous land holdings to the entails that European nobility inherited, possessed, and passed on to their lineage indefinitely, thus rendering the land inaccessible to anyone outside of their families.

\footnote{138}Ibid.  
\footnote{139}Levy, \textit{The Multiculturalism of Fear}, 212.
This is not an original analogy or concern. Carole Pateman notes that in the 1630s American theologian Roger Williams compared Indigenous territories in America to the entails of English nobility; Williams used this, however, as a defense for Indigenous entitlement to their land.\footnote{Pateman and Mills, \textit{Contract and Domination}, 45.} Levy, on the other hand, notes historical contentions of entails put forth by liberal theorists and statesmen such as Thomas Jefferson, Edmund Burke, John Locke, and Adam Smith. Levy argues that the common concern of these classical liberals, and what should be for all liberals today, is “the stagnating effect on society of a system that prevents the division, sale, and circulation of land.”\footnote{Levy, \textit{The Multiculturalism of Fear}, 209.}

To make the difference between the above liberal contentions more explicit, Levy disagrees with inalienable Indigenous territories because they represent mobility barriers to non-Indigenous people.\footnote{As I noted in the previous chapter, Levy is also concerned with the effects that this sort of land classification has on the mobility of Indigenous people themselves.} Ideally, as much land as possible should be available for exchange under this view. When it is not, this clogs the wheels of liberal society and makes certain activities, like industrial development, increasingly difficult. Theorists like Kymlicka and Steiner focus more on the equal distribution of resource wealth between all individuals. This does not necessarily require making all land exchangeable so long as withheld resources are compensated for.

The IFS demand of establishing new land reserves would certainly be condemned under these arguments. Why would Levy support even more land being inalienable and subject to traditional restrictions? This would further limit all individuals to use the land in new and progressive ways; it would only serve to increase Indigenous entails. I think that resource distribution theorists like Kymlicka would also oppose new land reserves in most cases. Wherever Indigenous nations already have enough or too much land, then the creation of new
reserves would mean an even less fair distribution of land and more hoarding of valuable resources. It is also unlikely that Indigenous nations could come close to paying for western valuations of resources in compensation. I further discuss the resource payment issue below when examining the viability of these liberal compromises.

2. Pathways to Cooperation

The first potential compromises that we should examine are those which come directly from liberal theorists. The conclusion above from global distribution theorists accepts that land is not going to be easily exchanged between nations. These thinkers realize that physical territory is not moveable and that owners may not always desire to give up their land. Kymlicka’s argument reflects this, and his conclusion technically maintains inalienability for Indigenous communities: they can keep their territory so long as they can pay for it. But is this a satisfactory compromise for IFS?

Avery Kolers has recently written on this subject and opposes the conclusions of distributive justice arguments. He contends that these arguments are based solely on a western “ethnogeography” (a culturally relative view of land – in this case, that land and resources can always be valued monetarily).\textsuperscript{143} Consequently, these arguments end up denying the value of Indigenous ways of life. This point becomes clearer if we consider the hypothetical case of an Indigenous tribe who refuses oil exploration on their land because they value a cluster of ancestral trees which exists over the extraction site. The liberal ethnogeography values the extracted oil to be worth 850 billion dollars; on the other hand, it values the trees to be worth

\textsuperscript{143} Kolers, \textit{Land, Conflict, and Justice: A Political Theory of Territory}, 54.
perhaps twelve thousand dollars (their weight in lumber, for example). The Indigenous people may not value the oil at all. Or, they may recognize its value but not be willing to extract it and destroy the trees which are literally priceless (or unpriceable).

In the context of an imposed resource tax, how could this Indigenous tribe ever possibly pay for the liberal valuation of their land? Kolers therefore states that under distributive justice arguments “it can become too expensive to live one's own life (as, say, a Bedouin), and when it does, resource egalitarians must recommend dropping that life for another.” This argument suggests then that distributive justice essentially denies a right to life for traditional Indigenous people. Would these liberal theorists end up in a situation where they would promote the forced assimilation or expulsion of the tribe from the region? And what would happen if the Indigenous people refused still? War? Extermination?

While this may portray liberals in a potentially cruel light, my intention here is merely to demonstrate the incommensurability of Indigenous and western valuations of land. I think it is clear that distributive justice arguments fail to acceptably resolve these differences. And this is not to side with the Indigenous position here. Would it be any better, for instance, if Indigenous people imposed their ethnogeography on liberals who disagree with it? Arguably, this is what IFS is trying to accomplish in some cases, such as with the creation of new land reserves outside of their treaty reserves.

Levy has also proposed a theoretical compromise to the primary issue of land inalienability. He argues that his conclusion is a point located between the two polar worldviews, one which is agreeable to both sides though not representing the essence of either. His hope here

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144 Land, Conflict, and Justice: A Political Theory of Territory, 55.
is to mitigate potentially disastrous cultural conflict in the future. The compromise is that
Indigenous nations should accept the idea of alienating land while liberals should accept
Indigenous communal governance of the land. That is, Indigenous land can be alienable to non-
Indigenous people, but Indigenous communities can make decisions over this alienability as a collective.

While inalienability cannot be part of the liberal system, collective ownership could and
often should be. A requirement that land be individually owned cannot be justified in
terms acceptable to those who hold divergent views on the nature and uses of land,
though alienability can be so justified as the measure that allows for the mutual
adjustment of projects and uses.\textsuperscript{145}

Levy further proposes that Indigenous ownership and sovereignty of land be separated. This
“limits the stakes of the alienation of land” by allowing Indigenous people to maintain rule of
law (sovereignty) over any land which is sold or leased to non-Indigenous persons.\textsuperscript{146}

Kolers opposes this liberal compromise as well, arguing that Levy’s conclusion is not a fair balance between the two cultures. Once again, Kolers’ contention is that liberalism’s
ethnogeography is being imposed on Indigenous people. Allegedly, Levy’s compromise fails by
incorrectly applying John Rawls’ theory of “overlapping consensus” between cultures.

In Rawls, the basic ground rules are set by a shared commitment to an identical set of
principles. No one is asked to give up any of their core commitments, and the state is not
taken to have basic interests beyond the promotion of justice . . . In Levy, the liberal state
has a clear agenda - maintaining the four mobilities underlying liberal dynamism - and

\textsuperscript{145} Levy, The Multiculturalism of Fear, 214.
\textsuperscript{146} The Multiculturalism of Fear, 218, 21.
uses the market to set ground rules. The state is thus based on unshared values - values that Indigenous groups cannot be expected to endorse.\textsuperscript{147}

That is to say, inalienability of land is a core Indigenous value which is being jettisoned by Levy’s compromise. In contrast, liberals giving up their opposition to communal land ownership does not strike at the heart of their worldview. In Levy’s own words: “while inalienability cannot be part of the liberal system, collective ownership could and often should be” (emphasis added).\textsuperscript{148} In fact, it is difficult to see why collective ownership of land would be opposed at all by liberals: should it not be a freedom of individuals to share control over land with others if they wish? Is this not already in practice where multiple people (such as a husband and wife or several business partners) share the deed to a property and collectively manage it?

Yet, I do not think that we should dismiss Levy’s conclusion as being unfair so quickly. We know from the previous chapter that this compromise supports one of the main claims that IFS makes, which is the sovereignty of Indigenous communities to make their own decisions on fundamental issues. I have suggested that this claim realistically includes the power of communities to decide for or against alienation. To recap, for IFS to give communities sovereignty over self-definition while trying to impose inalienability would be to deny communal sovereignty. Even if IFS’s claim includes a sort of “sub-clause” dictating that communities must not oppose fundamental values, it is questionable whether this is realistic or appropriate to enforce. On the other hand, for liberals to give communities sovereignty while trying to impose alienability would be to deny communal sovereignty as well. Thus, either side

\textsuperscript{147} Kolers, \textit{Land, Conflict, and Justice: A Political Theory of Territory}, 15.
\textsuperscript{148} Levy, \textit{The Multiculturalism of Fear}, 214.
enforcing a specific path of decision making denies their original argumentations of sovereignty. With this consideration, Levy’s compromise regains favour under IFS.

There is a further complexity for how the compromise applies to the current topic of external sovereignty however. It is important to recognize that, in the previous chapter, I was only examining how inalienability affected the freedoms of Indigenous individuals. In that context, I believe that Levy was in a position to accept that communities may or may not alienate, so long as the possibility of either was open. Currently, we are discussing how inalienability affects non-Indigenous people. In his writing, Levy states that Indigenous entails have a “stagnating” effect on liberal societies and that they reduce geographical and social mobility. These are effects that alienating land would mitigate. Yet, nowhere in his theorizing does Levy suggest that some land must be alienated in the future; the specific actions he repeatedly references are that Indigenous people “accept” and “recognize” alienability.¹⁴⁹ This does not lay out any demands for actual alienation.

I suspect Levy is unspecific in this regard for the sake of diplomacy. The spirit of his work is to avoid cultural conflict between two worldviews: one view which may demand the alienation of most Indigenous land and another which seeks to keep it all inalienable. I therefore interpret Levy’s conclusion as stating that Indigenous people should accept the idea of alienability while maintaining the right as communities to decide on whether they are actually going to do it or not.¹⁵⁰ This leaves the possibility of either result and could potentially mean that little or no land will be alienated if Indigenous nations so decide. This also means that in each case of decision, one worldview is going to be disappointed: liberalism when land is not

¹⁵⁰ The other potential interpretation is that Indigenous people must accept alienability in the sense that they actually alienate x amount of land. I find that this conclusion disappoints Levy’s goal of intercultural diplomacy and leads to cultural domination.
alienated, and Indigenousness when land is alienated. What is supposed to satisfy both sides is that either situation is possible – that is, the range of possibility is fair to both cultures. For either side to have *expectations* of decisions is fruitless (though I’m sure both sides have their respective *hopes*). This is, I think, where Levy’s compromise ends up logically.

As a final point on this compromise, we must consider the implications of Indigenous communities retaining sovereignty over lands that they do choose to alienate. This would allow them to impose Indigenous restrictions on these lands at their will, which I think could potentially confound the goal of promoting mobility and development. Communal land with Indigenous restrictions would be unattractive for development projects as well as for individuals who want more control over “property.” Therefore, although the separation of sovereignty and land ownership makes the prospect of leasing or selling land more attractive for Indigenous communities, it may not produce a greater desire for non-Indigenous persons and entities to enter into such agreements. From my research, it seems that IFS activists would want to limit the ways that alienated land is used. Additionally, they may desire to avoid large-scale leasing or selling altogether, given the limited land bases that many communities face. I think this is a situation that Levy and other liberals must accept, however, in allowing Indigenous sovereignty over land.

It should be clear by now that the Indigenous and liberal worldviews are indeed “simply incommensurable.” Liberals value land in vastly different ways than Indigenous people do; these values stem from polar perspectives concerning the status of land and the natural environment. We have also seen that one of the most developed compromises between these two perspectives places high levels of stress on both sides. It is difficult to say whether or not agreement is ultimately tenable. Yet, if compromise is not possible, we are left with a future which will likely contain only temporary peaceful arrangements interspersed with cultural conflict over land. This
sort of conflict is beneficial for neither side and contradicts the historical agreements to share the landmass known as Canada between peoples. Conflict is arguably much more devastating for the Indigenous side, considering their weakened position after centuries of conflict and assimilation.

For divergent views to coexist, both must be willing to sacrifice. Neither wishes to give up the essential values which make up their identities against their will, and neither should have to. In the above compromise, this is the opportunity that both sides are given – the playing field is theoretically fair. “Theoretically,” because this does not take into account the pressures of colonization and capitalistic development which Indigenous nations often face. It also does not account for the pressures that “global players” like Canada face, such as international defense and maintaining order across large populations. Yet, each side must make earnest efforts to respect the situations that the other is in and to respect their values.

As a final consideration, I think that one of the greatest weaknesses of any worldview or theory is to be too monolithic in its values. Any ethos that uniformly casts a shadow over a large group of people is bound to be unrepresentative of the diversity of views within the group. This is not to say that all individuals’ views need to be enacted or followed, but they should at least be recognized as possibilities. This is a form of individual representation that I think both worldviews can support. The imposition of monolithic cultural values on communities of individuals is a serious concern which I spoke about in the methodology section of this paper. And I think this is an issue that IFS attempts to mitigate through allowing communities to define for themselves which food and other cultural traditions are essential to their identity and which can be adapted to promote their communal resiliency. IFS presents the Indigenous worldview in a more lenient form, one which most Indigenous individuals can hopefully support.
In this respect, liberalism must consider how its values reflect the desires and needs of liberal individuals who live in the real world. We understand that land valuation and alienability is important for liberal freedom and mobility, but are these values absolutely representative of individuals who live in liberal states? I suggest that this is not always the case. Certainly many Canadians have special places that they would not want to see developed or drastically altered for almost any cost, places that they may even consider “priceless.” I think that Canadians furthermore often support the inalienability of land for ecological reasons; this is seen in the case of national parks and ecological reserves. Although Canadians may hold these views for reasons that are not particularly Indigenous in nature, these are also not liberal positions (if “liberalism” means the monetary valuation and alienability of all or most land). Like Indigenous theorists, liberals must also consider the desires of people who live in communities: what their values are, how they feel connected toward certain places, and the manner in which they desire to live.

It may be unrealistic to say that the majority of Canadians have demands which are similar to those of Indigenous people. Yet, even if a small or moderate minority does, this demonstrates that liberal theorists must re-think how to engage with liberal people as individuals who may or may not be wholly “liberal.” I have argued in this paper that the Indigenous worldview, represented through IFS, can accept that Indigenous communities decide for themselves on the nature of their identities, how they are connected to places, and how they in the end are Indigenous. Perhaps liberalism should consider this sort of approach for liberal people as well: to allow communities of individuals to decide how their particular relation to a liberal or western worldview defines the values they have of themselves and of the places in which they live.
V. Bibliography


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