



WALKING WITH AND ON TURTLE ISLAND

Indigenous Activist and Artistic Expressions in North America as Counter-Mapping Practices

While mapping or cartographic imagination could be associated with imperial and colonial enterprise of discovery, claiming of lands, exploitation of natural resources, imposition of geographical borders, and restriction of movements, G. Malcolm Lewis concludes his study of Indigenous mapmaking practices in North America by stating that “native North Americans differed from Europeans in not having used maps to divide their terrestrial worlds into finite areas comparable to the Europeans’ states, territories, townships, and properties” (182). Instead of divisions and fractures, Indigenous maps point to connections and relations. This becomes particularly visible in the Indigenous representation of their cartographic imagination. Woodward and Lewis identify that

The cosmographical dimension is present everywhere in native representations of the world, where the landscape and universe are regarded not as a passive backdrop against which human events unfold, but as active participants in human life. The land owns the people, not people, the land. [...] Cartography becomes less of a gridded stage on which life takes place and more a model of how the spiritual world and physical world interact. (538)

Indigenous Peoples have expressed, remembered, and performed their spatial orientation, imaginations, and relations as part of their various movements across Turtle Island (the North American continent, according to some Indigenous nation’s creation stories), including migrating, hunting, gathering, trading, ceremonies, storytelling, dancing and also while being forcibly removed and displaced from their ancestral lands to reserves. Acknowledging Indigenous practices of spatial imagination, orientation, and relations, this paper expounds

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on three Indigenous activist and artistic expressions in North America as counter-mapping practices. I look at the protest walk initiated by David Kawapit, known as the *Journey of Nishiyuu* or *The Journey of the People*, a 1,600-kilometer journey of a group of young Cree walkers from Whapmagoostui, Quebec, to Parliament Hill in Ottawa to support the Idle no More movement as a contemporary activist expression of embodied mapping through journeying. I refer to the traveling art installation project *Walking With Our Sisters*, honoring the lives of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada and the USA to demonstrate how Indigenous artists bridge the walking and traveling experience to enact a counter-mapping practice for resurgence and healing of the community. Finally, I discuss *Frost Exploding Trees Moon*, a solo performance choreographed by Michelle Olson and Floyd Favel and performed by Olson to present how Indigenous performers draw from travel stories and nomadic experiences of their ancestors to establish contemporary artistic expressions of embodied mapping as forms of resistance to colonial narratives. These three different Indigenous activist and artistic performances of journeying are explored as counter-mapping practices that offer decolonial mapping of Turtle Island, leading to embodied healing.

WALKING AS A COUNTER-MAPPING PRACTICE EMBEDDED IN INDIGENOUS WAYS OF BEING

The term “Indigenous” carries the core of Indigenous people’s relation to land. The Latin term *indigena* means “born of the land.” Shawn Wilson (Cree) explicates through his conversation with Lewis Cardinal (Cree) how “Indigenous peoples and their traditions and customs, they are shaped by the environment, the land, their relationship; their spiritual, emotion and physical relationship to that land. It [this relationship] speaks to them; it gives them their responsibility for stewardship” (88). Sandra Styres (Kanien’kehá:ka) elaborates on how this relationship determines Indigenous understanding:

Land is both space (abstract) and place/land (concrete) it is also conceptual, experiential, relational, and embodied. [...] Land is spiritual, emotional, relational, Land is experiential, (re)membered, and storied; Land is consciousness—Land is sentient. (27)

This explication defines land as more than a geographical or physical space. So, alongside connections, interactions, and relations (Woodward and Lewis), Indigenous mapping practices highlight lived, performed, and processual experiences, and they “may be gestural,

chanted, or inscribed in stone, wood, wall, tattoo, leaf, or paper. [...] Indigenous maps may be used to assess taxes, guide a pilgrim, connect the realms of the sacred and profane, or navigate beyond the horizon. Clearly, Indigenous cartographies are process oriented as opposed to product dependent” (Pearce and Louis 110). This processual cartography is reflected in the extension of the map into the landscape, inscriptions, stories, dances, or ceremonies, as well as the embodied experience of space and place (Pearce and Louis 110–111). Indigenous people have continued performing their spatial expressions and relations despite Western cartographic practices imposed upon these communities.

Not an Indigenous concept, the term counter-mapping was coined by Nancy Peluso (1995), who explored a grassroots map-making of a forest by an Indigenous community in Indonesia, which brought into light the realities and knowledge of the marginalized group in the society, who were being denied their traditional rights by the government. A counter-cartographic practice is fundamentally based on the premise that it is a “type of transgression [that] goes against official geopolitical maps while exposing relations of domination over and exploitation of a territory as well as revealing concealed networks of power. [...]” and may be employed “for analyzing networks and spaces in order to generate social change from below” (Mesquita 26). Counter-mapping in analog and digital forms of cartographic practices has been undertaken by different marginalized groups worldwide to bring social/political changes (*This is Not an Atlas*). In the context of the present study, I understand counter-mapping as a form of activism against dominant power structures to restore the voices and perspectives of Indigenous Nations that challenge Western notions of place and spatial imagination and question the arbitrarily imposed by colonization borders between different areas on earth, between people, nations and between nature and man. Indigenous people use various media and technology to protect, reclaim, and express their spatial imagination and relations and resist colonial or state narratives. Within cartographic practices, examples of Indigenous counter-mapping may include such projects as *Decolonial Atlas* or *Native Land Digital*, as well as those that involve digital mapping of locations of missing and murdered Indigenous women or residential school children’s unmarked graves. These projects incorporate new media and digital technologies alongside stories and embodied experiences. Given the diverse range of forms and practices that Indigenous mapping can encompass and recognizing the Cree heritage shared by many of the activists and artists in the projects discussed in this

paper, I turn to the act of walking, which holds significance in both mapping practices and Cree cultural experience.

While there is a long and complex history of walking amongst non-Indigenous philosophers, artists, writers and activities, due to this paper's focus on Indigenous practices, I deliberately avoid delving into those narratives and bring instead the reader's attention to Indigenous walking histories and practices. For the traditionally nomadic people, the act of walking is at the heart of Cree life and identity and is manifested in "The Walking Out Ceremony," where the practice of walking is a rite of passage marking a child's first encounter with nature, first steps on Mother Earth. Walking is central to vision quests, also practiced as rites of passage, understood as "a spiritual journey when participants, often adolescents, are said to receive sacred knowledge and strength from the spirit world" (Filice). Gwilym Lucas Eades and Yingqin Zheng explored the *Kaachewaapechuu*, a long commemorative walk in the northern Quebec Cree village of Wemindji, as a counter-mapping practice, as it "cuts across territorial trapline blocks historically defined by both state and market (hierarchical) interests operating in Wemindji Cree territories over the course of three centuries" (81), and they presented it as a form resistance to the state.

While walking has been long practiced across the globe in a variety of forms and for different purposes, according to Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman, co-directors of WalkingLab (www.walkinglab.org), a queer-feminist walking research-creation collective,

The sense of urgency and expediency surrounding walking is entangled with the desire to generate research and knowledge in situ, that is community-based, and that is attuned to more-than-human entanglements and encounters. [...] walking has become more than a utilitarian or pedestrian mode of getting from place to place; walking is an ethical and political call to collective action. (2)

I refer to Springgay and Truman because they accentuate Indigenous perspectives of relationality, connections, reciprocity, responsibility, and action that reflect Indigenous relations with the land, which remain central to all the walking projects discussed in this paper. I draw from these definitions of walking practices and counter-mapping to extend their application to Indigenous activists' and artistic expressions.

WALKING FOR LEARNING, RESTORATION AND HEALING

The Journey of Nishiyuu or the Journey of the People, a 1600-kilometer journey by a group of young James Bay Cree walkers from

Whapmagoostui First Nation in Quebec, Canada, was undertaken in 2013 in support of the Idle No More movement to express their opposition to the Canadian Government's Bill C-45, which included changes to land management on reservations. The journey's aim was also to "establish and unite our historical allies and restore our traditional trade routes with the Algonquin, Mohawk and other First Nations" (Hall). The seven walkers who set out on this journey, including Stanley George, Jr., 17; Travis George, 17; David Kawapit, 17; Johnny Abraham, 19; Raymond Kawapit, 20; Geordie Rupert, 21; and their guide, Isaac Kawapit, 47, performed an embodied mapping practice by hiking and snowshoeing for 68 days until they reached Parliament Hill in Ottawa to address the Canadian politicians.

These young men undertook this walk adhering to the Cree epistemologies emphasizing "the importance of respect, reciprocity, relation, protocol, holistic knowing, relevancy, story, interpretative meaning, and the experiential nested in place and kinship systems" (Kovach 67). They moved across different Indigenous territories, following Indigenous protocols of permission, hospitality, and collaboration, and their group kept growing and reached 270 walkers. The documentary *The Journey of Nishiiyuu* (2017), directed by Benjamin Masty, highlights how their walk connects back to the Cree story of Cheh-Cheojans, which tells about the best warriors sent to the South to bring back the bundle with the spirit of the spring and summer to their land of perpetual winter and restore the four seasons and their connection to nature (Halls, *The Journey of Nishiiyuu*). So, as these young men carried on the journey, moving along their people's paths, they reconnected with their ancestors' stories. Jordan Masty from Wemindji, who later joined the original walkers, remembers stories of his Elders, who stressed how powerful walking was for the mind and the body (*The Journey of Nishiiyuu* 00:26:15–00:33:50). For Masty, as he carried the Staff gifted by the Algonquin nation throughout his journey, this walk became an embodied experience of uniting nations. In the documentary, he reflects on his physical and mental struggles. While carrying the heavy staff and experiencing knee pain, he recalls feeling the responsibility bestowed upon him through the gift, which had the image of the medicine wheel, symbolizing the unity of all nations. The documentary emphasizes that unity is one of the key outcomes of this journey: "To walk together as one with all different nations and races. Both native and non-natives. I saw it happening," says Kawapit (*The Journey of Nishiiyuu* 00:39:07–00:40:04). For Kawapit, the walk was also to instill hope and motivation: "I wanted to help inspire somebody to make a change in their life or to be able to give

them that little extra boost of confidence to try something they were scared of trying” (Bell and Kitty). For these Cree walkers, the legend was like a prophecy of their ancestors or a story carrying a form of teaching that the young warriors would journey at the time of dis-balance. It was to awaken the ancestral spirit to resist and oppose the Canadian Bill C-45 and also to restore the strength to fight and survive some of the challenges faced by Indigenous people, such as poverty, lack of clean drinking water, and inadequate housing.

The walk and the journey also provided the young Cree men a learning and healing experience. They were drawn closer to nature as well as to the traditional ways of their ancestors. Styres, in explaining the literacies of land, states, “Traditional knowledges were and continue to be transmitted through storying; shared values and belief; as well as land-centered activities, reflections, and observations—they are woven out of individual and collective experiences” (28). Matthew Mukash, a Whapmagoostui Cree elder, former chief of the community, former Grand Chief of the Cree Nation, and co-producer of the documentary *The Journey of Nishiiyuu*, looking back after a decade of this walk noted that “a lot of stuff has changed since then. There are more land-based activities for youth ... and young adults” such as yearly winter journeys that offer healing and cultural connection and honor the purpose “for people not to forget their connection to the earth, because our culture is land-based” (Bell and Kitty).

The walkers faced physical, mental, and emotional struggles during their journey. Masty’s documentary visually captures the walkers’ struggle as they face the extreme weather, blizzards, the heat of the sun, and minus-fifty-two-degree temperature. But these embodied experiences turn into the lessons of kindness, both supporting each other and also receiving gifts from others in the form of food from women, a Sweatlodge ceremony or sacred items such as a staff or a sacred pipe, and other forms of hospitality and support from the communities by which they were hosted along their journey, as well as donations from individuals across the country, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

Besides the physical adversities of walking long distances, the walkers shared their personal stories and reasons behind the journey. Issac Kawapit, called the White Wizard, the guide, embarked on this healing journey to address his own addictions and hardships while showing the youth his ancestral pathways to healing. Geordie Rupert joined this walk after he lost his son. Rupert saw his child sitting on his toboggan during the walk, and the child’s spirit gave him the strength to continue walking despite difficulties. He said, “Let’s go, son,” as he began the journey and the spirit accompanied him (*The Journey*

of *Nishiiyuu* 00:12:15–00:14:08). Kawapit noted: “There was something in the Journey that no one knows about. I didn’t know about it first but there was a spirit that followed. At night, I would see it. Sometimes, in my dreams, I saw an Elder; he was with us during our walk.” (*The Journey of Nishiiyuu* 00:39:05–00:39:). Rupert and Kawapit refer to spirits as their relatives to whom they talk, who give them strength and look after them on their journey. The healing and spiritual essence of this walking experience is further exemplified in the title *Walking is Medicine* by Alanis Obomsawin, a brief documentary chronicling this Cree men’s walk. It was featured in the CBC Arts Series as a response to Buffy Sainte-Marie’s call to “Keep Calm and Decolonize.” Brock Lewis from Ojibway First Nation adequately explains in Obomsawin’s documentary that walking heals because “you get to feel the land, that’s how our ancestors are speaking to us, through the land” (*Walking is Medicine* 00:03:05–00:03:13). In the finale scenes, the camera follows people, animals, and all other beings as they keep walking, advocating that this protest walk is a decolonial act reconnecting with the land-based and reciprocal traditions and beliefs of their ancestors.

This embodied walking and journeying with humans and more-than-humans becomes part of decolonial ventures understood as “(trans)local struggles, movements, and actions to resist and refuse the legacies and ongoing relations and patterns of power established by external and internal colonialism” (Mignolo and Walsh 16). The journey of learning, restoration and healing as “an ethical and political call to collective action” (Springgay and Truman) could thus be seen as a decolonial counter-mapping practice that directly resists the state’s policies of governing Indigenous lands and lives.

WALKING WITH THE SPIRITS TOWARD RESURGENCE

A commemorative art installation for the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in Canada and the United States, *Walking With Our Sisters* (WWOS), was initiated by Métis artist and grassroots leader Christi Belcourt and joined by those who became members of this collective. The collaborative art piece was created from the 1,763+ pairs of moccasin vamps (tops) plus 108 pairs of children’s vamps donated by different individuals worldwide. As this installation traversed across Canada and the USA, a counter-mapping unfolded and witnessing the installation itself entailed a walking experience.

Presented as a floor installation, it included the donated beaded vamps arranged in the formation of a path made of fabric, and view-

ers were asked to walk barefoot on a path of cloth placed alongside the vamps. The *Walking With Our Sisters* collectives' website explains:

Each pair of vamps (or “uppers” as they are also called) represents one missing or murdered Indigenous woman. The unfinished moccasins represent the unfinished lives of the women whose lives were cut short. The children's vamps are dedicated to children who never returned home from residential schools. Together, the installation represents all these women; paying respect to their lives and existence on this earth. They are not forgotten. They are sisters, mothers, aunts, daughters, cousins, grandmothers, wives and partners. They have been cared for, they have been loved, they are missing and they are not forgotten. (*Walking With Our Sisters*)

While walking through the art installation, the participants acknowledged and tried to establish a connection with the spirits of those who are no longer physically present in this world. It reflects the Indigenous worldviews and the importance of relationships between people and the spiritual world. Drawing from Indigenous studies, the co-directors of the *WalkingLab* highlight that the practice of “walking with” refers to “more than’ orientation. Withness is not simply about group walking practices, but rather emphasizes complicated relations and entanglements with humans, non-humans, Land, and an ethics of situatedness, solidarity and resistance” (Springgay and Truman 3). This form of “walking with” also represents what scholars identified in the Indigenous mapmaking practice as the overlapping of different worlds to such an extent that “it is impossible to separate secular from sacred” (Woodward and Lewis 538). The members of the collective deliberately chose to design and undertake this project following Indigenous protocols and beliefs. Shalene Jobin and Tara Kappo state that the installation is not seen as an exhibit but a memorial, which transformed into a ceremony (135). With the guidance of Elder Maria Cambell (Métis), the installation was grounded in ceremonial protocols from its opening in Edmonton in 2013 to the closing in Batoche in 2019. The ceremonial character could also be noticed in the use of the terms “bundle” in reference to the collection of the vamps and other ceremonial objects and “lodge” as the space for the installation, which itself is referred to as “the memorial ceremony” (Jobin and Kappo 135). The sacredness of “walking with” in the installation has been essential in binding the community, as one of the volunteers at the Thunder Bay installation, Kristie Williams, said: “It’s been a really wonderful experience seeing how the community has shown a sincere interest and not just visiting Walking With Our Sisters but learning

what the significance... is for all of us and how in the end, we're all related" (Porter).

Jeff Corntassel (Cherokee) states, "If colonization is a disconnecting force, then resurgence is about reconnecting with homelands, cultures, and communities" (97). *Walking With Our Sisters* led toward this reconnection and resurgence, which, as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Mississauga Nishnaabeg) notes, requires "our Elders, our languages, and our lands, along with vision, intent, commitment, community, and ultimately action" (67). Jobin and Kappo explain that "the bundle is restor(y)ing the landscape of Turtle Island, re-engaging our relationships by hosting communities in places to which the lodge is invited [...] The bundle is a material demonstration of community—of physical and non-physical beings, being together—traveling the highways of Turtle Island, and in *pêbonânak* (gathering places) where the lodge is held" (142). They refer to the history of their ancestors from different nations traversing across Turtle Island and meeting in sacred places called in the Cree language *pêbonânak* to conduct "ceremonies, for activism, for mourning, for diplomacy, for trade, for celebration, and to share stories" (139). Between 2013 and 2019, this commemorative art installation traveled to twenty-seven sites, connecting communities across Turtle Island. When the installation came to its closure in Batoche, Kara Louttit, an Ottawa member of WWOS, shared how this has been a healing journey: "My life has changed so much since becoming a part of this and it feels like it's coming full circle for me to end it here in Batoche" (Laskowski). Through this walking and traveling act, the collective established a decolonial counter-mapping practice that offered communities resurgence, reconnection and healing. Mapping against the state's indifference to a human rights crisis concerning Indigenous women, the perpetuation of stereotypes, and the normalizing of power and privilege while putting forward Indigenous processes and engagements, *Walking With Our Sisters* united communities across Turtle Island to bring acknowledgment, understanding, and healing.

PERFORMING A WALK TO RECONNECT WITH LAND THROUGH KINESTHETIC MEMORY

Frost Exploding Trees Moon is a solo dance choreographed by Michelle Olson (a member of the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation) and Floyd Favel (Nêhiyaw/Cree) and performed by Olson, where a woman re-imagines, embodies, and performs walking-traveling along her trap

line.¹ The title refers to the harsh and cold month of December, when the trees freeze and crack, making a loud exploding sound. Moving on a trapline implies a form of embodied and kinetic map or map-making by walking. The trappers were experts who had an embodied sense of the terrain. By moving along an imagined ancestral trapline, the dancer performs a map, reconnecting herself with the land and her ancestors.

In the beginning, the audience sees a woman sitting with three wooden sticks, with which she engages throughout the piece, walking with them as a support, carrying them, and hunting with them; other times, they seem to become part of her body as she embodies the game she hunts for; later the sticks seem to signify the game she managed to hunt. Finally, once she finds a suitable place, she sets up her tipi, tying those same sticks with a rope and putting a white scarf upon it. She situates herself within it. Her explorations of positions inside a tipi ultimately lead her to become one with the tipi. The dancer fixes the tipi upon her shoulders, carefully balancing the sticks and rotating almost like a whirling dervish dancer in a deeply contemplative mood or meditation. This final moment leads to an embodiment of an imaginary map, reconnecting the woman with the land.

In this performance, Favel “was looking for the ‘bridge’ between the past and the present” (Favel), accentuated by the accompanying Native American Church songs sung by Kelly Daniels (Cree). Olson also identifies the search for traces of connection with the past, as the experiment employs “the body positions and movement of our aunties/grandmothers/elders when they are in the woods” (Olson). The idea behind it is that the traditional movements in relation to the way of life and practices were deeply intertwined with nature. Thus, the doing and embodiment of these movements may invoke memory, feeling, and energy, and let the performer embody it. Olson explains:

The piece is an homage to a way of being that is particular to people who live on the land. And it is an opportunity to take these shapes, emotions, and sensations and live in them. As I live mostly in urban areas, I love finding this calm/centered/responsive space in my body. I wonder, by inhabiting these movements, that some ancestral memory will arise. (Olson)

This is an approach discussed by other Indigenous performers. For instance, Santee Smith Tekaronhiákhwa, a Kahnnyen’kehàka/Mohawk dancer, explained:

1 For images see: <https://ravenspiritdance.com/project/frost-exploding-trees-moon/>.

So when we do our performances, and especially when we're talking about intention, about why we're moving in a certain way, what does that mean to us, as the individual performer, that's when we try to call upon that ancestral stuff or try to awaken that. [...] [W]ithin me is a piece of all my ancestors, and I have that memory within me somewhere. The challenge is to get in tune to that, to hear and feel it, respond to that kind of memory. (Murphy 223, 224)

Olson mentioned that both choreographers shared memories of seeing Elders in movement and positions, which became their research material or exercises. She says: "There is one image of my grandfather that I always resource in one of the positions in the tent, of him staring off into space and holding so much memory and experience as he quietly sits by the window" (Olson). These choreographic choices speak of Indigenous concepts of intergenerational connection (Murphy 224) or relationality (Wilson 80) and the importance of situating one's self (Kovach 109).

The performance aims not only to connect the performer with the ancestors and nature but also to bring the audience closer to nature. Favel explains, "Through her performance and us watching her, we should connect with the land. Like Nakajima (a Butoh dancer and teacher Favell trained with) said, 'when the dancer dances, I dance as the viewer'" (Favel). So, by observing the dancer's movements, actions, and feelings through kinesthetic empathy (Foster 2010; Sklar 2006), the audience member can "see what she does and see the thought in it" (Fraleigh 169). However, the sticks and the idea of the shelter provide a perspective for Olson, who says, "The sticks create shapes and structures through which I see the world. It frames my perspective. So, there are many layers in the piece that engage so many different audiences. Children love the building aspect, and building a home or fort, an adult may see a journey of a woman, someone may sit with their own loss, and an elder may remember what it was like living off the land as a child" (Olson).

By starting from the elemental level of the dance and the body movements, it was to reconnect with the past ways that, at the same time, bring one's body and self closer to nature. For Favel, "This would be an intensive healing process as one has to go past modern colonization back to an original connection to Creation". For Olson, this piece also provides an embodied healing experience:

It is about the push and pull between earth and sky, between living and death, and the struggle to stay in the moment when there is a strong desire to move on to the spirit world. I think about the word home, where is home? Also, where are my loved ones? It is a lonely piece, and the woman struggles sometimes

with the deep silence around her. My goal is to sit so deep inside the work that the audience will have to sit deeply inside of themselves. (Olson)

This performance of walking along the imagined traplines re-enacting the ancestral ways of living offers an experience of embodied mapping that leads to healing by reconnecting to one's ancestors and land through kinesthetic memory.

CONCLUSION: ACTIVIST AND ARTISTIC WALKING AS DECOLONIAL COUNTER-MAPPING AND EMBODIED HEALING

Styres explains that “land literacies” employ decolonizing praxis as “stories are etched into the essence of every rock, tree, animal, pathway, and waterway (whether in urban or rural/natural or built environment) in relation to the Indigenous people, who have existed on the land since time immemorial” (29). At the core of each of the discussed projects involving walking practices is the fundamental relationship with the land and the spiritual connections with the land and the spirit world. By walking with and on Turtle Island, these activists and artists employ lived and processual experiences of learning and healing that go against the colonial and state narratives, honor and bring Indigenous stories, perspectives, beliefs, methods, and practices to the forefront, and push forward towards bringing social change concerning the Indigenous as well as the Canadian society. So, whether by literally walking 1600 km on the land, walking with the spirits across different communities on Turtle Island, or by reimagining and reembodying their ancestors’ footsteps and trails, these Indigenous performers and activists draw from travel stories and nomadic experiences of their ancestors to establish contemporary artistic and activist expressions as forms of resistance to colonial and state narratives, making interventions and presenting “a form of storytelling and counter-storying that disrupts dominant narratives and representations of place” (Springgay and Truman 3) as well as their relations. These counter-mapping practices of walking and journeying undertaken by these Indigenous activists and artists establish a decolonial mapping of Turtle Island—North America that offers its participants an embodied healing experience.

Abstract: Indigenous Peoples have expressed, remembered, and performed spatial orientation, imaginations, and relations as part of their various movements across Turtle Island (the North American continent according to some Indigenous Nation’s creation stories), including migration, trading, hunting, gathering, and also the forced displacement of Indigenous Peoples from their ancestral lands to reserves. Gwilym Lucas Eades’ (2016) research demonstrates how Indigenous communities understand spatial imagination and use maps

and digital media to express their cultural identity, reclaim land and assert their sovereignty, tell stories, transmit cultural knowledge, and counter colonial narratives through counter-mapping showing the essence of one's spatial awareness. In the context of this study, I understand counter-mapping as a form of activism against dominant power structures to restore the voices and perspectives of Indigenous nations that oppose Western notions of place and spatial imagination and question the arbitrarily imposed by colonization borders between different areas on earth, between people and between nature and man. This paper explores three different forms of walking experiences as Indigenous counter-mapping practices. The protest walk initiated by David Kawapit, known as the *Journey of Nishiyuu* or the *Journey of the People*, a 1,600-kilometer journey of a group of young Cree walkers from Whapmagoostui, Quebec to Parliament Hill in Ottawa to support the Idle no More movement marks a contemporary activist expression of embodied mapping through journeying. The traveling art installation project *Walking With Our Sisters*, honoring the lives of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada, demonstrates how Indigenous artists bridge the walking and traveling experience to enact a counter-mapping practice for resurgence and healing of the community. Finally, *Frost Exploding Trees Moon*, a solo performance choreographed by Michelle Olson and Floyd Favel, presents how Indigenous performers draw from travel stories and nomadic experiences of their ancestors to establish contemporary artistic expressions of embodied mapping as forms of resistance to colonial narratives. Drawing from decolonial cartographic approaches and Indigenous perspectives on land and mapmaking, these Indigenous activist and artistic performances of journeying are theorized as counter-mapping practices offering decolonial mapping of Turtle Island and embodied healing.

Keywords: walking, counter-mapping, journeying, Indigenous performance, activism, stories, healing, resurgence, decolonial

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