

Mercury Poisoning in Grassy Narrows: Environmental Injustice, Colonialism, and Capitalist Expansion in Canada

NATALIA ILYNIAK*

University of Manitoba

Abstract: Using an environmental injustice framework, this paper explores how the case of mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows, an Anishinaabe community in Northwestern Ontario, exists as part of broader colonial processes in Canada. Drawing upon primary and secondary sources, as well as personal experiences, I discuss how corporations and the Ontario and federal governments undermine the community's culture, identities, and basic needs for subsistence. Unpacking the Grassy Narrows case study using four factors of environmental injustice— the distributional patterns of environmental hazards, the historical processes which determine hazard distributions, patterns of non-recognition, and unequal access to decision making – illuminates how Indigenous oppression secures their land for settlement and capitalist expansion. Capitalism and industrialization are inherently anti-ecological processes that demand an infinite supply of natural resources to satisfy capitalism's need for endless growth. Members of Grassy Narrows continue to actively struggle against these destructive colonial practices in their fight for environmental justice- a fight I am humbly an ally to.

Key Words: word ; key

Résumé: À l'aide d'un cadre d'analyse d'injustice environnementale, cet article explore comment le cas d'empoisonnement au mercure à Grassy Narrows, une communauté Anishinaabe du Nord-Ouest de l'Ontario, fait partie de processus coloniaux généralisés au Canada. À partir de sources primaires et secondaires et de mon expérience personnelle, j'examine comment les corporations et les gouvernements fédéral et ontarien nuisent à la culture, à l'identité et aux besoins de subsistance de base de la communauté. Faire l'étude du cas de Grassy Narrows en utilisant les quatre facteurs d'injustice environnementale – la configuration de la distribution des risques environnementaux, les processus historiques qui déterminent la distribution de ces risques, les formes de non-reconnaissance, et l'accès inégalitaire aux processus décisionnels – éclaire comment l'oppression des autochtones permet l'appropriation de leurs terres à des fins de colonisation et d'expansion capitaliste. Le capitalisme et l'industrialisation sont des processus fondamentalement anti-écologiques qui requièrent un apport incessant de ressources naturelles afin de satisfaire le besoin de croissance illimité du capitalisme. Aujourd'hui les membres de Grassy Narrows continuent de lutter activement contre ces pratiques coloniales destructrices par leur engagement envers la justice environnementale – un combat auquel je m'allie humblement.

Mots-clés: clés ; mots

* I thank the community members of Grassy Narrows First Nation; I am very grateful for their openness, generosity, and conversation. I'd like to acknowledge Professor Mark Hudson who advised my research project in his Environmental Sociology Seminar. Thank you to the University of Manitoba who funded my work, and especially thank you to McGill University for hosting my research.

Introduction: Mercury Poisoning in Grassy Narrows First Nation

Mercury poisoning in Asupeeschosewagong First Nation (Grassy Narrows), an Anishinaabe community in Northwestern Ontario, is an important example of environmental injustice. Grassy Narrows lies about 120 miles east of Winnipeg, with an approximate population of 1490 people (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in Canada 2012). Running through their traditional territory of the Whiskey Jack Forest is the English-Wabigoon river system. This land supplies the community's basic needs for subsistence and is essential to their culture, identity, and "life as a nation – as Anishinaabe" (da Silva 2008). The community has resisted repeated attempts to sever their connection to the land by corporations – previously Reed Paper Limited, Dryden Chemicals, Abitibi, and currently Weyerhaeuser logging company – as well as by the provincial and federal governments (p.o. 28 Sept 2012). The colonial and capitalist attacks included child apprehension, forced relocation, and economic deprivation (ibid).

The discovery of mercury poisoning in 1970 was a devastating blow to Grassy Narrows. Fish, their main source of food, contained extremely high levels of mercury from toxic dumping by the Dryden Chemicals pulp and paper mill upstream (Kraus 2013). The mill leaked about 9000 kilograms of mercury into the English-Wabigoon river system between 1962 and 1970 (ibid). In 1970, the high levels of contamination forced the community to stop commercial and tourist fishing (Kerr 2010) – one of the last avenues for traditional economic living (Kraus 2013). The Ontario government insisted that the poisonous fish were safe to eat, while the community increasingly showed signs of mercury poisoning (Vecsey 1987).

Mercury is highly poisonous to humans, with frightening health implications (Vecsey 1987). In the water, the metal undergoes a process of biomethylation, involving a reaction with a variety of organic bodies (such as fungi, bacteria and fish), making the metal an organic and lethal substance (ibid). This happens at a rate of about 1 percent every year (Hightower 2009). Bacteria are eaten by crustaceans that are eaten by fish, concentrating the mercury further up the food chain because it is not broken down in digestion (ibid). When humans ingest mercury, "[they] absorb 95-100% of it into the body, excreting it at a very slow rate" (Vecsey 1987: 294). Symptoms include: speech, taste, and smell impairment, difficulty swallowing, choking, blurry vision, loss of strength (CBC 2012, January 30), "tunnel vision, loss of co-ordination, numbness, tremors, loss of balance" (CBC 2009, July 29), and accelerated body deterioration, leading to impaired motor functioning (da Silva in Ball 2012). Toxins travel to large organs and in pregnant women the mercury settles in the fetus, leading to birth defects (Vecsey 1987). There are also "hidden effects, including things like miscarriage and lowered resistance to alcohol and infections" (ibid: 295). These are not just issues of the past.

Mercury poisoning continues to negatively affect the community (da Silva 2008). There is ongoing mercury poisoning in the water from Weyerhaeuser logging company's clear-cutting and dumping of cancer-causing toxic waste (ibid). Mercury levels remain elevated in the animals and fish and are concentrated in top sediment layers, proving contamination is recent (ibid). Otherwise, the river system would have buried the mercury naturally over time source. As a result, community members' health continues to suffer. In 2007, two children were born with brain cancer and many others experienced seizures (ibid). Upon his last visit in 2012, Dr. Masazumi Harada – mercury poisoning expert whose team worked on cases in Minimata, Japan before coming to Grassy Narrows (CBC 2009) – believes to have found an 8 year old girl from the community born with mercury poisoning (CBC 2012).

Using an environmental injustice framework, this paper explores how the case of mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows exists as part of broader colonial processes in Canada. Environmental injustice here is defined by four factors: the distributional patterns of environmental hazards, the historical processes which determine hazard distributions (Schlosberg 2007; Ali 2009), patterns of non-recognition (Fraser & Honneth 1998), and unequal access to decision making. Unpacking the Grassy Narrows case study using these four factors illuminates how governments and corporations produce and maintain Indigenous oppression to secure their land for capitalist expansion.

As capitalist economies develop, “new forms of industrial and commercial capital emerge, such as railways, hydro-electric or nuclear power stations, and corporate share capital” (Carroll 1989: 27). Capitalism and industrialization “systematically subordinate nature in pursuit of endless accumulation and production on ever larger scales” (Clausen & Clark 2005: 423). These processes are inherently anti-ecological (ibid.) and embedded in colonialism (Churchill 2004). This paper focuses on industrial expansion and its’ destructive consequences on the environment and subsequently Indigenous communities. In Grassy Narrows, these projects include pulp and paper mills, logging, and clear-cutting. Plans for new resource extraction projects include mineral extraction and mining (da Silva 2008).

Members of Grassy Narrows continue to actively struggle against destructive colonial practices and for environmental justice. “Environmental wars” are waged against government and corporate encroachment to protect Anishinaabe cultural and spiritual life (da Silva 2011: 89). As early as 1975 the community began mobilizing against the mercury poisoning (da Silva 2008). Capitalist expansion deliberately targets culture to weaken the community; cultural leaders demonstrate resilience in the face of persistent adversity. Grassy Narrows’ leadership speaks about the importance of cultural healing tied to land preservation for future generations, demonstrating the hope and determination to never stop fighting to protect their life as an autonomous nation upon their traditional lands, in spite of the harsh colonial reality (ibid).

My interest in Grassy Narrows stems from my personal involvement with the community starting in September 2012 when I attended an ally learning delegation organized by Tessa Blaikie. Our delegation met community members, including elders and traditional teachers, to learn about cultural practices and struggles over land rights. Since 2012, I have attended meetings and workshops hosted by activists from the community. I am involved with Grassy Narrows’ solidarity groups, including *Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement*. I attended a feast to celebrate the ending of a new moon fast for the welcoming of spring 2013 and continue to attend ceremonies and celebrations, spend time at their blockade site, and will soon be attending a Youth Gathering in the community. I am humbled and very grateful to the community for opening up to me and cherish these relationships.

Important to note, Grassy Narrows is not a homogenous group of one mind. They are diverse and maintain varying perspectives, ideologies, and practices. Cultural groups cannot be understood as fixed and static entities (Woolford 2009). Instead, they can be seen as social structures, people, and the environment existing through the fluid and ever-changing processes of relations (Powell 2007). Cultures exist as continuous networks of interactions and negotiations, and are constantly shifting and adapting (Woolford 2009).

The community is divided over the appropriateness of certain tactics (p.o. (personal observation) 28 Sept 2012)¹. While some value direct action on the ground, others feel the court-system is a better avenue for protecting their land (ibid). While many community members protest logging companies that contaminate the water (da Silva 2008) and clear-cut their land (i.e. Weyerhaeuser) (Wolfson 2011), some work for these companies and rely on them for their livelihoods and subsistence (p.o. 28 Sept 2012).

Similarly, the Ontario and federal governments, as well as capitalist industry in Canada, cannot be understood as monolithic entities. The government (provincial and federal) and corporations are bureaucratic fields of ongoing negotiations (Bourdieu in Webb et al. 2002). Not every program, policy, and individual working within these fields contributes to the colonization of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Rather, these fields demonstrate patterns of relations where certain practices and ideologies are valued over others. In fields of government and corporations, processes of nation-building and colonial ideologies are valued over Indigenous sovereignty and land rights, creating inequality (Milloy 1999).

Mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows is interconnected with government and corporate colonial practices and policies. I will draw upon secondary sources, primary accounts, personal experiences, and observations to make my arguments. The concluding section highlights the unyielding resistance efforts of the community and how their struggle against mercury poisoning is also a struggle for decolonization.

Literature Review: Environmental Injustice, Colonialism, and Grassy Narrows

Until recently, literature on environmental injustice focused on the distributional patterns of goods and hazards. John Rawls first defined justice as “the distribution of goods in a society” (Rawls 1971). I use the term “injustice,” rather than “justice,” for the same concept because I focus heavily on the unjust aspects of capitalist destruction of the environment. Environmental justice recognizes that distributional patterns of hazards created by industrialization disproportionately affect marginalized communities (Schlosberg 2007). To determine if a population is experiencing negative impacts of environmental hazards, one examines the commercial hazard site and determines who benefits from, and who is burdened, by its location (Cole & Foster 2001).

Awareness of the concentration of environmental hazards is not enough; further research illuminates underlying reasons behind this maldistribution (Schlosberg 2007). As Cole and Foster (2001: 79) point out, “focusing on the distributional results alone obscures the social structure and institutional context in which environmental decisions are made”. They suggest distribution patterns are a good “entry point” for a deeper analysis of the socio-historical processes and institutions that create maldistributed hazards, illuminating how they are reproduced and why people within governments and corporations are adamant on doing so (ibid). More recent literature on environmental injustice expands on Rawl’s model by analysing the underlying mechanisms that determine the patterns of distribution.

¹ In my citations, “p.o.” stands for personal observation. I include my personal observations from two public events I attended that involved various members of the Grassy Narrows community: the Grassy Narrows Blockade Panel Discussion and Book Launch at the University of Winnipeg on November 13, 2012 and the allied learning delegation I attended from September 27-29, 2012, in Grassy Narrows. These observations are my interpretations of teachings and stories I hear, as well as actions and interactions I either observed or participated in.

Nancy Fraser (2000) looks at environmental injustice as stemming from historical processes of misrecognition of different cultures and worldviews (ibid). Misrecognition manifests in the subordination and disrespect of different identities and communities, and subsequent maldistribution they experience (ibid). Misrecognition as a cause of environmental injustice is exemplified in Indigenous and settler colonial relations in Canada (da Silva 2008). The government's tendency to refuse Indigenous worldviews, specifically surrounding land responsibility and ownership, as legitimate has been an underlying justification for appropriating their lands (Churchill 2004).

Honneth (1992), Lake (1996), and Schlosberg (2007) take the environmental injustice model one step further by linking misrecognition to procedural injustice. Procedural injustice involves different groups having unequal access to decisions about industrial production sites and how hazards are distributed (Honneth 1992; Lake 1996; Schlosberg 2007). Misrecognition directly links to the decline in participation with decision making processes. Marginalized groups approach environmental decision making processes with fewer social goods - for example, "time, money, education, information, specialized knowledge, access and influence" - than privileged groups (Honneth 1992: 190). Understanding the maldistribution of environmental hazards as resulting from historical processes of misrecognition and procedural injustice is a useful framework for understanding Indigenous experiences of environmental injustice because it involves surveying the various practices and mechanisms throughout colonial history that determine the maldistribution of hazards.

Discussion about Indigenous communities and environmental injustice exists mainly amongst researchers focusing on environmental racism (Cole & Foster 2001; Pellow 2000). Environmental racism mirrors environmental injustice, except that the burden groups are targeted based on prescribed biological characteristics- their "race" (Pellow 2000). Cole and Foster (2001: 66) state that, "the physical distribution of hazardous waste facilities is linked to the historical organization of racially identified space and its precipitating social processes and mechanisms". Racialized spaces are targeted with industrial hazards because the people who live there have been historically deemed unworthy of respect. Environmental racism only partially addresses colonialism because, while racism plays a large factor in colonialism, more complex processes of exclusion are involved. Environmental injustice is a more encompassing approach that considers race, as well as many other factors.

Within environmental injustice and environmental racism literature, a gap presents itself; there is limited work focusing on Indigenous communities in Canada. An edited book of Indigenous authors, *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada*, offers detailed accounts of environmental justice in Canada from Indigenous perspectives (Haluza-DeLay et al. 2009). Otherwise, the majority of case studies look at Native Americans in the United States (see Adamson 2001; Cole & Foster 2001; Pellow 200; Turner & Pei Wu 2002) or focus internationally (see Schlosberg 2007; Westra 2008), without taking an in-depth look at Canada. This paper contributes to filling that gap by discussing these topics in a Canadian context.

There is limited literature on Grassy Narrows itself. Vecsey (1987) provides an in-depth analysis on the government and corporate destruction of Grassy Narrows' traditional land. His paper describes the consequences of systematic land theft, misrecognition of Indigenous worldviews, and procedural injustices. Vecsey was published in 1987 and is non-Indigenous. Since then, there have been no major contributions to the literature besides magazine and journal articles (see APTN National News 2013; CBC 2010, 2012, 2013; Ball 2012; Caine 2012; Forest Talk 2013; Free Grassy Narrows 2013; Hale 2013; Kraus 2013; Rodgers 2009; Saxe 2012; Schertow 2010) and two documentary films (see Clement 2003; Orui 2010).

To gain perspective from community members themselves, I also survey personal accounts of community members made publicly through articles and videos. I draw heavily upon the writings and teachings of Judy da Silva- Grassy Narrows Elder, earth protector, community advocate, and community leader. Relying on non-Indigenous perspectives to discuss Indigenous experiences is historically a colonial approach to conducting research (Smith 2012). I try to draw on contemporary perspectives of Grassy Narrows' community members. I was unable to incorporate many of my conversations with various community members, besides what was discussed as public knowledge. Ideally, this paper would be more community-led to avoid further misrepresentation of the community.

Since the 1980's, literature on Grassy Narrows discussing environmental injustice and resistance is scarce. Judy da Silva has published a variety of works (2010a, 2010b, 2011). Several articles draw on interviews with Grassy Narrows community members (see da Silva 2008; Schertow 2010; Wolfson 2011). Some community members and allies also run a website that updates on local events and activism (www.freegrassy.net). Anna Willow has done extensive work on the Grassy Narrows blockade and Anishinaabe clear-cutting activism in Northwestern Ontario, with a focus on environmental education, culture, and language (2011, 2012a, 2012b). She looks at Grassy Narrows in the context of alliance-building between Indigenous groups and environmental activists fighting to save the Boreal Forest (2012a, 2012b). She explores how Grassy Narrows' activists and environmentalists can work together towards undermining particular industrial projects, which is integral to saving land from destruction (*ibid*). I further this argument by suggesting that activist work should not only involve stopping trees from being cut down, but a broader goal of decolonization. My perspective as an ally to the Grassy Narrows' community and Indigenous struggles for decolonization also offers a contemporary perspective in the environmental justice literature.

Methodology: Critical Literature Review, Case Study, and Autoethnography

My research methodology combines critical literature review and case study with autoethnography. This paper is exploratory and my conclusions only suppositional for two reasons. First, I am an "outsider" (Smith 2012) to Grassy Narrows. I do not speak for, or represent, the community, nor any of its individual members. I am interpreting what I read, observe, and experience from my own worldviews as a white, privileged, academic researcher. Therefore, I do not draw any definite conclusions about Grassy Narrows' members' experiences with mercury poisoning. Second, I conduct qualitative research with the assumption that the data gathered is subjective. I did not make observations within the community using an objective positivistic approach. My experiences, relationships, and personal assumptions shaped my views and the arguments presented in this paper. I do not pretend to decide which realities are real and which are not; there is no authentic perspective of phenomenon besides that of one's own lived experience. I understand the interconnectedness of environmental injustice, colonialism, and Grassy Narrows First Nation through the methodological process outlined in this paper. If there is value to this process, then my understanding is valuable as well.

My methodology starts with a critical literature review, used to "tell a story and help to advance our understandings of what is already known" (Jesson & Lacey 2006: 139). Sources are selected to show existing literature on environmental injustice, colonialism, capitalism, and Grassy Narrows First

Nation. I then suggest a different approach to understanding environmental injustices experiences by Indigenous communities that acknowledges the colonial reality in Canada.

Next, I carry out a case study into the mercury poisoning experienced by Grassy Narrows First Nation. I explore how this case could be understood within the context of environmental injustice, capitalism, and colonialism. According to Johannson (2003), the “case” should follow three criteria. It must “be a complex functioning unit, be investigated in its natural context with a multitude of methods, and be contemporary” (ibid). This Anishinaabe community, just as any community, is a complex functioning unit. They are a dynamic social group existing as ongoing culturally-specific processes of relations that are ever-changing and in a constant state of flux (Powell 2011; Woolford 2009). This case is contemporary because the issues are ongoing concerns for Grassy Narrows. Finally, this case was investigated in its natural context through my personal time spent within Grassy Narrows and in Winnipeg with Grassy Narrows’ activist groups.

A case study is “expected to capture the complexity of a single case” (Johannson 2003). To do so, the case study approach values using a variety of sources to “[ensure] that the issue is not explored through one lens, but rather a variety of lenses which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (Baxter & Jack 2008: 544). To conduct this case study, I utilize literature review into secondary sources (described above), first-hand accounts from interviews and articles written by community members, and autoethnography.

Autoethnographic research involves describing and analyzing “personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis et al. 2011). My understanding of peoples’ experiences within Grassy Narrows continues to grow from both observing and listening to stories and teachings, as well as from participating in cultural and activist activities (which I have learned are not mutually exclusive). In autoethnography, both critical observations made by the researcher, and perspectives shared by community members, are subjective (Stake 2008). I only draw upon observations and experiences that were shared by community members and allies as public knowledge through public meetings, including the Grassy Narrows Blockade Panel Discussion and Book Launch at the University of Winnipeg on November 13, 2012 and the allied learning delegation I attended from September 27-29, 2012, in Grassy Narrows.

Next, I begin an analysis of the data collected. I organize my arguments within each of the four factors of environmental injustice: historical processes, distribution of environmental hazards, misrecognition, and procedural injustice. In the historical section, I mostly use information gathered through literature review and the teachings of community Elder Judy da Silva who speaks from personal experience and Anishinaabe oral history. I avoid autoethnography because I did not personally experience the socio-historical colonial processes that led to the mercury poisoning. In the remaining three sections, I use all three methodologies to analyze the historical and contemporary aspects of the mercury poisoning and how they interconnect with broader colonial processes.

Analysis of Grassy Narrows, Mercury Poisoning, and Colonialism in Canada: Unpacking the Four Factors of Environmental Injustice

1. Understanding Grassy Narrows mercury poisoning within broader historical processes of capitalism and colonialism

All four aspects of environmental injustice draw upon history to explore how mercury poisoning may be embedded in colonialism, however, historical processes are significant in their own right. The case of mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows cannot simply be understood as an incident of pollution without looking at the historically created colonial patterns that justify it. This section analyzes various interconnecting historical processes of capitalism and colonialism and how Grassy Narrows' experiences with industrial hazards developed from these processes. A deeply embedded colonial history shaped the culturally-ingrained racism, disrespect, and exclusion of Indigenous communities via "state-enforced assimilation policies and practices, unilateral erasure of treaty guarantees, denial of legal representations, denial or criminalization of spiritual practices, and other legalized and socialized forms of systemic violence" (Haluzá-DeLay et al. 2009: 10). Unearthing these systems of state and corporate oppression can be valuable in terms of resistance because, whether anti-colonial struggles are taking place in the courts or on the ground-level, industries are backed by powerful colonial socio-historical systems that value capitalist expansion and disregard Indigenous peoples (Adams 1989). Overlooking this history may hinder resistance struggles for historical treaty-guaranteed land rights. Environmental injustice cannot be understood by looking at isolated instances where marginalized populations are negatively affected by environmental inequalities- it must be understood as a socio-historical process that evolves over time (Pellow 2000).

The tendency for environmental justice groups to focus on these matters on a local level, "dealing with specific community-contamination events, the harmful health effects of local pollution on members of the community, and the local politics involved therein," is understandable because each situation is very much place-based and "context-dependent" (Ali 2009: 97). However, this approach overlooks structural inequality that causes maldistribution of environmental hazards (ibid). Understanding the socio-historical processes of environmental hazard distribution provides "explanation" rather than "description" of the problem (ibid)

A historical survey of the colonizing project in Canada, focusing on government appropriation of Indigenous lands for commercial gains, establishes some understanding of the broader colonial context within which Grassy Narrows fits. Due to spatial and temporal inconsistencies of colonial processes, it is "difficult to offer a brief and unified overview of colonial ... history in Canada" (Woolford 2013: 66). This section offers a summary of events I selected to familiarize the reader to the subject and is not comprehensive. Initial Indigenous and settler contact in what is now known as Canada occurred in the eleventh century, however, it was not until the fifteenth century that Europeans began settling the East coast and entrepreneurs began claiming territory on the West coast for resource exploitation (Woolford 2009). European colonizers claimed any land they come across, believing this was their right by God (Adams 1999). Through this process of internal colonialism, "[which involves] the colonizing power quite literally swallow[ing] up contiguous areas and peoples, incorporating them directly into itself" (Churchill 1999: 25), Indigenous peoples were dispossessed from their lands and rights to self-determination.

The Royal Proclamation was implemented in 1763 by the British Crown to protect "Indian Territory" from aggressive prospectors and to preserve military alliances (Satzewich & Liouakis 2007: 35). Initially, it protected Indigenous lands because success of the fur trade relied on having large amounts of undisturbed lands for hunting space (Satzewich & Liouakis 2007). European settlement was still encouraged, however, and the shift to agricultural and resource development made regulation and Indigenous claims to their territories problematic (Woolford 2005: 43). As a white settler colony, Canada is dependent on "natural resource staples" for economic prosperity (Ali 2009: 97). To secure

these, the European solution was land surrender treaties, which are “about how to extinguish Aboriginal peoples’ title to the land in order to provide a legal basis for settlement, economic expansion, and the eventual formation of the Canadian nation” (Satzewich and Liidakis 2007: 46). Vast lands were appropriated from Indigenous cultures and only the smallest sections of land were “gifted back” to them (Smith 2012). Even those sections do not remain under Indigenous control.

Any legislation protecting Indigenous land rights was rendered useless once Crown title over land became achievable through “discovery” in the late 1800s (Kulchyski 2007). The discovery doctrine gave Europeans power to put up a flag on any given territory, instantly giving them exclusive jurisdiction. This doctrine relied on the assumption that local Indigenous peoples were not civilized enough to own land (*ibid*). The government controlled Indigenous access to capital, technology, and other resources necessary for self-determination (Bolaria & Li 1988). The government continues to keep Indigenous people in a subjugated position in order to exploit their land and resources (da Silva 2008).

In Grassy Narrows, Anishinaabe relationships with colonizers began in 1873, when community members started working with the Hudson Bay Company (Vecsey 1987). The community maintained economic autonomy until 1947-1948, when the Ontario government implemented resource management and licensing (*ibid*) via the Ontario Department of Lands and Fisheries (which became the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources in 1972) (Kerr 2010). The government sought to monopolize traditional Anishinaabe land (Asubpechoseewagong Netum Anishinabek 2010) by encroaching on their ways of life through modernization, including the implementation of residential schools in the 1920’s, elective chieftaincy beginning in 1933, and discrimination against Indigenous religious practices in the beginning in the 1930’s (Vecsey 1987). In the 1950’s Ontario Hydro built dams that flooded the wild rice harvesting sites, destroying natural habitats for many fish and animals, and placing old graves under water (Ivy Keewatin, Grassy Narrows’ community member, in Rodgers 2009). In the 1960’s, the residents of Grassy Narrows relocated to a new reserve to prevent continued child apprehension (p.o. 28 Sept 2012). The new space was not consistent with their cultural lifestyles (Rodgers 2009). Government agencies’ attempts at modernization came with “racism, discrimination, loss of land and culture, and traditional Anishinaabe spiritual practices being outlawed” (da Silva 2011: 89). Anishinaabe people took their ceremonies underground and “reclaimed ... ceremonies through dreams and visions” (*ibid*). The state increasingly pressured the Anishinaabe community to limit their freedom to use their infusion sentence lands (Vecsey 1987).

In the 1940’s, the Ontario government significantly intensified its efforts to control Grassy Narrows’ land and resources (Vecsey 1987). The provincial government increasingly controlled Indigenous community’s fishing efforts through policies of conservation and management (*ibid*). Through forced licensing and regulating, the government undermined the community’s remaining socio-economic avenues (including trapping, gardening, hunting, medicine gathering, and fishing) (*ibid*). Soon after, commercial fishing remained one of the few economic practices complementary to Anishinaabe traditional ways of life (da Silva 2008).

In 1970, mercury poisoning forced the community to stop commercial fishing on all lakes and streams in the English-Wabigoon river system (Kerr 2010). Dangerously high levels of methyl mercury were found in the fish throughout this aquatic region from dumping by Dryden Chemicals and Reed Paper Limited (Dryden Division), which operated between 1962 and 1975 (Saxe 2012). Instead of listening to the needs and requests of the community to stop the contamination of their water, the government either avoided the issue or used compensation as a band-aid solution (Rodgers 2009),

neither of which prevented the ongoing poisoning of the community and loss of commercial fishing-based livelihoods (Saxe 2012).

The remaining three sections of the environmental injustice framework move beyond history. The involved corporations, and the Ontario and federal governments, continue to impede on the Anishinaabe peoples' traditional ways of life through various tactics, including the refusal to address the issue of contamination and the continual exploitation of Grassy Narrows land for commercial gains (da Silva 2008).

2. Mercury poisoning as part of unequal distributional patterns of environmental hazards amongst colonized communities in Canada

A second indicator of environmental injustice is the maldistribution of environmental hazards from industrial growth onto particular populations, namely poor, Indigenous, or coloured communities (Schlosberg 2007). Environmental hazards include garbage dumps, toxic waste production, pollution, and contamination (Cole & Foster 2001). Commercial hazard site location and functioning burden certain populations while others benefit (ibid). Benefits include access to resources, opportunities (such as employment), and freedoms to make desirable choices. Burdens include “costs, risks and unfreedoms” (ibid: 14). Having society allocate “rights, goods, and liberties” to some populations, while not to others, is a method of regulating and maintaining social inequality (ibid: 12). The colonizing project in Canada maintains a pattern of maldistribution of environmental hazards amongst Indigenous communities (Agyeman et al. 2009).

Indigenous communities in Canada often bear burdens of industrial hazards as a result of their location and functioning, while governments and corporations benefit (Churchill 1999). The State nearly controls all of the land and resources in Canada and continues creating future plans to exploit Indigenous territories (da Silva 2008). Government agencies utilize self-proclaimed “plenary power” over Aboriginal groups and their lands to shirk Indigenous groups' environmental protection standards (Churchill 1999). This allows environmentally destructive industrial technologies to develop in Indigenous territories, while settler communities experience less industrial harms (ibid).

Examples include hydroelectric water diversion schemes that wreak havoc on ecosystems that Indigenous ways of life depend on (Churchill 1999). The Hydro dams in northern Quebec destroyed ecosystems and the James Bay Cree's livelihoods that depended on them (Hamley 1993). Systematic theft of Indigenous lands and resources also continues by multinational corporations such as Weyerhaeuser, and up until recently Abitibi- two giant logging companies in Canada and the U.S. (da Silva 2008). Corporate fishing monopolies, such as the Weston and Pattison groups, encroach on Indigenous lands and run ecosystems to the ground (Annett 2001). Sadly, this theft is enabled by governments, churches, and privileged Indigenous leaders on state-funded reserves (Annett 2001; Adams 1989). Other key examples are the Tar Sands in Alberta (Caine 2012), Uranium mining in Saskatchewan and Ontario (Lovelace 2009), and potentially Hydro's BiPole 3. The capitalist profit of these industries devastates Indigenous lands and communities (Churchill 2004).

Grassy Narrows experiences disproportionate hazardous impacts as a result of the mercury dumping (Orui 2010). The community is burdened with costs, such as the destruction of their economy, risks to their health and livelihoods, and unfreedoms from being unable to live autonomously. The staple protein for many within the community is fish (da Silva 2008). When it became poisonous, their entire diet had to change. Food is now purchased in Kenora. Small budgets

lead to imbalanced diets contributing to type 2 diabetes, cancer, thyroid disease, and plasto-illnesses-never seen in the community previously (p.o. 13 Nov 2012). The economic losses from the fishing ban sent the community from a “95% employment to 95% unemployment” rate (Vecsey 1987: 294). Unemployment led to high rates of alcoholism, personal withdrawal, negative self-evaluation, and routine violence (Clement 2003). Today the community struggles to be dry and participate in traditional activities like trapping, rice harvesting, and hunting as much as possible (p.o. 28 Sept 2012). At the same time, major corporations reaped the benefits. Between when the mercury was discovered in 1970 and 1984, Reed’s operations (who changed their name to avoid liabilities, but remained under the same management) received net profits of \$235 million,

averaging almost forty million annually. [The company] paid \$50 million in dividends and in 1985 offered its stockholders a 4-to-1 stock split. In 1980 the company began a \$250 million expansion of Reed’s Dryden operations, and the Ontario and Federal Governments awarded Great Lakes \$48 million in grants for their expansion (Vecsey 1987: 300).

Today, Weyerhaeuser reaps these benefits. Benefitting settlers are privileged to prosper from eroding eco-systems and, unlike Grassy Narrows, never had a land-based sustainable economy as a way of life.

Activist work done by the community and Indigenous Peoples Solidarity Movement (IPSM) organizes around the idea that exploiting Indigenous lands for commercial gains is a systemic problem of unequal distributional hazards plaguing communities across Canada (p.o. 13 Nov 2012). IPSM started out as the Friends of Grassy Narrows in 2003 and since branched into a broadly-focused solidarity group that also looks at other communities’ issues such as fracking, the Tar sands (Caine 2012), the Keystone Pipeline, oil spills, Sun Peaks’ development in British Columbia, and water contamination. Grassy Narrows’ activism often mobilizes alongside other activist networks such as the Boreal Forest Network, the Rainforest Action Network (Willow 2012a, 2012b), Christian Peacemaker Teams, Amnesty International, the Council of Canadians, Greenpeace Canada (Caine 2012), and the Idle No More movement to work towards environmental justice and decolonization. This networked approach, while targeting instances of pollution and environmental degradation, also continue to expand their network and increase momentum towards the larger goal of decolonization.

3. The role of non-recognition in determining the maldistribution of industrial hazards amongst Indigenous communities in Canada

Environmental injustice often stems from patterns of non- or mis-recognition of different cultures and worldviews (Fraser 2000). Misrecognition manifests in the disregard of different identities and communities, and on maldistribution of environmental hazards experienced by these populations (ibid). Misrecognition appears through forms of “insults, degradation, and devaluation” towards different cultural groups (Schlosberg 2007: 14). Cultural contestations are a legitimate terrain of struggle (Said 1978). Their implications go much further than the victims feeling insulted or devalued (Schlosberg 2007). Ideas materialize and this material effectiveness implicates human lives (Said 1978). The delegitimizing of Indigenous worldviews has deep political and economic consequences (Schlosberg 2007). One way that Indigenous worldviews have consistently been denied legitimacy is through racism.

Racialization and inferiorization is used to justify the exploitation of Indigenous land. Race is used to create “structures of attitude and reference” (Churchill 2004), through which white Europeans are defined as civilized and all Others are something of lesser quality (Bhabha 1985). These binary notions of “self/Other” (ibid: 158) are created in order for one group to dominate another. Western reality became reified as representing something better, reflecting higher orders of thinking (Smith 2012: 48). European settlers use culture, ideas, and language to create discourses surrounding Indigenous groups and use these discourses to control them (Ngugi 1986; Said 1978). In Canada, European settlers are created in relation to Indigenous peoples – the good and pure in relation to the barbaric – and this relationship is one of “power, domination, of varying degrees of complex hegemony” (Said 1978: 5).

Overt racism, which argues biological distinctions create differences between Indigenous people and white Europeans, has diminished in the last 30 years (Ratansi 2007). Instead, an emergence of a covert system of racism is created to escape the “opprobrium of open racism by diminishing issues of biology and focusing instead on questions of culture and ethnicity” (ibid: 95). Today, misrecognitions of cultures, ethnicities, and “ways of life,” are embedded in public and private spheres, which hold racist connotations that are taken for granted (ibid: 99).

Grassy Narrows experiences misrecognition by governments and corporations. The destruction of land is devastating to many Anishinaabe communities because “territory is an essential part of their group-formation processes, and its removal represents a dire threat to the ability of these groups to reproduce a group identity” (Woolford 2009: 89). Indigenous groups’ identities, including those who are animist (Hallowell 1975), require a relationship with territory different from land ownership and control; instead, a reciprocal relationship of mutual respect (Woolford 2009). For this reason, “land and environment are not simply means of sustaining group life, but as key components of group life” (ibid: 89). Ties to the land are much stronger than appreciation, preservation, exploitation, or subsistence (Hallowell 1975). Removing Indigenous peoples from their traditional land compromises their ability to understand and reproduce themselves as a collective (Woolford 2009). The land is central to spirituality, culture, and survival (ibid).

Resiliently, Grassy Narrows’ community members continue living in many ways congruous with their traditions (p.o. 27-29 Sept 2012). Visiting Grassy, I learnt about land-based cultural activities that are part people’s daily realities. These activities included dancing on rice, preparing a deer hide, participating in a feast, and listening to stories of how these traditions are linked to the land and Anishinaabe peoples’ identities. Chrissy Swain, an Anishinaabe-kwe from Grassy Narrows, explains, “People within the community still partake in spiritual ceremonies, pick wild berries, fish and hunt” (Wolfson 2011), but not to an extent where community relies solely on traditional practices, and therefore identity is affected. Judy da Silva says community members continue eating contaminated walleye, explaining that “it’s a traditional way of eating” (2008). Understanding the role of the environment in Anishinaabe culture illuminates how industrial destruction of the environment undermines Grassy Narrows’ ways of life. If the Ontario government respected Anishinaabe worldviews, they would protect rather than sever their ties to the land. Similarly, if the companies respected Anishinaabe worldviews, it seems unlikely they would continue dumping poison into their environment.

The role of science in supporting patterns of non-recognition and environmental injustice

Science's role is not objective in conflicts surrounding environmental problems caused by capitalism and industrialization (Hannigan 2007). Science is manipulated to suit different (even opposing) positions when determining causes and effects of environmental issues, serving political and economic interests (ibid). Historically, science was a colonial tool for oppression used to "prove" race (Ratansi 2007). During the Enlightenment the question of why whites are a superior race, rather than if they are superior, was researched and answered, creating false data that explained the inferiority of non-whites assumed to be scientific truths (Eze 1997). An important aspect of government and corporate misrecognition of Anishinaabe worldviews is their tendency to use science to legitimize their arguments.

Scientists tend to downplay scientific evidence of mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows in the mainstream media, either suggesting the results are inconclusive or completely ignoring the issue (Rodgers 2009). Scientists funded by the government and corporations are intentionally obtuse when presenting conclusive scientific findings made by impartial researchers, like Dr. Masazumi Harada (CBC 2009). This prevents companies from having any repercussions for their environmental hazards (Vecsey 1987).

At first, the agencies including Ottawa and Health Canada and Ontario Ministry of Health conducted diligent tests of Grassy Narrows' mercury levels and "media accounts of the pollution raised Canadian consciousness about the horror" (Vecsey 1987: 295-296). Soon media attention dwindled and law-suits started and stopped. The federal and provincial governments checked mercury levels in blood and hair in the 1980's and found levels greatly exceeding a safe rate (Vecsey 1987). Nonetheless, Ottawa and Health Canada stopped monitoring mercury levels in 1999, claiming the levels were below the Health Canada safety guideline (Schertow 2010). In 2010, Doctor Harada stated that, based on his research within the community, "the amount of mercury poison-related symptoms in the community is much higher than government data identifies" (ibid).

The downplaying of the mercury poisoning problem is backed by racist rhetoric, such as suggesting that the symptoms being displayed are likely the result of alcoholism (Rodgers 2009). As Vecsey points out, "Some Canadian officials blamed the symptoms on alcoholism, venereal disease, laziness, and so forth" (1987: 295). These claims are suspect considering that doctors and professionals have consistently found dangerously high levels of mercury in both the water system and the local food supply, as well as in the local residents (Schertow 2010). Community members have continuously made observations of mercury poisoning symptoms since the 1970's (da Silva 2008; p.o. 13 Nov 2012).

The community continues to be met with reluctance and avoidance from scientific and medical institutions (da Silva 2008). There are still no regulations to protect reserve communities like Grassy Narrows from these industrial-related disasters. Looking at Sheila Fraser's 2009 Auditor General of Canada fall report, there appears to be no federal regulations in Canada to environmentally protect any reserve lands, including Grassy Narrows (Schertow 2010). "[We want] our issues to be dealt with seriously by the medical establishment in Canada and in Ontario," says Grassy Narrows First Nations Chief Simon Fobister in 1985 (CBC 2010). The process has been one of "pollute, deny, stall, bury, and forget" (Hightower 2009).

4. Grassy Narrows and Treaties: Understanding patterns of unequal access to decision making

Patterns of non-recognition displayed by governments and corporations correlate with the exclusion of populations from decision making processes (Schlosberg 2007). The burdens of environmental

hazards end up falling upon these excluded populations because they do not get a say in how and where industrial projects operate. As Schlosberg (2007: 28) points out, “distributive inequity and misrecognition hamper real participation in political and cultural institutions.” These exclusionary practices are sometimes referred to as “procedural injustice” (ibid: 26). Struggles for environmental justice in terms of recognition and equality are played out in the “procedural realm” (ibid). The actors with power within these procedural realms undermine marginal populations’ ability to participate in decision making that affects their lives (Cole & Foster 2001).

One common tactic involves granting “illusionary gains” on the basis of lies and deceit (ibid: 48). For example, some corporations claim to be providing job opportunities to a low-income community by establishing a hazardous waste plant, while withholding information about the health hazards and pollution the plant will create (Cole & Foster 2001). The local community that suffers the brunt of the negative impacts from industrialization is not consulted, nor given the opportunity to participate in decision making on equal grounds (Schlosberg 2007). The environmental injustice experienced by Grassy Narrows, and other Indigenous groups across Canada, demonstrates the tendency of governments and corporations to use illusionary gains to deny Indigenous people equal footing in decision making processes in regards to the use of their lands. This practice began in the treaties. One of the most fundamental components of the ongoing struggle for land in Canada is treaty-making (Kulchyski 2007). The consistent refusal of governments to uphold treaty agreements may indicate the level to which Indigenous communities across Canada are actively denied access to decision making processes that implicate their lives and land.

Treaty-making began in Canada with the decline of the fur trade (Satzewich & Liodakis 2007: 36). Pressure for settlement was growing and guarantees contained in the 1763 Royal Proclamation protecting Native land for the purposes of hunting and trapping became problematic for settlement (ibid). Honouring Indigenous title became a hindrance to further western expansion, economic development, and state formation. As a solution, the Proclamation introduced land surrender treaties (Satzewich & Liodakis 2007). As Woolford (2009: 84) notes: “Since treaty negotiations were happening in the afterglow of the fur trade, which involved a lot of trust and honesty between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, Aboriginal people assumed that they would be living documents that could be altered as their needs changed over time”. Non-Indigenous negotiators, however, viewed treaties as tools to confine Indigenous people to reserves and as a consequence profit from traditional territories via annuity payments (ibid).

Canadian land surrender treaties were settled upon in two ways. Parts of land were surrendered in exchange for one-time cash payments (Satzewich & Liodakis 2007). As pressure for the settlement of Western Canada grew, the government’s treaty-making strategy changed (ibid). One-time cash payments became too expensive. The decision was made to provide ongoing smaller payments like in the numbered treaties (ibid). The creation of the numbered treaties began in 1871 and was not finished until 1930. Upon completion, the treaties covered “northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and present day Northwest Territories” (ibid: 37). Although the specifics of the treaties varied, “they generally included the setting aside of reserve lands, cash annuities, and the provision of agricultural implements” (ibid: 37). Rights and obligations outlined in the numbered treaties are supposed to be valued today, including Indigenous groups’ right to natural resources on Crown land (ibid 2007).

The history of treaty-making is corrupt, involving neglect, malfeasance, deceit, and incompetence on behalf of the government (Kulchyski 2007). Indigenous communities were not given the amount

of land they were entitled to, as agreed upon in the treaties (*ibid*). Satzewich and Liodakis (2007) point out that, “even though reserve lands were supposed to be provided to Indigenous peoples in perpetuity, on many occasions Indian people were coerced or tricked into giving up portions of their reserve land” (p. 39). There were cases where Federal officials who “under-counted the number of people in a band in order to reduce the size of the reserve allotment; in other cases they did not bother to include individuals who were away from the community at the time of the count” (*ibid*). Some groups theorize the federal government’s intent is to “destroy Aboriginal rights and to eliminate bands as separate cultural and political entities” (Saskatchewan Indian 1975: 6). These groups, such as the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians, refer to the treaty process as a “systematic genocide,” because the treaty process has been, and continues to be, another method for land dispossession and consequently contributing to the demise of Indigenous ways of life (Chartier 1981).

Understanding contemporary patterns in Indigenous/settler relations begins with understanding treaties for a number of reasons. One, Indigenous peoples and the federal government currently disagree over the interpretations of treaty terms. As Satzewich and Liodakis (2007: 39) point out: “The federal government tends to favour narrow, literal interpretations of the obligations outlined in the treaties. Thus, in many reserve communities in western Canada, a ‘treaty day’ is still held at which a five-dollar payment is made to each band member”. Two, many Indigenous perspectives, the treaties secured their traditional territories, to ensure self-governance, and self-determination (Satzewich & Liodakis 2007). Three, treaties were more than a “contractual undertaking by the Crown to grant certain payments, rights, and benefits to Indigenous people in return for cession of the tribal land and Indian commitment to keep peace and obey laws of the land” (Saskatchewan Indian 1975: 6). They went beyond this, “affirming both the integrity of tribes and bands; as well they recognized the right of Indian people to manage affairs on their own land, in accordance with their customs and traditions” (Saskatchewan Indian 1975: 6). Finally, many Indigenous groups see treaties as “fluid and living documents that need to be changed and reinterpreted with changing times and social standards” (Satzewich & Liodakis 2007: 37). Current treaty disputes in Canada are considered violent by some because the modern treaty processes can be just as fraudulent and coercive as they historically were (Kulchyski 2007).

Treaty 3 and Grassy Narrows

Grassy Narrows falls within Treaty 3 territory. Currently, three copies of the Treaty exist: the Anishinaabe’s oral history, a document in possession of the government, and the Métis translator’s notes called the Papom documents (Blaikie 2012). There are many inconsistencies between each version. The government document is used as the official version, which denies the legitimacy of Indigenous oral history and establishes colonial “truths” in the place of Anishinaabe understandings. As a result, the Anishinaabe community is denied access to decision making regarding their Treaty 3 territory. The Papom documents reflect the oral history much more closely than the government’s version (*ibid*).

The Papom and the oral versions stress the importance of sharing land between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. From this perspective, everyone should be able live according to their own worldviews, and nations should maintain interdependent relationships without undermining each other’s ability to flourish (Blaikie 2012). Respect of each group’s way of life was to be maintained. This aspect was completely overlooked in the government’s documents (Clement 2003).

The government's version of Treaty 3 suggests that the land was given to the Canadian government as a gift from the Anishinaabe community, who apparently signed their rights away gladly (Blaikie 2012). The Grassy Narrows community agreed to no such deal and Anishinaabe Elders continue to assert that their ancestors would never agree to have their land and way of life taken away (Blaikie 2012). As the environmental injustice in Grassy Narrows exemplifies, the land has not been managed with sharing as a consideration.

Conclusion: Grassy Narrows' struggles for environmental justice and decolonization

In the face of these ongoing environmental injustices created and maintained by colonial governmental practices and capitalism's industrial growth, Grassy Narrows remains a strong and resilient community. They are a strong group in Canada for activism, resistance, and environmental justice struggles (Wolfson 2011). Importantly, their actions demonstrate that decolonization and environmental justice cannot be understood separately of one another. Community member's efforts to address the burdens of environmental hazards simultaneously work towards reclaiming traditions and asserting treaty-promised autonomy. Just as environmental injustice cannot be understood without the broader socio-historical processes that cause it, the same goes for the struggle towards justice.

Effective environmental justice focuses on the "elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression" (Schlosberg 2007: 15) that causes the maldistribution of environmental hazards. According to Pellow (2000), fighting for environmental justice involves addressing the distribution of environmental hazards and the social structures, historical processes, and power imbalances that determine where hazards are located. Schlosberg (2007) argues that environmental risks need to be addressed by looking at "distribution, recognition, capabilities, procedural justice, and participation" in both human and nonhuman realms (p. 7). This latter point is especially important for Indigenous communities like Grassy Narrows, for whom the environment and human societies are not separate entities. Recognition must "expand an inclusive conception of the environment to include the natural world and the animals that inhabit it, and the concern for human health and industrial impacts on individuals and communities" (ibid). These theorists agree that all four aspects of environmental injustice need to be addressed for justice to ensue. Grassy adopts a similar approach using range a strategies.

People from Grassy Narrows, and their allies, use a variety of tactics in their attempt to decolonize their land and seek environmental justice. In 2002, the community set up a blockade on the main logging road to physically prevent logging trucks to enter their territory. The Blockade continues to have significant positive impacts within Grassy Narrows (Wolfson 2011). While it reduced in intensity in 2009, the blockade remains the longest running in North American history. Yet, it receives little acknowledgement in the Canadian media (Clement 2003). The blockade mobilized after a series of other tactics failed: members wrote letters of complaints to companies, raised concerns at negotiations about the effects of the industrial projects on their lands, protested in Kenora, and marched all the way to Toronto in protest with limited results (ibid). Weyerhaeuser and Abitibi gave departmental run-arounds and any solutions discussed were in line with Ministry of Natural Resources' rather than Anishinaabe ideologies (Blaikie 2012). While the main directive of the blockade is to address clear-cutting on their land, it also attracts people's attention to other demands, such as having "the province ... come back to the table to resolve the mercury issue" (Schertow 2010).

While visiting the blockade on September 28, 2012, I learned about its role of resistance in Grassy Narrows Anishinaabe culture. The blockade is a site for education for their children and supporters of the community. Community members hold classes there to help the community's youth understand fighting for their rights (Clement 2003). Students from the community come to the blockade as part of and outside of school to learn about their traditional ways of life, including nonviolent direct action against the government (p.o. 28 Sept 2012). As Judy da Silva (2008) explains: "It's not just about like kicking the loggers out or just protecting the water from pollution, but its' about protecting our life as a nation, as Anishinabek, because our identity comes from there. For thousands of years we've been here, since like time started and that's what we want to pass onto our children." This is an important aspect of environmental justice and decolonization because it prepares the next generation for the struggles towards ameliorating environmental hazards and risks while addressing broader considerations of decolonization.

Discussions around the blockade illuminate some diversity in the community. People are divided over the appropriateness of the blockade as a resistance tactic (p.o. 28 Sept 2012). Grassy Narrows' youth and the Clan Mothers implemented the blockade in 2002 because they believed it was necessary to protect the earth- this was their job and obligation (Blaikie 2012; Wolfson 2011). Various community members, such as Judy da Silva, stand by this belief and consider the blockade site a sacred space (p.o. 28 Sept 2012). Others, while expressing support for the blockaders, do not support the blockade itself (ibid); this is a matter of diversity of tactics.

In terms of addressing unequal access to decision making, several Grassy Narrows trappers are playing this out in the "procedural realm" (Wolfson 2011; Schlosberg 2007: 26). They are in the midst of a number of legal cases, trying to protect the land from harmful industrial activity that affects hunting, trapping, and fishing (p.o. 27 Sept 2012). In 1999, Joseph Fobister, Andrew Keewatin, and Willie Keewatin - three trappers from Grassy Narrows - sued logging companies to stop clear-cutting on their territory (Wolfson 2011). On August 16, 2011, the Ontario Supreme Court ruled in favour of Grassy Narrows, protecting their right to hunt and trap on their land (ibid). The Ontario appeal court overruled their case in May 2013, once again giving the Ontario government jurisdiction of Grassy Narrows' land, which allows clear-cutting to continue (APTN National News 2013). Historically, Indigenous land rights have been upheld by the courts, although this has been an underrepresented outcome (see Alacantara, 2007; Hamley 1993; McGaw 2003; Perskey 1998). Grassy Narrows already filed their appeal with the Supreme Court of Canada in response to Ontario's court ruling to issue logging permits on Indigenous territories (Forest Talk 2013). During my first visit to Grassy Narrows, a local trapper told me a story about their family's trap-line that has been passed down through generations, providing subsistence to the family and maintaining family and communal ties. Fathers teach sons who teach grandsons how to maintain trap-line (p.o. 27 Sept 2012). Clear-cutting replaces forest with barren waste-land where animals are unable to survive. Destroying the forest is an act of violence towards the community because it sustains their life (p.o. 28 Sept 2012). Members of Grassy Narrows continue to fight this battle in the courts, demanding their rights to land as defined in Treaty 3 (ibid).

From my personal interactions with several activists from Grassy Narrows, I observe that a many of the community's activists value direct action. While meetings, planning, and talking are all necessary, they are not an end when it comes to protecting their land. Judy da Silva demonstrates her support for action over stagnation at a *Defenders of the Land* meeting:

Hopefully from this meeting today they will come up with a powerful action plan and not just paper and not just another conference and not just another meeting. Maybe to go support the Tar Sands people 'cause it's going to affect us all [sic]. It's in the territory that all these cancers are coming out. I'd like all the people that live in the urban centres, the big cities, to get in touch with the earth and the earth will give them guidance and the earth is our mother (da Silva 2008).

Individuals like Judy are not content with simply talking about resistance, especially because living in line with traditional values is a great form of resistance because it undermines the assimilative goals of a cultural oppressor (Bhabha 1985). In resistance movements, raising public awareness is always paramount (Starhawk 2011). Education is key to addressing patterns of misrecognition; disseminating information amongst non-Indigenous communities continues to unsettle the founding white myth of a peaceful Canadian settlement (Regan 2010). Since 2008, Grassy Narrows has led annual walks to draw attention to Indigenous and environmental justice issues (Wolfson 2011). The first walk was over 1,800 kilometres from Grassy Narrows to Toronto, ending in a "Sovereignty Sleepover" at Queen's Park attended by hundreds of Indigenous leaders and activists across Ontario (ibid). Community members and allies demand the UN address the Canadian government's ongoing refusal to recognize the rights of Indigenous people, and the fact that they act in violation of basic human rights as recognized by the United Nations (Blaikie 2012). From marches, to solidarity actions, to physically standing in the way of capitalist and colonial encroachment on their territory, to living in line with traditional ways of life, Grassy Narrows certainly has a strong culture of resistance.

Upon my next visit to Grassy Narrows, I will be attending a Youth Gathering. It is taking place to educate and mobilize Indigenous youth and settler supporters about protecting water from contamination for future generations. It will involve team building exercises, water ceremonies, Pipe songs, music, art, feasts, a Pow wow, sweat lodges, and direct actions talks. People from all different organizations and communities are attending, including Idle No More, Anti-Mining, and anti-fracking, (Free Grassy Narrows 2013). This event demonstrates environmental justice issues being addressed using a networked approach embedded in cultural practices and decolonizing strategies. Resistance in Grassy Narrows continues building momentum as more and more people become educated and awakened. I continue to be humbled and appreciative to have the privilege to work as an ally to the Grassy Narrows community in their struggles towards environmental justice and decolonization.

Natalia Ilyniak is a Master's student at the University of Manitoba in Sociology. She completed her undergraduate degrees in Sociology and Conflict Resolution Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Her MA research explores how colonial genocide in Canada can be understood by settler researchers working from within the academy in a way congruous to decolonizing principals. In addition to genocide and postcolonialism/decolonization, her research interests include race relations, power dynamics, the construction of the Other, and resistance movements. Natalia is involved in community-based activist groups working towards equality, inclusivity, and decolonization in Canada.

Reference List

- Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in Canada. 2012. *Registered Population: Grassy Narrows First Nation*. Retrieved from http://pse5-esd5.ainc-inac.gc.ca/fnp/Main/Search/FNRegPopulation.aspx?BAND_NUMBER=149&lang=eng.
- Asubpeechoosewagong Netum Anishinabek. 2010. *Working Groups*. Retrieved from <http://www.grassynarrows.ca/news-and-issues/working-groups/>.
- Adams, Howard. 1989. *Prison of Grass: Canada from a Native Point of View* (2nd ed.). Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: Fifth House Publishers.
- Adams, Howard. 1999. *Tortured People: The Politics of Colonization* (2nd ed.). Penticton, BC: Theytus Books Ltd.
- Adamson, Joni. 2001. *American Indian Literature, Environmental Justice and Ecocriticism: The Middle Place*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Agyeman, Julian, Peter Cole, Randolph Haluza-DeLay, and Pat O'Riley (Eds.). 2009. "Speaking for Ourselves, Speaking Together: Environmental Justice in Canada." *Speaking for Ourselves*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Alacantara, Christopher. 2007. "To Treaty or Not to Treaty? Aboriginal Peoples and Comprehensive Land Claims Negotiations in Canada." *Journal of Federalism* 38(2): 343-69.
- Ali, Harris. 2009. "The Political Economy of Environmental Inequality: The Social Distribution of Risk as an Environmental Injustice." In Julian Agyeman, Peter Cole, Randolph Haluza-DeLay, and Pat O'Riley (Eds.), *Speaking for Ourselves: Environmental Justice in Canada* (pp. 97-110). British Columbia: UBC Press.
- Annett, Kevin. 2001. *Hidden From History: The Canadian Holocaust*. Canada: The Truth Commission into Genocide in Canada.
- APTN National News. 2013, March 18. "Ontario Appeal court rules against Grassy Narrows: Ontario has jurisdiction over territory." *Aboriginal Peoples Television Network*. Retrieved from <http://aptn.ca/pages/news/2013/03/18/ontario-appeal-court-rules-against-grassy-narrows-ontario-has-jurisdiction-over-territory/>.
- Ball, David P. 2012. "Grassy Narrows marchers offer government mercury-tainted fish." *Windspeaker* 30(4). Retrieved from <http://www.ammsa.com/publications/windspeaker/grassy-narrows-marchers-offer-government-mercury-tainted-fish>.
- Baxter, Pamela & Susan Jack. 2008. "Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers." *The Qualitative Review* 13(4): 544-59.
- Bhabha, Homi K. 1985. "Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority Under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1987." *Critical Inquiry* 12: 89-106.
- Blaikie, Tessa. 2012. *From the Roots of Violence to the Route for Allied Relationships: The Role of Allies in the Struggle Towards Safety for Indigenous Women in Canada*. (Unpublished Master's Thesis). Carlton University: Ottawa.
- Bolaria, B. Singh & Peter S. Li. 1988. *Racial Oppression in Canada* (2nd ed.). Toronto, Ontario: Garamond Press.
- Caine, Natalie. 2012. "Justice overdue for Grassy Narrows." *Rabble.ca*. Retrieved from <http://rabble.ca/news/2012/06/week-action-justice-overdue-grassy-narrows>.
- Carroll, William K. 1989. *Corporate Power and Canadian Capitalism*. British Columbia: University of British Columbia Press.

- CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). 2009, July 29. "Mercury Poisoning in grassy Narrows?" *The CBC Digital Archives Website*. Archived at <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/environment/pollution/mercury-rising-the-poisoning-of-grassy-narrows/are-indians-slowly-dying.html>.
- CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). 2010, April 7. "Grassy Narrows Protests Mercury Poisoning." *CBC News Toronto*. Archived at <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/story/2010/04/07/tor-grassy-narrows.html>.
- CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). 2012, January 30. "Grassy Narrows: Still ill." *The CBC Digital Archives Website*. Archived at <http://www.cbc.ca/archives/categories/environment/pollution/mercury-rising-the-poisoning-of-grassy-narrows/still-ill.html>.
- Chartier, Clem. 1981. Fourth Russell Tribunal: On The Rights Of The Indians Of The Americas. *Saskatchewan Indian Federated College* 11(1-2).
- Churchill, Ward. 1999. *Struggle for Land: Native North American Resistance to Genocide, Ecocide, and Colonization*. Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
- Churchill, Ward. 2004. *Kill the Indian, Save the Man: The Genocidal Impact of American Indian Residential Schools*. San Francisco: City Lights Books.
- Clausen, R. & Clark B. 2005. "Metabolic Rift and Marine Ecology: An Analysis of the Ocean Crisis Within Capitalism Production." *Organization & Environment* 18(4): 422-44.
- Clement, Dave. 2003. *As Long as the River Flows*. DVD. Ontario, Canada: ThunderBay Indymedia.
- Cole, Luke W. & Shiela R. Foster. 2001. *From the Ground Up: Environmental Racism and the Rise of the Environmental Justice Movement*. New York: New York University Press.
- da Silva, Judy. 2008. *Defenders of the Land: a network of Indigenous communities and activists in land struggle across Canada*. [Interview by Jaggi Singh, video recording]. Retrieved from Isuma TV: <http://www.isuma.tv/en/defenders-land/judy-dasilva>.
- da Silva, Judy. 2010a. "Hashinoqwah." In Kiera Ladner & Leanne Simpson (Eds.), *This is an Honor Song* (p. 59-74). Winnipeg: Arbeiter Ring Publishing.
- da Silva, Judy. 2010b) "Grassy Narrows: Advocate for Mother Earth and Its Inhabitants." In Lynne Davis (Ed.), *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous- Non-Indigenous Relationships* (p. 69-76. Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press.
- da Silva, Judy. 2011. "Our young people have lost faith." In Prescilla Stettee (Ed.) *The Strength of Women*. Saskatchewan: Coteau Books.
- Ellis, Carolyn, Tony E. Adams, & Arthur P. Bachner. 2011. "Autoethnography: An Overview." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research Sozialforschung* 12(1), retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1589/3095#g1>.
- Eze, Emmanuel Chukwudi. 1997. *Race and the Enlightenment*. Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Fraser, Nancy and Axel Honneth. 1998. *Redistribution and Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. London-Verso.
- Fraser, Nancy. 2000. "Rethinking Recognition." *New Left Review* 3(May/June): 107-20.
- Free Grassy Narrows. 2013. "Grassy Narrows Youth Gathering." *Support Grassy Narrows First Nations* (Website run by solidarity activists and Grassy Narrows organizers). Retrieved from <http://freegrassy.net/2013/07/18/grassy-narrows-youth-gathering/>.

- Forest Talk. 2013. "Grassy Narrows First Nation has filed their Supreme Court appeal." *ForestTalk.com*. Retrieved from <http://foresttalk.com/index.php/2013/05/23/grassy-narrows-first-nation-has-filed-their-supreme-court-appeal/>.
- Hale, Alan S. 2013. "Grassy Narrows Files Supreme Court Appeal over Logging Rights." *Kenora Daily Miner and News*. Retrieved from <http://www.kenoradailyminerandnews.com/2013/05/21/grassy-narrows-files-supreme-court-appeal-over-logging-rights>.
- Hallowell, Irving A. 1975. "Anishinaabe Ontology, Behaviour, and World View." In Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock (Eds.) *Teachings from an American Earth*. New York: Motor City Books.
- Hamley, Will. 1993. "Native Land Claims in Quebec Considered in a Canadian Context." Blackwell Publishing, 75(2): 93-109.
- Hannigan, John. 2007. *Environmental Sociology* (2nd Edition). New York: Routledge.
- Haluza-DeLay, Randolph, Pat O'Riley, Peter Cole, and Julian Agyeman. 2009. "Speaking for Ourselves, Speaking Together: Environmental Justice in Canada." In , Julian Agyeman, Peter Cole, Randolph Haluza-DeLay, and Pat O'Riley (Eds) *Speaking for Ourselves*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Hightower, Jane M. 2009. *Diagnosis: Mercury: Money, Politics and Poison*. Washington: Island Press.
- Honneth, Axel. 1992), "Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition." *Political Theory* 20(2): 187-201.
- Jesson, Jill & Fiona Lacey. 2006. "How to do (or not to do) a critical literature review." *Pharmacy Education* 6(2): 139-148.
- Johansson, Rolf. 2003, September. *Case Study Methodology*. Speech presented at the Methodologies in Housing Research organized by the Royal Institute of Technology in cooperation with the International Association of People-Environment Studies, Stockholm.
- Kerr, S. J. 2010. *Fish and Fisheries Management in Ontario: A Chronology of Events: Biodiversity Branch*. Ontario: Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. Peterborough, Ontario.
- Kraus, Krystalline. 2013. "Grassy Narrows wants justice for destructive logging and mercury poisoning." *Rabble.ca*. Retrieved from <http://rabble.ca/news/2013/11/grassy-narrows-wants-justice-destructive-logging-and-mercury-poisoning>.
- Kulchyski, Peter. 2007. "The Violence of the Letter: Land Claims and Continuing Colonial Conquest in Canada." *Canadian Dimension* 41(1).
- Lake, R. 1996. "Volunteers, NIMBYs and environmental justice: dilemmas of democratic practice." *Antipode* 28(2): 175-92.
- Lovelace, Robert. 2009. "Speaking for Ourselves, Speaking Together: Environmental Justice in Canada." In Julian Agyeman, Peter Cole, Randolph Haluza-DeLay, and Pat O'Riley (Eds.) *Speaking for Ourselves*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- McGaw, Richard. 2003. "Aboriginal fisheries policy in Atlantic Canada." *Marine Policy* 27: 417-24.
- Milloy, John S. 1999. *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986*. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press.
- Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. 1986. *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey.
- Orui, Tadashi. 2010. *The Scars of Mercury*, DVD. Winnipeg: Sou International Ltd.

- Pellow, David N. 2000. "Environmental Inequality Formation: Toward a Theory of Environmental Injustice." *The American Behavioural Scientist* 43(4): 581-8.
- Persky, Stan. 1998. *Delgamuukw: The Supreme Court of Canada Decision on Aboriginal Title*. Vancouver: Greystone Books.
- Powell, Christopher 2007. "What do genocides kill? A relational conception of genocide." *Journal of Genocide Research* 9(4): 527-47.
- Powell, Christopher. 2011. *Barbaric Civilization: A Critical Sociology of Genocide*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Ratanski, Ali. 2007. *Racism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Regan, Paulette. 2010. *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. British Columbia: UBC Press.
- Rodgers, Bob. 2009, January-February. "Return to Grassy Narrows: A poisoned community tells its 40-year-old story." *Literary Review of Canada*. Retrieved from <http://reviewcanada.ca/magazine/2009/01/return-to-grassy-narrows/>.
- Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*. Michigan: Pantheon Books.
- Saskatchewan Indian. 1975. Our Way (The Saskatchewan Indian Position), *Historical Review*, p. 7, Retrieved from <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/archive/saskindian/a75our06.htm>.
- Satzewich, Vic & Nikolaos Liodakis. 2007. *Race and Ethnicity in Canada: A Critical Introduction*. Don Mills: Oxford University Press.
- Saxe, Dianne. 2012. "50 Years of mercury pollution: Grassy Narrows." *Environmental Law and Litigation*. Retrieved from <http://envirolaw.com/50-years-mercury-pollution/>.
- Schertow, John. 2010, April 6. "Mercury Poisoning in Grassy Narrows Worse than Ever." *Intercontinental Cry*. Retrieved November 20, 2011, from <http://intercontinentalcry.org/mercury-poisoning-in-grassy-narrows-worse-than-ever/>.
- Schlosberg, David. 2007. *Defining Environmental Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai. 2007. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. New York: Tenth Impression.
- Stake, Robert E. 2008. "Qualitative Case Studies." In Norman K. Denzin & Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry*. California: Sage Publications.
- Starhawk. 2008. *Webs of Power: Notes from the Global Uprising*. British Columbia: New Catalyst Books.
- Turner, Robin Lanette & Diana Pei We. 2002. *Environmental Justice and Environmental Racism: An Annotated Bibliography and General Overview, Focusing on U.S. Literature, 1996-2002*. Institute of International Studies: University of California, Berkeley. http://www.academia.edu/395112/Environmental_Justice_and_Environmental_Racism_An_Annotated_Bibliography.
- Vecsey, Christopher. 1987. "Grassy Narrows Reserve: Mercury Pollution, Social Disruption, and Natural Resources: A Question of Autonomy." *American Indian Quarterly* 11(4): 287-314.
- Webb, Jen, Tony Schirato, & Geoff Danaher. 2002. *Understanding Bourdieu*. New South Wales: Allen & Unwin.

- Westra, Laura. 2008. *Environmental Justice and the Rights of Indigenous Peoples: International and Domestic Legal Perspectives*. London: Earthscan.
- Willow, Anna J. 2011. "Conceiving Kakipitatapitmok: The Political Landscape of Anishinaabe Anti-Clearcutting Activism." *American Anthropologist* 13(2): 262-76.
- Willow, Anna J. 2012a. "Re(con)figuring Alliances: Place Membership, Environmental Justice, and the Remaking of Indigenous-Environmentalist Relationships in Canada's Boreal Forest." *Sociological Abstracts* 71(4): 371-82.
- Willow, Anna J. 2012b. *Strong Hearts, Native Lands: The Cultural and Political Landscape of Anishinaabe Anti-Clearcutting Activism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Wolfson, Carmelle. 2011, November-December. "How Grassy Narrows' lawsuit could change aboriginal-government relations across Canada." *This Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://this.org/magazine/tag/andrew-keewatin/>.
- Woolford, Andrew. 2005. *Between Justice and Certainty: Treaty-Making in British Columbia*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, Law and Society Series.
- Woolford, Andrew. 2009. "Ontological Destruction: Genocide and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada." *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal* 4(1): 81-97.
- Woolford, Andrew. 2013. "Nodal repair and networks of destruction: residential schools, colonial genocide, and redress in Canada." *Settler Colonial Studies* 3(1): 65-81.

This published article is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. Copyright for this article is held by McGill Sociological Review.

Grassy Narrows's legacy of mercury poisoning began in 1962, when the paper plant in Dryden, then owned by Reed Paper, began to dump mercury into the river about 100 kilometres upstream from the First Nation's home. By the time it stopped in 1970, about 10 tonnes of the toxin had been released. Meanwhile, recent key findings by the Star, environmental group Earthroots and top scientists have shown high levels of mercury in soil, fish and river sediment – all strongly suggesting the site of the mill is still leaking mercury. He found people with mercury levels more than three times the Health Canada limit in Grassy Narrows and seven times the limit in nearby Whitedog. When Harada returned in 2004, all of the people who had tested over the limit were dead. Grassy Narrows continues to fight deforestation on their land that threatens their remaining food source - their hunting habitat. The community continues to organize events, marches and maintain the blockade to bring attention to their environmental struggles and their efforts to protect their land, water and forests. (See less). Basic Data. Name of conflict Leaders of the Grassy Narrows First Nations are demanding that the Ontario government acknowledge mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows and apologize. They also want to see the river cleaned. As well, they want a permanent Grassy Narrows-run environmental health monitoring centre. And they want the compensation offered to those affected to be retroactively indexed to inflation. Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation (also known as Grassy Narrows First Nation or the Asabiinyashkosiwagong Nitam-Anishinaabeg in the Ojibwe language) is an Ojibwe First Nations band government who inhabit northern Kenora in Ontario, Canada. Their landbase is the 4,145 ha (10,240 acres) English River 21 Indian Reserve. It has a registered population of 1,595 as of October 2019, of which the on-reserve population was 971 They are a signatory to Treaty 3.