MORE POWERFUL TOGETHER

Movement Reflections on Decarbonizing and Decolonizing So-Called Canada

Summary Report for Activists and Land Defenders

Written by Jen Gobby and Rachel Ivey
Between 2016 and 2018, I had many conversations with climate activists and Indigenous land defenders across so-called Canada; people involved in the environmental/climate justice, anti-pipeline and Indigenous land defense movements. I asked many questions—from what’s working and what’s not working in the movements they are part of to what they think it’s going to take to meaningfully decarbonize and decolonize this country. This report summarizes what I learned. I am a settler activist and researcher based in Tiohtià:ke/Montréal. This project was part of my PhD at McGill. It’s my hope that this project can contribute to our collective learning about what makes movements strong and able to transform systems.

You can read more about the project and the findings in the book or thesis version. We wrote this summary report to ensure that no one has to purchase the book or read through the very long thesis in order to hear about what was learned through these conversations. Feel free to contact me at jengobby@gmail.com.

Jen Gobby
Much of daily life tries to facilitate change, but opportunities to think together about how change happens are far rarer.

**E. Tuck and K.W. Yang**, Youth Resistance Research and Theories of Change

While the climate justice movement is working hard to address the legacy of white supremacy and colonialism within environmental and conservation movements, it is a work in progress.

**E. Deranger**, The New Green Deal in Canada

Climate change is causing “us to take a look at ourselves and re-evaluate our relationship with each other, our communities, and the land.”

**Indigenous Climate Action**, Violence Against the Land is Violence Against Women
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Quotes from my conversations with activists and land defenders are represented in this report in the following ways:
- Quotes from interviews — (Int#)
- Quotes from surveys — (S#)
- Quotes from think tank sessions — (TT#)
- Quotes from public event — (E#)

A table of research participants is presented in the Appendix, providing basic information about each interview, survey, think tank and event interlocutor that was included in the report.

When quoting Indigenous people, their Nation is indicated.

More details about the research methods are also included in the Appendix.
Pipelines connect local communities all across Canada with the larger issues of tar sands extraction, climate change, and the violation of Indigenous rights.

Quebec-based grassroots activist
1. UNDERSTANDING THE CRISSES

Q: What is causing the social and environmental problems you aim to address in your activism?

Mainstream discourses about climate change and racial inequality in Canada generally fail to name the systems and structures driving the crises, and this allows for solutions and initiatives which leave the underlying drivers of the crises unaltered, or even reinforce them. Climate justice activists and Indigenous land defenders are digging down and exposing the root causes, offering much-needed counter-narratives to the mainstream discourse in Canada about the climate and inequality crises. Most of the people I spoke with have been actively involved with stopping oil and gas pipelines, but no one sees pipelines as the crux of the problem. Pipelines are driven by, and poignant symbols of, unjust and unsustainable political, economic and belief systems—systems that are driving both climate change and inequality.
The uneven impacts of extractivism and climate change

The climate crisis is impacting first and foremost poor, racialized and Indigenous people. So too are the impacts of the extraction, transport and processing of fossil fuels felt by some people more than others. This is environmental racism. It is environmental injustice. Systemic oppression, in its many forms including racism, sexism and classism, are shaping the patterns by which the benefits and burdens of the fossil fuel industry are being born in Canada. Pipeline are being forced through poor communities and Indigenous lands, bringing pollution, habitat destruction, violating the rights of Indigenous people and driving violence against women. These dynamics are not just about who is being negatively impacted, we also need to pay attention to who is benefiting and who is making the decisions that allow these injustices.

Uneven impacts are manifestations of colonial capitalism

These uneven impacts are driven by structures and systems that lock in unjust and unsustainable trajectories. Though some people may see Canada as a generally peaceful, nature loving nation, the people I spoke with see Canada, at its very core, as premised on the extraction of natural resources and the theft of Indigenous land as an ongoing settler colonial state. “It’s not just that there is inequality [in Canada], we are operating in a violent system of disparity and systemic violence and injustice” (Int#36).

We’re still living in the midst of colonialism.

“Canadian culture is not built around having an equal relationship with Indigenous people. It’s about colonization and domination” (Int#9)

Quebec-based grassroots organizer

Anishinaabe / Ojibway scholar
Indigenous Peoples are the first to be subject to environmental injustice, all in the name of economic progress.

Quebec-based grassroots activist and student
Colonization and disregard for Indigenous rights is what has allowed for all the fossil fuel extraction projects in Canada” (Int#26). “Though some Canadians may not see this, it is because these unequal, unjust systems are so ingrained and foundational to Canadian culture and economy that it can remain invisible” (Int#34 Anishinaabe/Ojibway). Settler colonialism, from the moment Europeans stepped foot on the shores of Turtle Island, was about establishing racial domination so that colonial control over land and resources could be established and settlers could acquire wealth through the extraction and exploitation of natural resources.

Capitalism not only incentivizes but actually requires the ongoing colonial relations and power asymmetries. “We’re never going to have climate justice or any sort of sustainable energy system under capitalism—it just doesn’t make sense. Capitalism is a system that necessitates infinite growth” (Int#20 Michif-Cree). Capitalism has inherent characteristics that are deeply problematic for both people and the planet. It requires the continual exploitation of natural resources and human labour. It requires and drives social inequality among humans, brings wealth to a few through the exploitation of many, and requires ideologies such as racism, classism, sexism, and human dominance over nature to justify and secure the social hierarchies required to drive growth and profit-making.

**Worldviews and ideologies of domination**

Eurocentric worldviews and ideologies of dominance still preside and are propping up the social and environmental injustices currently playing out in Canada. The deeply held belief that some lives are less valuable than others allow colonial capitalism to persist. This worldview justifies and reinforces systems and structures defined by domination of people over nature and of people over other people. This way of understanding the world separates and disconnects us from each other and from the natural world, driving social and environmental injustice, and is severing us from the collective knowledges and transformative relations that we need to get ourselves out of this mess.“The distance that allows us to exploit the Earth is the same distance that allows us to exploit other people” (Int#10).
We have to decolonize things: the capitalistic, extractive, destructive, money-making activities in the dominant society. All that has to change. That would work hand in hand with solving the issues of climate change.

Kanien’kehá:ka land defender
I dream of decentralized, self-determining communities... It’s better for health care, better for decision making... Most things would be better if things were smaller and we didn’t have these monolithic political, economic systems that we all need to contend with.

British Columbia-based grassroots organizer
Addressing the climate crisis requires decarbonization, the transformation away from fossil fuel–based energy and economic systems towards ones based on clean renewable sources of energy. Plans like the Green New Deal are one way that Canada can move forward using clean energy while ensuring just equal work for all. But clean energies cannot be THE solution — they depend on a massive amount of material resources, the extraction of which often leads to the dispossession and forced labour of vulnerable people around the world. And so a just energy transition needs to include huge changes of levels of energy consumption and production. And importantly, it must include a swift move away from capitalism which demands endless economic growth.
Decarbonizing energy systems is required but does not go far enough towards addressing the social inequalities and systems of domination that are driving climate change. Energy systems need to be decentralized and democratized whereby “decisions made by people who are most affected by the decisions” (Int#28). Energy democracy reflects a larger trend of building solidarity economies, in which “ordinary people play an active role in shaping all of the dimensions of human life: economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental” (RIPESS, 2015: 2). Degrowth, energy democracy and solidarity economies all call for producing less, sharing more and making genuinely democratic decisions about how to live together (Abraham, 2018). Others say this is not enough and they envision a society that is state-less, non-capitalistic and based on decolonization, mutual aid, direct democracy and solidarity (Int#5)... “the creation of autonomous zones where people are able to meet their own needs without the fossil fuel economy and the state” (Int#8).

Decentralizing and Democratizing

All these aforementioned visions of autonomous communities powered by decentralized, democratized renewable energy systems are important and powerful, but they are not the answer if they are built by settlers on stolen Indigenous land. Really addressing climate change and inequality in Canada requires a transformation of the economic systems and social relations driving the crises. It is not enough to just wrest power from the state and distribute this to settler communities. The fundamental injustice at the heart of Canada—settler colonialism—must be transformed through the return of self-determination and land to Indigenous Peoples.

Decolonizing means Indigenous peoples occupying places of power with strong matriarchs heading their communities once more as described by one Dene woman; a Mi’kmaw warrior and thinker describes it as reinstating Indigenous self determination and rebuilding Indigenous Nations. The work
of decolonization is different for Indigenous people than it is for settlers. And while there are concrete steps that can be taken by settlers (e.g. repudiating racist legal doctrines, respecting Indigenous rights like implementing UNDRIP, heeding the recommendations of RCAP, TRC, and other government-commissioned reports, and fairly redistributing land), colonization is multi-dimensional and therefore must be applied in all aspects of society. As colonization has, by definition, sought to sever this relationship, decolonization by necessity must involve the full reconnection between Indigenous Peoples and their lands. “Decolonization is in its simplest terms a return of and connection to the land” (Deranger, 2018: n.p.). Land repatriation and other dimensions of decolonization require huge transformations of economic and political systems (Yellowhead Institute, 2019). They will be deeply disruptive to the current political and economic order. But that’s the point. A transition that doesn’t force us to dig up the foundations of our current society—which is built on extraction, accumulation, oppression and theft—won’t be a just transition. “Respecting Treaties and Indigenous self-determination goes hand in hand with a very rapid transition, all the way from fossil fuel extraction towards other forms of social order, community living, energy use” (Int#26).

Decolonization is inseparable from decarbonizing our economic systems... the rebuilding of Indigenous Nations becomes the answer to how we deal with climate change. It isn’t just another issue of political justice off to the side, away from the issue of climate change and pipelines. It’s one and the same. [Decolonization] is a bigger solution to these problems.

Mi’kmaw warrior
I want a ton of things — the destruction of capitalism, the destruction of patriarchy, the destruction of colonialism, return of lands to the Indigenous folks. Equality. What else? Not to have to work so much. A place where my kid can feel safe... I want all of that.

Quebec-based grassroots activist and filmmaker
These visions of more just and ecologically-viable futures go far beyond renewable energies, carbon markets and reconciliation schemes and apologies. They conjure up a future of flourishing networks of decentralized, self-determining communities, powered by renewable energy, and learning from the land. This is a future where a hard process of decolonizing relations will have rendered us all much more capable of living and making decisions together — decisions that benefit all beings. This future depends on a fundamental restructuring of our systems and a massive redistribution of wealth, power, and land. This means some people — those most benefiting from our current system — will have to relinquish some things. But it is a small cost for a livable planet on which everyone’s basic needs are met.

Woven through all these powerful visions above is respect, love and reconnection with land and with each other. People spoke to me about how capitalism and colonialism have separated us from one another and from the land and that to create a more just and viable world, we need to reconnect with each other and with land. A community organizer in northern BC said, “connection to Land helps foster better decision making” (Int#37). “If people are taught that they are all stewards of the land, then it becomes a natural way to respond to the crisis. If we’re taught from an early age that your job is to be kind and support people, we try to figure out ways to do good with whatever passions and gifts we have” (Int#11).
Q: How do you think large-scale systems change happens? What is your theory of change?

Activists and land defenders’ answers to this question, when brought together like pieces of a puzzle, provide the insight that systems transformation happens through a convergence of the context, how we understand and what we value, and how we take action. Weaving through all these dimensions of change is how we relate. Each of these four themes is broken down further into sub-themes which are conceptualized in the following figure.
How We Relate
How We Understand & What We Value
How We Take Action

SYSTEMS TRANSFORMATION

Indigenous Leadership
Changing the Story
Systemic Analysis
Personal Transformation

Amplifying the Voices of Those Most Impacted
Educa-

TRANSFORMATION

Engaging with Electoral System
Collective Action

Events
TIMING

Coordinating

Building Power Through

Confronting and Dismantling Power

Necessity

UNDOING

Transforming and Promoting Solutions

Relations of Solidarity

RACE

Change the Story
Context

It’s the relationship between what we do and the context in which we do it that shapes change. Context can determine which tactics work and when; whether your “action gets traction” (Int#19). There are key moments in time where change is more possible than others; political opportunities, tipping points, political sweet spots. “There’s always a little spark that starts it. [Many] revolutions in history started with a riot and a bread line... There were people organizing beforehand, but then all of a sudden there’s a flashpoint and then everybody comes out” (Int#5). Disruptive events such as crises can trigger change. “We need some kind of other story to take us over, and sometimes that happens through crisis and catastrophe” (Int#34 Anishinaabe/Ojibway). That’s why it’s said we need to “be like water” because you can’t come in with this rigid template of strategy. (Int#38 Mi’kmaw). “There is no one size fits all... you have to examine the context, the location, the political climate you’re in” (Int#20 Michif Cree). Given how much needs to change on such a pressing timeline, learning to understand the contexts in which we act and to strategically seize moments of opportunity can help speed up and leverage our work.

There are windows of opportunity that are presented, often in times of crises, often manufactured by massive systemic forces we have no control over. The people who are able to have a massive impact in those moments are the ones who are expecting them and are organized and able to take those opportunities.

Michif Cree land defender and organizer
How we understand and what we value

In this dimension of change lies culture, worldviews and values. Many activists’ and land defenders’ theories of change emphasize this realm of hearts and minds. To change systems, we need to “shift the conversation, shift the frame, the imagination” (Int#26). This happens through personal transformation, through public education, through learning the history of previous struggles, through changing popular narratives, through storytelling, through dialogue with people we don’t already agree with. It’s also about developing a shared analysis of the systems and structures we’re up against. Through systematic analysis, dots can be connected between the struggles that so often are understood and waged separately—environment, anti-racism, labour, Indigenous rights, women’s rights and others. Through this shared analysis, coalitions and strategies can be built to form a strong counter-hegemonic power. And indeed, it is through power, who has it and how it is wielded, that change does or doesn’t happen.

No one is better positioned to see what is wrong with the systems and what needs to be done than the people most negatively impacted by them.

Indigenous Nations, and the ones specifically fighting pipelines are the ones with the solutions, not just the band-aids.

Anishinaabe water protector and educator

As such, transformative change happens through the leadership and amplification of those on the frontlines. To put dignity and justice into our relationships in this country and to build powerful movements, it is crucial that settlers, especially those who continue to benefit most from the status quo, step back from positions and attitudes of leadership and instead listen to, take leadership from and actively support Indigenous Peoples and others marginalized by the unjust systems. When settlers can humble ourselves, unlearn superiority and accept that we do not have the answers, we become more “ready to hear other solutions, other answers. And maybe that’s where transformation starts to take place” (Int#38 Mi’kmaw). This is central to many people’s theories of change.
Radical systems transformation requires large numbers of people to come together to form collectives to organize, mobilize, provide leadership and take action together. It is brought about by building up people power and then directing “a firehose of people-power” at key targets (E#10). Where there is agreement about that need, there are notable conflicting ideas about where to best point that firehose. Some believe that people power is generated in order to influence decision makers, shape policy and electoral outcomes. Others have little faith that structural change can come through government processes and put their hope and efforts instead into delegitimizing and dismantling existing systems. “Slavery didn’t end by slave owners deciding to be nice and free their slaves. It happened through civil war” (Int#2). “Change happens when... there is a very real threat to the powerful people and to the power structure” (Int#30). From this view, all the tactics we use, from awareness-raising to mobilizing, should be part of a larger strategy that escalates in order “to force change... This requires a diversity of tactics that include a confrontational stance” (Int#11).

There are clear limits to what can be achieved through the official political process, but it also seems true that “no movement has the luxury of ignoring the electoral front” (E#9). Although that tension between working from inside or from the outside of the systems is pervasive and ongoing, there is much alignment on the contention that people power should be directed to develop, renew, live and promote the alternatives to extractive colonial capitalism. “Maybe [change] comes down to those sparks where people can say, ‘we don’t need the fracking’, ‘we don’t need the pipelines’. Because in actual fact, we’ve got lots of other stuff going on already. We don’t need to sign up for that” (Int#2). One key aspect of building alternatives to colonial capitalism is the resurgence of Indigenous systems and the enactment of Indigenous self-determination. The theory of change here is that when Indigenous Peoples enact their own governance systems, lifeways and culture, colonial structures begin to lose power. And collective power is generated through community, culture and through connection to land.
When you’re yelling ‘Fire!’
everybody can hear that, but they
don’t necessarily know what to
do. It’s not as potent as saying
‘here’s the pump, here’s the water.’

BC-based grassroots activist
“My theory of change is that relationship is the basis of everything, and then you go from there” (Int#16). Woven through all the other dimensions of change is the theme of relationality; that systems transformation is forged as possible when strong, just relations are built. Many people’s theories of change emphasized that change happens when different groups and communities coordinate together; that building power happens when movement groups work well together, sharing resources and information, and building strong networks of solidarity. It is clear that there are many factors and forces involved in large-scale social change, and none of us can engage in all of them, or do all of them well. And so it is important to think about how all the different kinds of approaches to change and movement efforts fit together. How do we plan them so they are mutually supporting? It’s not enough that we’re all doing different things, we need to think about how all these different projects, campaigns and initiatives relate to each other and “think about new ways to bring it all together and leverage it... How do we connect the dots... maximizing the impact of what everyone is doing?” (S#37).

Finding ways to bring the diverse efforts for change into one “heterogenic front” (Int#19) is promising. But coordination can lead to more and more layers of bureaucracy and meetings. Furthermore, there are “some ways that differences within and across movements are irreconcilable. Theories of change are different, end goals are different, organizing structures are different. “Trying to make everyone work together all the time ends up watering down messages until they are palatable for everybody” (Int#19). We need to find ways to work across differences, that neither ignore debate nor erase difference. And we need to work with the diversity that exists in ways that are synergistic and don’t undermine each other’s efforts. “How do we make sure that what we do is in solidarity with the others’ tactics?” (Int#32).

**People need to meet people who are different from them... and talk about things that are hard. And that’s the foundation of everything.**

*Ontario-based grassroots organizer*
Many people emphasized that the kinds of mutually supportive relations that create strong movements cannot happen when we allow relations of domination, the legacies of colonialism, racism, classism and sexism to shape the ways we organize. And so we must unlearn relations of domination.

It’s about painting the vision that this “other world” is not only possible, but we’re going to do it together... The solutions are in our relations with each other, as we learn to be better with each other.

Quebec-based grassroots activist
We need to use the full toolbox and we need to be constantly finding new tools. We can’t be ruling anything out.

Quebec-based grassroots organizer
Q: What’s working and what’s not working in the movements you are part of?

What’s working?

Some organizers feel that we are starting to see more commitment to an intersectional approach within environmental movements and more understanding is being built about how climate change, racism, colonialism and other issues are connected. “There’s a real willingness to do things differently... being intentional about who is speaking and when. And about who needs to step back to make that space” (TT#3). Divestment efforts are having success and pipeline fights have connected people “from coast to coast... mobilizing on so many fronts” (Int#27). “Direct action and land defence have been working” (Int#14).
What’s not working?

The crises are accelerating and there is a feeling that tactics and participation are not keeping up. We’re fractured and at times pushing against each other rather than pulling together in the same direction and we’re outnumbered. “We’re not losing because our analysis is wrong. We’re not losing because our politics are not moral enough. We are losing because we are overpowered” (Int#14). Another problem is “the climate movement is… still very Western-centric and very white” (Int#6). And settlers are not doing well enough in educating ourselves about colonialism and relinquishing positions of power. “There are people with years of doing climate change work and they desperately want to be allies with Indigenous Peoples and have them in their movement but... they don’t know the actual history... It’s a real lack of knowledge” (Int#20 Michif Cree). “There is a lot of pressure we are under... it gets really old and tiring to teach successive waves of activists” (Int#7 Kanien’kehá:ka).

In some of the movements people are like, ‘we’re losing, we’re failing.’ It’s a wake-up call. We need to reassess and that has been liberating. There’s this big external crisis, so people are willing to talk about what can change.

Ontario-based grassroots organizer
Q: What are the biggest barriers to the kind of change you want to see?

There are some significant barriers that are obstructing movements’ efforts to decolonize and decarbonize Canada. Some of the barriers are external, and others are more internal to movement spaces and dynamics. It is important to name and understand them. By understanding the barriers we face, we are better equipped to tackle and overcome them.

**External barriers**

There’s a general acknowledgement that our movements are still too small, that the mass public engagement needed to steer Canada to justice and sustainability is just not there. Most Canadians either don’t feel compelled to act because they are not yet feeling the impacts of the climate and inequality crises, or because fear can render them paralysed or apathetic, or perhaps because they don’t believe that change can actually be achieved through public will. Some Canadians may not be engaged in social change efforts because they recognize that to do so attacks their own interests and others are busy just trying to get by and feed their families. “People are working beyond their limits, working too hard at jobs doing work they don’t like because they have to” (Int#18).

The number of times each external barrier was mentioned

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<th>The Economic System / Capitalism</th>
<th>Lack of Public Will</th>
<th>Corporate Influence on the Political System</th>
<th>The Legal System &amp; Criminalization of Dissent</th>
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The economic system, dominated by capitalism, acts as a barrier to change by insisting on continuous growth over wellbeing and sustainability, creating perverse incentives, locking in fossil-fuel dependence through market logics and global trade deals, offering only false solutions, funding only the kind of social change efforts that don’t threaten the status quo, and promoting competition among people when we need to be working together.

Under capitalism, “corporations and other special-interest lobby groups wield an anti-democratic influence over our political system” (Int#11). This too makes the work of movements much harder. “The most significant barrier is that there is not the political will for the kinds of transformative changes that climate change and social justice require. Decades of neoliberal rule have empowered the wealthy and corporate class. This is the force we are up against” (S#10).

The legal system too hinders social change efforts, for example, by criminalizing direct action and land defence. Instead of law and governance that can defend the rights of communities, ecosystems and the people fighting to protect them, the current legal system is regularly employed to watch, arrest and criminalize activists. Indigenous land defenders face more risk of arrest and criminalization than do settler activists (Monaghan and Walby 2017), as can be seen in the fact that Indigenous Peoples and people of colour are disproportionately overrepresented in Canadian incarceration rates (Owusu-Bempah and Wortley 2014; see also Maynard 2017). “When it comes to Indigenous Peoples defending their own territory, there is a history of law enforcement escalating quickly. This is not a new thing, this has been happening for a long time. It is a racist system playing out... white supremacy that is keeping Indigenous Peoples in fear because either you’re going to get shot, the military is going to be called, or you’re going to be facing life in prison. It’s not the same story when it comes to a bunch of white people in kayaks blocking the freighters... For Indigenous Peoples it’s our lives that are at stake when it comes to defending the land and the water” (TT#2 Anishinaabe).
“What they actually want to do is to criminalize political dissent. They want to create such a condition of fear that even people... think twice before they engage in their action. It amounts to an attempt to criminalize Indigeneity itself” (TT#2). To put it bluntly, “the elite [are] fighting dirty to hang on to their power and ill-gotten wealth,” and companies are realizing ‘wow we’re really in trouble’. They’re putting all their chips into obstructing justice and influencing the political system”. (Int[#23]). Social movements in Canada are up against some formidable barriers indeed. And those are just the ones stemming from outside the movements.

The domination of society by capitalist relations of production (interlocked with sexism, racism, settler colonialism, etc.) is the fundamental barrier to changing society.

Ontario-based organizer
Separate Oil and State banner at rally at the closing of PowerShift 2019.
Photographer: Desiree Wallace
The Internal Barriers

There are dynamics, internal to our movements, that are acting as obstacles to what we’re trying to accomplish. “I see sparks, tons of small ones... but we’re very fractured... super atomized” (Int#2). There is no “cohesive strategy” (Int#14). “This stuff has plagued movements forever. The right wing knows the left is fragmented. They bank on it” (Int#10).

Activist cultures can be insular, inaccessible, non welcoming and this can prevent new folks from getting involved. “We are organizing in self-selecting groups... we have no way to access the people who wouldn’t choose to talk to us” (TT#3). “We are mired in language that the rest of the world does not understand and so we create fairly inhospitable spaces for new people to come in” (Int#30). People also suggested that many activist cultures are overly critical: “One of the biggest challenges that movements face is... criticizing each other... Critical thinking is an absolutely necessary tool, but in what dose? (Int#16). “All these things are frustrating. It can make a lot of good people become cynical, throw their hands up and say, ‘Fuck it’” (Int#23).

The number of times each of the internal barriers was mentioned

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33
Another barrier that came up is around different and sometimes conflicting organizational structures. Where NGOs tend to be organized in centralized, top-down hierarchical structures, many community and grassroots groups organize themselves non-hierarchically. Some people feel that top-down structures are inherently non-transformative, others reflect on the barrier created by the tensions between groups, over incompatible organizational structures.

Other people named a lack of financial resources and activist burnout as barriers. “Right now, in Canada, the most significant barrier is the lack of financial support for front-line communities and organizations opposing fossil fuel development” (S#26). There is a lack of financial resources within Indigenous communities, which makes refusing and standing up to extractive projects very challenging: “They either need the jobs or just don’t have the resources to fight” (Int#25 Dene). Communities that want to build alternatives to extractive industries on their territories often “don’t have the money upfront to invest” (Int#37) and while resisting through the courts has sometimes been an effective strategy for Indigenous Nations, it is a “very expensive strategy... and many communities just can’t afford that” (Int#31). Communities that take a direct-action approach to resistance often face extremely high legal fees in cases where arrests have been made and charges laid. We need to find “some reliable economics... With some real funding you could have armies of people doing incredible work” (Int#2). Meanwhile, activists and land defenders are compensating for this lack of funds with their labour but are tired and burning out. Indeed, one person told me “the biggest threat I see is people getting burnt out” (Int#19). There is “emotional fallout from doing this kind of work” (Int#14), “[we] take on too much and become exhausted” (Int#18).

It’s important to note that there is money in these movements, but it’s mostly held and used by NGOs. This brings us to one of the most commonly mentioned barriers: NGOization, the process of institutionalization, professionalization, depoliticization and demobilization of movements and struggles (Choudry & Kapoor 2013). “One of the big barriers is NGOs. There are many ways that NGOization is decimating the movement” (Int#32). There are many ways this is playing out. NGOs are often not accountable to the grassroots groups, communities and...
Canada does not need another NGO; we need something else. We need some other model of organizing that can help coordinate but in a bottom-up, horizontal way.

BC-based organizer

others in the movement, and some collaborate with government and industry, sometimes cutting deals behind closed doors. “The biggest downfall... is the tendency of those larger NGOs to actively discredit people doing direct action in order to save their own capitalist, liberal legitimacy in the view of the public and the funders” (Int#20 Michif Cree). “We want to change the roots of the problems and NGOs never go into the structural, the roots of the problems” (Int#18). Indeed, “the reason they get the most resources is because they are not as threatening as the people who are advocating for system change” (Int#20 Michif Cree). “It’s a very big challenge for social movements to not be co-opted and to maintain the radical demands” (Int#16). Another problem is that “big NGOs often talk to the people who agree with them in Indigenous communities and use those viewpoints to further their goals for the environment without supporting Indigenous sovereignty in itself. Co-option is a big problem” (Int#13). NGOs need to be held to account for hoarding resources, for using others instrumentally, for co-opting movements, for paying high salaries to CEOs while front-line communities struggle to survive the very crises around which the NGOs craft their careful messages. “How do we hold them to account effectively without being divisive? I don’t know. That’s a barrier” (Int#16).

Though it’s important to note that not all NGOs are guilty of all the things described above, and many are working to counter these tendencies, many are working in ways that perpetuate uneven relations, weakening the potential to build counter-hegemonic force in Canada. All these dynamics make for very challenging collaborations, hindering effective, powerful coalitions.
Problematic relational dynamics often result from the reproduction of power inequalities within our movements. When “women aren’t given the platform to speak or the white people are dominating the conversation... These power imbalances are always present (Int#23). “In many NGOs, men are still calling the shots and women do all the work” (TT#3). Many environmental groups seek to work with Indigenous communities because Indigenous rights are powerful tools, but the environmental groups often end up co-opting the message, tokenizing Indigenous Peoples, financially benefiting from the relationship and not being accountable or transparent. Allyship between Indigenous and settlers can only go so far if settlers want to hold on to the benefits and privileges that colonialism has bestowed on us, namely power and land. “Even white allies with the best intentions won’t give up power. The minute you talk about land suddenly the limits of allyship presents itself ” (Int#38 Mi’kmaw).

These real conflicting interests are constantly present in movement spaces and make for shallow or strained collaborations at best. In many collaborations within the movements, settlers still hold the reins of power and this continues.
According to some folks I talked with, underlying many of the other barriers is bias, self-interest and privilege, all significant obstacles to achieving justice. The resistance to giving up the privileges and personal benefits of extractive colonialism makes it very hard to bring the masses to the work of radically transforming Canada and it also makes it hard for activists in the movements, with all the different positions they hold, to align around truly radical and just goals.

to damage relationships. As one land defender put it: “This has been the problem for five hundred years. We’ve been forced under their agenda” (Int#38 Mi’kmaw). “Get out of our way. We appreciate the support, but don’t try to tell us what to do. Don’t try to speak for us. We can speak for ourselves” (Int#9 Kanien’kehá:ka). There is a huge need for accountability and trust to be built if we are to begin to heal these relationships.

Takaya Blaney speaking at the We > Tarsands action. Photographer: Desiree Wallace
We need movements that, not just theoretically, but in practice embrace different people.

Quebec-based grassroots activist
5. OVERCOMING THE BARRIERS AND BUILDING MORE POWERFUL MOVEMENTS

Q: What do you think could be done to overcome the barriers and to strengthen, leverage, speed up the current efforts for transformative change in Canada?
To build the necessary counter-force we need to bring many more people to the movements: “We need to adopt a movement-building framework within our organizing” (Int#5), widen the scope and learn what it is “to organize millions of people” (Int#28). This means making the “space and time to actually connect with others” (Int#11), creating spaces that make it easy for people to get involved and providing concrete tasks that make sense given their skills, interests and availability (Int#29). We need to help people “see how they can make a difference, remind people that they have agency to shape their world and to be a part of history” (S#24). Can we organize through work places, communities and other existing social groups such that we can tap into the transformative potential of people where they are, as opposed to waiting for self-selecting people to come to us? We talked about “doing direct action trainings in neighbourhoods with people outside of activist circles, making everybody activists” (Int#10). We need to widen conceptions of activist and activism (Int#10), because “we’re still a niche bunch of weirdos. We need middle-aged church ladies blockading shit. Then we’ll be unstoppable” (Int#4). To do this, we need to divorce the radical message from the radical activist stereotype (Int#10). “We need to speak in more accessible terms and clearly show how these important issues intersect” (Int#16). We should seek out and create mobilizing structures that can “nourish grassroots organizing at every level” (Int#16). To make movement spaces warm, supportive and just, we need to be “really thinking about how to embody just, equitable and supportive values as we organize” (Int#28).

Quebec-based grassroots organizer

We need to map out the relationships. Who knows who? And who is doing what? How do we actualize those relationships and release the power that is inherent in those relationships such that we effectively make shit happen?
Many people emphasized that it’s not just about bringing new people to the movements; key to building more powerful movements is building connections across different social movements, “expanding our circle of allies... Strengthening our allyship among much broader political differences will allow this movement to expand exponentially” (Int#23).

It’s not enough to offer visions and narratives of a better world; we need to be “changing on the ground practicalities” (Int#2). “People need livelihoods... To transform this country, the livelihood issue has to get addressed” (Int#2). When the extractive industries come to town, what if our movements showed up with resources to help communities build ecologically and economically viable, culturally appropriate, scalable livelihoods? What if these alternatives were not only climate-friendly, but also addressed colonialism, poverty, inequality and other issues? “An environmental justice movement that offered alternative, meaningful livelihoods, that would be powerful” (S#37).

Overcoming internal barriers

There were many great ideas offered for addressing and overcoming the internal barriers, including “more training, more education. We need to get a sense of history of the movements, how to fight, what happened, what can go wrong, what can go right” (Int#19). There was a shared sense that we need to develop better skills at strategic planning: “We don’t have to out-muscle our opponent, we have to out-think them... If there is a secret weapon to defeat colonization, capitalism, industrialization, all that, it’s the weapon of strategy... without it we are taking shots in the dark. (Int#38 Mi’kmaw). Part of being “smarter and more strategic” (Int#14) “is studying the industries we oppose, [getting] better at identifying their weak points” (Int#8). It also requires asking ourselves: “Who are the allies we should be working with? What is our capacity? What are our strengths? What are our weaknesses? What are the targets? What kind of tactics and strategies do we want to engage in and why?” (Int#14).

Many ideas were offered for countering NGOization. “One of the problems with NGOs is that it’s not
Youth march through Ottawa at the closing of Powershift 2019.

Photographer: Desiree Wallace
clear what their role is in the broader movements. They need to know their place and let that determine what they do. If an NGO is there to give support for movement building than it should know what that looks like and organize from that place” (Int#32). If NGOs are serious about wanting to help strengthen the movements, they can only do that by actively supporting grassroots groups and communities: “NGOs need to constantly ask themselves: 1) How does what we’re doing impact the most vulnerable people? 2) How is this helping name the roots of the crisis? 3) How is this working towards the larger vision of changing structures and systems? It’s harder to use fucked up tactics if you ask yourselves those questions” (Int#32).

Another activist suggested that if every group and organization in the movements agreed to adopt the Jemez Principles for Democratic Organizing, this would help align our efforts into a common force. The principles include: be inclusive, emphasize bottom-up organizing, let people speak for themselves, work together in solidarity and mutuality, build just relationships among ourselves and commit to self-transformation (Solis and Union, 1997).

When it comes down to it, what needs to happen, in movements, just as in society as a whole, is the redistribution of power and wealth. “When you look at the salaries that executives in NGOs take in, it’s gargantuan... imagine putting that money towards grassroots direct actions, for people who are actually willing to fight. We could transform Canada if those resources were available to them instead of these high-paid executives” (Int#16).

Other forms of wealth redistribution were also suggested as ways to get funding to the frontlines and the more radical work. For example an Adopt An Activist program where concerned wealthy folks who don’t have time for activism could fund decent wages for frontline activists. Another idea offered was reconciliation reparation payments-Indigenous communities charging a tax to settlers living on stolen land. This tax would then be distributed to support land defenders and water protectors (Int#25 Dene).

Others focused more on ways to make our existing resources and efforts more effective through better collaboration and coordination—countering the forces of fragmentation and addressing and healing the relational tensions.
To begin with we need to practise talking openly about the internal tensions and power asymmetries that exist in our movements. One activist told me that “the tensions are always there... When I’ve experienced them to be barriers, it’s been because they are unnamed... We need to be making issues explicit” (Int#15). “Acknowledge it all, that helps” (Int#28).

Another important starting point should be a commitment to not publicly denounce each other: “Can we stop stepping on each other” (Int#40) and “not talk shit about each other?” (Int#20). Indeed, some groups have made explicit mutual non-aggression pacts between themselves. But we can aim for more than just non-aggression: “How do we [coordinate efforts] so that they become mutually supportive?” (Int#39). The call for greater coordination came up again and again. But there are costs associated with coordination: it takes time and it can add layers of bureaucracy. As one person told me, “as someone who sits for fifteen hours of meetings every week, I see the limits of [coordination]” (Int#39). “Coalitions can be awesome, and they can drive you nuts” (Int#33).

Coordination needs to be done in ways that do not replicate power-over relations, nor managerial, bureaucratic processes that hinder our autonomy and ability to respond quickly. What do bottom-up forms of communication, of connectivity, of synergizing efforts look like? Bottom-up coordination means “building trust between groups” (Int#28). We need to be looking outwards enough to see and respond when there is support needed elsewhere. “Solidarity is the antidote to factionalism” (Int#14). “I look at it as an ecosystem... different groups with different skills” (Int#40). “Like an octopus with many arms moving in different directions and doing different things... each arm knows what the other is doing” (Int#39). “Know where your place is and do your part well. Be part of a larger movement context” (Int#32). Can we get to the place where the different groups in the movement can identify as a necessary but insufficient part of a system? “We all need to be really humble about what our role is. People need to see value in each other” (Int#15). None of us can win without others. “Diversity is what makes us strong—in nature and in the movement” (S#27). The question becomes—“what is the kind of relationality that's going to make us do this better?” (Int#16).
Relationality as key to building a stronger whole evokes a call for unity and inclusion, which risks ignoring or glossing over ongoing power imbalances that exist in the movements. To have strong relationships, we need to have just relationships. “We need to be working together but we need to be working together in ways that reverse the existing power dynamics in our organizing” (Int#13).

Settlers seeking to develop just relationships with Indigenous Peoples must understand that solidarity in this context means “fighting against the colonization of Indigenous lands and Peoples” (Walia, 2012: 241). This unsettling process for settlers needs to include seeing and undoing the ways that ideas based in domination “seep into our practices, relationships, and aspirations” (Fortier, 2017: 76). “Settler society must… choose to change their ways, to decolonize their relationships to the land and Indigenous Nations and join in building a sustainable future based upon mutual recognition, justice, and respect” (Simpson, 2008: 14).

We need to build movement cultures that explicitly work to undo power imbalances and that have “systems of checks and balances that ensure that it is not going to be to the disadvantage of Indigenous Peoples when they interact with settlers” (Int#34). This kind of movement culture requires settlers learning to step back, play an active but supportive role and to learn to really listen. Settlers need to be “walking with care and real caution... and humility. Understand settler colonialism and use your power to privilege Indigenous Nations” (Int#20 Michif Cree).

If we can’t work together, we’re fucked.

Ontario-based grassroots organizer

Everything is a stake and we have no time to waste in movements weakened by divisions among us. That means rallying together around the needs, voices, visions and end goals of the people most impacted by the unjust and unsustainable systems we are trying to change. An anti-racist, decolonial climate movement is the only kind of climate movement that stands any chance of winning.
Rally at Vancouver Climate Strike in 2019.
Photographer: Desiree Wallace
6. APPENDICES
interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Research ethics process was strictly adhered to, and anonymity and confidentiality was ensured for all interviewees.

The survey was completed by 36 people of which 13 are women, 16 are men, and the rest didn’t specify. It was filled out by 3 people of colour, 3 Indigenous people and 19 white settlers, and the rest didn’t specify. To ensure that Indigenous voices did not get buried in the majority of white settlers I also spoke with, I raise up and report on disproportionately the views and theories of the BIPOC people I spoke with.
My goal of this review was not to summarize the insights from a body of literature, but rather to gather useful insight from many bodies of literature about one key question: how large-scale systems transformations can occur and how social movements can most effectively contribute to such transformations. I identified 6 bodies of literature to work with: Social Movement Studies, Historical Materialism, Intersectional Feminism, Socio-ecological Systems Transformation, and Indigenous Resistance and Resurgence. Insights from across these fields have been distilled into the following 8 Key Lessons.

**Key Lesson #1:**
To change the system, we need to understand the system and we need to think in systems.

*Activism happens in the context of complex systems*<br>Activism happens in the context of complex systems that are continuously changing, shaping and being shaped by many diverse factors and forces (Green, 2016). This complexity means that linear models of change like ‘If A, then B’ are inadequate. We need to deal with uncertainty, unpredictability, unintended consequences, emergent properties (Berkes et al., 2008).
Systems dynamics and behavior are determined by relationships between components
Changes in one part of a system feed back to encourage or hinder changes in other parts of the system. This means we need to pay attention to the relationships and ask: how can changing the relations in a system transform the overall behavior of the system (Meadows, 1997).

There are many places to intervene in a system
Some are more impactful than others. Some places (or leverage points), like people’s worldviews or the overall goal of a system for example, are difficult to change, but have huge impact. Others, like lifestyle choices and changes in policy are easier to implement, but have less impact. When devising strategies, think about leverage points (Meadows, 1997).

Pay attention to positive deviance
For any given problem, there will be some community somewhere that has come up with a solution that is working. Seek these out and try to understand what conditions, ideas, and strategies supporting this success (Green, 2016).

Beware of unintended consequences
All systems are part of wider systems and change reverberates through time and space and social systems. There are many spheres—economic, political, ecological etc.- of a system that we may be trying to change. Be careful that positive change in one time, place, system, or sphere doesn’t negatively impact in others (Temper et al., 2018).

Complex systems require that activists be ‘reflectivists’
Take time to understand the dynamics of the system you are trying to change. Create ongoing feedback mechanisms, so that you get regular information as to what is working and what is not working (Green, 2016). Avoid myopic thinking, try to see the big picture, which is often best accessed by thinking collectively with others.
Key Lesson #2:
There are many kinds of change. It is helpful to know exactly what kind of change you are working to bring about.

Scholars write about various kinds of social and ecological change, often distinguishing them in terms of how deep and far reaching change is.

**Transitions, adaptations, and transformations**
Adaptation refers to making adjustments in order to maintain the current system. Transformation, in contrast, is change that alters the overall composition and behavior of the system (Olsson et al., 2014). Where transformative change refers to more politically unruly, radical, large-scale, and long-term changes and involving significant changes in social relations, transitions tend to be more orderly, politically top-down and technocratic (Temper et al. 2018; Stirling, 2015).

**Affirmative vs transformative change**
Another distinction is affirmative vs. transformative change (Fraser, 1995). Affirmative approaches seek, for example, to reduce income inequality by transferring material resources to marginalized groups, “leaving intact the conditions, such as the capitalist mode of production, that were responsible for generating income inequality in the first place” (Temper et al., 2018, p.5). Transformative approaches, on the other hand, target the root causes of inequality, for example through “reorganizing the division of labour, subjecting investment to democratic decision-making, or transforming other basic economic structures” (Fraser 1995, p.73).

**Radical vs Reformist change**
Initiatives that address only the symptoms of a problem can be considered reformist, distinguishing them from change that shifts “the basic structural reasons for unsustainability, inequity and injustice, such as capitalism, patriarchy, state centrism, or other inequities in power” (Temper et al., 2018, p.6).

**Non-Reform Reform**
A promising conceptual tool for thinking past the radical-reform binary is what is referred to as non-reform reforms (see Walia, 2013; Bond, 2008). The idea here is that one
can design reformist strategies that create conditions for, and open up the possibility for more radical change to happen further down the road. As one interviewee told me “the challenge is creating a radical vision of change that is far reaching but also identifying steps along the way are achievable and head us in the right direction without being merely incremental” (S#26).

There are other axes by which we can distinguish different kinds of change: international to non-intentional, top-down and bottom-up, individual to systemic, formal and informal change. It is important to know and articulate what kind of change you are ultimately aiming to make because this will have important implications for which strategies you should choose, which agents are best positioned to act and who you should be allying with.

**Key Lesson #3:**
There are multiple stages of change processes and different stages call for different strategies and agents

**Systems are always changing**
Transforming them is easier at some moments than at others. Ecosystems move through cycles of growth, collapse, reorganization, renewal, and re-establishment, and social systems can follow similar patterns (Berkes et al., 2008). During times of collapse and reorganization, intentional transformation of a system becomes easier. Try to assess where in its own change cycle a system (that you’re trying to transform) is at and strategize accordingly.

**Crisis can trigger transformation**
Economic crises and other system disruptions can render systems more amenable to intentional change. Movements looking to transform economies away from capitalism are well advised to understand the various contradictions inherent in capitalism that create instability and crises and then develop strategies that can take advantage of the crises as they emerge (Harvey, 2014). Crisis and shocks provide windows of opportunities, when to decision-makers, “the status quo suddenly appears to be less worth defending”
(Green, 2016, p.17) and when activists’ “long term work... can suddenly come to fruition” (Green, 2016, p.18).

**Conflict and disturbance are often a first step of transformation**

Though some people envision societal change without it, conflict “by unearthing and making injustices visible, become catalysts for social change” (Temper et al., 2018, p.7; see also Dukes 1996; Lederach, 1996).

**Movements can create crises in the systems**

Social movements respond to but can also create crisis in the system whereby the state becomes more ‘receptive or vulnerable’ to movements’ collective action (McAdam et al., 1996). Change becomes more possible when powers that be are weak or experiencing crises of legitimation, when events disrupt people’s taken for granted understanding of social reality (Buechler, 2016).

**There are multiple stages of transformations**

There are multiple stages of transformations which include: disruption of the status old, preparing for and navigating the change, followed by building the resilience and institutionalizing of the new (Olsson et al., 2014). Different phases require different approaches to activism (Olsson et al., 2014; Moore et al., 2014). For example, disruption phases call for conflictive tactics by activists pushing from outside the incumbent governance structures, whereas during the institutionalizing period, it’s helpful to have activists doing collaborative work from within governance systems to translate the movement demands into policy and programs.

**Timing really matters**

Timing really matters in determining what interventions will work and when. Pay attention to timing, opportunities, and stages of change and choose your moments, lead actors and strategies accordingly.
Key Lesson #4:
Pay attention to the material as well as the less tangible world of ideas, identity, stories, and emotions when strategizing for change.

How we mobilize, pool, and allocate resources is crucial
To build transformative power, movements bring under collective control resources of various kinds: money, materials, and most importantly people’s labour and time. Collective action is costly and requires decisions on how to allocate resources. Alliances and mutual aid help lower costs of collective action (Carroll & Sarker, 2016).

Organizing is necessary but beware of bureaucracy
Using collective resources efficiently means organization. But movements can become organized in ways that lead to hierarchical bureaucracies that can render them ineffective in bringing about change (Buechler, 2011; see also Weber, 1978). This tendency can be countered through a combination of bottom up, local autonomy, dense interactions, democratic culture, and distributed leadership (Lipset et al., 1956; Buechler, 2011).

Change can happen through symbolic, not just material means
Movements raise up and promote alternative ways of thinking and living; they expose the underlying irrationality of unjust systems and “reveal the contradictions in prevailing systemic logic” (Buechler, 2011, p.170). Collective memories or new visions for a better world are held in stories and “Storytelling... becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism” (Simpson, 2011, p.33).

It matters how movements frame problems and solutions
Related to storytelling, effective movements develop collective-action frames to communicate compelling understandings of injustices, the underlying causes and articulate inspiring visions of alternative futures. Change can happen when these collective action frames resonate strongly with broad publics. Outreach strategies need to “maintain a democratic dialogue, so that frames, as they develop, enable an alignment between the movement and its social base” (Carroll & Sarker, 2016, p.15; see also Snow & Benford, 1992; Tarrow, 2011).
Through actions, rituals, and engaging people’s emotions, social movement mobilizing helps change cultures, values, and worldviews

Emotional energy built during collective actions serve as important fuel for these social mobilization processes (Buechler, 2011). Emotions fuel change to people’s beliefs and worldviews which play key roles in who participates in social change and why; they guide human actions, limiting the scope of possible actions (see Weber, 1905; Kznaric, 2007).

Identity & coalition formation is important

Social movements forge and promote new social identities and new solidarieties (Magnusson & Walker, 1988). Through this, unity across struggles can be built, helping form coalitions that make possible “a coherent, counter-hegemonic alternative to the dominant order” (Epstein, 1990, p.51).

Key Lesson #5:
There are Many Approaches to Making Change. Different approaches can work together to build transformative power

The No and the Yes

Many scholars emphasize the need for both resistance with the development of alternatives (Temper et al., 2018; Loorbach, 2014; Macy & Johnstone, 2012; Simpson, 2017; Alfred, 2008; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Miller, 2012; Allard & Davidson, 2008; Dixon, 2014). Temper et al. emphasize the concept of the “hatchet and seed” approach which involves a dual task of deconstructing the old systems, relations and ideas and creating the new (2018, p.14).

Defensive and offensive

Habermas saw social movements as playing a dual role of social change, of both defense and offence. Social movements can both defend the lifeworld from further encroachment as well as work to actively “conquer new territory for equality [and] justice” (Carroll & Sarker, 2016, p.38). Miller (2012) emphasizes that offense—actively working to dismantle oppressive systems—is a requirement for movements to be transformative.
**Indigenous resistance and resurgence**

Where non-Indigenous settlers need to innovate and create new systems and lifeways if they are to live in just and sustainable ways, Indigenous people have existing knowledge, practices, and systems that are being reinvigorated. Decolonial change calls for “actions that engage in a generative refusal of any aspect of state control, so they don’t just refuse, they also embody an Indigenous alternative” (Simpson, 2017, p.35). Resurgence calls for a “turning inward to focus on resurgence of an authentic Indigenous existence and recapturing the physical, political, and psychic spaces of freedom” for Indigenous people… resurgence is about “indigeneity coming back to life again” (Alfred, 2008, p.11).

**Prefiguration is necessary but insufficient**

Contemporary radical activism is not just about this exit from the dominant order. Dixon writes “most of us are much more ambitious: we value prefigurative politics and we want a transformed world—the only real exit from the existing one” (Dixon, 2014, p.283). In order to bring about such transformative change, movements need to develop deeper analysis about “what capitalism is and how we should go about fighting it” (Dixon, 2014, p.69). These movements should also embrace intentional, durable organization, and move beyond “purist principles and direct-action tactics” and work towards more effective strategy aimed at actual transformation (Dixon, 2014, p.111-12).

Social movements can live now (or prefigure), the values, relations, and structure of the worlds they are working to create—to render the system redundant by withdrawing energy from its structures (Day, 2005, p.124). In this way, movements can be “carriers of democratization” creating spaces “where we can live in the kinds of worlds we want to live in, here and now” (Carroll & Sarker, 2016, p.25; also see Day, 2007). “How you fight will determine who you will become when the battle is over” (Alfred, 2005, p.23). “Again and again it matters... how change is achieved” (Simpson, 2017, p.226).
Key Lesson #6:
It’s Important to Think about Why Change Doesn’t Happen

There are many barriers to change
Understanding them can help us overcome the barriers more effectively. Greene writes “[s]ystems, whether in thought, politics, or economy, can be remarkably resistant to change” (2016, p.41). To understand this inertia, he offers that a combination of institutions (management systems and corporate culture), ideas (conceptions and prejudices of decision makers) and interests (what do people stand to gain or lose materially or socially from the change sought?) often underlie this resistance to change (Green, 2016, p.41-42).

Strategies that target these can be powerful
MacKay argues that “ultimately, there are three factors that will determine the success or failure of a counter-hegemonic power to transform civilization”: context (objective facts about the crises), consciousness (awareness and mass concern about the crises), and movement (an organized, broad based radical movement for democratic socialism and ecological sustainability) (MacKay, 2017, p.216).

Both of these frameworks can help movements understand why the change we seek is not coming about and where to intervene in order to alter this.
Key Lesson #7:
Power is central to understanding and bringing about change.

“Power is everywhere, and it is multifaceted” (Green, 2016, p.31). It plays a “central role in both stasis and change” (Green, 2016, p.36). It is precisely by “impacting on hegemonic power structures that change can happen” (Temper et al., 2018, p.8). Power is a key dynamic shaping who can bring about change and who can’t and what sort of agency and influence different actors have access to.

Power functions and is wielded in a variety of ways, from direct to more indirect ways
Habermas (1987) argued that power not only shapes processes and outcomes in the public sphere but also in the private sphere of everyday life. Gramsci’s concept of hegemonic power refers to the domination of society by the ruling class through the manipulation of culture—through shaping the common understandings, values, and beliefs. These softer forms of power serve to render the status quo as seeming “natural and inevitable instead of as social constructs meant to benefit the ruling class” (Carroll & Sarker, 2016, p.41).

Scholars have provided various frameworks for understanding different forms of power
Collins and Bilge outline four distinctive yet interconnected dimensions or domains of the organization of power: 1) Interpersonal (how people relate to each other, who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged in social interactions); 2) Disciplinary (which rules apply to whom and how those rules are implemented); 3) Cultural (ideas shape how we understand what is fair and what is not and provide justifications for inequality); and 4) Structural — how intersecting power relations of class, gender, race and nations shape institutions and organizations (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.9). Another perspective is Lukes’ (1974) 3 dimensions of power of visible, hidden and invisible power. Visible power is the world of politics and authority, policed by laws, violence and money while Hidden power is what goes on behind the scenes: the lobbyists, the corporate cheque books, the old-boys networks. Hidden power also includes “the shared view of what those in power consider sensible or reasonable
We need to confront power and build counter-hegemony

“If we want a truly sustainable and equitable human civilization, then we have no choice but to directly confront the nexus of control that drives our current system…” (MacKay, 2017, p.27). Organized forces will resist transformative change and so “movements from below must... address and ultimately defeat the sedimented power of movements from above” (Carroll & Sarker, 2016, p.48). Building on Gramsci’s work, MacKay writes that “[a]s power in hegemonic states is based on perceived legitimacy, then a counter-hegemonic movement of movements must work to delegitimize the rule of elites, while simultaneously building the legitimacy and transformative capacity of the movement” (Mackay, 2017, p.205).

Building counter-hegemony requires that we understand the way power functions through classism, racism and sexism (and other forms of domination)

Given the ways that capitalism, colonialism, racism, sexism, classism and heteropatriarchy intersect in creating unjust systems, developing a strong counter-force to these systems of domination requires understanding these intersections and developing alliances and...
strategies accordingly (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Activists need to develop strategies that begin with the question “how can... forces for emancipation be strengthened through widening and deepening relations of solidarity across differences?” (Carroll & Sarker, 2016, p.47).

**Building counter-hegemonic force requires overcoming the divisions**

Building counter-hegemonic force requires overcoming the divisions and fragmentations of the left, created by divide-and-rule politics of the elite, and forging strong alliance politics of the left (Harvey, 2014). Despite this need for alliance, currently in Canada “opposition remains fragmented and episodic... there is not much likelihood of an alternative, counter hegemony powerful enough to bring about social transformation” (Carroll & Sarker, 2016). To overcome this, we need to understand how struggles are connected and find ways to devise strategies and solutions that address all forms of oppression, leaving no one behind.

**We need to address power dynamics and imbalances within our movements**

Movements themselves are social orders that can involve power inequalities that have implications for movement effectiveness (Carroll & Sarker, 2016). To form coalitions, we need strong relationships based on equality and mutual aid. Yet oppressive relations abound in and across social movements. These dynamics block, harm and sever inter- and intra- movement relationships. A focus on relationality can help create movements striving for intersectional coalitions which forge practices less likely to replicate oppressive relations in our movements. Andrea Smith envisions alliances built on a deep understanding in the ways we are complicit in the victimization of others. “We would check our aspirations against the aspirations of other communities to ensure that our model of liberation does not become a model of oppression for others” and that this requires “vigilance in reflecting about how we internalize and replicate oppressive logics in our organizing practices” (Smith, 2016, n.p).
Key Lesson #8: Relationships are at the heart of social change

One key theme that arose in many of the bodies of literature I engaged with as well as in the conversations I had with activists and land defenders is that building stronger, more just relationships is both the means and ends of radical systems transformation.

In order to build stronger, more just relations between Indigenous- and settler-led movements, it’s important to understand the differences and respect the boundaries between them

“Indigenous Peoples... are currently engaged in the longest running resistance movement in Canadian history” (Simpson, 2008, p.13).
Sovereignty and self-determination have long been the primary foundation of Indigenous politics and “Indigenous political movements contest the very foundation of the Canadian state” whereas many settler movements “take the state for granted” (Ladner, 2008, p.16). Indigenous approaches to change, grounded in particular nations and territories, while sharing these commonalities, are diverse. Indigenous approaches to change are grounded in and need to be understood through Indigenous theories and frameworks rather than through Western categories and frameworks (Ladner, 2008).

Building strong relations across differences requires relational ontologies

Intersectional analysis and other relational approaches help us see what we have in common with others, helping us overcome divisions across progressive movements, to connect our struggles. Where dualistic worldviews have ideologically undergirded systems of domination, non-dualistic worldviews are required to understand the problems and strategize change (see Plumwood, 2002; Moore, 2015). Many scholars promote relational ontologies as crucial to this. “Relationality shifts from analysing what distinguishes entities from each other... to examining their interconnections. This shift in perspective opens up intellectual and political possibilities” (Collins & Bilge, 2016, p.28).
**Relationship with land is central**

Coulthard writes that “Indigenous struggles… are best understood as struggles oriented around the question of land—struggles not only for land but also deeply informed by what the land as a mode of reciprocal relationship” [which can] “teach us about living our lives in relation to one another and our surroundings in a respectful, non-dominating and non exploitative way” (Coulthard, 2014, p.60). Relationship with land provides crucial guidance about the goals and strategies for change.

**Decolonization is a process of (re)building reciprocal relationships with land and each other**

“Survival demands that we act on the love we have for… land and our people. This is the counter-imperative to empire. Our power is a courageous love” (Alfred, 2005, p.36). Indigenous “cultures have much to teach the Western world about the establishment of relationships between peoples and the natural world that are profoundly non-imperialist” (Coulthard, in Simpson, 2008, p.201). Building reciprocal relations between Indigenous peoples and settlers requires settlers learning to listen.
Concluding the Literature Review

Several themes have emerged from this literature review and the key lessons that emerged from it, largely around the need to think and act more holistically, in ways that account for and include much more than our current modes of activism and understandings of change facilitate. We need to link across struggles (class, race, sex) and also across approaches to change (alternatives, resistance) and across our understandings of change processes (material, narrative, and symbolic). We need to think more strategically about how to engage in ways that take into account spatial scales, stages of change and windows of opportunities.

We need to transform the power inequalities within and between our movements so that we can build a movement of movement that can create the kind of counter-hegemony necessary to push back on those with power over us—those with vested interest in the status quo. The kind of transformation that is needed requires new ways of knowing and being, ones that undo dualistic, divisive ontologies and instead forge deep understandings of relationality and interdependence; worldviews and approaches to change that center relationships.
Rally at Vancouver Climate Strike in 2019. Photographer: Desiree Wallace
### Appendix 3

**Summary table of all research participants quoted in this report**

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